

Focus on the Kingdom

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Traveling for the Gospel

After a troublesome start (security was so severely drawn out in Atlanta that I missed the plane to Seoul and had to go the next day, spending the night in San Francisco), things went wonderfully. Steve An was a stalwart support as he and his wife Young met me in Seoul, Korea and drove four hours to the Bible College where we were due to teach the following morning. (Steve then drove me back in pouring rain the next afternoon to the airport to collect the bags which the airline had managed to lose for a couple of days!). Steve and I had a great time speaking to the students at the Bible College, with the kind approval of Dr. Chung who was most welcoming. I was also asked to don a long white robe and full academic regalia and then give the graduation address — which I did, urging them to preach the Kingdom of God. All the faculty were receptive and many photos (as is the Korean custom) were taken. Fortunately one staff member spoke some German and so I was able to break the otherwise difficult language barrier.

After some interesting sightseeing with members of the college, Steve, Young and I returned to Seoul and spoke at the Sunday services of a church bearing the name in a bold sign, “Church of God (Abrahamic Faith).” The afternoon was filled with intensive teaching by Steve, and it was obvious that the congregation wanted to receive extended Bible study. They worked at this without a break for about 3 1/2 hours taking notes throughout. I took many addresses and promised to send those who knew some English our book on the Kingdom. We were able to fit in some fascinating sightseeing in the immaculately clean Seoul, negotiating the subway system with ease and witnessing an amazing prolonged chorus of so-called “tongues-speaking” at Yongi Cho’s 800,000 member church.

We were treated to generous hospitality in Korean restaurants, where I learned to sit on the floor (though not to negotiate chopsticks) and do my best to select from the packed table foods which were not too strange to the western palate. Steve had kiddingly warned me that I would have to deal with octopus which would probably be walking across the plate. Thankfully, no such thing appeared, at least not still alive.

All in all, I would say that many Koreans are hungry for sound Bible understanding and are open to our efforts to supply this. Steve An has done a fine, diligent job of establishing contacts in Korea, building the Abrahamic faith there, and the fruit is being born equally among Koreans here in the USA. I look forward to helping Steve with his Korean students on Mondays this semester.

What a marvelous variegated world God has provided for us to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom in.

And what about this for generosity: When Dr. Chung learned that I had no clean clothes (temporarily), he went straight into town and provided a shirt, tie, socks and pajamas. So losing one’s suitcase for a time has its compensations.

On to the Philippines, via the rather amazing Singapore Airlines, with flight attendants in decorative long dresses. Here I was joined by Ray Faircloth of Somerset, UK, who within the past two years aligned himself solidly with the Abrahamic Faith after 35 years as a Jehovah’s Witness. Ray brings a rich experience of Bible study to his present ministry and a compassionate heart for those trapped in various forms of “mind control” where hierarchy is the all-important factor in seeing that no one thinks for himself.

We were met at Cebu City, in Cebu Island, one of the thousands of islands that compose the Philippines, by the excellent Peter and Harold Guzmana and a friend and singer, Larry Cagas. They had planned a full itinerary for the two weeks we spent together. This included a flight south to Mindanao, and an invitation to speak there in an Assemblies Church with a long afternoon session — which got off to a lively (understatement!) start when a lady on my right spoke out excitedly, with a note of threat in her voice: “Pastor, pastor, do you say that Jesus is God?” The implication was that if I did not repeat that definition I would be in bad trouble with her and with God.

There followed a four-hour session in which members of the audience popped up all over with “What about John 1:1?” “What about I John 5:7?” When I replied that I John 5:7 is known to be a forgery

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and not part of the inspired text of Scripture, the audience was appalled and seemed almost ready to dismiss me as teacher. It took some minutes to try to inform them of the overwhelming evidence that this verse does not belong in the Bible and has been omitted by all modern translations. I realized then how very blessed we are in the USA and the West to have good information available. The Philippines, under the heavy hand of a massive Roman Catholic presence, just does not have the resources to investigate the faith. It is our obligation as possessing a very great advantage in terms of study tools, to *share* this knowledge with them. Unless we do they will continue to be deprived of a sound understanding of the Bible. The world is in a desperate state of hunger for a straightforward exposition of the Gospel of the Kingdom and of the destiny of man **as needing the vital spark of new life imparted by the seed Gospel-Message of the Kingdom described by the master rabbi Jesus in his extraordinarily brilliant parable of the sower. Peter rehearsed this foundational fact about how to gain immortality by means of the words/spirit of Jesus imparted by that Gospel of the Kingdom (I Pet. 1:22ff).**

