

# Focus on the Kingdom

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## The Significance of Words

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Words communicate, provide context, describe, assure, dispute, express and perform any number of other functions which have roots in the very existence of culture, knowledge, wisdom and understanding, but not a single word has meaning and purpose without the Creator establishing precedent concerning them. We see that “To Him who by wisdom made the heavens” (Psalm 136:5), this creation in wisdom was consciously chosen by the Creator to be done through words. Genesis 1 displays (yes, also with words) a consistent pattern of “then God said...God made...and it was so...and God called.” This sets precedent for the use of words and the ensuing created results.

But beyond the elements of creation through spoken word is the precedent God established of words corresponding to specific meanings, that is, the definitions of words that must correspond to the words which exist and/or are spoken. Simply put, God could have said, “Cheetah, desktop, snow cone,” or any other combination of words and then there was light, but He chose to say, “Let there be light; and there was light” (Gen. 1:3). This set the precedent that words do and must have specific meanings to which the word or words directly, without deviation, correspond consistently. Given this understanding, clearly words and their corresponding, specific meanings hold a unique and significant reason for existing and purpose to the Creator, who first chose to use and apply them. This cannot be overemphasized, for God, after creating through words, chose words, again, to reemphasize the definitions of what He had created. These definitions, consistent with the words spoken to create, established an indissoluble bond between words and their actual meanings.

We see a preeminent position given to words consistently expressed throughout the Scriptures: “Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven” (Ps. 119:89). “For You have magnified Your word above all Your name” (Ps. 138:2). “He sends out His command to the earth; His word runs very swiftly” (Ps. 147:15). “The Lord gave the word; great was the company of those who proclaim it” (Ps. 68:11). And “incline your ears to the words of My mouth” (Ps. 78:1). These are just a few examples in the Psalms.

Great emphasis to further confirm this established order concerning words was given in the prophetic

promise of the prophet in Deuteronomy 18:15-20, where God promised, “I will put My words in his mouth, and he will speak to them all that I command him, and it will be that whoever will not hear My words, which he speaks in My name, I will require it of him” (v. 18-19). We know this promised prophet to be Jesus, the Christ, who further confirmed this promise and the significance of words by often stating, “Those who have ears to hear, let them hear!” (Matt. 11:15; 13:9, 43; Mark 4:9, 23; 7:16; Luke 8:8; 14:35). He also stated clearly, “he who rejects me and does not receive my words, has that which judges him — the words that I have spoken will judge him on the last day” (John 12:48). And “If you abide in me and my words abide in you, you will ask what you desire and it shall be done for you” (John 15:7) Any word study of “word,” “words,” and/or “my words” in the Gospels reaps a consistent theme of imperative words spoken and the need to hear them, intimately tied to God’s plan for redemption and eternal life.

## The Abuse of Words

Grasping all this, concerning words, gives us a useful tool to approach and engage those of a differing theological perspective. It allows us to point out (tactfully) the common theological bastardization of words commonly used, yet the definitions of these words have been greatly skewed or completely changed from the original meaning in order to accommodate false theologies. Though there are many of these words, for the purposes of example we shall look at “mortal,” “immortal” and “death.” The original and actual Biblical definitions of these words are as follows:

- “mortal” — having a beginning and an end (in death), existing for a specific and finite period of time
- “immortal” — living forever; unable to die
- “death” — the state of being no longer alive; ceasing to exist

Most Christian theologies embrace the idea of an immortal soul. This was derived from Hellenistic thought, the works of Plato, who utilized ancient Egyptian religion to reach that conclusion. This means that since Moses led the Exodus until today, there is still a great deal of “Egypt” that remains in many believers! The “immortal soul” cuts completely against the grain of actual Biblical meanings and understandings of these words. To many, though they

don't even realize it, death is not death, but rather a different state of being alive! They completely reject the Scriptural reality of their mortality and negate the sacrificial work of Christ on the cross, where he defeated death. That is, they believe that death was already defeated, because we were created with an immortal soul (for how do people die if they are immortal?).

