

Focus on the Kingdom

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Anthony Buzzard, editor

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Theological Conference

We begin by announcing details of our eleventh annual Theological Conference to be held here at Atlanta Bible College, Morrow, Georgia from February 8th, 2002, **starting in the morning on that Friday**, until Sunday, February 10th (ending at lunchtime). We extend a warm invitation to you and your friends to be with us here in Georgia for this occasion.

Thanks to the Internet and other means of outreach, our circle of friends of the Truth of the Abrahamic faith has been extended. We are hoping that we will all make brand new acquaintances as well as renew old ones.

The tragic state of the world compels us all to tighten our grip on faith and above all to become better informed about what we believe, and how to help others to understand it. We need to be empowered with a greater confidence. There is nothing like a conference to provide a “spiritual tune-up” enabling us to increase our influence for good in the world in which we are all responsible to be lights.

For the day-time sessions on Friday (Feb. 8th) we have invited two creation scientists to come and present their understanding of Genesis and its relation to creation. Particularly we want to be able to ask them questions on issues of chronology, dating of fossils, dinosaurs, the flood, and the age of the earth. This will be a unique opportunity to become informed in this crucial area of creation and science. My own interest in this subject was piqued when R.K. Smith of Brush Creek Church of God, Ohio showed me a set of videos with the Australian scientist Ken Ham and his colleague Dr. Gary Parker. Dr. Parker and another professor of science, Dr. McCombs, will lecture to us on creation with emphasis on the question of the age of the earth and of man. There will be ample scope for interaction with the speakers.

Dr. Gary Parker is a Professor of Biology at the Institute for Creation Research and an internationally renowned speaker on creation. As an atheist who taught evolution to his biology students, he was very critical of Christians who compromised with a literal reading of Genesis, hoping to convert them to evolution. Since becoming a Christian, he still is critical of those who compromise with the

Bible, but he now uses his knowledge of evolution to show how the facts have failed to support the theories put forth by evolutionists.

Dr. Charles McCombs is a PhD Organic Chemist trained in the methods of scientific investigation, and a scientist who has 20 chemical patents over 21 years. After becoming a Christian, Charles took the time to look at the evidence which is supposed to prove that evolution is true. He quickly discovered that there is no truly scientific proof for evolution, just theories based on unreasonable and/or preexisting assumptions for the age of the earth. Charles has given his talks in churches large and small from New York to Florida.

The remainder of the weekend we will devote to issues of Abrahamic faith and the principal doctrines we hold dear — some history, some Christology and some prophecy and also the relation of the Christian to the state. Modern scholarship has been undergoing a quiet revolution in exactly the areas of Christology and eschatology which have been our own prime concerns. There is in fact a massive amount of support for our “unorthodox” understandings amongst scholars past and present. It may well be that as a group we lack a sufficient depth of understanding of what is involved in the great framework doctrines of the Bible. Strengthening our understanding and our vision of what we can do to repair the current doctrinal confusion would seem to be an urgent task for us all. We will invite various speakers, some already known to us and others who are newer to our circle, to address us. Again there will be plenty of opportunity for questions and discussion. As usual there will be scope for any who wish to give a brief story of their own faith journey. In the past these stories have been such an inspiration.

Accommodation for the weekend in Atlanta is available at the Fairfield Inn. If you would like to take advantage of the special block prices, please phone the Inn at the number below. We will provide transportation from Hartsfield Airport to the College and also run a van from the Fairfield, which is five minutes from ABC. Continental breakfast is available at the Fairfield Inn.

Rooms may be booked (\$49, 1-4 people) at the Fairfield Inn, Morrow (cut-off date **Jan. 31**). Please phone Fairfield Inn at 770-961-6044 and refer to the group name “Anthony Buzzard.” The cost of the

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conference is \$29 **before Jan. 20th** and \$39 after (\$19 and \$29 for full-time students).

We are convinced that your visit to Atlanta to meet and encourage others will prove to be a time of enrichment and growth. We have a large number of testimonies to the fact that past gatherings of this sort have indeed been an inspiration. To register or for further information please phone Atlanta Bible College at 800-347-4261. ☐

Prophecy: Future or Past? All Over, or Yet to Come?

