

# Focus on the Kingdom

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## Getting Back to Basics

Our strong impression is that the theological enterprise has run into a serious confusion. One can search almost in vain for literature offering the Christian Gospel in the terms by which Jesus offered it. This strikes us as an amazing situation. It is simply not true to suggest, as multiple tracts offering “salvation” tell us, that Jesus came preaching: “This is the Gospel: I died for you and rose. Believe that and be saved.” Jesus, at that stage, said no such thing. Rather, he launched his ministry with these words: “Repent.” “Believe.” But believe what? “The time is at hand: The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and Believe *that Gospel!*”

Mark 1:14, 15 provides us with the summary statement par excellence of the Christian faith. Mark 1:14, 15 is the perfect encapsulation of what Jesus was about. Everything that Jesus subsequently taught is an expansion of his basic thesis enunciated in Mark 1:14, 15. Christian obedience begins here. Repent, i.e. have a complete change of heart, of understanding, and orient yourself to the new horizon of the Kingdom of God. “Repent and believe in the Good News about the Kingdom of God coming.” This is Jesus’ opening command: “Repent by believing the Gospel of the Kingdom.” This is Christianity’s mainspring and its rallying point — a wonderful place for establishing Christian unity.

Repentance according to Jesus is not just giving up sin, as we may choose to define sin. Repentance is the equivalent of believing the Gospel of the Kingdom. Repentance is evidenced by a commitment to the Gospel of Jesus, the Gospel of the Kingdom. The Messiah’s opening salvo comprises two imperatives: “Change your mind and begin believing the Gospel about the Kingdom.”

Jesus’ subsequent Gospel preaching expands on this opening summons. “When anyone is exposed to the Gospel of the Kingdom, the Devil comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart, *so that he may not believe it and be saved*” (Matt. 13:19 and Luke 8:12). “To you [Christians] has been given the secret about the Kingdom of God, but others look but do not see; they hear but do not understand. If

they did see and understand they would repent and be forgiven” (see Mark 4:11, 12).

These plain words amplify Jesus’ initial command that we believe the Gospel of the Kingdom and thus repent. Salvation, in the Master’s teaching, involves an intelligent understanding and grasp of the divine Plan concerning the Kingdom of God. Without that, there can be no repentance in the terms laid down by Jesus. The words of Mark 4:11, 12 should be pondered, and read in various translations, to allow their full impact to be heard. The contingency on which repentance and forgiveness hinge is the intelligent grasp of the Gospel of the Kingdom.

Later, of course, Jesus added to this substratum of the Gospel the facts about his death and resurrection which make entrance into the Kingdom possible. What has happened in popular preaching is this: the means to the Kingdom has replaced the Kingdom itself. The means has suppressed the end. The end, the objective and the first agenda on the salvation program, is always the Kingdom of God. Forgiveness and repentance center on our response to the basic command of Jesus in Mark 1:14, 15. Forgiveness is provided in the blood of the Lamb and our life in Christ proceeds from the risen Jesus. But Jesus may not be detached from his own ministry.

We have a saying in the classroom here at Atlanta Bible College. “The Devil only has one trick: to separate Jesus from his (Jesus’) own teachings.” A Jesus divorced from his Gospel of the Kingdom becomes a vague symbol into which, with our enormous ingenuity, we pack all sorts of ideas and ideals.

The Great Commission bids us spread the very same Gospel of the Kingdom (“all the things I taught you”) to the whole wide world, “to all the nations.” The Gospel of the Kingdom remains unchanged (“all the things I taught you”). The audience is now expanded to take in all the Gentiles. From this grand commission, Paul proceeds with the Gospel.

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Let it not be imagined for a moment that Paul altered the Message. He positively did not. Had Paul, as the accredited agent of Jesus, preached a Gospel other than that of Jesus, he (Paul) would have put himself under his own curse (Gal. 1:6-9). Luke expended much energy to assure us of Paul's perfect obedience as a preacher of the very same Gospel of the Kingdom that Jesus had preached. We see Paul imitating the master:

Jesus before the resurrection: "Jesus welcomed the people and began speaking about the Kingdom of God" (Luke 9:11).

