

Focus on the Kingdom

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Anthony Buzzard, editor

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Y'all Please Come!

Our 14th annual conference, April 29-May 1, offers a unique opportunity for truth-seekers in various parts of the USA and the world to come together in an atmosphere of friendly exchange, mutual edification and above all education in the great truths which we hold dear.

Our guest lecturer is Dr. Richard Rubenstein, celebrated author of the fascinating account of the Arian/Athanasian struggle which led to the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity: *When Jesus Became God: The Epic Fight over Christ's Divinity in the Last Days of Rome* (Harcourt Brace, 1999). The setting-in-stone of that mysterious doctrine has had frightful consequences for many earnest Bible students past and present. Calvin actually authorized the judicial murder of Michael Servetus (1553) for the latter's refusal to believe in the Trinity.

Participants may want to read Dr. Rubenstein's book, *When Jesus Became God*, in preparation for the conference. (Copies will also be available at our book table.) Dr. Rubenstein is a professor of conflict resolution at George Mason University. He is a graduate of Harvard Law School and an Oxford University Rhodes Scholar and lives in Fairfax, VA. He was a contemporary of Anthony Buzzard at Oxford (1959-61).

Dr. Rubenstein will present an account of the development of the Trinity in the 4th century and a second lecture on the revolutionary ideas of the great prophets of Israel. Other speakers will include visitors from England, Alex Hall and Delroy Gayle. Pastor Bill Wachtel will give a detailed account of the meaning of the famous Christological passage in Philippians 2. We will hear also from Miami professor of rhetoric, Robert Hach, whose important book *Possession and Persuasion* has been of such value to the Kingdom of God Gospel. He will address us on the supreme importance of the Gospel as Word. Also speaking will be Ray Faircloth of England, Dan Mages of California and our own resident students/teachers at Atlanta Bible College, Sean Finnegan and Dustin Smith.

Anthony Buzzard, whose book on the Trinity (*The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity's Self-Inflicted Wound*) is currently in 16 languages, will present a paper: "When Gabriel Speaks: The Revolutionary

Words of the Angel to Daniel (ch. 9) and Mary." Kent Ross will give the sermon at the concluding service on Sunday morning, May 1.

There will be space for faith stories in which we invite you to give us an account of your journey of faith thus far. These have traditionally been highlights of the conference. As usual we will have a book table. We will provide DVDs of the conference.

14th Theological Conference

To register, please call Atlanta Bible College at 800-347-4261 or mail the form on p. 7. Please give the time of your arrival and flight number and we will provide a van to meet you at Atlanta airport. **The cost of the conference is \$105 before April 14th.** This includes 5 meals.

Accommodation is available at the Hampton Inn, McDonough, GA for \$70 per night (1-4 persons per room), including continental breakfast. Transportation is provided each day between the hotel and Cornerstone Bible Church, which is 3 miles away. To book, call Hampton at 770-914-0077 **by April 14th** and mention Atlanta Bible College.

Intensive Class Offered

Atlanta Bible College will offer a three-day intensive course, "The Kingdom of God as Gospel," taught by Anthony, May 2-4, 2005 following the Theological Conference. The classes will be held at Cornerstone Bible Church. Times will be 9.00-12.30 and 1.30-5.00 Mon., Tues. and Wed. Tuition \$238 for credit, otherwise \$185, plus textbook. Call 800-347-4261 to register.

Keeping Your Eyes on the Future

There is a famous quotation from Karl Barth to the effect that Christianity which is not radically and decisively eschatological, i.e., *future* oriented, is not Christianity at all. How true that is. From the moment when Jesus issued his impressive opening *command* to "Repent because the Kingdom of God is at hand" (see Mark 1:14, 15), he was directing the minds of his followers to a *future* event, still future indeed to us also. Mark 1:14, 15 is the largely neglected foundational premise of Jesus' version of Christian faith. The rest of the New Testament is really an expansion and "unpacking" of Jesus' summary statement of saving faith. We are to base our relationship with God and His begotten Son Jesus on intelligently *believing* what Jesus announced and commanded in Mark 1:14, 15 as the basis of repentance: The Kingdom is coming, and in view of that stupendous coming event, we are urged to change our minds and lives and orientate our whole being and energy towards the Kingdom of God — the only venture

which is going to survive. It is God's Kingdom, and His will, now so flagrantly and blatantly rejected, is going to triumph everywhere on earth.