Religious television in Asia is dominated by a massive 24/7 presence of Seventh Day Adventism, characterized by vegetarianism, Trinitarianism, and a millennium in which, when Jesus comes, the earth will be totally emptied of human beings, leaving Satan alone on the earth. The text in Isaiah 24 of course does describe an alarming depopulation of the earth at the return of Jesus, but Ellen G. White, the “prophetess” of the Seventh Day Adventist Church, in her book the *Great Controversy*, omitted to tell us that “few men will be left” (Isa. 24:6). That view of the Kingdom of God on earth is a very far cry from the repopulated and magnificently regenerated world which will come into existence as the “restoration of all things about which the prophets spoke” (Acts 3:21). Isaiah certainly never imagined what the Adventists are teaching — a world without people! Indeed there will be blessed nations Assyria, Egypt and Israel (Isa. 19) and peace will spread to the four corners of the globe as Messiah and the saints take charge of a genuine New Era of untold prosperity and blessedness on earth. Truly, as my colleague Ray Faircloth reminded us on every occasion, the thief on the cross, even in the last hours of his life, was guaranteed a place in that future Paradise or Garden of Eden which will be the Kingdom of God inaugurated at the splendid Parousia or return of Jesus

in glory at the end of the present evil age. Thy Kingdom come!

We were able to speak of that Kingdom and of the necessity of “accepting Jesus” *by accepting his words and teachings* and thus taking in his spirit, in many settings. We visited the home of one who had been listening to our daily radio program “Focus on the Kingdom” (the 15-minute sessions are all available at www.focusonthekingdom.org). We took part in the daily “chapel” at Cebu City prison, a truly grim place. We walked by a special caged area in which human beings, obviously the less tractable inmates, were squeezed like animals behind bars. Wherever we could we left literature for further reading, and we invited bookstores to take copies of our books and placed them also in the city library. There is a mass of work to be done among the gentle Philippine people. They are teachable, yet vulnerable to the cult leader. One very large group with a single leader promotes a modalistic view of God on TV hour after hour. The leader considers himself to be somehow *the* anointed Son of God. Devoted followers hang on every one of his words.

You would be amazed how their taxi drivers and colorful “jeepneys” negotiate the entirely too narrow streets, jostling for places with amazing planned near-misses (there seem to be no formal rules) and an absence of bad temper.

On to Australia. It was so good to see Greg Deuble (pronounced to rhyme with Bible) who had been with us at the Theological Conference in April. Greg is a fine exponent of Abrahamic Faith with an extensive Bible and pastoral training. He was there to welcome us at Brisbane airport, not too far from his home. Barbara and my youngest daughter, Heather, had by now made their way to Brisbane from the USA, braving the long time change and some 15 hours on the plane. Our time in Australia allowed for more sightseeing and getting close to the extraordinary animals and birds of that country. We visited Steve Irwin’s (of “by crikey” crocodile fame) celebrated Australia Zoo, saw the world’s most poisonous snakes (New Zealand by contrast has no poisonous snakes), and kangaroos, a cassowary, and the Australian wombat. Most unusual was Harriet, the oldest living animal on earth, a giant tortoise, 187 years old and brought to England by Darwin himself. When feeding time came for this gentle creature, she chewed on a mixed salad and then obligingly elevated herself to allow her keeper to stroke her belly, a daily routine. The keeper gave us an enthralling account of this animal’s history. Truly God’s creation is diverse, both at the level of the human as well as the animal species.