False theological preoccupation with the final destination of this *supposed* immortal soul supplants the realities of existence, skews miserably people's perspective and consistently denies the actual meaning of scriptural words. One simple example is John 3:16, where Jesus clearly states that there are only two options — to not exist or to exist — with absolutely no inference within the verse concerning location (which is how most interpret it — wrongly!).

Emphasis upon the significance of words and their actual meanings, as pointed out here and consistently expressed within the Scriptures, can play a major role in discussion for building common ground and unity within the body of Christ for all. ✧

## Daniel 7 and the Eclipse of the Kingdom of God

**I**n order to lay before you my approach to getting at the truth of the Christian faith, I want to begin with a quotation from Professor A. Lukyn Williams, DD, Cambridge professor and Hebrew scholar, delivering a series of lectures on the Hebrew Christian Messiah (1916):

“With the Lord Jesus, as with every Jew, the Old Testament was the court to which, in the last instance, all appeal was made. It was the head from which flowed the waters of spiritual life in unadulterated purity and strength.”

Within that canon Jesus of course was very familiar with the book of Daniel, and it was in that book that he found the vision of the Son of Man and his investiture as sovereign in the Kingdom of God. The book of Daniel is a “base of operations” for the study of Jesus and the faith.

### Daniel 7:23-27:

“The fourth beast means that there will be a fourth kingdom on earth that will differ from all the other kingdoms. It will devour all the earth and will trample and crush it. The ten horns mean that ten kings will arise from that kingdom. Another king will arise after them, but he will be different from the earlier ones. He will subjugate three kings. He will speak words against the Most High. He will wear down the saints of the Most High. His intention will be to change times and law. The saints will be delivered into his hand for a

time, times, and half a time [3 ½ years]. But the court will convene, and his ruling authority will be removed — destroyed and abolished forever! Then the kingdom, authority, and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be delivered to the people who are the holy ones of the Most High. Their Kingdom is an eternal kingdom; all authorities will serve and obey them.”

This vision of Daniel 7 gives us a marvelously simple pattern of the development of world history, a veritable theology of world history out of which the NT works. Its scheme is not complicated. It speaks of the replacement of bestial governments by the government of the Son of Man, the ideal of humanity, what man was intended to be. We know that the book of Daniel was read avidly by the Qumran community, and it is obvious that it leaves a clear imprint on what Jesus has to say about his own career in Israel and in the future. The appearance of the Kingdom of God in Daniel 7 is placed *only after the demise of the fourth beast*, of which the last stage is marked by the appearance of a kind of chaos monster, the little horn who exhausts the saints for a brief period (7:25).

Note carefully the time-sequence given us by Daniel. In the vision of chapter 7, there is a sequence of four beasts and a final tyrant, the antichrist (horn). Following these four beasts and the horn, the Kingdom of God is introduced. It will be governed by the Son of Man (7:13-14). Note again most carefully the sequence. Where does the Kingdom come in relation to the other events? The answer is very simple. First the Beast power is slain and his body is destroyed by being given to the flame, the lake of fire. See 7:11: “I watched until the Beast was killed...” At that same time the ruling authority of the rest of the beasts was taken away (7:12). Only **after this** is the Kingdom given to the Son of Man.

Note now how the interpretation given to Daniel reinforces a proper understanding of the Kingdom in the sequence of events. **First** there are four Beasts (7:17). **After that**, the Kingdom is given to the saints (7:18). No less than three more times, this sequence is emphasized. **First** the 10 horns of the fourth Beast appear, as does the little horn (7:20-21). And **then** (and here we have our answer about the *timing* of the Kingdom of God) “**the time comes** when the saints take possession of the Kingdom” (7:22). Again the same point is made: Verses 23-25 **first** describe the rule of the Beast power which culminates in the arrival of a final tyrant (horn) who persecutes the saints. But this is only for a limited time (v. 25). The dominion of the little horn is removed and he is consumed and destroyed (v. 26). **Following the removal and destruction of the Beast, the Kingdom of God on**

earth, “under the whole heaven,” is given to the saints and “all nations and languages will serve and obey **them**” (Dan. 7:27, NRSV, etc.)