A leading observer of the Protestant church Ascene laments what he calls the “hopeless confusion of evangelicals on the issue of eschatology.”¹ That daunting word “eschatology” means simply “the study and teaching about things of the future, future hope,” especially relating to the hope of the coming Kingdom of God on the earth when the Messiah comes to take up his rightful position as heir to throne of David restored in Jerusalem. (This is the heart of the Christian Gospel as Jesus preached it.)

Not to see that the Kingdom of David has yet to be reinstated, under Jesus’ leadership, is to miss a large amount of Gospel information. Diminishing the Gospel is not a wise policy for Bible teachers who must be prepared to teach the whole counsel of God.

The central point of Scripture is that the Lord Messiah (Luke 2:11), the promised “Lord, Son of David” (Matt. 15:22; 20:31) has been divinely appointed by the One God, his Father, to rule the world. This, in due time, he will do.

We offer the following as a contribution to sorting out the muddle over the events of the future. This subject touches on the issue of Hope. Hope is the second great virtue bestowed on the believer by the spirit. So important is it to grasp the meaning of Hope that Paul taught that faith and love *depend on* a right understanding of Hope. Faith and love are built on and caused by Hope (Col. 1:4, 5).

For Jesus the future was the subject of a long lecture in Matthew 24 (Mark 13, Luke 21), but more than this, Jesus spoke almost constantly of the future of the world and its government. Jesus came announcing the most stupendous political event of all time — the future arrival of a brand new world government and order, the Kingdom of God (or Kingdom of Heaven; the two terms are exactly synonymous).

First a word about who Jesus is. The whole point of the Messiah is that he is the Lord’s *anointed King*. Jesus is presented in the New Testament, from cover to cover, as the promised King of Israel, God’s chosen agent and royal ruler. Luke introduces the leading character of his narrative as “the Lord’s Anointed” or “the Lord’s Christ/Messiah” (Luke 2:26). This phrase is found 12 times in the Bible, eleven of them in the Old Testament. People who knew their Bibles had little difficulty understanding who Jesus claimed to be. He was the ultimate model King, the final and definitive “Lord’s Messiah.”

On the understanding that Jesus was the Messiah, no more and no less, Jesus promised to found his whole church (Matt. 16:16-19). Any loss of information about the identity of Jesus as Messiah — for example the amazing notion that he *is in fact God at the same time as being the Messiah* — undercuts the Message of the New Testament at its base. You cannot be God and the Messiah at the same time. No Jew could have believed it and Jesus himself never imagined such a bizarre concept.

Churchgoers have lost touch with the Bible in this important matter of recognizing who Jesus is. Jesus Christ is of course not a first and second name. Jesus is not, as one Sunday School student imagined, the child of his parents Joseph and Mary Christ. Christ is not part of the family name of Jesus. Christ is his royal title. Jesus was itself not an uncommon name, but Jesus Christ is unique. He is the one and only designated ruler of Israel and the whole world and at the same time the Savior of all who believe in him and his Gospel, “me and my word,” “me and the Gospel” (Mark 8:35, 38).

Jesus came as a bearer of the warning announcement that the Kingdom is going to come. Yes, Jesus is coming back (unless he and the whole NT is a pious fraud!), and he is going to come and save the world from its mad rush to self-destruction. For God, one adultery per year in the world or one murder is too much. God is troubled deeply by the broken marriages and by the damaged children. He is agonized by the pathetic state of the world, drowned as it is in every imaginable form of evil — from the crippling, destructive cancer of pornography (an addiction to fornication) to the futile pursuit of amusement, the love of pleasure over the love of God.

Jesus was deeply concerned *to instruct* his followers, commissioning them to pass on their understanding to posterity. Jesus gave a detailed account of what is coming in the future just before the arrival of the Kingdom of God. Each generation is to relay that information accurately.

¹ Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, p. 244.

Jesus, of course, did not invent the idea of his own future coming. **The Day of the Lord**, the day when God, using His royal agent, intervenes to sort out our human chaos is a major feature of the Hebrew prophets' vision. **The Day of the Lord** is the day when God takes matters into His own hands. He calls a halt to the world's giddy descent into oblivion. He sends the Messiah, the Lord's anointed King — the Christ, descendant of David, to punish and restore; to reeducate and rebuild; to arbitrate permanent peace and to put an end to the present insanity of human killing human. "They will indeed beat their swords into useful farm implements. Never, ever again will nations train armies or think of building a tank!" (see Isa. 2:1-4).

