

WHAT IS THE



TRUE

GOSPEL?

IS IT BEING PROCLAIMED TODAY?

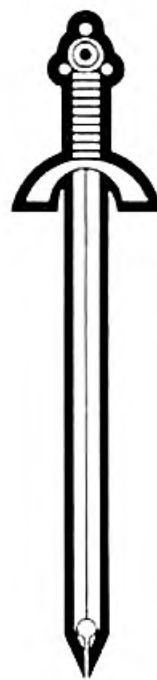
ALBERT JAMES DAGER

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by

Albert James Dager



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Dedicated to the King of kings and Lord of lords, true
God and Savior of the world.

And to Jean, my wife and faithful companion in ministry.

Unless otherwise indicated, or quoted from other sources, all Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version of the Bible, which we have rephrased in modern English, using the Greek Received Text as its main source.

Where appropriate we use the consonants for the name of God (YHWH) as translated from the Hebrew Torah, rather than the commonly used term, “the LORD,” or “GOD.”

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Introduction

When Jesus was on earth He proclaimed what He called, “the Gospel of the Kingdom.” The English word “gospel” means “good news” (Old English, *godspel*, from *god* “good” + *spell* “tale”). It is equivalent to the Greek *euangelion* (English, “evangel”).

Jesus commissioned His disciples to go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom, and to make more disciples from among the nations.

Sadly, even from the beginning there have been false gospels emanating from those who claimed to be messengers of God. Throughout the history of the churches founded by men, all of whom claimed to have a better grasp on truth than those from which they sprang, there have been unique approaches to the Gospel. Some have adhered more closely than others to the original Gospel, at least in their formal statements. Many have added to or subtracted from the Gospel to create unique hybrids. Some churches claim to be the only true and original church founded by Jesus Christ; others claim to be the restored church, reestablishing truths they say have been lost for centuries, or proclaiming supposedly “new truths” previously unknown.

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While there has always been a remnant of faithful disciples, there have been times when certain truths have been sublimated to popular theology among a majority of Christians, and then reestablished later. The Reformation is one example where the important truths of salvation by grace and the sufficiency of Scripture alone for revelation of God's truth were reestablished among the general Christian populace, some accepting, others rejecting, those truths. With the Bible being made available to the general populace, other truths have been reestablished which have been found to be in conflict with certain church traditions.

Today, however, we are witnessing the development of a great apostasy based largely on various traditions of the churches. There are many gospels going forth from pulpits, on radio and television, and on the mission fields—gospels that differ from one another on many points. Most importantly, some differ significantly from the Gospel proclaimed by the apostle Paul and recorded in the Bible.

Paul's chastisement of the early believers for claiming to be of Apollos, of Cephas, of Paul, or of other men whom they followed (1 Corinthians 1:15) is just as valid for those who call themselves Christians today. In spite of the present ecumenical climate, most qualify their beliefs by adding, "I am Catholic," "I am Lutheran," "I am Baptist," "I am Methodist," etc. But the true believer is of Christ Jesus alone. The Lord did not establish a religious order or hierarchical "church" with professional clergy who claim their organization is the only true, best, or most perfect.

These facts notwithstanding, many godly men have arisen in the ranks of some of these churches. And there remains today a remnant of godly people among the members of some establishment churches. Some godly pastors of those churches are striving to be faithful to the Gospel, at least as far as they understand it. Often they are handicapped by the theological systems in which they were

trained. Yet God continues to use them to bring souls into the Kingdom. We must be careful not to judge all of them as unfaithful. Even so, we cannot place unquestioning faith in any of the systems they represent. While most of those Christian systems stand in agreement on certain basics of the true Gospel, each has its own twists as to what the Gospel means.

The apostle Paul said that if anyone—man or angel—proclaimed any Gospel other than the Gospel he proclaimed, that person should be accursed (Galatians 1:8-9). Strong words that stress the importance of faithfulness in ministering the true Gospel.

1

What is “the Gospel”?

In the Bible, the Gospel is the telling of God’s redemption of man, and deliverance of creation, from a condition of death and decay. It is the “good news” of the Kingdom of God and of salvation which results in eternal life in new, uncorruptible bodies resurrected from the dead. That salvation is received by faith in Jesus Christ on the basis of His death as a sacrifice for mankind’s sins, as well as of His burial, resurrection, ascension to Heaven, and coming again to establish His Kingdom on the earth. The purpose of the Gospel is the revelation of God’s Kingdom among the people of earth, most of whom do not know the true God.

The need for the Gospel is found in the following dilemma:

- After God created the heavens and the earth, He created a man (Adam) in His own image and after His own likeness, and took a part of the man to make a woman (Eve). Together they constitute “man” or “mankind.” God instructed them to subdue the earth and to fill it with their own kind (Genesis 2:7-28);
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- God planted a garden in the eastern portion of an area called Eden as the starting place for that command. There He gave the man and his wife access to every tree for food. Yet He commanded them not to eat from a particular tree which He called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, lest they become like God in attaining that knowledge (Genesis 2:16-17);
 - Eve was deceived by God's adversary, Satan (in the form of a serpent), who promised her that she would indeed be like God if she ate from the forbidden tree. She did eat of it and she gave the fruit to Adam, thus conferring upon him the curse of sin, which is death (Genesis 2:17) and eternal separation from God;
 - Adam's sin also strengthened Satan's kingdom on the earth, giving him power over man's spiritual and temporal condition (2 Corinthians 4:4);
 - Because of Adam's sin, death passed to his offspring (Romans 5:12-21);
 - God's holy nature does not allow for unholy or sinful persons to have fellowship with Him. Thus, mankind is born alienated from God and condemned to an eternity of separation from Him (Colossians 1:21);
 - Man cannot initiate a return to fellowship with God. God, being sovereign over man, must initiate that return. All religions are man's futile attempts to please God with man's own self-righteous religious works. They assume that God (as they understand
-

Him) can be appeased by rituals, rote prayers, or other means invented by man to demonstrate piety and what he believes is his own righteousness. All these attempts are regarded by God as inadequate to do this. In truth, He likens man’s righteousness to “filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6);

- In order for man to again take his place in God’s Kingdom he must have his sins atoned for and his fellowship with God reestablished. Since the penalty of sin is death (Romans 6:23) the only way man’s sins can be atoned for is through the death of a substitute;
- Man, being sinful by nature, cannot atone for his own sins;
- Since man was given dominion over nature, all of nature suffers from the consequences of man’s sins, and no creature—man or animal—can fully atone for man’s sins (Hebrews 10:1-4);
- A *sinless* person must take the place of the *sinful* person to provide that atonement (Hebrews 9:22-28). But since there are no sinless persons fathered by men, a dilemma was created: how could man’s sins be atoned for in a manner that would satisfy God’s justice, and yet allow for God’s mercy;

God offers the solution to this dilemma through the Gospel that Jesus and His apostles proclaimed:

- God’s love for man prompted Him to provide a way for man to be restored to fellowship with Him (John 3:16). The Word of God, who came forth from the Father, and who is divine in His nature and essence, became a man by inhabiting a body
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conceived by the Holy Spirit of God through a miracle of birth involving a young virgin. Because His Father is not a man, but God, He is sinless—the only person who could offer Himself as a perfect sacrifice for the sins of all mankind (John 1:1-29);

- One man fulfilled the requirements established by God to be the perfect sacrifice. Jesus of Nazareth is the Word of God in human flesh who shed His blood on the cross to atone for mankind's sins (John 1:1-29);
- All who would enter into fellowship with God must do so through faith in the complete and perfect atoning work of Jesus, the Messiah (Greek, "Christ;" English, "Anointed") (Acts 4:12);
- The way to enter into fellowship with God through His covenant established in the blood of Jesus Christ is to repent of (change one's mind about) one's sins, and resolve to live according to the commands of Jesus Christ as recorded in God's Word, the Bible. In doing so, one receives Jesus as one's Savior and Lord (Acts 3:19; Ephesians 2:10);
- With true faith in Jesus Christ comes citizenship in the Kingdom of God, and eternal rewards for service in His Kingdom, which will exist throughout eternity (Colossians 3:23-25).

Jesus is the only mediator between God and men. There are no others. All who desire to come to God must do so through faith in Jesus Christ. No religion or perceived "god" or "goddess" has any power to save us:

“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under Heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. (1 Timothy 2:5-6)

Jesus came to reveal the way to His Father, God, and to open the throne of Heaven to us so that we may with confidence enter into His Father’s fellowship as adopted sons:

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.”

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. (Romans 8:14-17)

We suffer with Christ by suffering rejection by the world—even, many times, rejection by those whom we love dearly. That rejection may take many forms, but it is the price we pay to follow Him, and to be in close communion with God. That close communion allows us to approach the very God of the universe as our own Father. Thus, Jesus tells us that we are to pray directly to the Father in Jesus’ name for whatever we need because the Father loves us. We need not go through anyone else.

“And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.”

“Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

“These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father.

“In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father for you, for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God.

“I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. I leave the world again and go to the Father.” (John 16:23-28)

Admittedly, the Gospel seems foolish. The manner in which it has been presented often makes it seem like a fairy tale to those who find it difficult to believe. That God would send His Word to become a man and die for our sins is contrary to human reason. Yet the sheer abundance of evidence confirmed by fulfilled prophecies found only in the Bible gives ample reason to believe.

For this present life, God has provided all we need materially as well as spiritually. If we seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, all we need will be given to us (Matthew 6:33).

I have presented, in concise terms, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But there are important details of the Gospel, particularly in regard to our responsibilities and our eternal inheritance in the Kingdom of God. To understand those responsibilities, as well as that eternal inheritance, it is necessary to see how the Gospel is manifested in history, past, present and future.

2

Found In The Hebrew Torah

While we often associate the Gospel with what is called the “New Testament,” it is clearly found in the Hebrew Scriptures—the Torah—as well. The Torah is commonly called the “Old Testament” by Christians, and contains many prophecies that foretold the Redeemer’s coming. We will address some of those prophecies in a later chapter.

Jesus’ early disciples expounded from the Hebrew prophets to convince many in their day of the fulfillment of the messianic prophecies in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. It wouldn’t be until about sixty years had passed from the time of Jesus’ sojourn on earth that the writings which comprise the “New Testament” would be completed by the Lord’s disciples. The only Scriptures the first believers had to work with were the “Old Testament” Scriptures, and they did a good job of using them to spread the Gospel.

In the “Old Testament” the Gospel is initially intimated in God’s promise to Adam and Eve after they succumbed to the temptation of Satan. The promise was of a future Redeemer who would destroy Satan and his power over mankind:

So YHWH God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field. On your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life, and I will put enmity [hatred] between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed. He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.” (Genesis 3:14-15)

The Seed of the woman does not speak of mere men, but of the Messiah, or Redeemer, who would one day come from God and bruise the head of Satan, embodied in the serpent. To bruise his head is to destroy his kingdom in the earth and replace it with the Kingdom of God as originally intended through the creation of Adam. In order for that to happen it was necessary that the serpent (Satan) first bruise the heel of the woman’s Seed (Christ).

The bruising of the heel would not be a mortal blow, but a temporary inflicting of harm. But the bruising of the head is lethal, referring to the eternal destruction of Satan at the hands of Jesus.

This was the first of God’s promises to send a Redeemer who would reconcile creation to its Creator by paying the price of redemption—His own life. There are other Torah prophecies that speak of the Redeemer who would come. Isaiah paints a graphic picture of the Messiah’s suffering and death for our sins, as well as the blessings to be bestowed upon those who believe in Him:

Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

But He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way, and YHWH has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, even so He did not open His mouth.