Jesus after the resurrection: "For 40 days he spoke to them concerning the affairs of the Kingdom" (Acts 1:3).

Paul: "Paul welcomed all who came to him and solemnly testified about the Kingdom of God and taught about Jesus for two whole years, without hindrance" (Acts 28:30, 31).

Lest we might possibly be tempted to fall into the trap of separating Jesus from Paul, Paul provides in his own words a report of his life work: "I preached the Gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). And what was that? "I went about heralding the Gospel [*kerussein* means "preaching the Gospel"] about the Kingdom" (Acts 20:25).

Despite this startlingly clear testimony, modern gospel preaching has achieved the near impossible: It has actually denied that Jesus was a preacher of the Gospel and then substituted a gospel confined to the death and resurrection of Jesus, leaving the substratum Gospel of the Kingdom as some sort of "Jewish relic." This situation calls for redress. It cannot be right to make Paul the inventor of a new, reduced Gospel, and Jesus a Savior who died but does not also preach the Gospel to us. Too many are watching Jesus die and rise, and failing to hear him first as the preacher and teacher of the saving Gospel.

Paul would have been horrified at what has happened. In Romans 10, with inexorable logic, he spells out the chain of events by which salvation comes. "How can they believe in him [Jesus] whom they have not heard [i.e. preaching]?" (10:14). (Note the mistranslation "of whom" in the NIV, corrected by the NASV — it is insufficient just to "hear about" Jesus; you must hear him preach the Gospel.) Paul's point is that *first* one must hear the preacher Jesus, the bearer of the Gospel of the Kingdom. "How can they hear until someone is sent to preach?" Answer: How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the Gospel of good things — the future coming of the Kingdom as Paul's reference to Isaiah 52:7 in Romans 10:15

shows. So then, Paul concludes in Romans 10:17, faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Gospel of Christ — the Gospel preached by Christ.

So we are back to where we started. Paul is in perfect harmony with Jesus. Jesus came with the command to repent and believe the Gospel of the Kingdom (Mark 1:14, 15). Paul preaches that same Kingdom (Acts 19:8; 28:23, 31; 20:24, 25; cp. Acts 8:12) and requires that Kingdom Gospel to be heard for salvation. Just as Jesus lamented the terrible work of the Devil as the one who snatches away the word of the Kingdom from the heart, "so that they cannot believe it and be saved" (Luke 8:12), so Paul detects the malign work of the Devil as the confuser of the Gospel: "In whom the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers so that they may not see the glory of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:4). All depends, then, on our response to Jesus' opening command to repent and believe the Gospel (Mark 1:14, 15). This is only to say that God wants us to embrace His plan of world salvation (not just "a plan for your life" but the grand scheme of salvation for the world).

The Gospel bids us get on board in regard to the divine strategy for reintroducing peace to our tortured planet. ✧

## Stop the Violence!

The popular, cherished hope of churchgoers everywhere is that death means continuing to live on in heaven. Obituary notices daily reinforce what is thought to be a source of comfort: the deceased are now conscious and with Jesus in heaven. They have changed addresses, but they have not really died.

Despite its massive popularity, this idea is false to Scripture. Scores of Bible experts from all the various denominational camps have protested against it, but "business" seems to continue as usual. Very few appear motivated enough to search this matter out. Yet the issue is one affecting Christian hope and destiny. The Bible has a mass of information on this subject — for our comfort and as a vital part of the Gospel.

Whenever Paul addressed the subject of the Christian hope he insisted on the resurrection of *all* the Christians at the return of Christ to establish his Kingdom on earth. "Thus — by this process — we shall come to be with the Lord" (I Thess. 4:17). "Comfort one another with these words" (v. 18). So Paul concludes his dramatic account of Jesus' coming descent to the earth for the purpose of raising the faithful dead.