Read all the Kingdom passages in Mark carefully and you will find that the Kingdom is the great event of the future. Joseph of Arimathea was still waiting for the Kingdom of God, after Jesus' ministry was complete (Mark 15:43). He was a disciple of Jesus and he had his Kingdom theology straight! He did not imagine that the Kingdom of God had actually come while Jesus was preaching. Certainly he recognized, as we should, that the activity of Jesus in Israel provided *signs* of the future Kingdom in terms of its power, in advance of the actual arrival of the Kingdom. The Kingdom itself is definitely future in the mind of Jesus. Nor did it come at Pentecost. Luke deliberately teaches us (and so many seem to overlook this fact) that the coming of the spirit from the risen Jesus at Pentecost was expressly *not* the arrival of the Kingdom. Acts 1:5-7 could revolutionize the Christian world if those verses were taken to heart, discussed and preached clearly. There is a marvelous and simple truth to be found there. The disciples, after a six-week further seminar on Jesus' favorite subject, the Kingdom of God, present the Master Rabbi with just the right question: "Has the time now come for you to restore the Kingdom to [the nation of] Israel?" (Acts 1:6). Luke includes this illuminating request for precious information, because he had already reported Jesus' promise to the Apostles that they would supervise the future restored nation of Israel (see Luke 22:28-30; Matt. 19:28). Jesus informed his executive team — without the slightest hint that their question was misguided — that it was not for them to know *when* this restoration of Israel would occur. Indeed only the Father knew when Jesus would return to implement that grand restoration of all things as predicted by the prophets (Acts 3:21). Acts 1:6 is a golden text.

That the restoration would indeed happen was never in doubt, nor that the Kingdom would be restored *to Israel* (see also Isa. 19 and Rom. 11). Only the *chronology* of that future event was not to be revealed. But now notice this: The coming *of the spirit*, Jesus had said, was to be "not many days from now" (Acts 1:5). For the coming of the spirit, as distinct from the coming of the Kingdom, there is a definite time marker — within a few days. Please grasp once and for all the simple fact that the coming of the spirit is positively not the arrival of the Kingdom of God. Consequently the widely held notion that the Kingdom of God is simply the creation of *the*

church at Pentecost is a powerful falsehood (we must "call a spade a spade"!); Acts 1:5-7 is one of those pieces of primary biblical data given as a basis and framework for the entire New Testament story line.

Luke 19:11-27 is another, deserving to be preached very frequently. In this wonderful passage the crowd devoted to the gripping teaching of the Messiah Jesus is eager to know if the Kingdom of God is "about to appear immediately." Their reason for so wondering is precisely that the Messiah, as they rightly believe Jesus to be, is standing close by the capital of the Messianic Kingdom. Since he is near to Jerusalem, surely, they suppose, he must be on the verge of taking over rulership of the world, ousting the Romans and ushering in the golden age of world peace and prosperity promised by God through the Hebrew prophets.

But no. The time for that Kingdom is not yet. The parable by which Jesus so graphically imprints on their minds the biblical timetable goes as follows. Jesus likens himself to the nobleman who has first to depart to a far country (heaven) and then return. At his return, not before, he will have been authorized to inherit the Kingdom promised to him on earth by his Father. At that future return, what we now call the Parousia or Second Coming of Jesus, the Kingdom of God will indeed appear visibly in Jerusalem and the promises of God will be fulfilled.

Upon his return, Jesus goes on to say, his followers will be duly compensated for the Kingdom work they have been conducting while he is absent in heaven. By Kingdom work is meant a vital role in announcing the Kingdom of God, in preparation for its splendid arrival at the return of the Messiah. Everything Jesus taught was directed and focused on the Kingdom. Christians are "sons of the Kingdom," "disciples of the Kingdom," and "heirs of the Kingdom." They must be pledged now to the demanding ethics of love required by all who hope to be part of the Kingdom as executives when it arrives.

