

Focus on the Kingdom

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Anthony Buzzard, editor

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Plans for the upcoming conference at Atlanta Bible College — Friday, Feb. 16th until Sunday, Feb. 18th, 2001 — are developing well. Please consult the details at the end of this issue of “Focus on the Kingdom.” A registration form is provided there. For reservations at the block rate offered at the Fairfield Inn in Morrow (1559 Adamson Pkwy, Morrow, GA), please call 770-961-6044 and ask for Mary or April and a room will be available at \$49 per night. **Jan. 31st is the cut-off date for this price.** Transportation from Hartsfield International Airport and from the Fairfield Inn will be available. A number of different speakers will address issues of current interest for students of the Bible, and our focus will be on the Gospel of the Kingdom as Jesus preached it. All are warmly invited. No prior belief conditions are necessary!

Jesus Is Coming Back to the Earth — Coming to Stay, Not Just Visiting!

A popular diagram picturing the Christian future presents an arrow pointing downwards as Jesus descends to the earth at his return. Then, amazingly, Jesus is made to do a complete U-turn and, without ever touching the earth, he is off in the direction of the sky to “heaven.” Such a picture is fundamentally non-biblical and actual denies the Second *Coming* by disallowing the presence of Jesus Christ on this renewed earth. (Satan would be much in favor of this idea because his present domination of the world will cease dramatically when Jesus comes back.) The renewed earth is to be the Messiah’s home, as the King of the future Kingdom (see Jer. 3:17; 23:4, 5).

Rance Darity adds this to our theme:

Philippians 3:19-21 states: “Our citizenship is in heaven.” What does this mean? We have looked at verses in the past that have been part of the eschatology (view of the Christian future) of popular piety. The implicit assumption underlying much popular Christian literature is that the purpose of the Bible is to tell people “how to get to heaven when we die.” But is this in fact accurate?

We propose that the Gospel is not about a blissful post mortem destiny for the individual. It is about God’s victorious Kingdom that is coming to us in the person of his Son. The Kingdom of God is not about

what happens “ten minutes after we die.” It is about God’s promises to recreate, restore, and redeem His creation. Romans 8 teaches emphatically that the whole creation will be delivered (including our bodies) from its present decay and bondage. The world is to be liberated politically, socially and spiritually by the coming Kingdom and the glory of the Sons of God. I Corinthians 15 teaches that the *body, the whole man*, not just the soul, is going to be resurrected to participate in God’s Kingdom. The emphasis of Scripture is always on its promise of a new heaven and a new earth. In fact, the *angst* we are taught to feel and the dread that comes at the news of the “unsaved” friend who has “entered eternity” is absent from both the Old Testament and the New.

Popular unbiblical theology breeds a Neo-Platonic “Soul-winners” approach to evangelism that distorts Scriptural perspectives. How we understand mission and evangelism is crucial to the overall understanding of the church’s call to ministry. Preaching the gospel is precisely the announcement of the present Lordship of the resurrected Christ and the news that he will demonstrate his kingship in a way he has not displayed before.

I have watched the agony of some Christian folk as they anguished over the idea that their dear departed one was now being tortured in a subterranean hell fire. Some are attempting to pray their relatives out of a fiery purgatory. Others are frantically visiting dying patients to rescue their “souls” at the eleventh hour. Someone tell me: can this awful dread be derived from the Bible? Urgency? Yes. Judgment ahead? Yes. There is coming certainly “a day in which he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). Therefore, let “the kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath

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can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him” (Ps. 2:10-12).