Churchgoers however, have chosen their own model, not Paul's, to sustain them in the face of the death of loved ones.

Paul is consistent and logical. In I Corinthians 15 he tells us that the sound of the last trumpet will be the signal for Jesus to come and raise all the faithful dead and confer upon them immortality and a spiritual body — a body equipped with brand new capacities and not subject to disease and death. A year later Paul addressed the Corinthians again on the great theme of resurrection. In 2 Corinthians 4:14 he introduces his topic: "The one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us up/resurrect us with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence" (see RSV). Exactly as in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, it is only by resurrection at the second coming that Christians can come into the presence of Jesus and be with him forever.

A few verses later, in 2 Corinthians 5:8, Paul reinforces his teaching with other words: Christians desire, he says, "to leave the body and go home to be with the Lord" — "absent from the body and present with the Lord." It is at this point that Bible readers abandon the all-important context of Paul's remarks. They forget that Paul has been talking about the *resurrection* (2 Cor. 4:14). Let us attach that verse to what we find in 2 Corinthians 5:8: "We are of good courage and would rather be away from the body and, **when the Lord Jesus raises us up (4:14)**, be present with the Lord [in our new bodies]."

An amazing violence is done to Paul when half of one verse, 2 Corinthians 5:8, is wrenched from its context and offered as support for a *disembodied* existence of the dead in heaven, *before the resurrection*. But this is precisely not what Paul intended. In fact Paul expressly states that he does *not* want to be without a body, "naked" (v.3). He longs rather to be invested with his new body, the resurrection body. When this happens at the coming of Jesus he will be at home with the Lord, equipped with an indestructible body.

Popular teaching, relying on one half of one verse isolated from its immediate and wider context in Paul's other letters, offers a hopeless future in which the dying will be "homeless," bodiless, naked in heaven. The Bible's view of our hope is so much more comforting. We will be at home with Jesus in his presence only and exclusively via resurrection of the whole man, at the return of Jesus. Then we will be clothed with immortality, the event of the seventh trumpet (1 Cor. 15:51-55). There is no other way to come into the presence of Jesus.

We recommend that Paul not be derailed on the basis of that one verse in 2 Corinthians 5:8; that he be read in context; and that we understand that death is not swallowed up for Christians until Jesus comes back to raise the dead (1 Cor. 15:54, 55). Hades, the resting place of the faithful dead, will be overcome only in the future. There is no passage into immortality apart from the great central Hebrew doctrine of resurrection. Bypassing resurrection in favor of the disappearance of so-called "immortal souls" is the common practice of pagan religions. The faith of the Bible ought not to be contaminated by the mixing of alien thought-worlds. It would be good for us to heed the words of the distinguished Professor of Systematic Theology at Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, GA:

Shirley Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, p. 378: (Dr. Guthrie is author also of *Diversity in Faith — Unity in Christ*. His book from which the following is quoted is known as a "classic text.")

**"We have to talk about a point of view that from the perspective of Christian faith is *falsely optimistic* because it does not take death seriously enough...Because the position we are about to criticize and reject is just what many believe is the foundation of the Christian hope for the future...we reject it not to destroy hope for eternal life, but to defend an authentically biblical Christian hope...We refer to belief in the immortality of the soul. This doctrine was not taught by the biblical writers themselves, but was common in the [pagan] Greek and oriental religions of the ancient world in which the Christian church was born. Some of the earliest Christian theologians were influenced by it, read the Bible in the light of it, and introduced it into the thinking of the church. It has been with us ever since. Calvin accepted it and so did the classical confession of the Reformed Churches, the Westminster Confession. According to this doctrine, my body will die but *I myself will not really die*...What happens to me at death, then, is that my immortal soul escapes from my mortal body. My body dies but *I myself live on* and return to the spiritual realm from which I came and to which I really belong. If we follow the Protestant Reformation in seeking to ground our faith on 'Scripture alone,' we must reject this traditional hope for the future based on the immortality of the soul...[Death] does not mean that the immortal divine part of us has departed to live on somewhere else. It means that life has left us, that our lives have come to an end, that we are 'dead and gone.' According to Scripture...my soul is just as human,**

creaturely, finite — and *mortal* — as my body. It is simply the life of my body...We have no hope at all if our hope is in our own in-built immortality.”