He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; He was stricken for the transgressions of My people.

And they made His grave with the wicked, but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth.

Yet it pleased YHWH to bruise Him. He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His Seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of YHWH shall prosper in His hand.

“He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.

“Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” (Isaiah 53:4-12)

In his exposition on the Gospel, the apostle Peter refers to Isaiah:

For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth. Who,

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when He was despised, did not despise in return. When He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.

Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. (1 Peter 2:21-24)

Because of His obedience to His heavenly Father's plan of redemption, Jesus is promised rulership over the Kingdom of Heaven which He will share with His loyal subjects. This promise is the Gospel of the Kingdom of which Jesus proclaimed, and which He commanded His disciples to proclaim.

Ancient Israel understood the truth that God would establish His Kingdom on the earth, but misunderstood the true nature of the Kingdom. Jesus' disciples, correctly believing Him to be the promised Messiah, asked Him when He would restore the Kingdom to Israel:

Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You now restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6)

Jesus' response indicated that the time was not yet, but that His followers must proclaim the Gospel until He returns:

He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:7-8)

All of Scripture—both the "Old Testament" and the "New Testament"—relates God's plan of redemption. It

tells of man's fall from fellowship with God; of man's sinful nature manifesting itself through evil actions throughout history; of man's inability to raise himself above his sin nature and reestablish fellowship with God no matter how righteous his life appears in his own eyes or in the eyes of other men. It speaks of God's love for man in spite of man's rejection of God; of His making a way for man to have fellowship with Him not merely as a friend, but as an adopted son; of an eternal inheritance for those who choose to accept His way for salvation.

The first mention of the Gospel in the "New Testament" was in a promise revealed to Mary, the woman who bore Jesus' physical body:

Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God, and behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name 'Jesus.'"

"He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest, and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and there will be no end of His kingdom." (Luke 1:30-33)

When Mary brought forth her first-born child, Jesus, as prophesied by the angel, God's Kingdom message was proclaimed not to kings and religious leaders, but to lowly shepherds as they tended their flocks nearby:

Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, because look, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

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“And this will be the sign to you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.”

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” (Luke 2:10-14)

As emissaries from God’s Kingdom, the angels were proclaiming God’s plan of reconciliation with fallen man. That is the “good news”—the Gospel of Jesus Christ, also called the Gospel of the Kingdom.

There are many other prophecies found in the Torah which relate to the Gospel of the Kingdom. We will be looking at them in later chapters where relevant.

3

The Gospel of the Kingdom

Answering His disciple's questions of when He would come again, and what would be the signs of the end of this current age, Jesus replied that, among other things, "this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be proclaimed in all the world for a witness to all nations, and then the end shall come" (Matthew 24:14).

In spite of Jesus' words, seldom do teachers in the churches make reference to "the Gospel of the Kingdom." More often we are told only about the sacrifice of Jesus for our sins as summed up in John 3:16-17:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

"For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him."

While this is an excellent summation of the Gospel, the full Gospel of the Kingdom reveals how men enter into God's Kingdom, and what awaits those who do so, not only in this world, but in the world to come.

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There are many takes on the Gospel of the Kingdom, but it is not often that we hear the true Gospel of the Kingdom, even among the more Bible-oriented churches.

We hear that Jesus died for our sins. We hear that we can be “saved” if we “accept” Him as our personal Savior. Some even distinguish between His being Savior and being Lord, implying that we can accept Him as our Savior even if we do not accept Him as our Lord. But Scripture speaks of Jesus as “Lord of lords and King of kings” (Revelation 17:14). If we are to enter into His Kingdom we must receive Him as our Lord. Jesus chastised those who called Him Lord without obeying Him:

“But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46)

The reason Jesus became man’s Savior is so that He can be man’s Lord. The two roles are inseparable! Yet many deny that one must receive Jesus as Lord, and emphasize only that He is man’s Savior. This effectively leaves man in his sins, impotent to live righteously for God’s Kingdom. Jesus is Lord of God’s Kingdom. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is intrinsic to the Gospel of the Kingdom, which refers to the Kingdom of God (also called the Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of Christ [Matthew 19:23-24]).

Some believe that the Kingdom of God is somehow distinct from the Kingdom of Heaven, but Mark and Luke refer to the Kingdom of God relating events where Matthew speaks of the Kingdom of Heaven. Matthew also uses both forms interchangeably, particularly in verses 19:23-24.

Because many Christian teachers leave out the Kingdom aspect of the Gospel and focus only on spiritual salvation, they misdirect the hopes and hinder the service of those who respond to their limited gospel.

By God’s grace many have been saved through such “inadequate gospels.” Yet many are also stunted in their

spiritual growth because of the failure of their religious teachers to fully explain what the Gospel really entails in responsibilities as well as in blessings. For there are responsibilities that come with one's commitment to Christ.

The full Gospel of the Kingdom is the telling of not only God's redemption of man, but also of the deliverance of His entire creation from a state of corruption. If one does not understand the Gospel of the Kingdom one does not fully understand what salvation means. The purpose for Jesus dying to atone for man's sins was first in order to restore the Kingdom of God in Creation; the redemption of man is part of that restoration. While we are blessed to know that we are saved by that great sacrifice, we must also know the purpose for which we have been saved.

Whenever the Kingdom of God *is* expounded upon today, it is seldom apart from some hare-brained theory about "the Church" gaining victory over this present world system without the physical presence of Jesus. Over the centuries certain cults have arisen that claim their religious system is the Kingdom of God, or at least the only true representative of the Kingdom of God. These include, among others, the late Herbert W. Armstrong's Worldwide Church of God; the Watchtower Society (Jehovah's Witnesses); The Church of Jesus Christ, Latter-day Saints (Mormons); and, the first of them all, Roman Catholicism. All these have their own take on the Gospel of the Kingdom, and believe they alone will inherit it. Some leave room for those outside their organizations to possibly populate the Kingdom, but not inherit it. They are all in error, for no institutional religion will ever inherit the Kingdom of God. Only God's true saints will do so, regardless of (perhaps in spite of) any religious affiliation to which they belong.

Such mutilated gospels leave us with half gospels, quarter gospels and, in some cases, no gospel. As a result we have worldly-minded churches comprised of the weak and

led by the weak. All these non-gospels can do is give a false sense of security. They have left out enough so that they can be classified as “another gospel,” different from that proclaimed by Paul (2 Corinthians 11:1-4).

Now, we must be careful not to assume that the Gospel is found only in that which Paul wrote. The so-called “New Testament Scriptures” had not yet been written. He proclaimed the Gospel from the Hebrew Torah. Therefore he no doubt expounded much more than he wrote, considering that his letters were written to the assemblies of believers who had already professed faith in Jesus Christ. It wasn't necessary for him to write every detail that he had already proclaimed to them. But he did feel it necessary to warn them of those who might proclaim a different gospel:

But even if we, or an angel from Heaven, proclaim any other gospel to you than what we have proclaimed to you, let him be accursed.
(Galatians 1:8)

The full Gospel is found in the whole counsel of God. One cannot pull out from Scripture certain verses, isolate them, and then say, “this is the Gospel.”

The Gospel of the Kingdom is a Gospel promising rulership over the earth with Jesus the supreme Ruler. The Kingdom of God is where, ultimately, unrighteousness is banished. It is a Kingdom that came with the creation of man, has been coming through God's plan of redemption, was demonstrated in the life of Jesus of Nazareth, continues to come through the proclaiming of the true Gospel, will be manifested in the physical reign of Jesus on the earth, and will culminate in a New Heaven and a New Earth, when God moves His throne from Heaven to the earth after all iniquity is eliminated (Revelation 21:1-8).

In the following chapters we will look at each of these manifestations of the Kingdom of Heaven.

4

The Creation of Man

The Kingdom of Heaven entered the present age when God created man in His own image and commissioned him to fill the earth and to subdue it. Man was to be God's emissary to the earth, to have dominion over it and all its creatures, and to care for it for God's glory:

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Genesis 1:26-28)

Jesus said that He saw Satan fall from Heaven like lightning (Luke 10:18). By giving man dominion over the earth, God established His Kingdom in the midst of the territory Satan had invaded. Scripture does not reveal all about how Satan gained a foothold in the earth, but Isaiah gives us a clue in his lament to the king of Tyre:

“How you have fallen from Heaven, Oh Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart, ‘I will ascend into Heaven; I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.’

“Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit.” (Isaiah 14:12-15)

The king of Tyre, in his self-esteem, had exalted himself above God. Isaiah, speaking prophetically, likened the king of Tyre to Lucifer, the “light bearer,” who came to be called Satan, the “destroyer.” Paul tells us that Satan comes as an angel of light and his ministers as ministers of righteousness (2 Corinthians 11:14-15).

The Gospel of the Kingdom, which includes God’s redemption of man, cannot be told without divulging the truth of man’s fallen condition that *requires* a Redeemer. Because Adam succumbed to Satan’s temptation, all those born of Adam are lost in sin, unable to rise to the former status of fellowship with God and to the place of exercising dominion over the earth in a truly righteous manner.

Man still has dominion over the earth and all its creatures, but his dominion is corrupt, largely controlled by the evil spiritual entities that guide from the unseen realm man’s institutions of government, finances, and, yes, religion.

5

It Has Been Coming

The Kingdom of Heaven has been manifested throughout history by righteous men of faith who obeyed God in the midst of a sinful world—a world that had become corrupted through the influence of Satan and his fallen angels who followed him in rebelling against God:

And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they took themselves wives of all whom they chose.

And YHWH said, “My spirit will not always strive with man, for he also is flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.”

There were giants in the earth in those days, and also after that, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. The same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown.

And YHWH saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And YHWH was sorrowful that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.

So YHWH said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." (Genesis 6:1-7)

That these "sons of God" were fallen angels and not godly men marrying ungodly women (the line of Seth with others) as proposed by some, is evidenced by the fact that every other mention in the Torah of the "sons of God" refers to angels (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7). Also, the apostle Jude alludes to angels who did not maintain their position, but committed fornication just as did Sodom and Gomorrha:

And the angels which did not keep their first estate, but left their own habitation, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness until the judgment of the great day, even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. (Jude 1:6-7)

These angels fathered giants in the earth, and corrupted the lineage of mankind in their attempt to thwart God's plan to send a Redeemer. As mankind became more and more corrupted, God found one man alone to be righteous and pure in his generations (Genesis 6:9), untainted by the angelic influences, and by the evil around him. So God determined that He would send a flood throughout the

earth to destroy mankind. But for the righteousness of one man, the human race would have been annihilated. The account of that one man, Noah, is much more than that of a man and his family saved from the destruction of a world-wide flood. It is an important element in God's plan of redemption. Unfortunately that account is reserved largely for children's Sunday school classes, with the major focus being on the animals that entered with Noah into the ark. But were it not for Noah and God's grace, man's role in the Kingdom of Heaven would have ceased.

Because of His promise to Adam and Eve that He would send a Redeemer, God would not allow mankind to come to the place of total corruption. He intervened before man's corruption had become complete. However, had it not been for that promise, and had He not found Noah to be righteous, He would have destroyed man utterly:

But Noah found grace in the eyes of YHWH.
(Genesis 6:5-8)

This tells us that the redemption of man is not the central point of the Gospel. It is incidental to God establishing His Kingdom on the earth. The central point of the Gospel is the deliverance of the whole creation, including man, but not man alone.

I realize how this may seem blasphemous to some. That is because the churches have focused only on man, largely ignoring the Kingdom of God. Yet this does not negate the tremendous sacrifice of Jesus on the cross; it merely establishes that God's purpose for redeeming man is to develop the visible Kingdom of Heaven on earth. His love for man prompted Him to make that provision even from the foundation of the world. Yet, again, had Noah not been found faithful, and had God not promised to send a Redeemer for mankind, man would not exist now.