And when it does finally arrive on earth, Jesus as returning and rewarding King will invite those who have employed their talent now in persistent work for the Kingdom Gospel to be promoted to positions of government over five or ten cities. At that time their scope for blessing others will increase vastly over the influence they can have even now by bringing the knowledge of the Gospel of the Kingdom to the public. The New Testament Christians, in whose steps we should follow, are ministers and servants of Jesus' amazing immortality program — how we can gain life forever and enjoy it forever with our loved ones and with Jesus in that future Kingdom. No suffering now,

no temporary frustration or difficulty now can compare, as Paul remarked, with the dazzling privilege which will be ours when we take up our positions with Jesus in that future Kingdom of glory: "I am persuaded that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to be revealed in us Christians" (Rom. 8:18).

Yes, the Kingdom of God is first and foremost the event of the Second Coming of Jesus. To say, without further comment, that the Kingdom has already come is to destroy the New Testament witness and hope. Jesus was more than clear on this point. He teaches us to pray "Your Kingdom come!" as our first request to God. He spoke of that astonishing future time when Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (resurrected) will appear in the Kingdom of God (Matt. 8:11). He warned that many would-be, sincere but deluded followers of his, will be disappointed "in that day." They will fail to enter the Kingdom of God. Note that the Kingdom of God belongs in the mind of Jesus to that *future* day (Matt. 7:22, 23).

In Mark 9:45-48 Jesus presents two future destinies, destruction in the fires of Gehenna or a welcome into the life of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is predominantly, then, the grand, revolutionary and political event of the future. The Kingdom of God will come only when the seventh angel issues his trumpet blast (Rev. 11:15-18). From that moment on it can truly be said that God and His Messiah have *begun* to reign. To say then that the Messiah and God are already reigning quickly renders the New Testament a giant muddle. If the Kingdom begins only at the resurrection (as Rev. 11:15-18 states so clearly) that Kingdom has not yet come. Matt. 6:10 is a prayer for it to *come* (Mic.4:8).

Back to that fundamentally significant opening and summary of the whole Gospel-teaching ministry of Jesus in Mark 1:14, 15. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* captures well the intent of Jesus' first command to us the public. Without a basic repentance and belief in the Kingdom of God, we risk "accepting Jesus" without really accepting him, since Jesus cannot and must not be divorced from his words, which define his mind and person.

"It was in the full heat of this eschatological revival that John the Baptist had fanned, that Christ began to teach, and he also began with the eschatological phrase, 'The Kingdom of God is at hand.' Consequently, his teaching must have been taken at once in an eschatological sense, and it is rather futile to attempt to limit such implications to passages where modern eschatological phrases are

used unambiguously. 'The Kingdom of God is at hand' had the inseparable connotation 'Judgment is at hand,' and in this context, 'Repent' (Mk 1:15) must mean 'lest you be judged.' Hence, our Lord's teaching about salvation **had primarily a future content**: positively, admission into the kingdom of God, and negatively, deliverance from the preceding judgment." Believing in the Kingdom is the proper response to Jesus' Gospel demand for our allegiance.

The Transfiguration: A Vision of the Coming Kingdom

A startling statement by Jesus that "there are some standing here who will not experience death before they see the Kingdom of God coming with power" (Mark 9:1) should by no means be allowed to contradict the primary and massive evidence for the Kingdom of God as the great event of the future. A small group of disciples only were privileged to witness *a vision* of the Kingdom. Mark goes on to report that "after six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves and he was transfigured before them. His garments became glistening, intensely white as no launderer could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah and Moses and they were talking to Jesus" (Mark 9:2-4). A cloud overshadowed them and a voice was heard: "This is my beloved Son: *listen* to him," (not just "watch him die"!).

The event is one of the most spectacular in the gospel records. The presence of the overshadowing cloud is reminiscent of the event at which the Old Covenant was inaugurated through Moses in Exodus 24:18ff. We are reminded also of the overshadowing of Mary by the presence of God when Gabriel announced that the Son of God was to be divinely created in her womb (Luke 1:35).

Here at the transfiguration that same miraculously created Son of God, the second Adam, is the focus of our attention. We are to listen to him! (Mark 9:7). The disciples were permitted to see the yet future Kingdom of God in a *vision* (note that the parallel in Matt. 17:9 calls this event a *vision* — not just, as poorly translated in the NIV, "what you have seen").