*Companion Bible* by E.W. Bullinger, on 2 Corinthians 5:8:

“It is little less than a crime for anyone to pick out certain words and frame them into a sentence, not only disregarding the scope and context, but ignoring the other words in the verse, and quote the words ‘*absent from the body, present with the Lord*’ with the view of dispensing with the hope of the Resurrection (which is the subject of the whole passage) as though it were unnecessary; and as though ‘*present with the Lord*’ is obtainable without it.”

## The Bible about Death What Happens? What about Resurrection? Rewards, When?

### Let the Bible speak for itself:

#### Job 14:10ff.

Man dies and lies prostrate. Man expires and where is he?

As water evaporates from the sea and a river becomes parched and dried up, so man lies down [to sleep] and does not rise.

Until the heavens be no more he will not awake nor be aroused out of *his sleep*.

Oh that you would hide me *in SHEOL/Hades*, that you would conceal me until your wrath returns, that you would set a limit for me and remember me.

If a man dies will he come to life again?

#### Daniel 12:2

Many of those who are sleeping in the dust of the earth will awake, some to the life of the Age (everlasting life: more exactly the Life of the Age [to come]).

#### I Samuel 2:6

The Lord kills and makes alive; He brings *down* to SHEOL and raises *up*.

#### Psalm 13:3

Enlighten my eyes lest I *sleep the sleep of death*.

#### Psalm 88:3-5

My soul has had enough troubles and my life has drawn near to SHEOL.

I am reckoned among those who go down to the pit...Like the slain who lie in the grave (LXX, lie sleeping in the grave), whom you remember no more.

#### Job 7:21

Now I will lie down in the dust and you will seek me and I will not be.

#### Ecc. 9:2ff; 3:19ff.

It is the same for all. There is one fate for the righteous and for the wicked; for the good, for the clean and for the unclean...This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men...For the living know that they will die; but the dead do not know anything, nor have they any reward for their memory is forgotten. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might: for there is no activity or planning or wisdom in SHEOL where you are going.

For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same. As one dies so dies the other. Indeed, they all have the same breath and there is no advantage for man over the beast, for all is vanity. All go to the same place. All come from the dust and all return to the dust.

#### Isaiah 38:18, 19

SHEOL cannot thank you [i.e. its inhabitants cannot]. Death cannot praise you. Those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness. It is the living who give thanks to you.

### Any Hope?

“The Son of Man will be three days...in the heart of the earth” (Matt. 12:40).

“After three days I will rise again” (Matt. 27:63).

“Stop clinging to me: I have not yet ascended to the Father” (John 20:17).

“Christ was not abandoned to HADES/SHEOL. This Jesus God raised up again” (Acts 2:31, 32).

#### Jesus said:

“Our friend Lazarus *is sleeping/has fallen asleep*. Lazarus is dead and I am going to awake him out of his sleep” = resurrect him (John 11:11-14). “‘Lazarus, *come forth,*’ and he who had died *came forth*” (John 11:43). (*He came forth from the tomb, not back from heaven.*)

“Do not marvel at this: The hour is coming when all who are in the *tombs* shall hear his voice, and shall *come forth*: those who did good things to a *resurrection* of life and those who did evil things to a resurrection of judgment” (John 5:28, 29).

“You will be repaid [rewarded] at the *resurrection* of the righteous” (Luke 14:14).

“Those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection of the dead...cannot die anymore” (Luke 20:35, 36).

“The Son of Man will come in the glory of his Father with his angels and then he will reward every man according to his deeds” (Matt. 16:27).