It is on the ruins of that last, fourth beast with its evil tyrant that the Kingdom of God arises. The Kingdom of God is clearly as much a government as the preceding beast powers. Its arena is obviously the earth, since it is to be set up “under the whole heaven” (7:27). The Son of Man, as a corporate figure representing the saints, is unmistakably the agent of God for the administration of sound government on the earth. The nature of the Kingdom of God as Daniel foresaw it may not be subjected to the disastrous “spiritualizing” tendency typical of much commentary. The sober comments of the *International Critical Commentary* warn us not to sacrifice common sense and sound mindedness in the interests of trying to force on Daniel some sort of *abstract* Kingdom or *present* social ideal. Nebuchadnezzar would have been amazed if anyone thought his kingdom was mainly an abstract idea! The empire which follows the demise of the fourth evil empire is clearly just as much a visible, concrete, kingdom. It is in fact God’s revolutionary government, a true theocracy, a regime destined to do away with all present human governments.

*The International Critical Commentary* says: “The last Kingdom replaces the first four in the dream, and is, in the idea of the scene, **spatially bound** as are its predecessors; the Mountain fills the whole earth and is not a ‘spiritual’ Kingdom of Heaven” (p. 178).

The book of Revelation which of course develops the themes of Jesus’ teaching and particularly the matter of the Kingdom in Daniel, tells us exactly what we would expect from our study of Daniel 7. **First** the Beast is slain in Revelation 19:20 by being thrown into the lake of fire. This event happens when the rider on the white horse (Jesus) appears as a warrior-king accompanied by the armies of heaven (Rev. 19:11-15). His arrival in these verses is, as all agree, his second coming which, of course, has not yet happened. He comes in fact to “rule [i.e. set up the Kingdom over] the nations with a rod of iron” (Rev. 19:15). This same event is the one also described in Revelation 11:15-18, when “the kingdoms of the world will become the Kingdom of God and His Messiah.” This happens at the 7th trumpet, the trumpet announcing the resurrection of all the faithful dead. If this has not yet happened, then obviously the Kingdom of God has not yet arrived.

This sequence of events — **first** four Beasts, culminating in the final Antichrist, **then** the second coming of Jesus to establish the Kingdom — is exactly

the sequence laid out by Daniel 7, as we have seen. There are three critically important “inceptive aorists” telling us about the Kingdom of God in Revelation:

1. In Revelation 11:17 God has “**begun to reign**,” at the time when the kingdoms of this world become the Kingdom of God at the future crisis.

2. So in Revelation 19:6: “Hallelujah, because the Lord our God, the Almighty **has begun to reign**,” at the time of the future marriage banquet.

3. And again in Revelation 20:4 the saints “came to life and **begun to reign** with the Messiah for the 1000 years.” As Mounce says, Daniel’s vision of the 4 beasts, their judgment and the passing of the kingdom to the saints of the Most High is undoubtedly the background for much of Revelation.<sup>1</sup>

John Goldingay in his illuminating commentary on Daniel (*Word Biblical Commentary*, state of the art in evangelical commentary) notes:

“When God’s time comes, his kingdom requires the destruction of earthly kingdoms rather than his working through them. They are God’s will for now, but not for ever; and when his moment arrives, his kingdom comes **by catastrophe, not by development**...