Peter was present at this wonderfully encouraging event (the disciples had very recently been told of the upcoming death of the Messiah, and needed to know that his death was not the end!). In Peter's second letter he wrote of God's "great and precious promises [of immortality in the Kingdom to come], that through these we may escape the corruption that is in the world because of passion and become partakers of the divine nature," including of course ultimately the gift of indestructible life at the resurrection (II Pet. 1:4). Peter

then expands on the promises which impart immortality: “We did not follow cleverly devised fables when we made known to you the power and Parousia [Second Coming] of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (II Pet. 1:16). Peter’s words remind us of Jesus when he spoke of the knowledge of the mystery of the Kingdom of God which “has been given to you” (Matt. 13:11). Not only were the Apostles eyewitnesses of the resurrection of Jesus, they were witnesses also of the entire teaching-preaching ministry of Jesus (Acts 10:39). A major event in that ministry was their experience of a direct vision of the future Kingdom of God. Peter puts it this way: “We heard this voice coming from heaven for we were with him on the holy mountain [at the transfiguration]. And we have the prophetic word confirmed. You will do well to pay attention to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns” (II Pet. 1:18, 19). It was at this event that the Parousia of Jesus (II Pet. 1:16) was promised and actually seen in a special vision.

The coming of the Kingdom of God in Mark 9:2 was simply a preview in vision of the glorious arrival of the Kingdom of God in the future. Luke links the Kingdom of God even more closely to the Transfiguration when he writes (in 9:26-28): “Whoever is ashamed of me and my words [**note the absolute inseparability of Jesus and his words!**] of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of his Father and the holy angels. But I tell you there are some standing here who will not see death before they see the Kingdom of God. Now about eight days *after these sayings*, Jesus took with him Peter, John and James and went up on the mountain to pray” — and the transfiguration occurred. Those leading Apostles were uniquely privileged. They lived to see the arrival of the Kingdom of God in the form of a powerful vision in which the resurrected Moses and Elijah (in vision) appeared on earth with Jesus. This was a visionary projection into the future, and it does not of course mean that Elijah and Moses were in the first century actually alive. They were asleep in death (“these all died not having received the promises,” Heb 11:13, 39). In the future at the return of Jesus, Moses and Elijah will be brought back to life and will with the rest of the faithful converse with Jesus on the renewed earth. It is important to observe that the Kingdom promised will be established on this planet and not in some super-celestial location.

On one occasion Jesus promised that he would return before the missionary work in Israel was

complete (Matt. 10:23). Jesus was not mistaken. In typical Hebrew fashion he addresses the Apostles as the representatives of an end-time preaching in the cities of Israel. Speaking to the eleven Apostles, after his own resurrection, Jesus promised, “I will be with you till the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). The promise incorporates all those “descendants” of the Apostles, i.e. disciples of Jesus who undertake the work of preaching the Kingdom until the end of the age, the return of Jesus.

The Kingdom, not “Heaven,” is the Christian Goal

The Kingdom of God is the Christian objective. Tracts which speak of “heaven” as the goal of the Christian betray the Gnostic leaven which has so seriously permeated official Christianity. Dr. J.A.T. Robinson of Cambridge ought to have been heeded when he stated correctly that “heaven is never in fact used in the Bible for the destination of the dying.” He complained that a misleading impression is made on all who attend funeral services. “The reading of I Cor. 15 [about the future resurrection of the faithful] at funerals reinforces the impression that this chapter is about the moment of death. In fact it revolves around two points, the ‘third day’ [Jesus’ resurrection] and ‘the last day’ [the future resurrection of the saints]” (*In the End God*, pp. 104, 105).

The Bible is misused on every occasion on which it is said that the deceased has “gone to be with Jesus,” “passed away” or “gone to heaven.” Jesus’ language, and therefore Jesus himself, has been abandoned as our Christian model. He plainly stated that Lazarus had “fallen asleep” and “died” (John 1:11, 14). The dead are waiting in the sleep of death (Ps. 13:3) to be woken up from death to life in the resurrection at the Second Coming (I Cor. 15:23). Paul labored to teach his converts that one can only be “with the Lord” via resurrection/rapture *when Jesus comes back*. “Thus, in this way, we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort each other with these words” (I Thess. 4:17, 18). Whereupon the public decides quite otherwise! It comforts itself with the illusion that one can be with the Lord *apart from that resurrection*.