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But God's promise that the woman's Seed would bruise Satan's head had to be fulfilled. Thus, God saved Noah and his family, as well as a remnant of animals, so that His promise may be fulfilled in mankind.

Noah, then, is the human patriarch of the Kingdom of Heaven from the time of the flood onward. God gave him the same command He had given to Adam: be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth (Genesis 9:1). In other words, God told Noah to represent God's Kingdom on earth in the midst of Satan's kingdom.

From the time of Noah the Kingdom of God continued to make itself known among fallen men through a remnant of faithful believers in God's promise. That promise was reiterated throughout the millennia by God's prophets. To fulfill His promise of man's redemption, God chose one man through whom that promise would come (Genesis 11:27-12:3). That man was Abram, from Ur of the Chaldees (ancient Syria). Abram was a man of normal passions. He had failings as do we all. Yet he trusted God; he had a faith that pleased God. It would take great faith for an ordinary man to believe the promise that God made to him, and Abram's faith has been an example to all of God's people throughout the millennia..

Because Abram (Heb., "high father") obeyed God, God changed his name to Abraham (father of a multitude). For out of him would come many nations (Genesis 17:1-8) so that his offspring would be likened in number to the stars in the sky and the sand upon the seashore (Genesis 22:15-18).

From Abraham's loins, one nation in particular would be the means by which God's Kingdom on earth would be evident to the rest of the world. Abraham's son Isaac, and Isaac's son Jacob (whom God later named Israel), continued the lineage through which that promise would be realized. It would culminate in the twelve tribes of Israel. For

Israel to fulfill that purpose, God made a covenant with that nation and gave it His Law through His prophet Moses:

“Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.”

So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which YHWH commanded him. (Exodus. 19:5-7)

Peter applies this prophecy to believers in Jesus Christ:

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light—who at one time were not a people, but are now the people of God; who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10)

The Mosaic covenant made all Israelites subjects of God’s Kingdom whether or not they were faithful. Why? Because the nation of Israel was the visible manifestation of God’s Kingdom on earth—the only theocracy (government administered directly by God through His prophets) from the beginning until today. And there will be no other theocracy until Jesus returns to establish it once again through His physical reign on the earth (Revelation 20:6).

God’s dealings with Israel puzzle many because of the manner in which He held the entire nation accountable for the sins of individuals. Until the sins were dealt with, the nation suffered. He did not spare the righteous from captivity when Israel became so apostate that it was aborted from the land it had been given. Because of His promise,

initially to Abraham, later restated to Isaac and then Jacob, God did not select another nation through which He would channel His redemptive plan.

The Torah is a written history of God's plan working through the nation of Israel to bring into the world Jesus, the Redeemer of mankind, by whom the Kingdom of God on earth would be ruled. Israel was not chosen because it was more righteous than other nations, but because of Abraham's faithfulness and because of God's promise to Abraham that through his lineage the Redeemer, who would bless all nations, would come (Genesis 22:18).

Not all citizens of ancient Israel were saved; only those who placed their faith in the Redeemer even before they knew who He would be were saved. Israel was not chosen to be blessed with automatic salvation for every Israelite person; the nation was chosen as a vessel through which God's Messiah would come.

Although the majority of the Kingdom's subjects were unfaithful to the laws of the covenant, God spared a remnant of the righteous—mostly from the tribe of Judah (the Jews)—and allowed them to go back into their land. The vast majority from the other tribes were dispersed to become assimilated into the nations. It was through the remnant—specifically the tribe of Judah—that the Messiah made His initial appearance.

6

Demonstrated by Jesus

The prophet Malachi foretold the day when another special prophet would announce the coming of God's Messiah (the uniquely Anointed One) who would perfectly demonstrate to man the Kingdom of Heaven:

“Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple—even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” says YHWH of hosts. (Malachi 3:1)

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of YHWH. And He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.” (Malachi 4:5-6)

Elijah lived centuries before Malachi gave these prophecies. Thus, these prophecies revealed a future time when the Spirit of prophecy that was in Elijah would come again to

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proclaim the day of God's visitation through His only-begotten Son.

Jesus applied Malachi 4:5-6 to John the Baptist who came in the spirit of Elijah, proclaiming that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand:

“For this is He of whom it is written, ‘Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You.’

“Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist, but he who is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he.

“And from the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of Heaven suffers aggression, and the aggressive take it by force.

“For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

“And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come.” (Matthew 11:10-14)

John the Baptist appeared before Jesus of Nazareth did, proclaiming that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand, and identifying Jesus as the Messiah sent from God. Thus, John related the coming of God's Kingdom with the appearance of Jesus of Nazareth:

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!”

For this is He who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, who said, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight.’” (Matthew 3:1-3)

Jesus repeated John's proclamation:

From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” (Matthew 4:17)

Later, Jesus commissioned His disciples to go throughout Israel and perform miracles which would accompany the same proclamation, and validate that the Kingdom of Heaven was being revealed among them:

And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease.

Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him [Jesus].

Jesus sent out these twelve and commanded them, saying, “Do not go into the area of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, proclaim, ‘The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.” (Matthew 10:1-8)

Jesus’ miracles were not merely for show or to demonstrate power for power’s sake. They were proof that the Kingdom of Heaven is a reality, and that He is the administrator of that Kingdom. He took power over the kingdom of Satan to destroy Satan’s works, especially the works that lead to sin:

He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested: that He might destroy the works of the devil. (1 John 3:8)

Jesus' miracles foreshadowed the healing that would come upon the nations at the end of this age when He returns to establish His visible reign upon the earth. The evidence of His power over Satan was in the miracles He performed.

When John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask Jesus if He were the Christ, or if they should look for someone else, Jesus affirmed that His miracles coincided with the proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom:

Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: "The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel proclaimed to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me." (Matthew 11:4-6)

When Jesus proclaimed what have come to be called "the Beatitudes," He was explaining to the people the Kingdom of Heaven, and what promises awaited those who obeyed the Gospel of the Kingdom:

And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven;

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted;

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth;

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled;

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy;

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God;

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God;

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven;

“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in Heaven, for this is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matthew 5:1-12)

These words give hope to the righteous who suffer for their faith in this world. The Beatitudes speak of the Kingdom of God manifested in the earth through the visible, personal reign of Jesus Christ. How else could the meek inherit the earth? His words do not offer one type of blessing for each type of person. The poor in spirit are not distinguished from the peacemakers, or the meek distinguished from the pure in heart. The true believer in Christ must be all of these. And the several blessings are for all the saints when they come to possess the future Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

This is what Paul was speaking of in 2 Corinthians 13:5 where he tells us to examine ourselves whether we are in the Faith:

Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the Faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know that Jesus Christ is in you? Unless indeed you are disqualified.

Paul was not merely suggesting that we ask ourselves what we believe and why we believe it; he was admonishing us to see if our lives measure up to the godly standard required to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven when Jesus returns. For those who are loyal subjects of His Kingdom there will be many blessings and they will rule the nations with Him:

“But hold fast what you have until I come, and to him who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, I will give power over the nations. He shall rule them with a rod of iron—they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels—as I also have received from My Father, and I will give him the Morning Star.” (Revelation 2:25-28)

In His mercy, God has provided for those believers who are deficient in their service. Though they may lose their rewards, they may still be saved:

According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it.

For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear. For the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire. And the fire will test everyone’s work, of what sort it is.

If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.

If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.
(1 Corinthians 3:10-15)

Some hold an erroneous interpretation of these verses—that unrepentant sin results only in the loss of rewards in the Kingdom. Besides esteeming God's rewards as something to be taken lightly, those who believe this error equate sin with faulty works. But this scriptural provision for rewards is not about unrepentant sin; it is about service in God's Kingdom. We build our works (service in the Kingdom) on Jesus Christ. We can produce gold, silver and precious stones for faithful service, or we can produce wood, hay and straw for works performed in the flesh—good works of “righteousness” performed with either impure motives or outside the will of God. They are all good works, built on the foundation of Jesus. But only those works done in accordance with God's will will result in *lasting* rewards (Ephesians 2:8-10). These are works of obedience. All other works will be burned up, although the servant may still be saved as if he had barely escaped a fire.

A brother in Christ once described this latter scenario as appearing before God like a singed, featherless chicken. How disgraceful, even in the wake of eternal salvation. Though they may enter the Kingdom, there will be few or no rewards for them.

Works built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ, whether for reward or not, are not the same as willful sin, which brings condemnation and rejection out of the Kingdom of God. Although it is wrong to do outwardly good works in the flesh, this is not the same as committing overt, unrepentant, willful sin such as fornication, adultery, murder, lying, stealing, or anything that is contrary to godliness.

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When Jesus told the Pharisees that the Kingdom of God is “within you” (Luke 17:20-21), He was telling them that the Kingdom was not coming at that time in the way they anticipated; it was within their midst.

The Greek word *entos* may be translated as “within,” or as “within the midst.” Certainly the Kingdom of God was not in the hearts of the Pharisees who opposed Jesus. Therefore, it would have been better translated, “The Kingdom of God is within your midst.”

This verse has been wrongly interpreted to mean that God dwells within everyone—a form of pantheism. But what Jesus was really saying was that the King (Jesus) was in their midst, and was telling them so. He has sovereignty over every soul, to judge every person’s faith or lack of faith. His Kingdom will be manifested as a government on earth after He comes the second time, and not before.

Do not be deceived to think that sin in the Kingdom of God is something to be taken lightly. God’s judgment is reserved for those who continue in willful sin, because they did not respond to His love manifested through conviction or chastisement for their sin (Hebrews 6 & 10).

7

It Continues to Come

Every time the true Gospel is proclaimed the Kingdom of Heaven is being manifested in the earth. It continues to come each time a new soul enters into God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. It manifests itself every time a believer in Christ demonstrates obedience to God's Law through love for his fellow man. For love is the sum total of God's Law:

Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him [Jesus] a question, testing Him, and saying, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"

Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."

"This is the first and great commandment, and the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

"On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:35-40)

This is why Scripture says that Jesus' commandments are not burdensome (1 John 5:3). We need not focus on the

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fine points of the Law; we need but love God with all our hearts, all our souls, and with all our minds, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. If we will do this we will not sin willfully.

Because of Christ's sacrifice we no longer need to keep Israel's Old Covenant ceremonial and sacrificial laws that pointed to His coming. To do so would demonstrate lack of faith in His perfect atoning death.

Yet the Mosaic laws have been done away with in terms of the necessity to struggle over how to keep ourselves from sinning. They remain to tell us what pleases God, and how we can demonstrate our love for Him and for our fellow man. But the Holy Spirit is in the believer now to guide him into all truth through the study of God's Word. The heart that is truly in love with God will abhor sin and will keep the law of love by not willfully disobeying God's commands.

We can be part of the continuing manifestation of God's Kingdom on earth through our love for God and for man. That love compels us to minister the truth of God's Word so that others may enter into His love through faith.

For now, the Kingdom of Heaven is visible to the world only through the lives of God's people. We are ambassadors of the Kingdom of Heaven to the kingdoms and peoples of the earth, bringing the news of God's reconciliation:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God, for He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5:17-21)

Jesus became "sin" in the sense that He took the place of our sins on the cross. Now, wherever the feet of those who believe in Him are planted, the Kingdom of Heaven is manifested. We are first of all citizens of Heaven, secondly citizens of the nation that holds our earthly citizenship. The first holds our spiritual allegiance and our primary responsibility in any temporal sense; the second holds our temporal allegiance only insofar as it does not conflict with our heavenly allegiance.