But what of the New Testament themes of judgment, hell, salvation, and condemnation? Aren't these about saving souls? No. In fact, they are not. It is important to read the Bible in its own historical and literary and political context. By decoupling the Bible from the long history of post-Augustinian interpretation and returning to the first-century world of Judaism, we gain a new and meaningful outlook. I leave you with this quotation from New Testament scholar N.T. Wright on Philippians 3:19-21, part of his 1993 Drew lecture at Spurgeon College. “Many have thought that if our citizenship is in heaven that means that heaven is our real home, the place to which we will eventually go. But that is not how the language of citizenship functions. The point of being a citizen of a mother city is not that when life gets really tough, or when you retire, you can go back home to the mother city. The people to whom Paul was writing in Philippi were Roman citizens, but they had no intention of going back to Rome. They were the means through which Roman civilization was being brought to the world of Northern Greece. If and when the going got tough there, the emperor would come *from* Rome to deliver them from their enemies in Philippi, and establish them as a true Roman presence right there. So Paul says, ‘*from* heaven we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body.’ This is, I suggest, much more integrated with a theology of a coming new heaven and new earth than with a theology of going from the present space-time world to a non-spatio-temporal one. It ties in with other passages such as Galatians 4:21-31, which speaks of the Jerusalem ‘which is above.’ The purpose is not to escape to that Jerusalem, any more than the muddled Galatians thought they had to go and live in terrestrial Jerusalem in order to be proper Christians. No: they were under the dangerous influence of the [then] terrestrial Jerusalem, and Paul is saying, in effect, ‘you must be under the influence of, and act as the agents of, the heavenly Jerusalem.’ Philippians 3 and Galatians 4 both speak of the dimension of the present reality which is to be informed by the mother city, not of a sense of escaping from the present reality to the mother city.”

Editor: The mother city, now prepared in heaven, is going to appear on the future earth with Jesus at his return. This globe is the scene of the Christian's destiny. Christians are going to assist Jesus in the restoration of sound government to the earth. Indeed

God “has appointed a day when he is going to *administer* the world through a man whom He has appointed” for this marvelous task (Acts 17:31; Paul here quotes Ps. 96:13 expressing his joy at the prospect of the Kingdom to come). And that man is Jesus who now sits at the right hand of the Father, pending his dramatic and dazzling return to our planet, where he will be installed as the first successful world ruler. Jesus is *coming back*, the reverse of his departure from the earth (Acts 1:11). All systems of theology which leave him suspended above the earth, or hurrying away beyond the clouds have missed the mind of Messiah on this important topic. False ideas are to the health of the Christian as junk food is to the body. ✧

Our Sentiments Exactly:

“The proper fundamental idea of the **doctrine of God's Kingdom on earth** is so simple that we cannot understand how its truth could ever be doubted — until we remember the farragoes of nonsense which have been propounded under its sanction. This simple, radical idea of the Kingdom is merely that as God redeems not merely a part of man, his spirit alone, his soul alone or his body alone, but the *whole* man, so the redeeming power of Christ has for its object the deliverance of the human race and of the creation in general from the yoke of sin” (Olshausen, *Preface to Commentary on N.T.*, p. 117).

Romans 10:14 (with help from the commentary on Romans by John Stott)

John Stott has wise words about one of the most often-quoted passages of Scripture (Rom. 10:14ff). Stott entitles this passage “The Necessity of Evangelism,” pointing to the responsibility of the believer to be involved in whatever way possible with the task of spreading Jesus' Gospel. Paul sees the evangelism process as a series of successive steps: “How,” asks Paul, “can they call on the one they have not believed in?” Secondly, “how can they believe in the one whom they have not heard [preaching].” We call your attention to an important mistranslation in the NIV of Romans 10:14. John Stott makes our point: “Just as believing is logically prior to calling [on Jesus], so hearing is logically prior to believing. What kind of hearing however? In accordance with the normal grammatical usage, the phrase ‘the one *of* whom they have not heard’ should be translated ‘the one *whom*.’” John Stott makes the excellent observation that one must hear Jesus himself speaking in order to have faith. “In other words they will not believe Christ until they have heard him speaking through his messengers or ambassadors” (p. 286).