“Daniel promises a new future, one which is not merely an extension of the present. It is of supernatural origin. **But it is located on earth, not in heaven.** Daniel envisages no dissolution of the cosmos or creation of a different world. His understanding of this kingdom is more like the prophetic idea of the Day of Yahweh than that of some later apocalypses. The problems of politics and history can only be resolved by a supernatural intervention that inaugurates a new kingdom, but this involves changing the lordship of this world, not abandoning this world. The new Kingdom fills the *earth*. *History* is not destroyed; other sovereignties are...

Daniel does not turn the Kingdom into something “individualistic (his kingship is to be realized in the individual believer’s life) or otherworldly (it is to be realized in heaven). He reaffirms the universal, this-worldly, corporate perspective of Isa. 40-55. Daniel *is* talking about a reign of God on earth, and that continues to be more an object of hope than of sight. We still pray ‘may your rule [Kingdom] come’ (Luke 11:2), and — in the light of Daniel’s revelation — have to be referring to a rule which is temporal, worldly, and social. Precisely at moments when such a vision is difficult to believe, Daniel’s readers are urged, via his final declaration to the king (2:45b), to take it with utmost seriousness (cf. 8:26; 10:21; Rev. 19:9; 21:5; 22:6)” (p. 59-61).

These facts have enormous importance for the teaching of Jesus about the Kingdom, about *the Gospel* in fact. We should not forget that the Gospel as it fell

<sup>1</sup> *Commentary on Revelation, New London Commentaries*, 1997, p. 354.

from the lips of Jesus and Paul has a specific label. It is always the Gospel **about the Kingdom of God**. Jesus uses his Kingdom message (the whole reason for which he was commissioned: Luke 4:43) to recruit the saints whom he gathered around him. This is the core of the subject matter of the Gospels. And the Old Testament text from which this matter is taken is certainly the book of Daniel, principally the seventh chapter (along with the 2nd chapter which likewise teaches us about the Kingdom which is to supersede present nation-states, not by development but by catastrophe: Dan. 2:44). The Kingdom, it is quite clear, will not come by evolution but by revolution. But such revolution is appropriate only when the Messiah returns. The Kingdom of God was not set up in Acts when the spirit came, much less in AD 70, as is fantastically suggested by Preterists.

Of course Daniel 7 is not the only passage of Scripture to speak of the Messiah and His service for the Kingdom of God. We must include in the same picture the righteous sufferer in the psalms and of course the rejected prophets and the suffering servant of Isaiah. The thread which holds together all these "saints" (of whom Jesus is the chief) is their destiny. This involves temporary, if intense suffering, followed by vindication when the Kingdom of God becomes theirs. According to the pattern laid out in Daniel, that vindication comes only at, and not before, the demise of the final evil ruler, who arises out of the fourth and final beast power. The NT echoes this scheme when it summarizes the faith by saying, "Through much tribulation we are destined to enter the Kingdom" (Acts 14:22).

### Daniel 7 and the Christian Gospel

What, then, is the importance of this for our understanding of the Christian Gospel? Jesus came into Galilee and launched his opening salvo: "The Kingdom of God is at hand: Repent and believe in the Gospel" i.e., about the **Kingdom**. So it would be a fatal mistake of interpretation to ignore the background to the Kingdom of God in Daniel 7. To do this is to distort the Gospel. Yet this is what so often happens in contemporary evangelism. The Kingdom must be defined from its Hebrew, apocalyptic background in Daniel 7. This, I am convinced, is the right hermeneutical thing to do. Jesus must be understood in his own context, not ours. The peril is too great that we simply impose on Jesus our own ideological agendas and construct a Gospel to suit ourselves. History shows that we human beings are fond of attaching the label "Jesus" to our own projects and ideals and then thinking of them as genuine expressions of the will of God. This method must be avoided.

We cannot afford to misunderstand Jesus when it comes to the Gospel because "whoever loses his life

for me and **the Gospel** will save it...Whoever is ashamed of me and **my words**, among this unfaithful and sinful society, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in the glory of his Father" (Mark 8:35, 38). Notice how **the Gospel** is parallel to and defined as **the words of Jesus**.