We may appeal to our earthly citizenship, as Paul did (Acts 22:24-30), in order to protect ourselves and to gain advantage for our ambassadorship. But we may not take undue advantage of others for personal gain, or rebel against any earthly government.

The most important thing we have as believers in Jesus Christ is our testimony. We cannot risk sullyng our testimony because of scandal. We obey the laws of the land; we pay our taxes; we love everyone; we do not return evil for evil. These things are essential if we are to have a good reputation among those who are outside the Kingdom of Heaven. This is especially true for those who hold positions of leadership among God's people. (1 Timothy 3:7; 1 Peter 2:9-25).

As ambassadors of Christ, our message is one of peace and reconciliation. Ambassadors are not to foment rebellion against the people to whom they are sent by their own government. Nor are they to abuse the privileges that come with their office. They are to work in the best interests of

their own government, and may work peacefully among the people of the nations to which they are sent in order to gain loyal subjects for their own government.

We cannot control how others treat us, but we can control how we treat others. And God's Word leaves no room for rebellion or dishonesty on the part of His people:

Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.

If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.

Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather put wrath in its place, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord."

Therefore, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:17-21)

While the King remains in Heaven, conducting the affairs of His Kingdom on earth through His ambassadors, His Kingdom is only partially manifested over the nations. It will be fully manifested when He comes the next time to conquer the nations and establish His rule.

8

The Resurrection

When Jesus said that the gates of Hell (Hades) would not prevail against His called out ones (Matthew 16:18), He did not mean that it was the duty of His disciples to attack Satan and his domain with the purpose of establishing dominion over the earth. Hades had two compartments: one where the unrighteous were held in torment for the day of judgment; another where the righteous were held in comfort awaiting their release (Luke 16:20-31). With the resurrection of Jesus the righteous captives were set free to follow Him to Heaven to await the end of the age. Now the spirits of believers who die in the Lord are immediately in His presence:

We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. (2 Corinthians 5:8)

There is no longer the need to wait in Hades. In other words, the gates of Hades could not prevent the resurrection of Jesus and the saints who followed Him. And the Resurrection is the great hope of the Gospel of the Kingdom.

When Jesus returns, those who have died in Christ will be resurrected with incorruptible bodies and will rise to meet the Lord in the air. Those who are alive in the flesh will be changed from corruptible to incorruptible to join them:

For this we say to you by the Word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.

For the Lord Himself will descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we will always be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17)

“But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars of the heavens will fall, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.

“And then He will send His angels, and gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of Heaven.” (Mark 13:24-27)

The world will actually see Jesus take His saints out of the world and it will know His wrath is about to be meted out:

I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood.

And the stars of the heavens fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind.

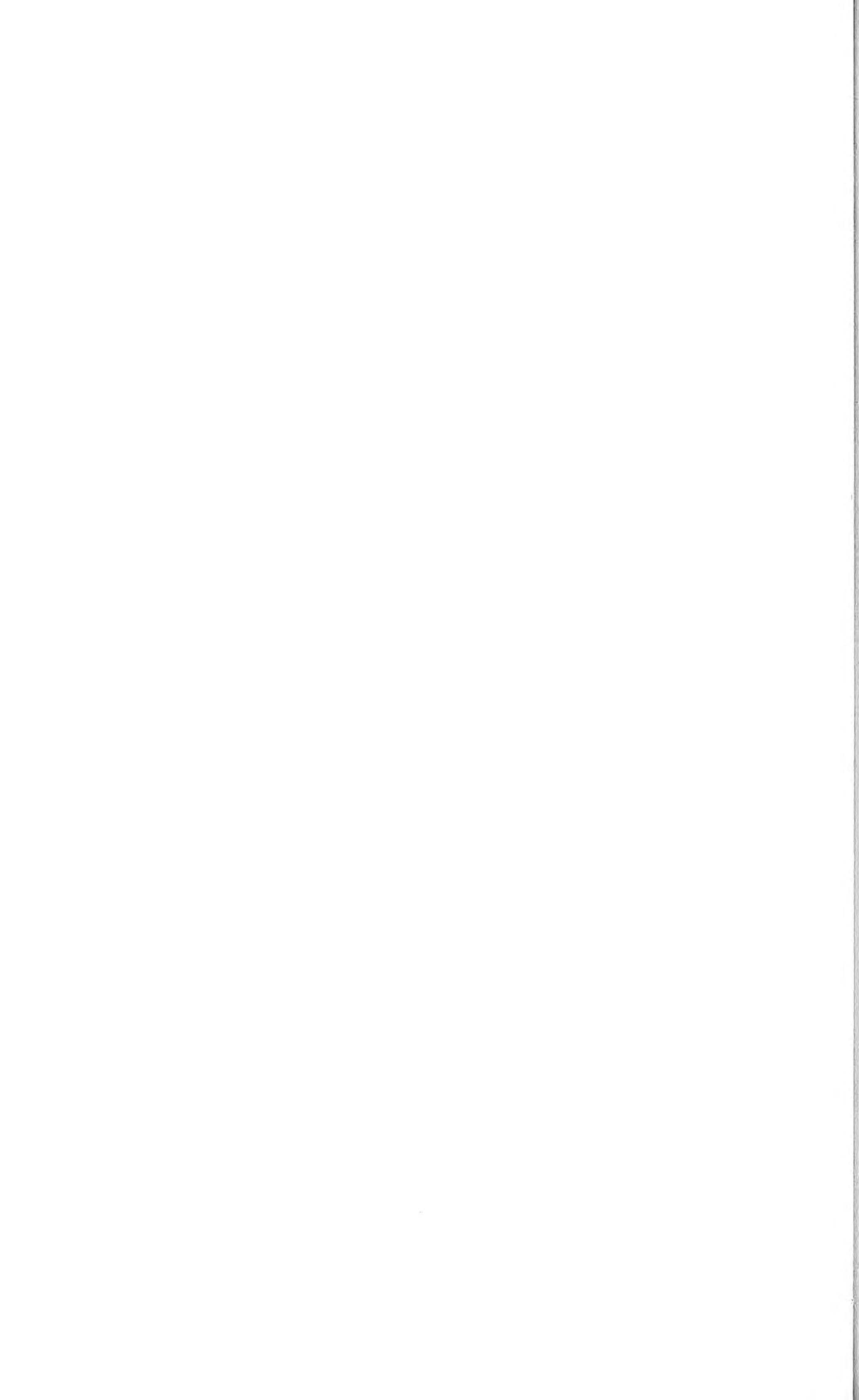
Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place.

And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" (Revelation 6:12-17)

After this event the saints will remain with the Lord while He pours out His wrath upon the satanic world system ruled by a man called "anti-Christ." The "good news," or Gospel, is that the Lord's disciples are not appointed to wrath, though we may suffer tribulation in this world because of our faith:

For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. (1 Thessalonians 5:9-10)

These verses are in concert with Matthew 24:29-31, Mark 13:24-27, and Revelation 6:12-7:17. Read these verses together, in their proper contexts, to see the true scenario of the Lord's catching up of His saints to meet Him in the air. That event will occur at the time of the "fullness of the Gentiles" (Romans 11:25), and will herald the Lord's return to the earth (Revelation 7:1-8).



9

The Second Coming

At the proper time, the Lord Jesus will return to the earth with His saints. He will destroy the armies of anti-Christ and will then set up His visible Kingdom on earth which He will rule in righteousness:

Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, “Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.” (Jude 1:14-15)

Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him—even they who pierced Him. And all the nations of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen. (Revelation 1:7)

Now I saw Heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called “Faithful and True,” and in righteousness He

judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself.

He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called "The Word of God."

And the armies in Heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses.

Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS."

Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of the heavens, "Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great."

And I saw the beast [anti-Christ], the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army.

Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone.

And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh. (Revelation 19:11-21)

This horrific scene speaks of God's wrath upon all who will not bend their knees in submission to His rightful claim as their King. This need not befall anyone who will only heed His plea to repent of their sins and obey His Word.

Men seek escape from the world unaware that its problems exist because of Satan's rule. Their escape takes the form of drugs, alcohol, sex, suicide, even religion. They do not know they can escape through faith in Jesus Christ who offers perfect peace to His faithful subjects. Yet because the churches do not proclaim a full Gospel of the Kingdom many think of salvation as only "pie-in-the-sky"—a fable. Some come to Christ merely for "fire insurance," but they have no sustaining strength to remain in the Kingdom. This is what Jesus was speaking of in His parable of the sower:

"A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it.

"Some fell on rock; and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture.

"And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it.

"But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold." When He had said these things He cried, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

Then His disciples asked Him, saying, "What does this parable mean?"

And He said, "To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to

the rest it is given in parables, that 'Seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.'

"Now the parable is this: The seed is the Word of God.

"Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the Word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.

"But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the Word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of testing fall away.

"And the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity.

"But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the Word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience." (Luke 8:4-15)

The first class of people refuse to believe the Gospel and remain in their lost state.

The second class of people believe for awhile, but are later persuaded to turn from the faith. This is apostasy.

The third class of people maintain their belief, but become so embroiled in the world's pleasures that they bear no fruit and, though possibly saved (at least some of them), they will receive little or no reward in the Kingdom.

The fourth class of people take to heart their salvation and work for the benefit of the Kingdom.

Let us have eyes to see that this was a "mystery of the Kingdom of God." Many enter the Kingdom with gladness for a time, eager for its blessings, but they do not remain. As long as they remain they will be saved.

10

The Millennium

The Kingdom of Heaven on earth will be manifested in the future millennial (one-thousand-year) reign of Jesus Christ. When He returns He will establish His government and will apportion rewards to His saints according to their work for the Kingdom while in their mortal bodies. Thus, He will demonstrate to the peoples of the earth the manner in which their governments should have ruled. His righteous government will rule with a rod of iron, and justice will be meted out without compromise.

This promise to God's Son was prophesied in Psalm 2:7-12:

“I will declare the decree: YHWH has said to Me, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; you shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel.’”

Now therefore, be wise, Oh kings; be instructed, you judges of the earth.

Serve YHWH with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.

During Jesus' reign, the nations will be powerless to oppose Him, for Satan—the deceiver of the nations and ruler of this world system—will be bound for one thousand years:

Then I saw an angel coming down from Heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. And he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should no longer deceive the nations until the thousand years are finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while. (Revelation 20:1-3)

The great hope of the true disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ is to be resurrected to eternal life in a new body impervious to death, and to reign with his sovereign King over the nations of the earth for the one thousand years (the Millennium). After the Millennium God will renew all things through creation of new heavens and a new earth, and we will reign with Him for eternity on the new earth.

But even by the end of the millennial Kingdom the battle will not be over. For Satan will be released to try the hearts of those who, though obeying the laws of the Kingdom out of fear, hold no love for the King and resent His rule over them:

Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four

corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea.

They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city [Jerusalem]. And fire came down from God out of the heavens and devoured them.

The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heavens fled away. And there was found no place for them.

And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.

The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.

Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:7-15)

The Kingdom of Christ on earth will not be a democracy. The people will not be granted “self-determination,” or any semblance of self-governance. They will be ruled with a rod of iron befitting the nature of fallen men. Thus, when Satan is loosed for a while they will be ready for his deception to think they can overthrow the King.

But they will be destroyed by God's supernatural means, and will not be able to inherit the eternal Kingdom.

When the thousand years are ended the eternal phase of the Kingdom of God as it applies to its human subjects will have just begun. The Kingdom has been, is now, and always will be, eternal. But we have merely entered into the portal of the Kingdom. What lies ahead is truly wondrous.