In New Zealand (the north island — the trip to Hamilton is about two hours from Brisbane) we had been invited by members of the Church of Christ, Life and Advent, who hold to the conditional immortality teaching planted there in the 20th century by British clergy who sometimes spent their whole lives in New Zealand. Conditional immortality is the belief, very biblical we think, which states that there is no such thing in the Bible as disappearing at death to “heaven” as a soul deprived of a body. The all-pervasive notion that when you die, you really are not dead, but merely change your address and survive as a soul in heaven or hell, has been constantly opposed as non-biblical by “conditionalists,” who can be found amongst leading thinkers in many denominations. Conditionalists also deny that God will torture the wicked forever and ever. They maintain that the “eternal fire” of Jude 7 which annihilated Sodom and Gomorrah and is clearly not still burning, is a model of the same “eternal fire” which will consume the wicked at the return of Jesus. “Eternal” in other words is a tricky mistranslation designed to promote the Platonic, non-biblical idea that man has an immortal soul which is bound to live on somewhere. That fire which will put the wicked forever out of existence is really “the fire of the age to come” (*aionion* fire). It will eliminate the wicked as the refuse of the earth.

The Conditional Immortality movement in New Zealand struggles to maintain an identity and it was exciting to find wonderful Bible students evening after evening, engaging various topics, including the important teaching that God is one and that Jesus is the Son of God and not God the Son. This idea had taken root in New Zealand thanks to two visits in the 1970s by the late Sid Hatch who produced the magazine *Brief Bible Studies* and the book *Daring to Differ: Adventures in Conditional Immortality*. We are now in possession of an interesting video made at our first Theological Conference in 1991 in which Sid Hatch explained with an impressive simplicity and sincerity his belief in the One God of Israel and in Jesus as His unique Son, not God the Son. We can supply that video or DVD if you would care to email us (suggested cost \$3).

It is a remarkable experience to be exposed in some five weeks to such a variety of culture, landscape and language. As a British person, I felt uncannily at home in New Zealand. The Australians of course, as they will tell you, were originally British convicts dispatched to the huge continent of Australia. And much of their language and culture reminds me of home. In New Zealand the impression of being back

home was even more pronounced. Both countries drive on the left side of the road, thus displaying something of the independent spirit typical of people of British origin.

We encourage our readers to prepare daily for whatever teaching ministry they are planning. I can say with absolute confidence that there is a huge vacuum of ignorance needing to be filled with basic lessons on the way to immortality in the coming Kingdom of God on earth. ✧

Restoring the Gospel Terminology of the Early Church

Most of the confusion and/or apathy existing in churches today is traceable to one cause. The voice of Jesus and his teaching has been muzzled. People have been invited to “get saved” (what that is exactly is often left vague) by “accepting Jesus in your heart.” What has not been made clear is that Jesus must be defined, and secondly that accepting Jesus is impossible unless one is told what his Gospel message is. It is by the words of Jesus that his spirit and mind are conveyed to us. Hence the emphatic warnings in Paul (I Tim. 6:3) that any preacher who does not hold forth the “health-giving words, namely those of the Lord Jesus Christ” is worse than useless. Indeed he is a positive menace (see again I Tim. 6:3). John repeats that same message with equal clarity in II John 7-9 where a Jesus divorced from *his teachings* is not the real Jesus at all. He is an imagined Jesus, reinvented by our very creative but wicked human hearts. One might say this: The Devil has one major trick: To separate Jesus from his Gospel teachings. See the marvelously insightful warning in Luke 8:12!

A large measure of the present chaos in churches and denominational divisions is a failure to define the building-block concepts of the Bible. We need first to define God correctly as Jesus did. Jesus agreed with the unitarian creed of Israel (Mark 12:28ff with Deut. 6:4). In conversation with an inquiring professional theologian, a scribe, Jesus affirmed that **God is one Lord**, and that this cardinal tenet of biblical faith is the most important of all truths. “Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is One Lord.”

We should add that God is positively not three Lords! At present churchgoers have generally given this issue very little thought. They have merely parroted various popular utterances that “Jesus is God,” with almost no investigation how that amazing proposition could possibly be true — especially since Jesus never said anything like that and insisted that his Father was “the only one who is truly God” (John 17:3).