### The Kingdom of God Defined by Daniel 7 and a Standard Lexicon

The term "Kingdom of God" is perhaps the most important word in the Bible. As someone has said, the whole genius of the Christian faith is concentrated in the words "Kingdom of God." So what is this Kingdom of God? What, in fact, is the Gospel which Jesus commands us to believe? Sometimes Christians would do well to go back to a standard Bible lexicon to find a proper definition. Let's look at the famous lexicon by Thayer for enlightenment. Under the entry "Kingdom of God," the lexicon gives the information from Daniel which provides us with this idea of the Kingdom of God, the subject of the Christian gospel:

"Daniel had declared it to be God's purpose that after four vast and mighty kingdoms had succeeded one another and the last of them shown itself hostile to the people of God, at length its despotism should be broken and the empire of the world pass over forever to the holy people of God (Dan. 2:44; **7:14, 18, 22, 27**)."

Thayer then speaks of the foundation of the Kingdom which has already been laid in the preaching and miracles of Jesus in his ministry on earth. Then he refers to **the primary meaning of the Kingdom of God**:

"But **far more frequently** [i.e. than any references to the "presence" of the Kingdom] the kingdom of heaven is spoken of as **a future blessing**, since its consummate establishment is to be looked for on **Christ's solemn return from the skies, the dead being called to life again**, the ills and wrongs which burden the present state of things being done away, the powers hostile to God being vanquished: Matt. 6:10: 'Your Kingdom come'; 8:11; 26:29; Mark 9:1; 15:43; Luke 9:27; 13:28: 'When you see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the prophets in the Kingdom'; 14:15; 22:18: 'I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the Kingdom will come'; 2 Peter 1:11: 'Kingdom in the age to come'; also in the phrase 'enter the Kingdom of God' Matt. 5:20; 7:21; 18:3; 19:23-24; Mark 9:47; 10:23-25; Luke 18:24, 25; John 3:5; Acts 14:22; James 2:5: 'heirs [not yet inheritors] of the Kingdom'; 'inherit the Kingdom of God' Matt. 25:34; 1 Cor. 6:9; 15:50; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5."

Thayer speaks of the Kingdom of God as occasionally a description of persons (Christians) who are being made fit for admission into the Kingdom of

God when it comes (Rev. 1:6). But it should be noted that **the first and dominant meaning of the Kingdom of God** is the one given us by Daniel 7, from which the whole NT idea of the Kingdom of God is derived.

From this essential background in Daniel, it is a very simple matter to understand that the Kingdom of God is, as Thayer says, “**far more frequently spoken of as a future blessing.**”

### Why Does All This Matter?

If I could leave you with a single point for meditation it would be just this question. Is it sufficient to quote 3 verses from Paul (typically 1 Cor. 15:1-3) to the effect that belief in the death and resurrection of Jesus is all that he taught as the Gospel? Can we afford to overlook the obvious fact that Jesus and the Apostles preached “the Gospel of the Kingdom” without *at that stage* saying a word about the Messiah’s death and resurrection? Can it possibly be right that the phrase “Gospel of the Kingdom” is not the way most Christians describe the Gospel, though Luke insists that the Kingdom *was* the content of the Gospel which Paul (following Jesus) always took to the people both Jews and Gentiles? (Acts 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31; cp. Acts 8:12).

Surely it must be the part of wisdom to adopt the “standard of sound words” recommended by Paul as a sort of creed (2 Tim. 1:13) by habitually using the very words of Jesus as the basis of our teaching? These words of Jesus Paul calls “health-giving words” (1 Tim. 6:3). Without the words and the Gospel of Jesus (Rom. 10:17; 16:25) we are as, Paul said, ignoramuses. And John could not have warned us more vigorously when, late in the NT period, he said, “Anyone who ‘progresses’ and does not remain in the teaching of Christ does not belong to God. He who remains in that teaching has both the Father and the Son” (2 John 7-9).