The New Earth

The Kingdom of Heaven will reign triumphant over the nations, and then God will renew His creation to what it was before the fall of Lucifer and Adam. Exactly how that will take effect in the stars and planets we are not told. What we are told is that God will move His throne from Heaven to the earth and will dwell with His people for eternity in new heavens and a new earth:

Now I saw new heavens and a new earth, for the first heavens and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea.

Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from Heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor

sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”

Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” And He said to me, “Write, for these words are true and faithful.”

And He said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts.

“He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.

“But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” (Revelation 21:1-8)

The new earth will come into existence when God renovates this present earth through fire which will destroy every corrupt thing (2 Peter 3:10-12).

John was privileged to see the culmination of the Kingdom of Heaven on the earth in the city called New Jerusalem:

But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light.

And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it.

Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there).

And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it.

But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him.

They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads.

There shall be no night there. They need no lamp or light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.

Then he said to me, "These words are faithful and true." And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place.

"Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."

Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the messenger who showed me these things.

Then he said to me, "See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God."

And he said to me, "Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand.

"He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still."

"And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last."

Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. (Revelation 21:22-22:14)

Nations will still exist, but they will be populated by the redeemed only, who will go into and out of the city with gifts for the eternal God and His Son.

The Gospel of the Kingdom has both temporal and spiritual blessings for its loyal subjects. Our eternal state will not be one of idleness, but of fruitful service to the King and to God the Father. The earth will be the paradise it was intended to be at its creation. And God's people, having endured the presence of evil and tribulation, will be happy to tend the fields of the Lord which will easily give forth their abundance to the redeemed nations.

12

Entering the Kingdom

How do we enter into the Kingdom of Heaven today? By believing in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. As the jailer of Paul and Silas asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved” (Acts 16:25-34)?

The answer given was concise:

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.” (Acts 16:31)

This did not mean that everyone in the jailer’s house would be saved automatically just because the jailer was saved; no one comes into the Kingdom of Heaven on their relatives’ coattails. Paul was making the same promise to the jailer’s household as he was to the jailer: believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. But what does “believe” mean?

Belief is based on faith in the atoning work of Jesus on the cross of Calvary. It has to do with the remission of sins. Therefore, in order to believe, one must turn away from one’s sins (repent). When the multitude heard the Gospel being proclaimed in their own languages at Pentecost, they

were convicted in their hearts and asked, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” When Peter gave the answer the response was dramatic:

Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

“For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”

And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.”

Then those who gladly received his word were baptized, and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. (Acts 2:38-41)

We enter into the covenant of grace through repentance and baptism, the latter being the open testimony of our faith. Repentance means that we are truly sorry for our sins, and we determine to turn away from them. Baptism is symbolic of our being put to death, buried and resurrected to new life in Christ. While baptism does not of itself save anyone apart from believing faith, it is a command of Jesus for all who would claim faith in Him. To neglect baptism out of ignorance may result in nothing more than stunted spiritual growth; to refuse baptism is to disobey the Lord’s command. And He asks a difficult question:

“But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do the things which I say?

“Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like:

“He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And

when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock.

“But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great.” (Luke 6:46-49)

When we enter into salvation through faith in Jesus Christ we are made citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus is the only Way into the Kingdom, as attested by His own words:

“Do not let your heart be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in Me.

“In my Father’s house there are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself, so that where I am, you may be also. And where I go you know, and you know the way.”

Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?”

Jesus said to Him, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man comes to the Father, but through Me.” (John 14:1-6)

Then Jesus said to them again, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door for the sheep. All that ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them.

“I am the door; if any man enter in by Me, he will be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.” (John 10:7-9)

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These words were recorded by the apostle of Jesus, John, who gave his life for his testimony. Either this man, whose words speak godliness throughout, was a liar, or Jesus Himself was a liar, or these are faithful words which every man must heed in order to be saved and enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

13

Living in the Kingdom

Entering into the Kingdom of Heaven is only the beginning. We must learn to live in the Kingdom through obedience to its laws. Those who enter but do not maintain their citizenship are faced with a terrible end:

Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

And this we will do if God permits.

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.

For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and briars, it is rejected and close to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.

But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner.

For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and continue to minister.

And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. (Hebrews 6:1-12)

The writer of Hebrews encouraged his readers by saying that he was persuaded they would not fail, even though he had to give them warning. This did not mean they would not fail, but only that he was encouraging them not to fail. We have many choices in life. How we choose is important.

This dire warning to those who enter the Kingdom of Heaven but do not remain faithful is repeated further on in the Book of Hebrews:

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.

Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?

For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine; I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The Lord will judge His people."

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings, partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were treated in that manner.

For you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in Heaven.

Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward.

For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: "For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not wait. Now the just shall live by faith, but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him."

But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul. (Hebrews 10:23-39)

There are those who say these words are not for believers in Christ—that the people spoken of were never believers even though they were among believers. Those who teach this have learned this position from specific theological belief systems, not from any independent, honest exegetical study of Scripture alone. This is a grave error which gives many a false sense of security.

Read the context. Who has been “sanctified by the blood of Christ” but those who are believers and have entered into the Kingdom of God? Just a few verses earlier the writer qualifies this by including himself among those to whom he wrote as “sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Hebrews 10:10).

Although he continues to encourage those to whom he wrote by saying “we are not of them who draw back,” the truth remains that there are those who draw back from the Faith after having been sanctified by the blood of Christ. This is what is known as apostasy.

Now, apostasy is not something that takes place merely by committing sin. It is a process that begins by refusing to repent from sin and to ask forgiveness from God—a willful turning away from the Lord’s conviction.

When we sin the Holy Spirit in us convicts us of that sin; we know we are guilty. God, in His mercy, has promised to forgive us if we confess our sins to Him (1 John 1:9).

If we do not confess our sins He will bring us into circumstances that should cause us to repent. This is chastisement for our benefit:

“For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.”

If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons, for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?

But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. (Hebrews 12:6-8)

God's chastisement is meant to cause us to repent of our sins. He chastises only His sons; He does not chastise others. If we respond properly to His chastisement—correct our actions—He will allow us to remain in the place of heirs. If we do not respond properly to His chastisement, but resist from repenting of our sins, we risk being cast out of the Kingdom as unfaithful subjects. Willful sin is not the committing of sin with knowledge; it is committing sin and remaining in sin with a rebellious attitude. It considers as unclean (“unholy”) the blood of Christ whereby the person had been sanctified.

The process may take months or years, but it must come to a head sooner or later. Eventually the one who resists God's grace for restoration will be cut off from the Kingdom of Heaven:

For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning.

For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them.

But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: “A dog returns to his own vomit, and a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mud.” (2 Peter 2:20-22)

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The end for such is apostasy—falling away from the Faith.

Now, I know I will receive many scathing letters condemning me for this position. To those who would send them, I will say don't waste your time; I once believed as you because I believed what men taught erroneously. Read the Scriptures and keep them in context. Do not seek explanations or answers from other men. Do not receive my explanation without first studying God's Word for yourself.

Read the Scriptures. Keep them in context. Be a Berean (Acts 17:10-12). Don't just parrot what you've been told by others no matter how highly they are esteemed within the Christian community, or how much trust you have placed in their teachings because they seem to love God and otherwise teach much truth.

We must all give an account of ourselves before the Judgment Seat of Christ. We cannot claim ignorance just because we trusted pastors of churches to be priests for us. We have no priest but Jesus.

Old and New Reconciled

The basis for all belief and practice for the true believer in Jesus is the Word of God—the Bible. To understand God’s Word we must realize that all of it is pertinent to our faith if for no other reason than attaining knowledge.

It is supposed that the “New Testament” replaced the “Old Testament” for those who follow Jesus. The word rendered “testament” is *diatheke*, which means “contract.” Those who compiled the Scriptures, particularly those within the Roman Catholic Church, created a problem. Confusion exists in what is meant by the “Old Testament” and the “New Testament” as they relate to the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

There is no such division of Scripture as an “Old Testament” and a “New Testament,” except as invented by the apostate early “church.” Nor is there any such thing as different testaments. There is only God’s Word given through His prophets who wrote prior to the coming of Israel’s Messiah, and through His apostles and prophets who wrote after the coming of Israel’s Messiah. There is one Testimony which is made up of all the prophetic writings, and it

was given to Israel—the Testimony of Yeshua HaMashiach (Jesus the Messiah), which spoke of Him before He came (these are the pre-messianic Scriptures), and related His life and teachings after He came (these are the post-messianic Scriptures).

The apostate “church” (which developed into Roman Catholicism) separated these into two categories called “Old Testament” and “New Testament,” then said that these are two different covenants for two different people.

While “testament” means “covenant,” it was erroneous for them to separate the prophetic writings given before Messiah came, from the prophetic writings given after Messiah came, and call them the “Old Testament” and the “New Testament.” This implied that all of the pre-messianic writings comprised the whole of what was done away with when Messiah instituted His New Covenant in His blood. The only parts of those pre-messianic writings that were done away were the Mosaic laws given to Israel. But it is not true of God’s original covenant with Abraham, or of any other Scriptures.

The pre-messianic Scriptures recorded many covenants with different people: Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and others, including non-Israelites such as Hagar and her son Ishmael (Genesis 17:20). So the so-called “Old Testament” is really the record of many covenants between God and men. All of those covenants were specific to those people. The Old Covenant in Moses, and the New Covenant in Jesus were made specifically with the nation of Israel. The Old Covenant with the house of Israel was sealed by keeping the Law by faith. The New Covenant with the house of Israel was sealed with the blood of the Messiah.

All who come to God through faith in His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, enter into the covenant He made with Abraham. The Old Covenant with Israel through Moses,

sealed with the blood of animals, has been done away with and replaced by the New Covenant in Jesus' blood. The only parts of the pre-messianic writings that do not apply to today's Israel of Faith are those that specifically related to ancient Israel's sacrifices for sin and the ceremonial laws that pointed to the coming of Messiah. Once the Messiah fulfilled those laws they no longer had to be adhered to by faithful Israel. In truth, they could not be obeyed, because the temple in which many of them resided was destroyed. The wall of separation was torn down and the Gentiles were invited to enter into God's New Covenant with Israel.

To ignore the Abrahamic Covenant is an error that has hindered the spiritual growth of Christians for centuries. The New Covenant did not replace the Abrahamic Covenant; it supplemented it. More properly, it fulfilled it. And it pertained to Israel, not to "the Church."

When Jesus told His apostles at His last Passover meal with them, "This is my blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for many," He was fulfilling a prophecy given through the prophet Jeremiah that spoke of a new covenant God would make with.....*Israel*:

"Behold, the days are coming, says YHWH, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt—My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says YHWH.

"But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says YHWH: I will put My Law in their minds, and write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people." (Jeremiah 31:31-33)

This prophecy pertained to Jesus at His first coming. It is specific not only to the nation of Israel, but to the tribe of Judah. That specificity means it cannot be construed to mean it is for something called “the Church,” which replaced, or was created in addition to, Israel. This important truth, which is based on the truth that Jesus is *Israel’s* Messiah, is affirmed in the post-messianic Scriptures, especially in the writing to the Hebrew believers in Christ. Speaking of Jesus as the perfect High Priest of Israel, the writer says:

But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.

For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second.

Because finding fault with them, He says, “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the Lord.

“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

“None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.

“For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will no longer remember.”