The next major step towards Christian unity will be taken when we all sit down and decide what the saving Gospel is. It really should not be hard to agree that **the Gospel is about the Kingdom of God**. Jesus spoke daily of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God as did Paul (Acts 19:8; 20:24, 25; 28:23, 31; II Tim. 4:1, etc.). A valuable step towards clearing up confusion over the Kingdom of God would be taken if Christians adopted the Bible's primary Gospel language. In Acts 8 Luke uses several parallel phrases to describe the evangelistic activity of the Church. They were "preaching the Message as Good News" (literally, "evangelizing the Word," Acts 8:4). Philip "proclaimed the Christ to them" (Acts 8:5). Samaria thus "received the Message of God" (Acts 8:14). After "they had testified and spoken the Message of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the Gospel to many villages of the Samaritans" (Acts 8:25). At the center of this account, however, Luke provides the most comprehensive description of the content of the saving Message. With a carefully worded formula, he lets us know exactly what "proclaiming the Christ" or "proclaiming the Message" or "preaching the Gospel" mean. It is "preaching the Gospel of [i.e., about — Gr. *peri*] the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 8:12). This is Luke's fullest summary of the Gospel. He repeats it at two other critically important points in his narrative.¹ It defines his other "shorthand" statements, appearing in his Gospel as well as in Acts, and ought to serve as a rallying point for all proclamations of the Gospel. Quite extraordinarily, these texts receive almost no mention in literature defining the Gospel. If they were taken seriously, current "gospels" would be exposed as lacking a primary biblical element. The all-important fact would emerge that the Apostles were no less insistent upon the Kingdom of God as the center of their Message than Jesus had been. They were following their Master faithfully. But can the same be said of evangelism in the twentieth century? "The Gospel of Christ" is an ambiguous phrase in the 20th century, though not in its New Testament context where it is assumed to be a synonym for the Gospel of the Kingdom. Contemporary evangelism chooses the ambiguous label for the Gospel and dispenses with its clear title as the Message about the Kingdom.

¹ Acts 28:23, 31, linking it directly to Jesus' proclamation in Luke 4:43. Compare Luke 9:11 with Acts 28:30.

A very misleading idea has become ingrained in much contemporary evangelism. The idea has been widely accepted that the Kingdom of God was not the main emphasis of Paul's preaching, though it was the leading topic in Jesus' evangelism. One has only to read Acts 20:25 to learn what Luke constantly tells us about Paul's Gospel: that it was a "proclamation of the Kingdom of God." It is puzzling that such an obvious clue to the mind of Paul should have been so neglected. Not only does the centrality of the Kingdom in Paul's Message appear frequently in Luke's accounts of Paul's evangelism, it is found indirectly throughout his own writings. He reminded the Thessalonians that they had received "the Word" (Luke's synonym for the Gospel of the Kingdom, Luke 4:43; 5:1) and in so doing were expressing their faith in God as they "waited for His Son from heaven whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come" (I Thess. 1:10). (The theme of the return of Christ and the wrath associated with the coming of the future Kingdom are exactly John the Baptist's and Jesus' Gospel themes.) Paul then refers to his proclamation as the Gospel of God (I Thess. 2:2, 8, 9), which is precisely the phrase used by Mark to denote Jesus' preaching of the Gospel about the Kingdom (Mark 1:14, 15). Almost in the same breath Paul exhorts his converts to "walk worthy of the God who is inviting you into *His own Kingdom and glory*" (1 Thess. 2:12). It is clear that the Gospel of the Kingdom is at the center of Paul's thought, exactly as Luke reports that the Kingdom was always the heart of Paul's Gospel (Acts 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31). Moreover he goes on to tell the Thessalonians that this "Word," or "Word of God," both synonyms for the Gospel of the Kingdom, was "performing its work" in the believers. The concept is exactly that of Jesus who spoke of the essential saving "Message of the Kingdom" taking root in the heart of the believer as the life-giving seed able to produce fruit (Matt. 13:19, 23).

Another evidence of the Gospel of the Kingdom throughout the New Testament is provided by the term "glory" which is closely related to Kingdom. Matthew recalls that the mother of James and John requested for her sons close association with the Messiah in the administration of the coming Kingdom (Matt. 20:20, 21). Mark reports the same event but substitutes the word glory for Kingdom: "Grant that we may sit in your *glory*, one on the right and the other on the left" (Mark 10:37). Thus when Mark speaks of the Son of Man coming in the glory of his Father (Mark 8:38) there is an immediate reference to the Kingdom of God (Mark 9:1). The whole discussion is closely related to Jesus' words about losing one's life for the sake of