“Behold, I am coming quickly and my reward is with me, to give to every man according to his work” (Rev. 22:12).

#### **Paul said:**

“He who raised the Lord Jesus will *raise us up* also with Jesus and will present us with you” (II Cor. 4:14). (He develops this concept in chapter 5, where he speaks of being present *with the Lord*.)

“We do not want you to be uninformed about those who are asleep...The dead in Christ will *rise first*...and *in this way* we will all be *with the Lord*” (see I Thess. 4:13ff).

“For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation, through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we are *awake or sleeping*, we will *live together with him*” (I Thess. 5:9, 10).

“The Lord, the righteous judge, will give me a crown *on that day*, not to me only, but *to all* those who love his appearing [second coming]” (II Tim. 4:8).

“In Christ all will be *brought back to life*. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; after that those who are Christ’s *at his COMING* [Parousia]... Behold I tell you a mystery [one of the mysteries of the Kingdom]: We shall not all sleep, but we shall be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, *at the last trumpet*, for the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised, and we shall be changed...For this mortal must put on immortality...When this mortal will have put on immortality THEN will come about the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?’” (I Cor. 15:22, 23; 51-55).

“The third woe is coming quickly. The seventh angel sounded his trumpet: and there arose loud voices in heaven, saying ‘The Kingdom of this world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Messiah

and he will reign into the ages of the ages...’ We give thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who is and who was, because you have assumed your great power and have begun to reign. And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came and *the time came to give their reward to Your bond-servants* the prophets and to the saints and to those who fear your name, great and small, and to destroy those who destroy the earth” (Rev. 11:14-18).

“The saints of the Highest One will receive the Kingdom and possess the Kingdom forever, for all ages to come...*The time arrived when the saints took possession of the Kingdom*...Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of Highest one. Their Kingdom will be an everlasting Kingdom and all dominions will serve and obey them” (Dan. 7:18, 22, 27).

#### **John saw it. Do we believe it?**

“*I saw* thrones with people sitting on them, and judgment was given in favor of them. And I saw those persons who had been beheaded because of Jesus’ testimony and because of the word of God [Gospel of the Kingdom], and those who had not worshiped the Beast, and they came back to life and began to reign with the Messiah for the millennium [thousand years]. (The remainder of the dead did not come back to life until the millennium was completed.) This is called the First Resurrection. Blessed and holy is the one who takes part in this First Resurrection. The second death [the Lake of Fire] has no power over them, but they will be God’s and Christ’s priests, and they will rule as kings for the millennium” (Rev. 20:4-6; cp. 5:10 and Matt. 5:5).

#### **From the Old Testament:**

Adam, “You will return to the ground, because from it you were taken. Dust you are and to dust you will return” (Gen. 3:19).

“God will redeem my soul [me] from the power of SHEOL. He will receive me” (Ps. 49:15)

“I will be satisfied with your likeness, when *I shall awake*” (Ps. 17:15).

“Many of those who *are asleep* in the dust of the earth *will awake*...” (Dan. 12:2).

“Your dead *will live*: Their corpses *will rise*. You who are lying in the dust, *awake* and shout for joy” (Isa. 26:19).

“The LORD kills and makes alive; he brings *down to SHEOL* and *raises up*” (I Sam. 2:6). ✧

## The Transfiguration: Grand Preview of the Coming Kingdom of God on Earth

The disciples had suffered a shattering blow. Peter had moments earlier received the heartiest congratulations for his inspired insight that Jesus was the Messiah of God (Matt. 16:16). Then these unwelcome words: The Son of Man is going to be arrested and killed, but he will come back from death on the third day. Peter takes matters into his own hands and rebukes the Savior, only to receive a severer rebuke in return. Peter's agenda would wreck the Messianic program designed by God for Jesus. The lesson is clear: If we gain the whole world, but are unwilling to give up everything for Jesus, what have we *really* gained? Better to abandon all for the Gospel of the Messiah than to be excluded from the Kingdom. Then Jesus said: "I tell you with absolute certainty, there are some standing here with me who this side of death will see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom" (Matt.16:28).