In that He says, “A new covenant,” He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away. (Hebrews 8:6-13)

The Old Covenant spoken of here was that which God made with Israel through Moses and the giving of the Mosaic laws. That covenant provided for animal sacrifices which could not fully remove the sins of the people. These were types that pointed to Christ. The New Covenant is a more perfect one based upon the shed blood of Jesus. Both the Old Covenant and New Covenant are said to be made with “the house of Israel.” Thus, the imperfect was replaced by the perfect for the benefit of Israel. There is no mention of a “Church.”

God’s covenant with Abraham through Israel still stands. Again, only the laws of the covenant given through Moses and pertaining to sacrifices for sin, and those meant to keep Israel separate from the nations were abolished.

While the Mosaic laws pertaining to the sacrifices and other things necessary to demonstrate righteousness before God were abolished, it remains that God’s covenant with Abraham, operating through Israel, carries through to the disciples of Jesus. This is part of the Gospel: we are joint heirs with Christ as promised to the father of our faith, Abraham. This is affirmed in the post-messianic Scriptures:

Just as Abraham “believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness,” therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.

And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, proclaimed the Gospel

to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed."

So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.

For as many as are of the works of the Law are under the curse, for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the Book of the Law, to do them."

But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for "the just shall live by faith."

Yet the Law is not of faith, but "the man who does them shall live by them."

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"), so that the blessing of Abraham may come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though it is only a man's covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it.

Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ. (Galatians 3:6-16)

Thus, we enter not into the Mosaic Covenant, but into the Covenant of Jesus Christ, which is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant that promised the Messiah through the lineage of Abraham.

The Mosaic Covenant was interspersed during the time between Abraham's grandson Jacob and Jesus in order to keep Israel separate from the nations until Messiah came.

Through faith in the Messiah, Jesus, believers from out of the nations are melded with the faithful of Israel so that out of the two God has made one people for Himself (Ephesians 2:11-22). God's covenant with Abraham was not annulled by the covenant later given through Moses to Israel:

And this I say, that the Law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect.

For if the inheritance is of the Law, it is no longer of promise, but God gave it to Abraham by promise. (Galatians 3:17-18)

To whom was the promise of a better covenant given? Israel. Yet all who come to Christ by faith, whether born naturally to Israel or to any other nations, are heirs of the Abrahamic Covenant administered through Israel by faith:

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:26-29)

God proclaimed the Gospel to Abraham before it was fulfilled—that through Abraham all nations would be blessed (Galatians 3:7-9). God, speaking prophetically through Isaiah, told the Messiah that He would be a light to the Gentiles:

Indeed He says, “It is too small a thing that You should be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.” (Isaiah 49:6)

Simeon, seeing the Lord as a child in the temple quoted Isaiah:

“For my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples—a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.” (Luke 2:30-32)

Jesus, as the Messiah of Israel, came to break down the wall of separation between Israel and the other nations:

Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called “Uncircumcision” by those called “the Circumcision” made in the flesh by hands—were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.

And He came and proclaimed peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone. (Ephesians 2:11-20)

The Gentiles, without Christ, are alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and are strangers from the covenant of promise. In Christ they are bonded to the commonwealth of Israel and partake of the covenants between God and Israel. This is a mystery that was hidden throughout the ages:

I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, who are the called out, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God—the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.

To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. (Colossians 1:25-27)

So sacred is the truth that God has made of two people one in Israel for His glory, that Paul condemns those who would try to erect again the wall torn down through Christ's sacrifice:

Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed. For before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles, but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision.

And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.

But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the Gospel, I said to Peter before them all, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?"

"We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but by faith in Jesus Christ, have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; for by the works of the Law no flesh shall be justified." (Galatians 2:11-16)

From the very beginning, in the early stages of the New Covenant's spreading, Satan tried to undo what Christ had done. He tried to drive a wedge between Israel and the Gentiles, devising false teachings that treated the two as something distinct.

Roman Catholicism proved his perfect foil to accomplish this. Using the military power of Rome, that religious system—a hybrid Christian-pagan hierarchical "church"—imposed upon kings and their subjects the belief that the Kingdom of God had come through the Roman pontiff as the Vicar of Christ on earth. Its leaders claimed that Israel was no longer the inheritor of God's promises; "the Church" was.

What is “the Church”?

When Jesus came the first time to Israel He proclaimed the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, also known as the Kingdom of Heaven. He demonstrated how the Kingdom came in the past, how it continues to come in the present, and will fully come in the future. There is an important detail to the Kingdom which must be addressed if we are to enter into it with understanding. One of those details has to do with a great apostasy (falling away from the Faith) that occurred in the early centuries after Jesus came.

Because of that apostasy, which came in the name of Jesus and claimed to be the visible representation of His Kingdom on earth, the truth of the nature of the Body of Christ (the sum of His believers) has been obscured. One reason we have been left in the dark on this issue is that we have been taught to think of ourselves as members of something called “the Church.”

Since at least as early as the fourth century, Christians have referred to themselves as “the Church.” We have become accustomed to the word “church,” without understanding how it came about or why.

The various English translations of Scripture use the word “church” for the Greek “*ekklesia*.” In truth, however, *ekklesia* is properly translated “called out.” The word “church” is not a proper translation of *ekklesia*, but comes from another root word with a different meaning.

In reference to the word “Church,” the *Online Etymology Dictionary* states:

Church - O.E. *cirice* “church,” from W.Gmc. **kirika*, from Gk. *kyriake (oikia)* “Lord’s (house),” from *kyrios* “ruler, lord.” For vowel evolution, see *bury*. Gk. *kyriakon* (adj.) “of the Lord” was used of houses of Christian worship since c.300, especially in the East, though it was less common in this sense than *ekklesia* or *basilike*. An example of the direct Gk.-to-Gmc. progress of many Christian words, via the Goths; it was probably used by W.Gmc. people in their pre-Christian period. Also picked up by Slavic, via Gmc. (cf. O.Slav. *criky*, Rus. *cerkov*).

To explain, the term “church” (Anglo-Saxon, *cirice*, *circe*; Modern German, *cirche*; Sw., *kyrka*) is the word employed in the Teutonic languages to translate *ekklesia*. But this is an error.

The Greek origin of “church” (*kyriake [oikia]*) meant “The Lord’s house.” At first glance this may seem a moot point. But “the Lord’s house” speaks of the place of gathering (or the institution) rather than of the people themselves. *Kyriake oikia* came to be used in the fourth century by the developing hierarchical establishment of Roman society to refer to itself and to the Christian “synagogues” or meeting places called “churches,” “cathedrals,” “basilicas,” “chapels,” etc. in which they plied their religious trade.

The word “sanctuary,” is used even in non-Catholic churches as a name for the room in a church building where

the congregation meets. It means a holy place, or the place where God dwells. It was used for the Holy of Holies in the Hebrew temple. Yet Scripture says that each believer in Jesus is the temple of God; He does not dwell in temples made by hands (Acts 17:24; 1 Corinthians 3:16).

It is the erroneous translation of *ekklesia* that was adopted for the developing hierarchical system which eventually became the Roman Catholic Church. Over the centuries, the word *ekklesia* was usurped to mean the institutions whose leaders rule the spiritual lives of their congregants through a clergy-laity system. Originally this was done to preserve the establishment of the Roman papal system. Later it was carried over to the Protestant religions at the time of the Reformation. Today the word “church” is commonly used to denote the Body of Christ, which is an error. That error was propagated by the English translators of the “New Testament,” who knew that the word “church” would cement in the minds of their congregants the legitimacy of their hierarchical establishments. So, too, the words, “bishop,” “pastor,” and other terms did not originate in the Greek Scriptures but in the apostate Roman Catholic religious system. All are incorrect translations of the original Greek.

This is not a matter of semantics. Those English words were included as a means to keep the people subservient to the hierarchical systems that produced their Bible translations. William Tyndale, who first translated the so-called “New Testament” into English from the Greek, rendered *ekklesia* as “congregation.” Later English versions, produced by those under the authority of the Church of England, changed it to “church.” Subsequent translations have followed suit. The carry-over of this error into the English translations of the Bible effectively keep the people thinking of themselves as members of their particular institutions rather than members of the larger Body of Christ within autonomous local assemblies.

This may be denied by religious leaders, yet what do they call their institutions but “churches”? Christians ask other Christians, “Which ‘church’ do you attend?” Every week they attend “church.” When speaking of religious meeting places even Christians encourage people to attend their “church,” equivocating the church with other places of gathering such as synagogues, temples, or mosques. In practical terms, church institutions are detached from the identity of individual believers as the *ekklesia*, or “called out” of God. Observe how they operate and you will see they exist for their own benefit above that of the people.

Although *ekklesia* may mean the “called out” for Christ in total, or as individual assemblies of the called out, it has no exclusive connotation of a religious system. It was used by the Greeks to describe any gathering of people for any number of purposes including crowds at the games. It properly means a gathering or assembly of people called out from the masses. The churches, however, are part of a theological system which operates on a professional level. They are clergy-laity oriented; the rank-and-file believers are distinguished from the clergy who function as priests—the perceived oracles of God. Thus, the many churches (professional institutions) are not the true *ekklesia* of Jesus.

Outside the so-called “high” churches such as Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism, Lutheranism, and the various Orthodox churches of the East, most Christians would say that their pastors are not priests. But they make the clergy-laity distinction by referring to them as “Reverend,” “Bishop,” or some other hierarchical religious term. Some pastors wear clerical robes that speak as loudly as words: “I am clergy; you are laity.” Even the word “pastor” is suspect. Technically, the Greek word, *poimen*, and the Latin word, *pastores*, mean “shepherds.” But Latin being the official language of the apostate Roman Church, *pastores* took effect in referring to its papal priests.

In the true *ekklesia*, all believers are equal before God, although some are gifted as elders who function in roles of leadership. They are not professional clergy, but work with their own hands so that they are not a burden to others (1 Thessalonians 4:11). Professional clergy often preach only that which is popular or will ensure their financial security.

In spite of these problems we can thank God for using the apostate establishments to preserve the Scriptures for us. Had it not been for their avaricious, power-grabbing nature, much of what we have in ancient manuscripts would have been lost to us today. They made possible the King James Bible and all subsequent translations in many languages for the average person. The truth is available to us if we but study the Scriptures diligently. While translations have their flaws—some more so than others—the Gospel can be found in most of them.

Because of the confusion wrought by the early apostasy, today virtually all churches hold that “the Church” was either a new creation by Jesus to replace Israel, or was created in addition to Israel as a separate entity. Both positions are based on the erroneous assumption that “the Church” was necessary to be the oracle of God because of Israel’s unfaithfulness. The truth is that all the promises of God in Scripture are only to the faithful of Israel, and all believers in Jesus are heirs to those promises regardless of their national heritage. This is important to know if we are going to understand the true nature of the *ekklesia* of God and function in the manner He has ordained for us.

Because of their erroneous belief that they had replaced Israel, the churches drove further the wedge between the two—Jew and Gentile—through persecution and a bloody pogrom that still reeks today.

Although God has managed to preserve individuals—even among the leaders—in the religious institutions, the fact remains that those institutions are all illegitimate usurp-

ers of the promises made to the Israel of Faith. They do not proclaim the full Gospel, but claim rewards and promises distinct from those of the Israel of Faith. In doing so, they cut off their hearers from blessings.

It pains me to say this. I know wonderful men who are pastors of the churches I am indicting. I would not question their love for the Lord. They also are victims of the deception, having been trained in particular theological systems. I know I am wounding them by my words here. All I can say is I'm sorry. But as I understood these things I felt the same as when the true nature of the Roman Catholic Church—which I loved—was revealed to me in 1964. I gave up what I loved for Him whom I loved more.