Jesus and *the Gospel* (Mark 8:35). When Paul speaks of future glory he always has the Kingdom in mind. In Romans 8 he recognizes that Christians are “heirs with Christ” and goes on to say that “the sufferings of this present time are not to be compared with the *glory* that is to be revealed for us” (Rom. 8:17, 18).² Just as Joseph of Arimathea, a Christian disciple, was waiting for the Kingdom of God, so Paul sees the creation as “waiting for the revealing of the Sons of God,” a Messianic title (Rom. 8:19). He takes up exactly the same theme when he summarizes the faith: “If we suffer with him we shall also be kings [i.e., in the Kingdom] with him” (II Tim. 2:12). “Salvation,” “inheritance of the Kingdom of God,” inheritance of “life” or “life in the coming age,” “ruling with the Messiah as kings” and “glory” are all interchangeable ways of describing the same goal of the Kingdom. Paul may sometimes have chosen politically less explosive words like “glory” and “salvation,” rather than Kingdom. Such “code words” were clear to his readers. Provided Paul’s synonyms for Kingdom are detected, there is every reason to find in his epistles complete confirmation of his claim to have been a preacher of the Kingdom of God, faithfully speaking for the risen Christ whose Message of the Kingdom was continued in the Apostles’ ministries.

Without an understanding of the phrase “Gospel of the Kingdom,” it is hard to see how there can be intelligent response to Jesus’ first command. We are asked to “repent and *believe the Good News about the Kingdom of God*” (Mark 1:14, 15). That is the essence of faith. All subsequent preaching in the New Testament should be referred to this basic thesis statement about the Gospel of salvation. Cut loose from Jesus’ appeal for belief in the Gospel of the Kingdom, preaching exposes itself to the menace of a distorted and thus “another gospel.” That such a distortion has occurred will not be hard to see. One has only to listen to preachers of “the Gospel” to recognize that whatever else they may preach, there is precious little mention of the Kingdom of God. This can only mean that the principal element of Jesus’ proclamation has been silenced. Such a “muzzling” of the Savior, in the name of the Savior, remains the baffling and disturbing feature of contemporary preaching and of the history of the Church from the earliest centuries.

² Christians are rejoicing in the hope of glory, i.e. the Kingdom (Rom. 5:2).

The Kingdom of God in Relation to the Death and Resurrection of Jesus

The urgent demand by Jesus to “repent and believe the Good News of the Kingdom” (surely an excellent place for Gospel preaching to begin) implies an understanding of the term “Kingdom of God.” While Jesus’ leading phrase remains unclear, the Gospel itself is obscured. Perhaps it is this uncertainty over the meaning of Jesus’ proclamation about the Kingdom that has caused evangelicals to drop all reference to the Kingdom of God in their definition of the Gospel, and to rely on what they think is a full account of the saving Message: the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. It is customary to appeal to Paul’s words in I Corinthians 15:1-11:

“Now I make known to you, brethren, the Gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are being saved, if you hold fast the message which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance [literally “among the first,” NASV margin] what I also received, that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas and then to the twelve...Whether then it was I or they, so we preached and so you believed.”

An important key to understanding Paul’s fine statement about his own Gospel Message is found in the little phrase “*en protois*,” “amongst things of primary importance” (verse 3). The point at issue in the Corinthian letter was the resurrection of Jesus which some of the Corinthians were beginning to doubt — “How do some among you say there is no resurrection of the dead?” (verse 12). In response to this particular crisis of belief, Paul reminds his audience that the death and resurrection of Jesus are of absolutely fundamental significance in the Christian Gospel. Without the death of Jesus to gain forgiveness for all of us, and without his return from death to life through resurrection, there can be no hope of salvation in the coming Kingdom. The Gospel of the Kingdom is nullified if in fact Jesus has not been raised from the dead.

It is a mistake, however, to argue from this text that the facts about Jesus’ death and resurrection formed *the whole Message of the Gospel*. Paul is careful to say that these central facts were preached “amongst things of primary importance.” This, however, was not his entire Gospel. There were other things also, of equal importance in the Gospel, namely the announcement

about the Kingdom of God.³ We recall that Jesus had proclaimed the Kingdom of God as the Gospel *long before he spoke of his death and resurrection*, a fact which proves that the Kingdom of God is not a synonym for the death and resurrection of Christ (Luke 4:43; cp. Luke 18:31-34). As a leading authority notes:

“Neither Romans 1:1-3 nor I Corinthians 15:1-4 is meant to be a full statement of what Paul understood by the Gospel. We can see this from the fact that the death of Jesus is not mentioned in Romans 1:1ff...The Gospel of Paul is identical with that which Jesus himself preached during his earthly life. Christ himself speaks in the Gospel of Paul. Paul is not referring [in Rom. 16:25] to his Gospel added to the preaching of the risen Lord. He is emphasizing the agreement of his preaching with that of the earthly Jesus. Hence the ‘proclamation of Jesus Christ’ can only mean the message which Jesus Christ proclaimed.”⁴

It is evident that Paul was not in I Corinthians 15 directly addressing the subject of the Kingdom of God as a future event coinciding with the return of Jesus. The Corinthians had already accepted that belief as part of the Gospel of salvation. Thus Paul is able to elaborate on the already understood doctrine of the Kingdom only a few verses later. Having just mentioned the future coming of Jesus (I Cor. 15:23), he speaks of the Kingdom over which Jesus will preside at his coming (I Cor. 15:25-27). That Kingdom, it should be carefully noted, is the Kingdom which “flesh and blood” cannot inherit, for “the perishable cannot inherit the imperishable” (I Cor. 15:50). In order to *enter the Kingdom of God*, Christians must be summoned from death at the last trumpet and be changed, in the twinkling of an eye, into immortal persons (I Cor. 15:51, 52). These verses confirm, once again, the fact that the Kingdom of God comes into power at the Second Coming. Following Jesus, Paul speaks of entering or inheriting the Kingdom in the future.

The Kingdom has a principal place in the New Testament Gospel Message in addition, of course, to the equally essential preaching of the death and resurrection of the Savior. It is a serious mishandling of the Bible to place I Corinthians 15:1-4 in conflict

³ Acts 8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31, in addition to frequent use of synonyms like “mystery,” “Gospel,” “Word,” which cover the same ground.

⁴ *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, “kerygma,” pp. 730, 716.

with the massive evidence for the central importance of the Kingdom of God in the pre- and post- resurrection proclamation.⁵ Once again we must emphasize the importance of Acts 8:12 (echoed in Acts 19:8; 28:23, 31) as Luke’s comprehensive summary statement about the Gospel Message: “When they believed Philip as he preached the Good News about the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, both men and women” (see also Matt. 13:19; Luke 8:12). “Kingdom of God” “frames” the entire writing of Luke. For him and for the New Testament church it was the term *par excellence* to denote the restoration of the land under the reign of the Messiah, as well as the urgent present necessity for converts to prepare for the high honor of ruling with the Messiah.

The substitution of the word “heaven” for Kingdom of God is a major contributing factor in a loss of clarity about the Gospel of Jesus. When the language of Jesus is abandoned the damage in terms of the loss of the mind of Jesus is untold. Such a loss, tragically, has been characteristic of the history of the development of the central Christian idea — “the Gospel of the Kingdom and the things concerning Jesus.” Out of deference for Jesus, as God’s Messiah, and in obedience to his original challenge to belief in the Good News of the Kingdom, we must insist on defining the Kingdom according to its biblical setting and restoring it to a central position in all exposition of the Gospel. Can intelligent response to the Gospel mean anything less?

Kingship as the Christian Goal

The nation of Israel had long been convinced of its high destiny in the purposes of God. As part of the covenant between the nation and its God, Israel was to enjoy a position of special privilege: “If you obey My voice and hold fast to My covenant, you of all the nations shall be My very own, for all the earth is Mine. I will count you a kingdom of priests, a consecrated nation. These are the words you are to speak to the sons of Israel” (Exod. 19:5, 6).

Israel as a whole had repeatedly failed to live up to her high calling. Nevertheless, the promise of world supremacy was reserved for a faithful remnant destined to inherit the future Kingdom of God. The invitation to kingship was repeated through the prophet Isaiah:

“Pay attention, come to Me; listen and your soul will live. With you I will make an everlasting covenant out of the favors promised to David. See, I have made of you a witness to the peoples, a leader and a master of

⁵ Luke 4:43; Mark 1:14, 15; Matt. 4:17; Acts 8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31, etc.

the nations. See, you will summon a nation you never knew, those unknown will come hurrying to you, for the sake of Yahweh, your God, of the Holy One of Israel who will glorify you” (Isa. 55:3-5, Jerusalem Bible).