Paul displays here a relentless logic as he presents his scheme of salvation through evangelism. There are specific steps in the process — links in the chain — which lead to a connection with Jesus. Someone must preach the right Gospel, the Gospel as Jesus preached it; then one must believe Jesus by believing his Gospel (Mark 1:14, 15, etc.). Then one can call on that Gospel-preaching, saving Jesus. It is customary for Paul to be quoted out of context. One of the steps, one of the links in the chain is twisted. All you have to do, it is often claimed, is “confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised him from the dead and you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9). Context, context, context! — the great watchword of sound Bible study. Paul has more to say about the Gospel than is found in verse nine of Romans ten. He has just been speaking of “the Message of faith which *we* [all the apostles] are preaching as Gospel” (Rom. 10:8). Paul has no special Pauline gospel. He preaches the only New Testament Gospel there is. Certainly there is no distinction between Jew and Greek (v. 12), and believing the Message with one’s whole being, especially *the mind* (heart, v. 10) is essential. But back to his question in verse 14: “How shall they believe in him [Jesus] whom they have not heard preaching?” The crucial issue here is that salvation depends on *hearing Jesus preach the Gospel*, not just in watching Jesus die or seeing him resurrected. The fundamental difference between New Testament Gospel preaching and much contemporary practice is that in the Bible **Jesus preaches the Gospel as well as dying** as part of that Gospel. Thus Paul insists: You can only believe in Jesus if you hear Jesus, i.e. preaching the Gospel. The NIV muddles that great truth, by making Paul say: “How can they believe in him **of** whom they have not heard?” It is insufficient just to hear **of** or **about** Jesus. You must hear him speak as a preacher of the saving Gospel. Sometimes a corrected translation is of the utmost value.

Verse 15 gives us a strong clue as to *the content* of that saving Gospel as Jesus preached it: Firstly, preachers who are truly commissioned must preach along the biblical lines as witnessed by the verse Paul now cites from Isaiah: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring the Gospel of good things.” Paul has cited Isaiah 52:7 as a definition of the Gospel. A glance at that section of Isaiah reveals that the Gospel is all about God becoming King *in Jerusalem* (Zion) — about God restoring Zion and redeeming Jerusalem and extending His salvation to the ends of the earth (see Isa. 52:7-10). The vital point to be grasped here is that Isaiah 52:7 (Paul’s key Gospel verse) describes

the *future* Kingdom of God as the rescue of captive Jerusalem (52:2) from the clutches of a final wicked tyrant, the establishment of the Kingdom of God (v. 7) and the political and spiritual liberation of the city of Jerusalem and the world. This is indeed the heart of the Good News (Gospel) presented by the New Testament. The equally essential information about the dying Messiah should never be presented without its foundation in the News of the coming Kingdom on earth at the return of Jesus. A Gospel without the Kingdom as its central element is a poor reflection of New Testament evangelism. The key to this is found in Paul’s conclusion to his carefully argued thesis. He gives us the last link in the chain of events: “So then” — in conclusion — “faith [or believing] stems from hearing/understanding and hearing from **Messiah’s Gospel/Word**” (Rom. 10:17; cp. Matt. 13:19; Luke 8:12).

What that “Gospel-as-the-Messiah-preached-it” is may be demonstrated from the texts we present in our next section, below. ✧

The Kingdom of God (22 Texts)

The Core of the Christian Message of Salvation, as Jesus and the Apostles Preached It

We invite you to read the following Biblical verses thoughtfully. We propose that **intelligent understanding of and believing the Gospel about the Kingdom leads to salvation:**

BBE¹ Matthew 13:19: When **the word of the kingdom comes** to anyone, and the sense of it is not clear to him, then the Evil One comes, and quickly takes away that which was put in his heart. He is the seed dropped by the wayside.

How important is it to understand the Kingdom?

BBE Luke 8:12: Those by the side of the road are those who have given hearing; then the Evil One comes and takes away **the word** from their hearts, so that they may not **have faith and get salvation**.

The Devil understands the danger to his cause from your exposure to the Gospel of the Kingdom.

NAU Mark 4:11, 12: And He was saying to them, "To you has been given **the mystery of the kingdom of God**, but those who are outside get everything in parables, so that WHILE SEEING, THEY MAY SEE AND NOT PERCEIVE, AND WHILE HEARING, THEY MAY HEAR AND NOT UNDERSTAND, OTHERWISE THEY MIGHT RETURN AND BE FORGIVEN."

Repentance and forgiveness depend on a prior understanding and reception of the Kingdom Gospel.

¹Basic Bible in English

NLT² Mark 4:11, 12: He replied, "You are permitted to **understand the secret about the Kingdom of God**. But I am using these stories to conceal everything about it from outsiders, so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled: 'They see what I do, but they don't perceive its meaning. They hear my words, but they don't understand. **So they will not turn from their sins and be forgiven.**'"

This text (Mark 4:11, 12) was repeated in another version because of its critical importance.