To be sure, we are not saved by this knowledge. We are saved by grace through our faith in Jesus. And we must regard as saved by grace our true brethren in Christ who are still in the churches, content under the tutelage of even the most errant pastors. We must likewise regard as saved those pastors who labor out of a motive of love for God's flock. We must not be prideful of the knowledge we possess. Our eyes may be opened now, but they were closed for too long before. Let us show grace toward those who do not see these truths at this time. Some may resist until they can no longer countenance the religious errors of their churches. Some pastors will even be cast out by their own congregations as well when they begin to really teach the truth.

WERE JESUS' WORDS FOR CHRISTIANS?

Satan had such great success in erecting again the wall of separation between Jew and Gentile through the churches that there are some who even say that Jesus' words were not meant for "the Church," but were part of the "Old Covenant" for the Jews only.

They assume that, since the Lord related His teachings to the Law, they were meant only for Israel. And since the

Law was done away with, they do not apply to “the Church.” They assume that Israel was saved by keeping the Law while “the Church” is saved by grace merely through affirmation of faith in Jesus. They have misconstrued the meaning of grace, lacking understanding of how grace came to Israel through the Law. Thus, they have established an inadequate gospel as a means to salvation.

Let us be clear about this very important truth: there is nothing man can do to earn his salvation. Salvation comes by grace through faith, and that is a gift from God (Ephesians 2:4-10). God’s gift of faith is available to all who seek truth with an honest heart:

Oh Lord, You open my lips, and my mouth
will show forth Your praise.

For You did not desire sacrifice, or else I
would give it. You do not delight in burnt offering.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A
broken and a contrite heart, Oh God, You will not
despise. (Psalms 51:15-17)

Many assert that man’s heart is utterly corrupt, and that no semblance of goodness can be found in it. And it is true that there are several Scriptures that attest to the deceitfulness of man’s heart. Yet man, bearing the image of God, does have a sense of goodness, even if that goodness of itself cannot save him. Even Jesus acknowledged the possibility of a good heart. When explaining the parable of the sower, He said:

“But the ones that fell on the good ground are
those who, having heard the Word with a noble
and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with
patience.” (Luke 8:15)

So whom do we believe? Jesus or some theological system? I suppose we should correct the Lord?

We are saved by God's grace, not by our own works of righteousness. But our response to God's grace reveals the condition of our hearts. We are not robots to be forced against our wills into the Kingdom of God. We have the ability to choose Christ or reject Him. Otherwise there would be no such thing as love on our part toward our heavenly Father and Jesus. Love is an act of one's will. And God desires that we love Him with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength.

God's grace as the only means of salvation does not apply only to Jesus' disciples, but also to pre-messianic Israel. Israelites were never saved by keeping the Law; faith has always been at the heart of God's dealing with men even from the creation of Adam. The moral law was given to Israel as an expression of God's grace to show man what God required of him in order to be in fellowship with Him. It was never meant as a way to be saved.

True faith desires to obey God's moral law, which must be kept by faith in what it teaches us: that God has made us His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works in which God had ordained us to walk. One cannot break God's commands and claim to love God. Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

"But," some say, "Jesus never spoke to Christians, He spoke only to Old Covenant Jews." Yet what did He say immediately following?

"If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever—even the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him, nor does it know Him. But you know Him; for He lives within you, and shall be in you."

“I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you.

“Yet a little while, and the world will no longer see Me, but you see Me. Because I live, you, too, shall live.

“In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you are in Me, and I am in you.

“He that has My commandments, and keeps them, is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him.” (John 14:15-21)

Those who say Jesus’ words are not for “Christians” want to claim this promise of the Holy Spirit for themselves, but they do not want to assume the responsibilities required to receive that blessing. They insist that they are “saved by grace” to the exclusion of any need for obedience to the commands of Jesus. It is therefore convenient to disregard His words as meant for the “lesser-blessed” Israelites.

To whom did Jesus promise the Comforter—to Israel, or to “Christians”? We cannot have it both ways.

In truth, the Holy Spirit is sent to those who are faithful among the Israelites and to all Gentiles who are grafted into Israel by faith in Jesus. So, in that sense the Lord’s words were only for Israel. But we are all Israel by faith if we have been baptized into the New Covenant which was promised to Israel. Thus, all of the apostles’ writings are for the Israel of Faith, not for the apostate religious system that came to be known as “the Church.” Additionally, those Israelites who do not believe in Jesus as their Messiah are cut off from Israel.

All who believe in Jesus as Messiah, whether Jews or Gentiles, have the faith of Abraham. And only those who have the same faith Abraham had may enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

DOES “THE CHURCH” EXIST?

The truth is that there is no such thing as “the Church” in God’s economy. All of the churches that exist today are descended from the original apostate system, no matter how far from the original they may have progressed. As long as they think of themselves as something other than a company of people within the Abrahamic covenant, and as distinct from Israel, they are in error. This does not mean that all individuals in those churches are not saved, or do not love God. It merely means that they have not been taught properly who they are in Christ. God did not create a new entity to replace Israel, nor did He establish a new creation in addition to Israel. There is only the Israel of Faith. I realize I am being redundant, but this is necessary to impress upon the reader the truth that all who would be saved, whether Jew or Gentile, are of one and the same company—Israel—through faith in the promise to Abraham:

Now the promises were made to Abraham and his Seed. He did not say, “And to seeds,” as of many; but as of one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ.

And this I say, that the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ—the Law, which was four hundred and thirty years after—cannot annul, that it should make the promise of no effect.

For if the inheritance be of the Law, it is no more of promise. But God gave it to Abraham by promise....

For you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:16-29)

Thus, all true believers, whether born to natural Israelite stock, or from other nations, grow together on the same tree—Israel:

For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy. And if the root is holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches are broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them partake of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you boast, you do not bear the root, but the root you.

You will say then, “The branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.”

Well, because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be prideful, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, take care lest He also not spare you.

See therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity, but toward you, goodness—if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.

And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.

For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree, how much more shall these, which are the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?

For I would not have it, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you be wise

in your own conceits, that blindness in part has happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in.

And so all Israel shall be saved, as it is written, “There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and He shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob. For this is my covenant with them, when I shall take away their sins.” (Romans 11:16-27)

Read this Scripture carefully. You will see that there are not two trees, but one. God did not create a new tree called “the Church,” but grafted into the existing tree, Israel (not natural Israel, but faithful Israel), all who have faith in Jesus Christ and obey His commandments by faith.

We are not members of something called “the Church.” We are members of Israel by faith.

The concept of “replacement theology” is a terrible deception. It boasts against the natural branches. It states that God has completely finished with Israel with the coming of Christ, and that He has replaced Israel with something called “the Church,” which word is not found in the original Greek Scriptures. As we have seen, the Greek word mistranslated “church” is *ekklesia*, which means “called out.” Israel was called out from among the nations to present the Gospel to the world. This is why Paul calls the faithful of Israel “the elect of grace” (Romans 11:5). This is a term we often hear applied to the so-called “Church,” but it initially applied to the believing remnant of Israel. If Paul referred to Israel as the elect of grace at a time when “the Church” was supposed to have replaced Israel, why has the concept been discarded?

Satan’s hatred for God’s people caused him to devise a religious system that would confuse those who come to Christ, and would obscure their understanding of the great promises that are theirs if they will be faithful.

But didn't Jesus say to Peter, “on this rock I will build my church”? That must prove that “the Church” is Jesus' institution.

No. Again at the risk of being redundant, Jesus said He would build His *ekklesia* (His “called out”) on the faith exhibited by Peter when he stated that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah), the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:15-20). Jesus was not going to build something new called “the Church.” He was calling out the faithful of Israel, this time to be built on the New Covenant in His blood. His “called out” were Israelites. Later, the Gentiles were called out from the nations.

Today, the Israel of Faith has been in captivity to pastoral Christianity for the past 1700 years, just as it was in captivity to rabbinic Judaism for centuries before Messiah came. In many ways pastoral Christianity is much the same as rabbinic Judaism. A remnant of rabbis followed their Messiah when He came. Most rejected Him. A remnant of pastors strive to remain faithful to the Lord. Most do not. And most in both companies have made the Scriptures of no effect in the lives of God's Israel through their traditions. If there **are** two distinct companies *they are Judaism and Christianity*, both of which are part of the world's religious system. Many of today's Christian leaders do not realize the degree to which worldly tradition governs their belief systems.

The churches are fraught with anecdotes and psychobabble in place of God's Word; programs in place of discipleship; entertainment in place of worship. But should we be surprised that they are sliding into apostasy, considering that they originated in apostasy?

I am certain that many who read this will be alarmed. It's as if the very foundation for all they have believed since coming to Christ has been taken out from under them. That is how I felt when the truth about Roman Catholicism

was revealed to me. At that time I determined to leave that place of comfort—of beloved priests and comfortable ritual. I knew that I could not remain there and be faithful to the Lord because of the truth I had attained.

SHOULD YOU LEAVE YOUR CHURCH ?

Now the question is certainly on the minds of some whether or not they should leave their churches and all the comfort they provide. They love those with whom they fellowship. They know that salvation is in Jesus, not in the church they attend. They love their pastors, and rightly so. They should not forget the true servants of God who have labored in the churches these past centuries—some still today. But they also know that the church system is part of the world's religious establishment, its various elements at worst controlled by Satan; at best influenced by him.

I would say that each must make up his own mind what to do, provided his church is not overtly apostate. However, for those with knowledge the purpose for attending should shift from what they can receive from the churches to what they have to offer to the churches in the way of sharing the truth. We should treat the churches as the Lord's disciples treated the synagogues. Recognize that few in them hold a genuine faith in the Lord, but demonstrate the love of Christ to all.

However, we should not be naïve to think that we will be welcomed. Jesus told His disciples that He was sending them out as sheep among wolves (Matthew 10:16-17). He warned that they would be cast out of the synagogues and would even be killed by those who think they are doing God a service (John 16:2).

It is difficult to face the prospect of giving up one's church. The churches provide a sense of community; they give an air of security; they are lovely places. And there are many sweet brethren in them. But the cost of following

Christ is to be willing to give up one’s own life for Him. Yet I am not suggesting my brethren do anything more than I have done. I know the pain that arises with separation from those we love.

Frankly, you need not leave your church; just bring the hard truth and most likely you will be escorted out.

Most of the churches will say we are apostate, reprobate—that we hate Christians and Christianity; they will warn others that we are a cult, and that they should stay away from us. They will insist that we show them our “credentials,” just as Israel’s religious leaders demanded of the Lord and His disciples their credentials. The myriad theologians of the Christian religions all have credentials and they cannot agree on what is the truth. But they will join with one another, especially in their rejection of us, because they possess the same religious spirit. They have a large investment in their religious systems and they won’t like to see them threatened.

What they will not do is weigh by the Scriptures what we have to say, at least not without scouring commentaries and theological theses in vain attempts to support their position and assuage their consciences.

One very important thing: because Christians have been conditioned to think of “the Church” as their home, and church buildings as their authorized place of gathering, they will not understand just what a Holy Spirit-led assembly really is.

Even those who have forsaken the formal church setting in favor of the house assembly have a difficult time thinking of their gathering as that of the family of God—the *ekklesia*. So let us make it clear: those who gather outside the establishment churches are not “Bible-study groups,” “Bible fellowships,” “cell churches,” “care groups,” social gatherings for Christians or anything less than or different from the assembly of the saints just as were the first-century gatherings described in Scripture.