Revival and unity amongst believers will be under way when the Hebrew Bible again takes its place as the repository of divine truth lying at the basis of what Jesus believed and taught. When the doctrine of man as a whole person needing to acquire immortality through resurrection is reinstated, believers will be able to identify with the Apostles for whom the hope of the Kingdom and immortality in it was the great driving force behind Christian living and evangelism. The teaching of Jesus is to be accepted lock, stock and barrel. Only then can we do what Jesus calls “doing well”: You call me **teacher** and lord and you do well. For so I am” (John 13:13). We may hear about accepting Jesus as lord, but how seldom is there a plea to accept him as “rabbi/teacher” in all his splendid Jewishness and as the model preacher of the saving Gospel?

Let me summarize. The basic teachings of Jesus are the basis for establishing a relationship between ourselves and God. Truth, not error, is essential if we are to serve God “in spirit and truth,” in the holy spirit, in fact, which is the “spirit of the truth,” and the operational presence of God, his vitalizing energy (Ps. 51:11), and the mind of Christ. The Gospel is the vehicle of that energy and must not be tampered with (Rom. 1:16; 1 Thess. 2:13). The Gospel is to be defined first **by the words of the historical Jesus** and not first from isolated texts in Paul. Jesus’ own example forces us back to the Hebrew Bible and especially the book of Daniel in order to get our feet firmly planted on solid exegetical ground.

When we ask how Paul went about creating faith and love in the Church, we find that it was often by pleading for a clear idea about the *content of hope*. He speaks about “faith and love which spring from *hope*” (Col. 1:4, 5). No wonder he prayed for the Ephesians to have their mental eyes opened to *the hope* of the future inheritance (Eph. 1:14-18). Paul recognized that it was because of future joy that Jesus endured the cross (Heb. 12:2).

The “Jesus covenant,” based on the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants, was the gift of the Kingdom of God: “Just as my Father **covenanted** with me... so I **covenant** with you to give you the Kingdom” (Luke 22:28-30). Ruling the world with Jesus is likely to provide a much better stimulus to good ethics now than Platonic promises of disembodied life in heaven! News about the Kingdom is anyway the heart of the Gospel as Jesus preached it, and the spreading of that news to the far corners of the world is the task of the Church until the Messiah arrives (Matt. 24:14). “Fear not, little flock; it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom,” he had said earlier (Luke 12:32). Quite a gift!

In no text of the NT does anyone say that we are *now reigning with Christ*, much less that the dead are. As Eric Sauer says so well, “The Church is the official administrative staff, the ruling aristocracy of the coming Kingdom” (*From Eternity to Eternity*, 1993, p. 93). Is this not a beautiful, realistic, comforting and inspiring prospect for all believers — so easy and straightforward and asking only for a child-like acceptance on our part?

And in 1 Corinthians 15:50 Paul says that apart from a new body at the resurrection it is impossible to inherit the Kingdom of God. Such is his fight with Gnostic attempts to move the future into the present and thus have no future. **You can have June’s weather in April, but you cannot pretend that April is really June!** ♦

## The End Goal and Amillennialism

Here are some striking observations about the essential value of what is misleadingly called the “Old Testament,” giving the idea that it is, as a whole, outdated and not for us! How very far from the truth that is! I quote this: “**The period of Messiah’s Kingdom on the earth was the chief subject of the Old Testament.**”<sup>2</sup> Wow! That means that the Christian Gospel which is about the Kingdom of God is the main topic of the Hebrew Bible.

This will explain the fact that if you do not grasp the core of the Old Testament, you will very likely fail to understand the Christian Gospel of the Kingdom! The hope of the Kingdom of God and coming peace on earth is the thrilling drama of the whole Bible.