The Gospel of salvation from John the Baptist and Jesus to Paul at the end of Acts always has the Kingdom of God as its *first item* on the agenda:

NJB³ Matthew 3:1: In due course John the Baptist appeared; he proclaimed this **message** in the desert of Judaea,

NJB Matthew 3:2: "Repent, for the **kingdom of Heaven** is close at hand."

NJB Matthew 4:17: From then onwards **Jesus** began his proclamation with the message, "Repent, for **the kingdom of Heaven is close at hand.**"

ASV⁴ Matthew 4:23: And **Jesus** went about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and **preaching the gospel of the kingdom**, and healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness among the people.

ASV Matthew 24:14: And **this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached** in the whole world for a testimony to all the nations; and then shall the end come.

ASV Matthew 9:35: And **Jesus** went about all the cities and the villages, teaching in their synagogues, and **preaching the gospel of the kingdom**, and healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness.

ASV Mark 1:14, 15: Now after John was delivered up, **Jesus** came into Galilee, preaching **the gospel of God**, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the **Kingdom of God** is at hand: repent ye, and believe in the gospel.

NJB Luke 4:43: But he answered, "I must **proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God** to the other towns too, because **that is what I was sent to do.**"

NJB Luke 8:1: Now it happened that after this he made his way through towns and villages **preaching and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God**. With him went the Twelve.

NJB Luke 9:2: And **he sent them** out to **proclaim the kingdom of God** and to heal.

RSV⁵ Luke 9:6: And they departed and went through the villages, **preaching the gospel** and healing everywhere

NRS⁶ Luke 9:11: When the crowds found out about it, they followed him; and he welcomed them, and **spoke to them about the kingdom of God**, and healed those who needed to be cured.

NAB⁷ Luke 9:60: But he answered him, "Let the dead bury their dead. But **you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.**"

NAS⁸ Luke 10:9: And heal those in it who are sick, and say to them, "**The kingdom of God has come near to you.**"

NAU Luke 16:16: "The Law and the Prophets *were proclaimed* until John; since that time **the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached**, and everyone is forcing his way into it.

NAU Acts 8:12: But when they believed **Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ**, they were being baptized, men and women alike.

NAB Acts 19:8: He entered the synagogue, and for three months **debated boldly with persuasive arguments about the kingdom of God.**

NJB Acts 20:25: I now feel sure that none of you among whom **I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom** will ever see my face again.

NAB Acts 28:23: So they arranged a day with him and came to his lodgings in great numbers. From early morning until evening, **he expounded his position to them, bearing witness to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus** from the law of Moses and the prophets.

NAS Acts 28:30: And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters, and was welcoming all who came to him,

BBE Acts 28:31: **Preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ** without fear, and no orders were given that he was not to do so.

Paul's last command:

NRS 2 Timothy 4:1, 2: In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and **in view of his appearing and his Kingdom**, I solemnly urge you: **proclaim the message**; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching.

(A better translation of this verse would be: "In the presence of God and of Jesus Christ, who is to judge the living and the dead, I solemnly testify to you both

²New Living Translation

³New Jerusalem Bible

⁴American Standard Version

⁵Revised Standard Version

⁶New Revised Standard Version

⁷New American Bible

⁸New American Standard Version

to the appearing of Jesus and the Kingdom of God. Proclaim the Message...")

Cp. the *Augsburg Commentary on Acts*, 1986, and its excellent summary of New Testament evangelism: "The missionary Paul made a day-long concentrated effort **testifying to the Kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus** both from the Law of Moses and the prophets. Paul's witness is a concise summary of the total teaching of Luke-Acts. The subject **of the Kingdom of God** forms brackets around the book of Acts. It is **what Jesus taught** after the resurrection (1:3; cp. 1:6) and before the resurrection (Luke 4:43, etc.) and **what Paul taught** in Rome at the end of Luke's story (28:23, 31; cp. 8:12, 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; Luke 9:2). **Preaching or testifying to the Kingdom of God refers to the Christian message** which is in continuity with the Apostles, with Jesus and with the Old Testament."