According to the witness of the prophets that day is coming. The issue for us as individuals is this: Are we prepared by repentance, belief in the Gospel of the Kingdom (Mark 1:14, 15; Mark 4:11, 12; Matt. 13:19) to take part in that glorious new political order and society of the Messianic future? Are we fit to "manage the affairs of the world and have the world under our jurisdiction"? (see Moffat translation of I Cor. 6:2). Are we en route to the fulfillment of the destiny given originally to Adam and now to Christ: the charge to represent the Deity on earth and to organize the affairs of mankind in the way God intended?

In Matthew 24 Jesus gave a rather straightforward account of what to expect. He spoke first of massive deception and warned against it. He then promised, as he often had elsewhere, that his followers would be a rejected minority, subject to harassment and persecution. Not for a moment did Jesus think of massive, national structures as his church. Not once did Jesus envisage a fully Christian nation. It is the wildest delusion to claim that any nation-state in the present evil age is equivalent to the body of Christ. If so, then Revelation 11:15-18 would present a falsehood. That text says that at the coming of the Christ — and only then — all the present nations will become the Kingdom of God. They are not so now.

In Jesus' discourse on the Mount of Olives (Matt. 24) he warned believers that things would become so difficult that the time would arrive when (as he said elsewhere) "those who kill you Christians will think they are doing so in the service of God" (see John 16:2). Such a situation can only point to a pernicious deception, so effective that the professed believers would actually destroy the true believers! Surely that saying of Jesus calls us to the closest, most intensive

self-examination and investigation of the Bible. Could we be deceived? Could we have been tricked into disobedience? Could we be practicing a partial discipleship, stopping short of the "hard teachings" of Jesus? The murderers of Jesus were convinced that they represented the true religion. But a careless acceptance of tradition contrary to Scripture had undermined their judgment. They had killed their own promised Messiah!

Jesus reaches the climax of his account of what is coming (eschatology) at Matthew 24:14. Defining the Gospel as **the Gospel about the Kingdom**, he stated that this saving message must have worldwide coverage before the closing events of the present evil age (Gal. 1:4; cp. II Cor. 4:4) could occur. After an extensive warning about the coming intervention by God through the Messiah, Jesus went on: "When you see the Abomination of Desolation standing in the holy place [Mark says "standing where *he* ought not to"² (Gk. *esteekota*, a masculine participle)], then flee to the hills..." (Matt. 24:15).

The first important point to be noted here is that Jesus knew nothing about a so-called "Prior-to-the Tribulation-Rapture" or pre-trib. rapture! A gullible and uninstructed churchgoing public has been feeding in recent times on a pleasant illusion: that being a Christian means that during the coming Great Tribulation they will be supernaturally airlifted from the earth. But if Jesus believed that, why, oh why did he instruct his followers to "escape to the mountains" at the onset of the time of trouble (Matt. 24:15, 16)? There would be no need for flight to the hills if the resurrection/rapture (I Thess. 4:13ff) was going to occur *before* the tribulation.

It is of course a drastic evasion to suggest that Jesus was not talking to Christians in this discourse! Let us assure our readers that Jesus addressed his teachings to us and our children, via the Apostles, whose students we are to be. To say that Jesus was not talking to Christians would establish a principle by which anything in the teaching of Jesus could be discarded.

The sign for flight to the hills was meant for "those who are living in Judea." What if you live elsewhere? Then other directions or guidance will be forthcoming when the time is ripe. The critical sign, however, was to be the appearance of the **Abomination of Desolation**, the Desecrating Abomination, or Idol, appearing in the holy place.

Jesus did not leave us in the dark about the specifics of this terrible event. He directed us to the same expression found in the extraordinary prophecies of

² See for example Weymouth or NEB, RNEB.

Daniel. Jesus of course did not believe that Daniel was a pious forgery. That is the view of many who write on the Bible today. Thus the authority of Daniel has been disparaged. Jesus, on the other hand, believed that the essential prophetic warning had been detailed “through the prophet Daniel” (Matt. 24:15). By this he did *not* intend us to understand “through a pseudo-Daniel, claiming to be the sixth-century prophet”!