If you have been taught that the Gospel is exclusively about the death and resurrection of Jesus (Billy Graham stated that Jesus “came to do three days’ work”), you have not been told the whole truth! You have been told about the *means* but not the *end*. The fact is that the Kingdom coming is the end-goal of the faith. The cross is an *essential means* to the goal, but the goal is the future Kingdom, in which the saints are going to rule the world with Jesus. The “half Gospel” would be like saying that going to college means signing up, but never graduating!

The very false idea that Christians are *at present* ruling the world is dramatically opposed and dogmatically rejected by Paul in 1 Corinthians 4:8: “Some of you think that you are **now** ruling the world as kings! I wish that you were in fact ruling as kings, so that we might be ruling as kings with you!” That of course deals a decisive blow to the very false idea that the millennium of Revelation 20 is present! The joint rule of Jesus and all the saints lies in the future. To say otherwise is to muddle the Bible timeline and disintegrate that important part of the Gospel, that the true believers are destined to “manage the world” and have the world “under your jurisdiction” (1 Cor. 6:2, Moffatt; see Dan. 7:18, 22, 27, “obey **them**,” the saints, NRSV etc.). On no account should you get rid of God’s future by putting it into the past — which is a dangerous form of unbelief of the words of Jesus, especially Revelation 20:1-6.

So-called “amillennialism” is a chaotic frontal attack on a major truth of the saving Gospel about the Kingdom. Amillennialism says that the “first resurrection” of Revelation 20:4-5 means your Christian conversion, and that you are *now* “ruling” with the Messiah for 1000 years, which would just mean a somewhat long time. They also say that Satan

is somehow *now* “bound” and “not deceiving the nations any longer” (Rev 20:2-3). I hope that none of our readers has fallen for that falsehood.

### Why Amillennialism Is Impossible

1. Satan cannot be *currently* deceiving the whole world and *not* deceiving it at the same time (1 John 5:19; 2 Cor. 4:4; 1 Pet. 5:8; Rev. 12:9; 20:3).
2. Saints are explicitly *not* ruling the world now. It is a heresy to say otherwise (1 Cor. 4:8).
3. People having been “beheaded” (Rev. 20:4) cannot possibly describe a conversion experience. And if the “first resurrection” means conversion, then people are being beheaded *before* being converted! As McClain says, this leads to “the absurdity of having souls being regenerated *after* they’ve been beheaded for their faithfulness to Christ!”<sup>3</sup>
4. BDAG defines “**came to life**” in both verses 4 and 5 as “dead persons who return to life, become alive again (Matt. 9:18; Acts 9:41; 20:12).” Also see Revelation 2:8: Jesus “was dead, but **came to life**” (same Greek word *ezesan*). Otherwise, as George Ladd said, “we are faced with the problem of the same word being used in the same context with two entirely different meanings, with no indication whatsoever as to the change of meaning” (*Commentary on Revelation*).
5. Verse 4 says that all the saints begin to reign *at the same time* and *at the establishment* of the millennium. They will all reign for the entirety of the thousand years, not just portions of it. In contrast, amillennialism teaches that each person begins to “reign” at a different time — his or her conversion — and their personal “millennium” may last as short or as long as the rest of their lifetime.
6. It’s impossible to switch the meaning of “resurrection” (*anastasis*), to make the first resurrection *non-literal* (meaning conversion) and the second resurrection a *literal* resurrection from *literal* death.
7. Amillennialism destroys the spectacular climax to the Gospel of the Kingdom.

<sup>2</sup> G.H. Lang, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 332.

<sup>3</sup> *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, p. 488.