Is this clearly the Message of your church? Is the Kingdom your magnificent obsession as it clearly was of Jesus?✧

Issues of Biblical Prophecy

"Babylon in the Apocalypse is the symbolic name by which Rome is denoted (Rev. 14:8; 17:18). [Is this true within the terms of the Bible?] The power of Rome was regarded by *the later Jews* as was that of Babylon by their forefathers. Compare Jeremiah 51:7 with Revelation 14:8. The occurrence of this name Babylon in 1 Peter 5:13 has given rise to a variety of conjectures, many giving it the same meaning as in the Apocalypse; others refer it to Babylon in Asia, and others still to Babylon in Egypt. **The most natural supposition of all is that by Babylon is intended the old Babylon of Assyria, which was largely inhabited by Jews at the time in question**" (*Smith's Bible Dictionary*).

When confronted by the twisted quotations of Scripture offered him by Satan, the external Devil in the wilderness, Jesus offered us a fundamentally important gem of wisdom: "Man is to have life *through every word of God* and not by bread only" (Matt. 4:4).

Our impression is that many churchgoers are selective in their choice of biblical topics for study and spiritual digestion. But is this fair? Why, for example, would one be more interested in Christian ethics than in, say, the 27% of the Bible which announces the future — prophecy? If every word of God counts and mediates Christian vitality, would it not be wise for the "I-just-like-the-Christian-living" camp to consider

a serious period of time with issues of prophecy — and vice versa.

Various excuses may be forthcoming. Some will say, "I don't concern myself with prophecy. I just know that everything will 'pan out.' I am therefore a 'pan-millennialist.' I don't know what the thousand-year reign of Christ and the Saints means (the millennium) and I am really not concerned as to whether it is going on now or will arrive with Jesus in the future." Such however may merely be a form of cowardice. The Millennium, though only mentioned in one passage in terms of its chronological length, is in fact nothing less than the Kingdom of God, first stage. And the Kingdom of God is the heart of the Gospel message (Luke 4:43; Acts 8:12, etc.). All possible diligence would seem, therefore, to be in order on all questions related to the Kingdom. The text in Revelation 20 is actually far from daunting. Here's why.

How many Christian people shrink in despair from understanding these words of John's gospel? No one, we think. "Lazarus, who had died, came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings" (John 11:44). A plain statement about Lazarus' return to life after being dead. The statement in Revelation 20:4 is structurally no more difficult: "I saw the souls of those who had been decapitated (executed) for the word of God [Gospel of the Kingdom, Acts 8:4, 5, 12; Luke 4:43; 5:1] and they came to life and began to reign with Christ for a thousand years [the Millennium]." This proposition is no more complex than the statement about Lazarus coming back to life from death. In Revelation we see "the souls of those who had been beheaded" and "they came to life and began to reign with Christ for a thousand years." The "souls" of those who had been beheaded means simply "those persons who had been beheaded." "Soul" in the Bible on no occasion means an immortal component of man. "Soul" means the human person himself. Thus in the millennial passage above John saw "those persons who had been decapitated" coming to life again. This of course is resurrection from the dead. First, death by beheading and then a return to life via resurrection. As Lazarus was resurrected, so will be these noble persons who had died for the faith. The major point in Revelation 20 is that the return to life was not their conversion to faith, but their restoration to life after being dead. There should be no doubt about this at all. Those persons described in Revelation 20 first died by execution; then they came back to life from death. Then they began to reign with the Messiah during the Millennium. This, of course, demonstrates that the

Millennium is a period of time, following, not preceding, the future resurrection of the faithful dead. The promise of future rulership of the world, following the return of Jesus and the resurrection of the dead, is one of the ABC teachings of the Bible. “Don’t you know,” said Paul with some indignation, “that the saints are going to manage the world, and if the world is going to come under your jurisdiction, can you not now settle your petty squabbles in church?” (see I Cor 6:2, Moffat). We might add, “Don’t you understand that the millennium is a future period of worldwide rule of Christ and the saints, following the second coming and the first resurrection?”