How can that be? Did the Kingdom of God arrive within the lifetime of Peter, James and John? If so, then the vision of the Kingdom proposed in the pages of this magazine is completely astray. We have been saying constantly that the primary and dominant meaning of "Kingdom of God" is the theocratic world empire of the Messiah to be inaugurated on a renewed earth, with headquarters in Jerusalem, consequent upon the future arrival of Jesus. No such Kingdom arrived within the lifetime of the Apostles. No such Kingdom came into view at the crucifixion of Jesus. No such Kingdom appeared when Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father. A very considerable confusion has come over churchgoers on this issue of the definition of the Kingdom, a confusion which is all the more perplexing because the Kingdom forms the content of all New Testament presentation of *the Gospel* (see for example Luke 4:43; Matt. 3:2; 4:23; 9:35; 24:14, etc.).

Commentary which proposes that Jesus ascended to the throne of David at his ascension has not learned to think in Messianic terms. The throne of David was and will be located in Jerusalem, not in heaven. The heir to the throne is presently absent from the earth which is to be his inheritance along with the faithful (Matt. 5:5; Rev. 5:10). Luke, brilliant evangelist and companion of Paul, carefully laid out the Messianic Program in Acts 1:5-7. In those much-neglected verses Jesus is asked the crucial question, "Is it at *this*

*time* that you are going to restore the Kingdom to Israel?" The question is raised after three years and a further 40 days of intensive training in Kingdom studies (Acts 1:3). Despite this fact commentaries think they know better than the trained Apostles. To criticize them at this point in their career, as many do at this verse (Acts 1:6), is to impugn the Messiah himself. Jesus did not for one moment discount the fact that the Kingdom will be restored to Israel (as the whole of Old Testament prophecy announces). He simply stated that it is impossible to know when that event will take place. That the Kingdom will come is sure. When it will come is unknown. It is not a question about whether the Kingdom is to return to Israel. It is a question about when that will happen. What did come "within a few days" was the powerful outpouring of the Spirit. What did not come within a few days was the Kingdom. It is a serious mistake to overlook that vital distinction between two events so carefully spelled out in Acts 1. Those who think they find the throne of David in heaven in Acts 2 do so, we propose, at the expense of the primary data supplied by Acts 1:5-7.

Back to our initial question. Jesus had made the amazing statement that some standing in his presence in the early years of the first century would witness the coming of the Kingdom. Yet the Kingdom did not come, neither then, nor at the ascension, nor certainly in AD 70! (The current proposal in some quarters that the destruction of Jerusalem without any restoration of Israel was the coming of the Kingdom is sheer impossibility!)

What the inner circle of disciples saw was indeed the Kingdom of God. But they saw it *in vision*. Luke makes the closest connection possible between the prediction about the Kingdom and the transfiguration event which followed (Luke 9:28: "Now it came to pass about eight days *after this saying* [about seeing the Kingdom]). What the disciples witnessed was the Kingdom of God on earth. They saw the glory of Jesus — glory is a common synonym for the coming Kingdom — and in his company there appeared the resurrected Elijah and Moses. The righteous would "shine forth like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father," Jesus had said earlier (Matt. 13:43). So Jesus at the transfiguration appeared with shining face, shining like the sun, while his clothing was white as light (Matt. 17:2). This extraordinary glimpse into the world as it will be when the Kingdom comes was a fitting encouragement to the disciples after the daunting announcement of Jesus' impending death. The event of transfiguration is deliberately described as a vision —

orama.<sup>1</sup> Those who witnessed the event were projected temporarily into the future. No other event in the experience of the disciples is perhaps as amazing as this. The memory of it and the meaning of it were indelibly written on the mind of the leading Apostle, Peter.