Is it unreasonable to ask churches *first* to put their own theological house in order on these most basic issues of life and death, before indicting the world for its departure from the Bible? If Christianity is unhappy with its present performance, as so many commentators tell us, why not try using the Bible as a remedy, and replace our paganized faith with the life-giving, health-promoting truths of Jesus and the Apostles?

The False Idea of the Immortal Soul

Confusion or uncertainty about the Kingdom and thus about the Gospel, which is the Gospel of the

Kingdom, arises from the destructive falsehood that man has an “immortal soul,” which must continue to live when the man dies. If the Christian goal is reached in a conscious disembodied existence at death, who needs the future resurrection? William Tyndale long ago posed this question to the Pope. The same question needs to be asked of our Protestant friends, who unwittingly take on board a large dose of paganism when they imagine that the dead are not dead, but alive somewhere else before the resurrection. The future resurrection of believers provides the only and indispensable entrance into immortality. “*Thus we shall be with the Lord.*”

The millions of tracts which offer “salvation” mislead when they say, “The free gift of eternal life (Heaven) is yours only through Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8, 9).” That text says nothing about “Heaven.” Nor does it imply that salvation is received apart from obedience. Paul was not contradicting Hebrews 5:9: Jesus is “the author of salvation to all who obey him.” Paul was not at variance with Jesus who said: “He who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him” (John 3:36). Doing the will of God is a requisite for salvation: “Not everyone who calls me ‘lord, lord’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in Heaven” (Matt. 7:21).

The trouble stems from this long-standing false impression that inheriting the Kingdom of Heaven means that you “go to heaven when you die.” Jesus spoke of preparing a place for the future inheritance of the saints (in John 14). He then explained that he was going to *return* to the earth (“I will come back,” John 14:3), so that his followers may be with him.

It is evident that if you want to be with Jesus at that time you will not want to be in heaven, where Jesus won’t be! It should not be difficult to see the connection between this statement and Jesus’ promise in Matthew 25:31, 34. “When the Son of Man comes [back] in his glory...*then* he will sit on his throne of glory...and say, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’”

Most seem not to believe the words of Jesus that “the meek are going to have the earth/land as their inheritance” (Matt. 5:5, quoting Ps. 37:11) and that the saints of all the nations are going in the future “to rule as kings **on the earth**” (Rev. 5:10), meaning, of course, that the “camp of the saints and the beloved city” will be located close to the “broad plain of the earth” (Rev. 20:9). This marvelous hope is based on a mass of texts from the Hebrew Bible. Amongst the

most impressive is the information provided by Jeremiah about where the Messiah is going to be and what he will be doing. Listen to this beautiful promise for us believers and for a permanently peaceful Middle East:

“Look, the days are coming, the Lord of Hosts announces, when I will produce for David a righteous Branch and he will reign as monarch and govern wisely and execute justice and righteousness *in the land*. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in security. And this will be his title: ‘The Lord is our righteousness’” (Jer. 23:5, 6).

And so say the prophets of Israel unanimously. So often, the unambiguous declarations of Jesus that *the earth* is the scene of future salvation for believers are suppressed, that is, they are not believed and taught. In their place a distorted understanding of one verse in John’s gospel takes center stage in the popular imagination. But that verse about the mansions in John 14 includes the express comment by Jesus that he is *coming back to the earth to reward the faithful*.

Dr. Robinson of Cambridge provided just the sort of intelligent analysis of our problem which should lead to a complete revision of what we learn about the future — and indeed the Gospel — in church. According to Scripture “men are not immortal by nature. For the Bible writers, ‘God alone has immortality’ [Even Jesus was not immortal before God *made him* immortal at his resurrection. We know that, because he died!...]...It is an almost universally cherished belief that the Immortality of the Soul is a tenet of the Christian faith, despite the fact that it rests on theological assumptions *which are fundamentally at variance with the Biblical doctrine of God and man*...At death the whole man dies, and not just the material part of him, so likewise the whole man will be raised, and not merely the spiritual in him. The Bible opposes the immortality of the soul with the resurrection of the body” (*In the End God*, pp. 91, 94).

The root of the division of churches is a lack of a grasp of the Gospel itself. Charles Fuller, founder of Fuller Seminary, once told a student that he longed for the day when the seminary would sit down and discuss the question “What is the Gospel”!