## Conclusion

“In the words of George Eldon Ladd, ‘It is difficult to see how this *first resurrection* can be anything but literal bodily resurrection.’ For this reason, the first resurrection in Revelation 20 must be the first of **two physical resurrections which are separated by a thousand years**. The first is a resurrection of the righteous, who will be raised at the Second Coming of Christ (Rev. 20:4–6), and the second is a resurrection of the wicked (Rev. 20:5a), who will be raised after the millennium to stand before the judgment of the great white throne (Rev 20:11–15). And **between these two physical resurrections, King Jesus will reign upon the earth for a thousand years, just as premillennialism teaches.**”<sup>4</sup> ✧

## Comments

- “While I love fellowshiping with other believers at my church, I would be shown the door, if I began to tell others that I believe the Trinity doctrine was derived by men and forced on the masses until they accepted it. It grieves me that this doctrine has been a stumbling block for Jews and Muslims and others. The pastor is very aware that I do not accept the doctrine, as I ‘locked horns’ with him twice, and there is no compromise, of course! I came to believe this after two years of earnest searching of Scripture and church history and much prayer, over 12 years ago, but had still thought that Jesus was somehow ‘part’ of who God is, perhaps because it was different from what I had believed for so long, and it would be considered heresy by most. There is someone who has been quite hostile towards me because of my beliefs — it reminds me of the period described in the book *Jesus Wars*.” — *Wisconsin*

- “I enjoy receiving *Focus on the Kingdom* and really like reading all the articles. God bless you and all who work with you.” — *Illinois*

- “I was born and grew up in Germany. Ever since I was little, I have always been very curious and have always questioned the world. I had a long journey where I looked at many different theories, religions, philosophies etc. until I finally realized that everything that happens in the world is biblical. When I then found my way to the Bible, I also recognized that the Trinity, like most things in the world, is a lie and I recognized that God is only one. In this journey Aleksander Vuksanovic in Switzerland helped me a lot, and through him I found your books which I’m very

thankful for because they opened my eyes.” — *Germany*

- “I have always been fascinated with the Bible. Seeing your work, debates and teachings is helping me find my way. I’m very grateful for all the work you’re doing.” — *England*

- “I am a Jew by natural birth. My tale is of a futile life in the flesh until around 2000, when God began to get my attention in a new way. Around 2004, I decided to follow Jesus. I never embraced a formal denominational affiliation, but my association was with Methodists, Presbyterians of the zealously Calvinist persuasion, Independent Baptists, Free Will Baptists, Mennonite, Amish and unaffiliated folk in New York, Maryland, Connecticut and Maine. My wife and I abandoned Trinitarian beliefs in August of last year, in favor of the overwhelming testimony of the Scriptures. We can attest that the Scriptures are so much more harmonious, elegant and sensible now. Around that same time we also listened to your delightful series of audio recordings on the subject of what happens at death. As we searched the Scriptures along with you, we abandoned the dogma of the essential immortality of the soul.” — *Virginia*

- “I would like to thank you for this pure truth you are teaching about the relationship between God and Jesus Christ! Indeed, God and Jesus Christ are two different personages. I have been a truth seeker for so many years and I tried many churches, but I did not get satisfaction by what they teach. I am so grateful for this information and discovery!” — *Malawi*

**The Kingdom of God.** “When Jesus proclaims that the Kingdom of God is near, he is adopting a concept which was coined in the Old Testament....It refers primarily to his [God’s] **unchallenged sovereignty in the end-time** (Isa. 52:7)....In the New Testament the Kingdom of God is conceived, **first of all, as something in the future** (Mark 9:1, 47, 14:25, Matt. 13:41-43; 20:21; Luke 22:16, 18; 1 Cor. 15:50, et al.) which comes from God (Mark 9:1; Matt. 6:10; Luke 17:20; 19:11). Therefore, it is something man can only wait for (Mark 15:43), seek (Matt. 6:33), receive (Mark 10:15, cf. Luke 12:32) and inherit (1 Cor. 6:9ff; Gal. 5:21; James 2:5), but he is not able to create it by himself.”

— Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Mark*, p. 45

<sup>4</sup> Matt Waymeyer, “The First Resurrection in Revelation 20,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal*, Spring 2016, p. 32.