What Daniel had seen would surely come to pass. Jesus instructs us to take careful note of the Danielic teaching on the Abomination. When would it appear in relation to other prophetic end-time events? We are urged by the Master Rabbi to read with understanding. What then is the scoop on the Abomination of Desolation? We must not construct our own interpretation but rely on the data given by Daniel and confirmed by the Messiah. A Despicable, Desecrating Abomination, a human individual (as Mark reports Jesus saying, Mark 13:14), either in person or represented by his statue, will take up a position in the holy place.

The connections to Daniel are expressly said to be the key to understanding. The Abomination is found in four passages in Daniel: 9:27; 8:13; 11:31 and 12:11. Three of these reflect the precise language of Jesus in Matthew 24:15. The fourth expression in Daniel 8:13 is very similar, “the rebellion causing desolation.”

The crucial question is where in the sequence of events *Jesus* places the Abomination event. Let us follow his narrative: “When you see the Abomination of Desolation usurping a place which is **not his** (let the reader understand) then those who are in Judea must take to the hills” (Matt. 24:15, NEB). This dramatic development will trigger the worst time of trouble and chaos in the whole of human history: “For those days will bring distress such as never has been until now, since the beginning of the world which God created — and never will be again” (Matt. 24:21, NEB). *The connecting time indicators must be noted with all care.* “Then [at the appearance of the Abomination in the holy place] there will be great tribulation” (Matt. 24:21). “Alas for women with child in those days” (Matt. 24:19). “It will be a time of great distress. There has never been such a time from the beginning of the world until now and never will be again. If that time of troubles were not cut short, no living thing could survive, but for the sake of God’s chosen it will be cut short” (Matt. 24:19-22).

Jesus was positively not speaking of the distress of AD 70! There have been worse times of agony than the period of Roman invasion of Jerusalem in AD 70.

But even if that were not so, the words of Jesus absolutely forbid us to restrict the “great tribulation” to the events of AD 70. He goes on to connect the time of unparalleled distress with the appearance of cosmic signs introducing the stupendous event of his Second Coming in glory. Note the all-important connection: “**immediately after** the Tribulation of those days,” “**in those days**, after **that** tribulation, the sun will be darkened” (Matt. 24:29; Mark 13:24).

It is a measure of the unwillingness of readers to believe the words of Jesus that various devices have been proposed to avoid the obvious. Some have argued that the Great Tribulation began in AD 70 and *has been continuing and is continuing uninterrupted until our day*. This cannot be true: It is false to extend this “great tribulation” over millennia. It is impossible to posit a “great tribulation” at least twice as long as the future millennium! Jesus has expressly directed us to the words of Daniel and Daniel had already fixed the limits of the Great Tribulation in Daniel 12:1: “At that moment [he is referring to the final days of the ultimate antichristian tyrant, Dan. 11:31-45] Michael will appear...and there will be a time of distress such as has never been since Israel became a nation till that moment. But at that hour people will be delivered, everyone who is written in the book: many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life...” (Dan. 12:1-2).

The Great Tribulation is not a concept to be devised and elaborated according to our choice. It is a well-defined period of final agony, defined by Daniel, in connection with a brutal despot, and just preceding the resurrection of the dead. These facts of course exclude AD 70 as the time of the Great Tribulation. They tell us that the Great Tribulation lies in the future, “**immediately after**” which (Matt. 24:29) cosmic disturbances will herald the visible³ arrival of Jesus to inaugurate his Kingdom in Jerusalem.

This is exactly the picture drawn by Daniel. Jesus is merely developing that preexisting prophecy. Daniel’s vision had revealed the rise of a final antichristian figure, **the King of the North** (Dan. 11:21ff) who in verse 30ff will act like a “beast”: “He will turn and vent his fury against the holy covenant; on his way back he will take due note of those who have forsaken it. Armed forces dispatched by him will desecrate the sanctuary and the citadel and do away with the regular offering. And there they will set up the abominable thing which causes desolation” (Dan. 11:30ff, NEB). This same

³ Systems of theology which have proposed an *invisible* second coming represent an amazing assault on Scripture!

king “will do what he chooses. He will exalt and magnify himself above every god and against the God of gods he will utter monstrous blasphemies” (Dan. 11:36). “At the time of the end” (v. 40) he and the King of the South will collide in battle. But the evil aggressor will “come to his end with no one to help him” (11:45). The resurrection follows in Daniel 12:2.