The Bible is full of information describing events destined to occur just before the return of Jesus. Jesus will not return to earth before you receive this magazine. He and Paul devoted much teaching to support the view that certain things have to happen first (there is no such thing as a *pre-tribulation* rapture in the teaching of Jesus, though there is a “catching up” to meet the Lord Messiah in the air — I Thess. 4:17 — with a view to our escorting him to the earth. The event will be after the tribulation, Matt. 24:29-31; II Thess. 1:7-10).

What are we to expect as a prelude to the coming Kingdom of God on earth? Micah 5 has some fascinating predictions about the role of the Messiah at his first and second comings. A selective method of Bible study, however, leads often to neglect of the second half of Micah’s prediction. Micah 5:2 is famous. Christians are confident about already fulfilled prophecy: “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, the least of the clans of Judah, from you will come for Me a future ruler of Israel, whose origins go back to the distant past, to the days of old.” This celebrated prophecy foretells the birth of the Messiah, who is heir to the throne of David in Jerusalem. What is far less known is the so-far unfulfilled prediction which follows in vv. 4ff: “He will take his stand and will shepherd them [Israel] with the power of Yahweh, with the majesty of the name of his God, and they [Israel] will be secure [hardly true today!], for his [the Messiah’s] greatness will extend to the most distant parts of the country. He himself will be peace, when the Assyrian invades our land, when he tramples on our citadels...and he will deliver us from the Assyrian when he attacks our land and when he tramples our territory.”

When did the Messiah ever confront the Assyrian, a Mesopotamian power? It has never happened, but it must. The Assyrian, Middle Eastern power has yet to arise and threaten Israel. The Messiah has yet to

arrive in the power of the Lord his God to free Israel from that Assyrian invasion. Our point is that faith in the words of God require us to believe not only in prophecies which have already become history — the birth of Messiah in Bethlehem — but in the Messiah’s future liberation of Israel from the Assyrian power. As Barton-Payne in his famous *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* pointed out: “Micah 5:6 states that the armies of the Messiah will waste the land of Assyria...the important fact to maintain in the *still unfulfilled* Micah passage is that whatever be the particular weapons, **there will be a conflict at the time and place identified**, and with the results that are indicated” (Barton-Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy*, Baker, 1973, p. 81).

The extended prophecy given by Jesus to John in the Book of Revelation speaks of Babylon as the evil city of the future. One school of prophetic study has claimed that “Babylon” means Rome. But does it? When Peter signed his letter from Babylon, he was resident amongst Jews in Mesopotamian Babylon (the ancient seat of Nimrod, in Gen. 10). There is no warrant for switching names from Babylon to Rome. But what about the woman who sits on seven hills (Rev. 17:9)? The hills must be the hills of Rome, surely. The text does not say this, however strong the tradition. The woman is a city, certainly. But “the hills” on which she sits are nowhere said to be literal geographical hills. That idea must be imported. Scripture says: “The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits.” The heads/mountains are defined by Scripture in the next verse: “*And they are seven kings* on which the woman sits.” The woman sits also on “many waters” (17:1). Literal waters? No, because the text goes on to tell us that “the waters which you saw, on which the woman sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues” (17:15). The woman is also seen to be sitting on a scarlet Beast (17:3), but no one takes the Beast as a literal animal. So then the facts are these:

The woman, defined as “the great city” (17:18), is seated on 1) a Beast, 2) seven heads/mountains of the Beast, 3) waters. It would be inconsistent to understand the “mountains” *literally*, when the “Beast,” its “heads” and the “waters” on which the woman sits are non-literal symbols. The “seven mountains” therefore are not necessarily a cryptic reference to Rome at all. They are symbols of governmental power.