Evangelicals, by taking that title, profess themselves to be “Gospel people.” *Evangelion* (so pronounced in modern Greek) is the Greek New Testament word for Gospel. But what “evangelicals” today call the Gospel — although many say they cannot define it clearly — is a far cry from the saving Message as Jesus and Paul preached it. The modern invitations to “accept Jesus in your heart” contain no reference at all to the Kingdom of God. And without the Kingdom the

death and resurrection of Jesus are “floating vaguely,” detached from the substratum of Kingdom of God information which Jesus always insisted on. For our readers’ reflection we list finally all the Kingdom statements in Mark’s Gospel. If we were to include the Kingdom statements in Matthew and Luke also, we would quickly see that references to the Kingdom as future outnumber about 20 to 1 the small number of statements in which the Kingdom is said to be, in a different sense, present. In Mark the Kingdom is exclusively the event of the future.

1:14, 15 Believe in the Gospel which is about the Kingdom and which is at hand, near but not yet here. This is called God’s Gospel. It is also the Gospel preached by Jesus. There is as yet no information about Jesus’ death and resurrection, added later.

1:38, 39 Preaching/heralding (the Kingdom, cp. the parallel in Luke 4:43)

2:2 Preaching the word; 2:13, teaching; 3:14 disciples preach. The word is the word of the Kingdom (Matt. 13:19; Luke 5:1, Acts 8:4, 5, 12).

8:38, 9:1 Son of Man comes in his Kingdom, the future as seen in vision at the Transfiguration

9:43, 45, 47 Enter life = enter Kingdom. Future, and parallel and opposite to enter hell = cast into hell.

10:15 (9:37) (cp. John 17:8) Receive Jesus = receive Kingdom = enter it when it comes.

10:23 Enter Kingdom = inherit eternal life, v.17.

10:25, 26 Enter Kingdom, be saved, for the sake of the Gospel, gain eternal life.

10:37 James and John seek places in the future Kingdom.

11:10 Future coming Kingdom of our father David

13:26 Son of Man coming at the Parousia = Kingdom of God about to appear in Luke 21:31

13:32 That day coming, v. 33 appointed time.

14:25 Eat in the future Kingdom. Kingdom = that day when it comes with the return of Jesus.

14:62 The Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven.

15:43 Joseph of Arimathea is waiting for the kingdom (last ref. to Kingdom)✧

Eddie Garrett’s DVDs on The Kingdom, Conditional Immortality, Salvation, and Who Is Jesus are available for \$6 each from ekgarrett11@aol.com

The Church: The New “Israel of God”

A major theme of Paul’s and Peter’s theology is the recognition of the New Testament Church, Jew and Gentile united as one in Christ, as the *spiritual Israel of God*. The following texts make this quite plain. This truth does not of course exclude the fact that a remnant of what is now ethnic, *physical* Israel will be regathered in the future. This later conversion of Israel is discussed by Paul in Romans 9-11.

At present the Church is clearly distinct from the physical nation of Israel (flesh and blood Israelites) but it is equated with the new spiritual “Israel of God.” Both these truths — that is, the use of “Israel” both for the Church and, in prophecy, for the nation of Israel — must be kept in mind for a proper understanding of the Apostles.

To the Gentile Christians Paul wrote: “Remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth, and called ‘uncircumcision’ by those who call themselves ‘circumcision,’ were separate from Messiah, *excluded from citizenship in Israel* and foreigners to the covenants of promise...But now you are no longer foreigners and aliens but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household” (from Eph. 2:11-19). The contrast is between former *exclusion* from citizenship in Israel and present inclusion in the commonwealth of Israel, God’s people.

So in Galatians 6:15, 16, Paul says of the Jew/Gentile church: “It does not matter if a person is circumcised or not; what matters is for him to become an altogether new creature. Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, *who form the Israel of God*” (Jerusalem Bible).

One may gain exactly the same sense by translating: “Peace and mercy on all who follow this rule [in Galatia] and on the [wider] Israel of God.” Paul means the Church.

From Romans 9:6-24, we see that there are two Israels in Paul’s thinking: “Not all those who descend from Israel are Israel; not all the descendants of Abraham are his children...[true children of Abraham are here equated with the new spiritual Israel]...It is not *physical* descent that decided who are the children of God; it is only the children of the promise who will count as the true descendants...Well, we are those people, whether we were Jews or Gentiles, we are the ones he has called.”