Further reference to the Abomination of Desolation is found in the “debriefing” conversation between Daniel and the interpreting angels. Daniel had some chronological questions about the vision he had just seen. The interpreting angel provided answers: “From the time when the continual burnt offering will be taken away, and the detestable thing which causes desolation set up [11:31], there will be 1290 days” (Dan. 12:11). The time when the Abomination of Desolation appeared was described as the activity of the final King of the North (Dan. 11:31). From that moment on a brief period of time — 1290 days — will see the completion “of all these events” ending with the resurrection.

The third reference to the Abomination appears in Daniel 9:24-27. Daniel 9:26b reads: “the city and the sanctuary shall be destroyed by the people of the prince who is to come, but **his** end [*kitzo*] [cp 11:45] will be with a flood [of judgment]. To the end of the war desolations are determined. And **he** will make a firm covenant with the many for one ‘seven’ [of years] and for half of the week **he** will cause the sacrifice and offering to cease; and upon the wing of Abominations **he** will cause Desolation, until what is determined is poured out [as a flood of judgment] upon the Desolator.”

Once again the Abominating event is placed *immediately* before the end, immediately prior to the death of the Desolator. Jesus places the Abomination of Desolation in a period of brief, terrible tribulation just before his coming. On what basis did Jesus know of this end-time Abomination? He read about it in Daniel 11:31 and 12:11 (and 9:27). He recognized that it must occur within a period of 1290 days from the end (11:31; 12:11). Jesus thus also recognized the futurity of the seventieth “week” of years given to Daniel in Daniel 9:24-27. He speaks of the Abomination in connection with the *final* events of the present era. This proves that Jesus read the seventieth “week” of Daniel as future.

Some have objected to a disconnection of the final seven years from the other 483. The objection, however, risks challenging the Master Rabbi. It is Jesus who is our model for a “futurist” understanding of the final seven years:

“Jesus puts the Abominable Horror in the future yet, In Daniel’s 70th ‘week’ the abomination will be set. That the 70th ‘week’ is future, therefore, let us not forget.”

The final reference to the Abomination is found in Daniel 8:13. The eighth chapter of Daniel provides important information about the final events of the present age. Following the political rise and fall of Medo-Persia and Greece, represented by Alexander the Great as a principal “horn,” i.e., ruler, there will arise a future wicked “horn” who will interfere with the sacrifices for a period of 2300 days. There can be little disagreement that the vision of Daniel 8 foretold the rise and fall of Alexander the Great and the subsequent division of his Greek kingdom into **four geographical regions**. This happened in history. But the main point of the vision, to which by far the most attention is given, is the rise of a further wicked “horn from small beginnings” (Dan. 8:9). “Out of one [of the four divisions of the Greek empire, i.e., ‘out of one of the four horns’] there issued one small horn, which made a prodigious show of strength south and east and towards the fairest of all lands [Israel]. It aspired to be as great as the host of heaven, and it cast down to the earth some of the host and some of the stars and trod them underfoot. It aspired to be as great as the Prince of the host, suppressed his regular offering and even threw down his sanctuary. The heavenly host were delivered up, and it raised itself impiously against the regular offering and threw true religion to the ground. In all that it did it succeeded. I heard a holy one speaking and another holy one answering him. The one said: ‘For how long will the period of this vision last? How long will impiety cause desolation, and both the Holy Place and the fairest of all lands be given over to be trodden down?’ The answer came ‘For 2300 evenings and mornings. Then the Holy Place will emerge victorious’” (Dan. 8:9-14).

Much prophecy study of Daniel’s vision of this wicked ruler has relegated it to past history only — to the desecration perpetrated by Antiochus Epiphanes of Syria in 167 BC. Daniel’s visions, however, stretch forward to the time of the coming Kingdom (2:44; 7:18, 22, 27; 11:45-12:2, 7, 11). The eighth chapter is hardly an exception. The angel could not have made himself much clearer: “Understand, O man, that the vision points to **the time of the end**...When he spoke to me, I fell to the ground in a trance, but he grasped me and made me stand up where I was. And he said, ‘I shall

make known to you what is to happen **at the end of the wrath**; for it belongs to **the appointed time of the end**” (Dan. 8:17, 19). Daniel 8 presents the final enemy of God as emerging from one of the divisions of the Greek Kingdom.