Isaiah 13 provides further indication of the great city destined to fall in the coming “Day of the Lord” (v. 9), when God “will punish the world for its evil and the wicked for their iniquity. I will also put an end to

the arrogance of the proud and abase the haughtiness of the ruthless. I will make mortal man scarcer than pure gold and mankind than the gold of Ophir. Therefore I will make the heavens tremble and the earth will be shaken from its place at the fury of the Lord of hosts in the Day of His burning anger” (vv. 11-13). It is at this same time that Babylon will be reduced to a desolation, as was Sodom and Gomorrah, and it will never be inhabited or lived in from generation to generation (vv. 19, 20). The time for this terrible Day of the Lord coincides with the destruction of Babylon, and following, in the same context, will be the wonderful restoration of Israel, “when the Lord will have compassion on Jacob and again choose Israel and settle them in their own land. Then foreigners will join them and attach themselves to the house of Jacob. And the Gentiles will take Israel along and bring them to their place and the House of Israel will possess the Gentiles as an inheritance in the Land of the Lord as male servants and female servants, and Israel will take their captors captive and will rule over their oppressors” (Isa. 14:1-2). At that same time a taunting song will ring out against the King of Babylon who has been oppressing Israel and causing them “pain, turmoil and harsh service” (v. 3). This vivid picture of the future concludes with one of the Bible’s most beautiful and comforting descriptions of a world which, under the government of the returned Messiah, will enjoy a millennium of glorious peace: “The whole earth is at rest and is quiet. They break forth into shouts of joy” (Isa. 14:7). How rich and full of promise is God’s future. Christians should strive to make their calling to that wonderful future world “secure and certain” (II Pet. 1:10, 11). ✧

Comments

“I have been reading with great excitement the book *Our Fathers Who Aren’t in Heaven*. This has been a great blessing to understanding the truth of Jesus’ message concerning the Kingdom of God.”—*Connecticut*
 “I enjoyed your book [*The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity’s Self-Inflicted Wound*]. I was very blessed to see such soundness in print and grateful for all the information on many others, past and present, who hold to the truth...I wept for quite a while after reading of our brother Michael Servetus and rejoiced in his boldness as in yours for writing this book.” — *New York*

“I am thankful to have been exposed to your expounding of the good news gospel of our Messiah. Whenever I speak of the Kingdom I love to explain the earthly resurrection at the coming of Christ, and dismantle the belief in disembodied souls going to hell forever, and all the other misunderstandings that various traditions have filtered into the teachings of Christ.” — *Maryland*

Atlanta Bible College’s Tenth Annual Theological Conference — February 16th-18th, 2001

We invite all of our readers to visit us for a unique experience. Beginning on the afternoon of Friday, Feb. 16th and ending at lunchtime on Sunday, Feb. 18th we will convene a gathering of like-minded Bible students and inquirers (all are welcome). We have invited as guest speaker, Professor Clayton Sullivan of the University of Southern Mississippi, author of a remarkable book, *Rethinking Realized Eschatology* (Mercer University Press, 1988). None should be daunted by the technical language — the issues are well known to students of the Bible. The professor’s objective in writing was to examine Jesus’ central and favorite topic: the Kingdom of God. Professor Sullivan exposes and unravels the immensely popular notion (promoted by well-known scholar C.H. Dodd) that the Kingdom of God in the gospels was actualized and exclusively present in the ministry of Jesus. Dodd had left no room for the understanding of the Kingdom as the future, decisive event by which God will establish through the Messiah peace on earth, when Jesus returns. Sullivan writes provocatively: “Throughout most of this two millennia span, the Church has paid scant attention to Jesus the Jew...Instead primary attention was given to doctrines and dogmas about Jesus.”

Professor Sullivan’s expert knowledge of this most crucial of Christian issues will sharpen your understanding of what has been going on by way of an eclipse of Jesus’ own Gospel. You will be empowered by this information to speak with greater confidence about the Kingdom of God, Jesus’ “magnificent obsession.” Professor Sullivan will present two lectures (with opportunity for questions following).

The remainder of our weekend will consist of presentations (with time for audience participation) by various speakers on central Christian topics. There will be space also for short “journey of faith” presentations by our visitors. We look forward to becoming acquainted with those whom we have met only through radio contact. We expect visitors from abroad. The meetings and socializing provide a rare opportunity to meet other “truth-seekers.” For more information please call Atlanta Bible College at 1-800-347-4261 or email us at anthonybuzzard@mindspring.com

Conference Cost	Regular Rate	Full-time Student
Early Bird (by Jan 20 th)	\$29	\$19
After Jan. 20th	\$39	\$29

2001 Theological Conference

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