Thus he confirms for us the impression we gain of the Transfiguration given by the three Gospel writers. In 2 Peter 1 he speaks of the diligence required for entrance into the future Kingdom (vv. 1-11). With this teaching in mind he is anxious to provide good documentation for the basis of Christian faith. He wants them to remember what he had taught about the Kingdom. “We did not follow clever fables when we made known to you the facts about the power and Coming [*parousia* = second coming] of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (2 Pet. 1:16). When was this? “When we were with him in the holy mountain” (v. 18). We saw the second coming of Jesus and we saw the Kingdom. We saw them when we saw Jesus transfigured in the presence of Moses and Elijah on the mountain. They had indeed seen the Kingdom of God. Most interestingly, Peter describes himself and his companions as eyewitnesses of the future Kingdom. The word he used is a technical term to describe what is seen by an initiate into the divine mysteries. Peter was privy to the secrets of God’s Kingdom, the mysteries of the Kingdom, the heart of the Gospel of salvation (Matt. 13:11ff; cp. Luke 8:12).

How clear is our vision of the Kingdom? How well have we been initiated into the unfolding secrets of the Kingdom plan, God’s ongoing activity to produce immortals to supervise the Kingdom of God with Jesus when he returns? We suspect that there is much work to be done before the church can unite in its testimony to the Kingdom of God Gospel so beloved by Jesus. A giant step forward will be taken when Acts 1:5-7 is reinstated as a basis for a clear distinction between the coming of the *spirit* at Pentecost and the different event entirely, which is the *future* coming of the *Kingdom* at the return of Jesus. Indeed the Messiah must remain in heaven (thus the Kingdom cannot possibly be yet restored) *until the restoration*<sup>2</sup> of all things in accordance with the words of the Hebrew prophets (see Acts 3:21).

<sup>1</sup> Note the inadequate translation of the NIV which fails to tell us that this was a vision.

<sup>2</sup> Note the link provided between Acts 1:6 and Acts 3:21. Luke connects the two verses with the words “restore” and “restoration.”

Systems of teaching which evaporate the concrete hope of the restoration of the throne of David in Jerusalem at the coming of Jesus risk depriving the Messiah and the saints of their inheritance. ✧

“Jesus opened the Apostles understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45). For 40 days he ‘spoke to them about the issues of the Kingdom of God’ (Acts 1:3). Illuminated and instructed, they asked him on his last day with them, ‘Has the time come now for you to restore the Kingdom to Israel?’ evidently based on the belief that it had not yet been established. He gave an answer which implied the correctness of their belief. Is it conceivable either that they were mistaken, or, if they had been, that he would have so answered as to confirm them in their mistake?”  
(*Lange’s Commentary on Revelation*, p. 95)

## Comments

“Recently I have come to understand the heart of the Bible concerning the Kingdom of God. Along with reading your book *Our Fathers Who Aren’t in Heaven* it has been like a spiritual awakening! All that I had learned and ‘thought’ I know and/or understood about the Bible and God is now suspect. It is like finding God and His truth for the first time and it has literally changed my life! It has begun to renew and cleanse my heart and allow me to see and hear the Word. I thank God I no longer have to be as those that Jesus spoke of in his parables, seeing they see not and hearing they hear not. The scales have begun to fall off my eyes and I am getting a good ear cleaning too.” — *Connecticut*

“I’m 39, and have been a Christian for about 30 years. I was initially raised Catholic and then went to a fundamentalist church in NJ. I have attended different churches as an adult, so I have been exposed to a lot of theology in my life. But I’ve never quite been satisfied. Even in high school, I always questioned the fundamentalist beliefs at my church (people in such denominations don’t react well to questions). Anyway, I’ve pretty much come to believe that what is taught in churches today has very little to do with what is in the Bible.” — *NJ*

“We have begun a study on the nature of God and Christ. As former WCG and UCG members, we are finding this most challenging and interesting. We had long since determined that we did NOT believe that Christ was God. We cannot accept Binitarianism any more than Trinitarianism.” — *New Mexico*