All this fits admirably both with the King of the North of chapter 11 and with the Desolator of 9:27. The future seventieth “week” of years will apparently see the creation of a covenant between Israel and a political leader. The spirit of antichrist has of course been active since the times of the Apostles, but it will culminate in a final wicked figure. A false view of who Jesus is will foster the antichristian spirit (I John 4:1-4; II John 7). How all the events come together will remain to be seen. The interesting fact is that this view of the future was known not only in New Testament times but by the earliest and finest Christian experts in the field of eschatology.

Two early, major contributors to the explanation of Bible prophecy were Irenaeus and Hippolytus. These men were classic believers in the future millennial Kingdom, knew nothing of a “pre-trib rapture” and strongly opposed the notion that the soul goes consciously to heaven or hell at death. These men “were undoubtedly the forerunners of the modern ‘dispensationalist’ interpreters of the Seventy Weeks.”⁴ We may say that Irenaeus presented the seed of an idea that found its full growth in the writings of Hippolytus. In the works of these fathers, we can find most of the basic concepts of the modern **futuristic view** of the seventieth ‘week’ of Daniel 9. That they were dependent to some extent on earlier material is no doubt true. Certainly we can see the influence of the pre-Christian Jewish exegesis at times, but by and large we must regard them as founders of a school of interpretation, and in this lies their significance for exegesis [explaining the Bible].⁵ Hippolytus believed there would be a gap between the 69th and 70th “week.” “For when the sixty two weeks are fulfilled, and Christ has come, and the Gospel is preached in every place, the times being then accomplished, there will remain only one week, the last, in which Elijah will appear, and Enoch, and in the midst of it the Abomination of Desolation will be manifested, that is to say, Antichrist, announcing desolation to the world” (*Fragments from Commentaries, Daniel*, para. 22).

⁴ This by no means implies that Irenaeus or any early writer shared other teachings of modern “dispensationalists.”

⁵ Knowles, “The Interpretation of the Seventy Weeks of Daniel in the Early Fathers,” *WTJ*, Vol. 7, pp. 136-60.

This view of the future close-to-the-second coming-Abomination of Desolation was exactly that of the New Testament itself. As the celebrated *International Critical Commentary* on Daniel tells us, “The apocalyptic view of the seventieth ‘week’ is found in the Gospels and in Paul” (p. 394). “Irenaeus (*Against Heresies*, 5, 24, 4) inherits the apocalyptic interpretation of the NT; Dan. 9:27, with its 3 ½ years, is a prophecy of the Antichrist. He relates with it Paul’s prospect of the Antichrist in II Thess. 2:3ff” (p. 398). The final 3 ½ years “is understood as of the era of Antichrist” (p. 399). George Ladd was undoubtedly right when he stated that the modern view of the seventieth “week” as still future is very ancient in the church:

“The [modern] futuristic interpretation was essentially a return to the method of prophetic truth found in the early fathers, essential to which is the teaching that the antichrist will be a satanically-inspired world ruler at the end of the age who would inflict severe persecution upon the church during the Great Tribulation” (*Blessed Hope*, p. 37).

It would therefore be most misleading to suggest that futurism arose first in Roman Catholic circles, as some have alleged.

The Bible’s extensive discussion of the future points to trouble for Israel from a neighboring Middle Eastern country, designated Assyria (Mic. 5:6, etc.), the King(dom) of the North (Dan. 11) and the Land of Nimrod or Shinar (Zech. 5:11; Mic. 5:6). The Messiah will deliver his exiled and oppressed people at his return. The believers will be immortalized and become the royal family with Jesus in the Messianic rule over a renewed earth and society. The “word of the Kingdom” (Matt. 13:19) — the Gospel of salvation — imparts the life-giving message. It creates the members of the royal family, the “Sons of the Kingdom” who will one day help to “fix” the world with Messiah. For that glorious day of peace and justice on earth Jesus urged us to pray. Meanwhile the Messianic community must be busy spreading the saving word of the Kingdom, the seed of immortality. This will be indeed a continuation of the ministry of Jesus, superintended by the now risen Messiah, whose Gospel has not changed! ☩

Insights from the Past and Present

Spinoza, Jewish theologian, 1632-1677: The fundamental error in the interpretation of Scripture has been men's desire to find philosophy in it:

"I grant that the Christians are never tired of professing their wonder at the profound mysteries of Holy Scripture; yet I cannot discover that they teach anything but speculations of Platonists and Aristotelians, to which (in order to save their credit for Christianity) they have made Holy Scripture conform. Not content to rave with the Greeks they want to make the prophets rave also" (Preface to *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*).