Paul here makes a clear distinction between Israelites, Paul’s flesh and blood relatives (Rom. 9:4), and the new spiritual Israel in Christ, which is the Church.

Paul goes on to quote from Hosea 2:23, applying phrases which originally referred to the *nation* of Israel (and will refer to them again in the future) to the Church now: “even us, whom He also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles. As He says in Hosea, ‘I will call them *My people*, who are not *My people*.’”

This most important practice of quoting texts which originally referred to the nation of Israel and applying them to the Church is found very clearly in 1 Peter 2:9-10: “You [the Church] are a chosen people [quoting Isa. 43:20], a royal priesthood, a holy *nation* [Ex. 19:6], a people belonging to God [Deut. 7:6], that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light [Isa. 43:21]. Once you were not a people of God, once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy [Hos. 2:23].”

In 1 Peter 2:5, we read: “You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” This was exactly the function of Israel. The Church has for the moment taken the place of Israel, though Israel has not been finally rejected (Rom. 11). Individual Jews can by repentance and belief in Jesus as Messiah become part of the present Israel of the spirit. And the Jews, or a remnant of them, will repent nationally and collectively in the future, consequent upon the events of the Tribulation (Rom. 9-11; Isa. 19:24).

The Church, as God’s new Israel, is *now* to perform all the functions of Old Testament Israel. None of this, we emphasize, means that physical Israelites will not in the future as a nation turn to God, and thus also become part of the New Israel of God. Formerly *blinded* Israel (not = church) will be saved (Rom. 11:26) at the Parousia.

The importance of the identity of God’s Church as the New Israel is that we are a body with a real constitution based on the laws of the Sermon on the Mount and the covenant of the Kingdom of God made by God with Jesus (Luke 22:28-30). Carrying a passport in the Commonwealth of Israel, we reside as aliens (1 Pet. 2:11) in the various countries where we are domiciled. We are ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:20) representing the Kingdom of God, and have become spiritually speaking “Jews,” circumcised not in the flesh but in the heart: “A true *Jew* is not the man who is merely a Jew outwardly, and real circumcision is not just a matter of the body. The true Jew is the one who is circumcised inwardly, and the true circumcision is of the heart” (Rom. 2:28, 29). Thus

Paul asserts in Philippians 3:3: “We [the Church] are the circumcision, we whose worship is spiritual.”

The crucial importance of Exodus 19:5, 6, the constitution of Israel as kings and priests, is seen by its frequent application to *the New Testament Church*, by Peter (1 Pet. 2:9-10, quoted above), but also by John in Revelation 1:6: “(Jesus) has made us a kingdom and priests to our God and His Father.”

Again, in Revelation 5:10: “(Jesus) purchased men from every tribe, tongue, people and nation and *made them to our God a kingdom and priests* and they will reign on the earth.” This finds *future* fulfillment in Revelation 20:6: “Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection: on such the second death has no power, but they *shall* be priests of God and of Christ and *shall* reign as kings with him for 1000 years.” Once again the original application to Israel (Ex. 19:6) has been transferred to the Church.

No wonder then that Paul addresses the Church as “the Israel of God.” Salvation, after all, is “from the Jews” (John 4:22). The tragedy is that the Jews did not, and still do not, as a nation accept their Messiah. Those few who did, became the founding members of the New Israel of God which we as Gentiles are privileged now to join as brothers and sisters to the Apostles and Jesus, the Great Apostle.

In Philippians 3:3 Paul states expressly that the Church is the spiritual Jew: “We are the true circumcision who worship in the spirit.” That Paul recognized the Israel of the Spirit is shown by 1 Corinthians 10:18 where he speaks of physical Israel as the “Israel *according to the flesh*” (see KJV or an interlinear). Why would Paul use this expression unless he recognized two kinds of Israel: the natural, national Israel and the true Israel of the Spirit?

Remember again: “Salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22). Israel’s creed is the Christian creed. We must be incorporated into the Jewish Messiah to be saved. Thus Gentiles, too, can become the children of Abraham who is “the father of us all” (Rom. 4:16). ✧

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