In the New Testament the prospect of royal position in the Kingdom is offered to the New Israel of the Church (Gal. 6:16) gathered from both Jews and Gentiles. Jesus assured the faithful Church: “Those who prove victorious, I will allow to share my throne, just as I was victorious myself and took my place with my Father on His throne...To those who prove victorious, and keep working for me until the end, I will give the authority over the pagans which I myself have been given by my Father, to rule them with an iron scepter and shatter them like earthenware” (Rev. 2:26, 27). This prospect gave rise to the Christian “slogan” found in II Timothy 2:12: “If we suffer with him, we shall also reign as kings with him.”

In Revelation 2:26 Jesus quotes the celebrated Messianic Psalm 2, one of many which describe the glories of the future Kingdom of God. It will be initiated by a decisive intervention by God, sending His Messiah to crush political rebellion and establish a new government in Jerusalem. The fact that appeal is made to this Psalm in the book of Revelation shows that the traditional Messianic hope was taken over into Christianity, with full approval of Jesus himself:

“Why this uproar among the nations? Why this impotent muttering of pagans — kings on earth rising in revolt, princes plotting against Yahweh and His Anointed [Messiah]. ‘Now let us break their fetters! Now let us throw off their yoke!’ The One whose throne is in heaven sits laughing, Yahweh derides them. Then angrily He addresses them, in a rage He strikes them with panic, ‘This is My King installed by Me on Zion, My holy mountain.’ Let me proclaim Yahweh’s decree; He has told Me, ‘You are My son, today I have become your Father. Ask and I will give the nations for your heritage, the ends of the earth for your domain. With an iron scepter you will break them, shatter them like potter’s ware.’ So, now, you kings, learn wisdom, earthly rulers, be warned: Serve Yahweh, fear Him, tremble and kiss His feet, or He will be angry and you will perish, for His anger is very quick to blaze. Happy are all who take shelter in Him” (Psalm 2, Jerusalem Bible).

The promise of “the ends of the earth for your domain” is reflected in Jesus’ own claim to the “authority which I myself have been given by my Father” (Rev. 2:27). The same theme is taken up by the angelic chorus when they sing of the faithful who

“shall rule as kings on the earth” (Rev. 5:10) and in the famous millennial passage which foresees the saints ruling with the Messiah for a thousand years (Rev. 20:4-6).✧

A Misleading Translation in the KJV—Acts 13:33

The **begetting** of Jesus was foretold in the important verse Psalm 2:7: God said of His Son who was one day to be born: “You are My Son; Today I have begotten you.” Paul quotes this verse in an important sermon in Acts 13. In verse 33 he refers Psalm 2:7 to the “raising up” of Jesus. In Acts 13:33 “raising up” does not refer to the resurrection of Jesus—he was not begotten as Son for the first time at his resurrection—but to the Father’s procreation of His unique Son in Mary. The KJV has wrongly added the word “again” to the text, making the reader think of the resurrection. F.F. Bruce is one of several expert commentators who insist that verse 33 is the fulfillment of verse 23 which promises that God will send the Messiah, i.e., “raise him up,” put him on the scene of history. By contrast verse 34 (Gk. *de*) speaks of the resurrection of Jesus, when God raised him *from the dead*. A different proof-text is supplied for this fact. The word “raise up” can point to the origin of a person, his appearance in history: see Acts 13:22, 3:22, 7:37. Acts 13:23 speaks of the arrival of Jesus and it is this “raising up” of Jesus which fulfills the promise “today I have begotten you.” Our text harmonizes exactly with the begetting of Jesus announced in Matthew 1:18 (*genesis*) and 20 (“begotten [the word is not “conceived”] in her”). John refers also to the creation/begetting of the Son in I John 5:18, where the KJV has a corrupted text, corrected by modern translations. “He who was begotten—brought into existence—keeps him [the believer].”

Comment

“I grew up in the Churches of Christ, Life and Advent which as a group emphasized the twin truths of ‘Life Only in Christ’ (or Conditional Immortality) and the centrality of the Second Coming of Christ as the hope of the apostles. I treasure that heritage. I was recently given a number of Anthony Buzzard’s books and booklets to read. I found his arguments in support of the ‘One God’ position well written, concise and convincing. I am still struggling with some verses, but Rome wasn’t built in a day.” — *New Zealand*