He went on to advocate "an examination of Scripture afresh in a careful, impartial, and unfettered spirit, making no assumption concerning it." This advice is given also in Acts 17:11.

Hobbes (1588-1679), *Leviathan*, 1651, ch. 44: After observing that spiritual darkness results from misinterpreting the Scriptures, he points out against the Roman Catholic Belarmine: "The greatest and main abuse of Scripture, and to which almost all the rest are either consequent or subservient, is the wresting of it to prove that the Kingdom of God mentioned so often in Scripture is the present church." The confusion over the Kingdom of God is a confusion over the saving Gospel. The Gospel of salvation is found in the words of Jesus (Heb. 2:3). How *Jesus* defines the Gospel is the question of ultimate significance for all of us. He defined it as the "Message about the Kingdom" (Matt. 13:19).

Essays on Principles and Methods edited by I. Howard Marshall:

R.T. France from Nigeria writes: "The terms 'flesh' and 'spirit' need careful handling. In the world of Greek philosophy they would mean the material and immaterial 'parts' of a man, of which the former dies but the latter survives. Many have automatically read this clause in such terms, without reflecting that such a distinction is foreign to Jewish thought, and that it is in the world of the Old Testament and later Jewish literature that our [Christian] authors [NT] move. Nor is there any reference here to the divine and human natures of Christ: This is the New Testament, not a fifth-century doctrinal work, and the New Testament never speaks of the two natures in Christ, let alone using *sarx* [flesh] and *pneuma* [spirit] to describe them" (p. 267).

Robin Nixon from Nottingham writes: "It has to be admitted that the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity cannot be read straight out of the New Testament" (p. 344).

E. Earle Ellis is a well-known Baptist scholar. He is also a firm believer in Conditional Immortality (the sleep of the dead). He writes this in his *Christ and the Future in New Testament History*:

"The Platonic view that the essential person (soul/spirit) survives physical death has serious implications for Luke's Christology and for his theology of salvation in history...For eschatology it represents a Platonizing of the Christian hope, a redemption *from* time and matter. Luke, on the contrary, places individual salvation (and loss) at the resurrection *in* time and matter at the last day. He underscores that Jesus was resurrected in 'the flesh' and makes him 'the first to rise from the dead,' the model on which all 'entering into glory' is to be understood.

"An anthropological dualism did enter the thought of the Patristic [post-biblical] Church, chiefly, I suppose, with the grandiose synthesis of Christianity and Greek philosophy made by Clement and Origen. It brought into eclipse the early Christian hope of the return of Christ and the resurrection of the dead [and the Kingdom of God on earth]. But it did not characterize the Christianity of the New Testament, and can be found in Luke only if one reads the texts, as those Christian fathers did, with lenses ground in Athens" (p. 127).

"...while death is not an individual fulfillment of salvation, during death one remains under Christ's Lordship and in his care...[but] while the Christian dead remain in time, they do not count time. The hiatus in their individual being between their death and their resurrection at the last day of this age is, in their consciousness, a tick of the clock. For them the great and glorious day of Christ's Parousia is only a moment into the future. The 'intermediate state' is something that the living experience with respect to the dead, not something the dead experience with respect to the living or to Christ.

"Those with lenses ground in Athens, numerous in Christian tradition, see a quite different picture. They posit that a part of the person, the soul, is not subject to a cessation of being (and thus is not an element of the natural world) but that at the death of the body it is 'separated' to bodiless bliss or, in a variation on the theme, that there is a resurrection at death in which the physical body is exchanged for a spirit body already being formed within." [This would destroy the program given in I Cor. 15 and many times elsewhere – ed.]

"...such theologies have, I think, seriously misunderstood Paul's salvation-in-history eschatology. It is because Paul regards the body as the person and the person as the physical body that he insists on the resurrection of the body, placing it at the Parousia of Christ in which personal redemption is coupled to and is part of the redemption-by-transfiguration of the whole physical cosmos. The transformed physical body of the believer will be called forth from the earth by God's almighty creative word [at the Parousia], no less than were the transformed physical body of Christ and the originally lifeless body of the Genesis creation" (pp. 177, 178). ☩