I suggest that we stop using the word “church” to describe ourselves or our gatherings lest we fail to make the distinction in our own minds, let alone in the minds of others. Thus, in the Scriptures we quote in all our writings of late, we have replaced the mistranslation of the word “church” with the more proper “assembly” or “called out.” We also replace the mistranslation of the word *episkopon* as “bishop” with “overseer,” which is synonymous with *presbuteros*—“elder.” This is done to help distinguish between the commonly held error that a “bishop” is some hierarchical figure within an institution known as a “church.”

We must also stand ready to correct those who have these false impressions because of their ignorance. Help them see that our Father has a more excellent way of gathering—free from the constraints of religious men and women—“wherein every member of the body may be fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplies, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, making increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.” (Ephesians 4:16)

It will take time for things to come together as the Lord intended. We carry a lot of baggage from the churches. But patient enduring of our stumbling along the path to biblical fellowship will eventually be rewarded.

This is an important aspect of the true Gospel—that we need not be in bondage to religious men or institutions. No one can hold us to anything beyond what is written in God’s Word. All else is legalism which enslaves the minds and hearts of men to other men’s religious fabrications.

He whom the Son sets free is free indeed!

16

Counting the Cost

The Gospel requires that we count the cost of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. We are not invited to merely “accept Jesus” and let it go at that. Our belief must be genuine to the point of sacrificing our very lives for Him. There is a price to be paid:

Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

“For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it, lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’

“Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider

whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace.

“So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.

“Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its flavor, how will it be seasoned?

“It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill, but men throw it out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” (Luke 14:25-35)

While we are not to literally hate anyone, the Lord was making a point: we cannot love anyone—not even our own lives—more than we love Him, or we are not worthy to be His disciples.

To forsake all for Him does not mean to separate ourselves from all we have and know; it means to place them behind Christ in our affections and *be willing* to separate from them if necessary for His will in our lives.

Loving Him may cost us our families, our friends, our homes, our jobs, our very lives. It may even cost fellowship in the “church.” If we are not willing to give up these things we are not worthy of Him; He says we *cannot be His disciples*. He can make this demand because He is our Creator—the Word of God who became a man for our sakes. Jesus is not interested in the lukewarm who claim faith in Him but do not live according to His commandments (Revelation 3:16). All who come to Him in truth are disciples, meaning those who discipline their lives according to their Lord’s will and who bear fruit:

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away, and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, so that it may bear more fruit.

“You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.

“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

“If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered, and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.

“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it will be done for you.

“By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

“As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.

“If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.

“These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.

“This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.

“You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.” (John 15:1-14)

Do not be deceived by a limited “gospel” based on what is called God’s “unconditional love,” which implies we may live as we choose, even in sin. God’s love was unconditional in that He sent His Son to die for the sins of the

world without the world having any hand in it, or asking for it. While we were yet sinners Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). We cannot earn His gift of salvation. But there are conditions to entering into that salvation, to remaining in the love of God, and to inheriting the Kingdom of God. If this were not true, why did Jesus say those things? And why do the Scriptures stress what is necessary for us to do to inherit eternal life if there is nothing we can do about it? This is not “works” salvation; it is the Word of God.

God created us with our own wills. There is a great error that says man is incapable of responding to the Gospel—that he cannot even choose Christ because he is chosen by Christ. The Scripture that is used to “prove” this is a portion of John 15:16 wherein Jesus says, “You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you.” But what does the whole verse say?

“You did not choose Me, but I have chosen you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.” (John 15:16)

This is a continuation of the verses cited immediately above, where we are told to bear fruit or risk being cut off and burned with the dead branches just as happened to unfaithful Israel. This is what Paul meant when he said, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Romans 8:1).

There is a cost to salvation: denying ourselves, picking up our cross and following (obeying) Jesus. If we do not do these things we cannot be His disciples. If we are not His disciples we cannot inherit the Kingdom of Heaven.

As far as our wills are concerned, God has not made us robots. He wants men who will love Him from their hearts.

And while the unregenerate heart is dead to God, the proclaiming of the Gospel brings conviction by the Holy Spirit which, in turn, causes those whose hearts long for truth and righteousness to respond with repentance and obedience. Otherwise there would be no such love available for God.

The question for those who say they had nothing to do in responding to the Gospel is, “Do you love God?” If they say yes, then we ask, “How do you know?”

Indeed, how can anyone know if they love God if they deny that they are capable of loving God even under the conviction of the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit does not cause or force us to love God. Nor does He cause or force us to do what is right; He merely convicts us of sin and encourages us to respond in righteousness. Otherwise, if He controls all our actions (as is claimed by some) why would He cause us to sin? He is not the author of sin. Yet we do sin. And anyone who says he does not sin calls God a liar (1 John 1:10). So we do have free will.

If we desire to manifest the Kingdom of Heaven during our short span of life on the earth, we must obey Christ. That means we must obey His Scriptures. And how can we do so if we do not know them apart from what men have told us they mean? Each of us must study to show ourselves approved, workmen that need not be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

Test by the Word of God even these words I write. But do not test them by the writings of other men. There are many clever manipulators of Scripture who can make them say what they want them to say. Do not trust me or any man; trust the Holy Spirit to give you understanding in these matters as you test them by the Scriptures.



In Summary

We must look back at how the Law of God served a purpose in leading us to Christ. How did it do so? By revealing to us our sin nature and the standards by which we are expected to live. Yet we are not under bondage to the Law, but to Christ. If we sin willfully and do not repent we place ourselves back under the Law for judgment, for sin is the transgression of the Law (1 John 3:4). This is why we are told that those who are in Christ do not practice sin (1 John 3:9) we do not live sinful lives. We obey God's Word. One's love for God is manifested in his desire to keep the Law; yet keeping the Law in itself cannot save him. However, breaking the Law can condemn him, unless he repents, confesses his sins, and asks forgiveness (1 John 1:9). Although our spirits have been redeemed, our bodies will not be redeemed until the Resurrection; they still bear the sin nature. In His mercy God made provision for us if we do sin:

If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not do the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the

light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. (1 John 1:6-10)

If God's moral laws are not in effect, then it is not possible to sin, for sin is the transgression of the Law:

Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. (1 John 3:4)

God's grace has made provision for us to have our sins forgiven, not only when we first enter into His love through Jesus Christ, but even afterwards.

The laws that pertained to the remission of sin were the sacrificial laws that necessitated the shedding of animal blood. The reason for that necessity is that death entered into man through sin, and in order for him to overcome death it is necessary for life to be given. Since life is in the blood, it is necessary that blood be shed for sins.

God's grace was manifested to Israel through the sacrificial laws that gave temporary covering for their sins, but were not sufficient to erase them forever:

For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make those who came to them perfect. For then would they not have stopped being offered? Because the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.

But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year.

For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. (Hebrews 10:1-4)

When Messiah Jesus came, He offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for the taking away of sins:

But Christ having become a high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands—that is to say, not of this building, nor by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood—He entered in one time into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.

For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean sanctifies to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? For this cause He is the mediator of the New Covenant, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.

For where a covenant is, there must also by necessity be the death of the testator. For a covenant is in force after men are dead. Otherwise it is has no power while the testator lives. Whereupon the first covenant was not dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both

the book, and all the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant which God has made with you."

Moreover, he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry.

And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood there is no remission.

It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in Heaven should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

For Christ has not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into Heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.

Nor should He offer Himself often, as the high priest enters into the holy place every year with the blood of others. For then He must have suffered often since the foundation of the world. But now, once in the end of the age, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered one time to bear the sins of many. And to them that look for Him He will appear the second time without sin unto salvation. (Hebrews 9:11-28)

It is Christ's perfect sacrifice on the cross, through the shedding of His blood, that allows all men who come to Him in faith to enter into His covenant and inherit the Kingdom of Heaven.

Because His sacrifice was a perfect sacrifice there is no need for Him to be sacrificed over and over again. It is an

insult to the Spirit of grace to say that Jesus must be sacrificed anew as some claim. It is saying that His sacrifice is no more valuable than that of animals. Scripture is very clear on this matter.

Nor is it necessary that every believer be what some consider “giants of the Faith.” The Lord asks only that we love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and that we love others as ourselves. As we go about our daily lives we are to show kindness to all and we are to give an answer to everyone who asks for the reason for our hope:

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready with meekness and fear to give an answer to every man that asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, having a good conscience so that, whereas they that falsely accuse your good conduct in Christ speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed. (1 Peter 3:15-16)

We need not be busy, busy, busy, trying to do things for God; we need to be ready to serve where He directs while we work with our hands so we not be a burden to others. Many have erroneously given their lives for religious work, not because they were called by God, but because they “felt” they could be of use somewhere. In the process they have neglected their families and shipwrecked relationships with those who may have been won to Christ by them.

Part of the good news is that we need not strive to do religious works which, if not directed by the Holy Spirit, are wood, hay and straw, and will be burned up.

We need to live peaceable lives in fellowship with the saints of God, held without reproach by those outside the Body of Christ.

If we will do this, we will live joyful lives, experiencing true freedom from the consequences of sin, and from the

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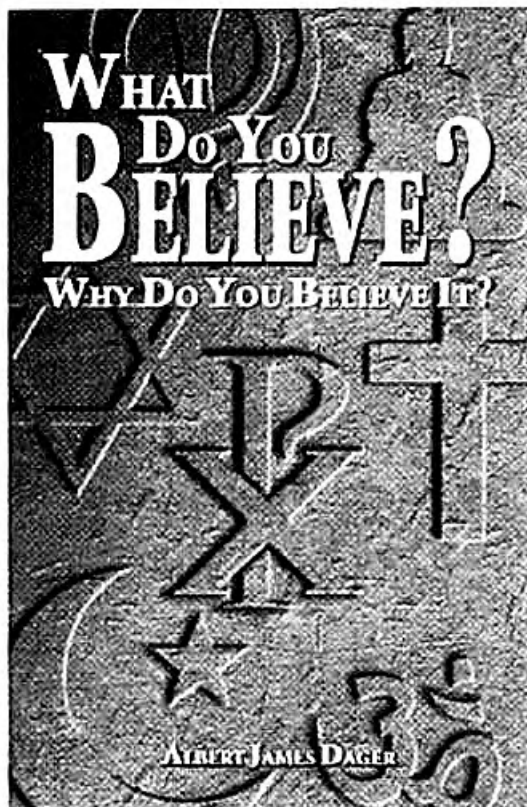
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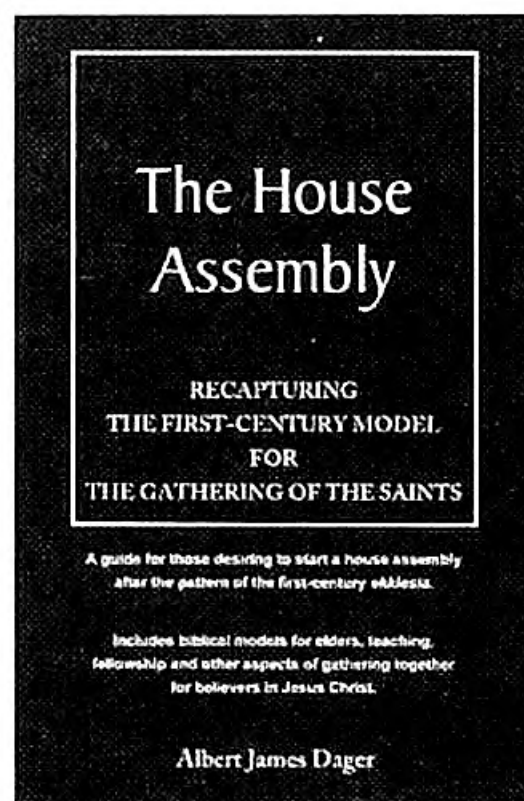
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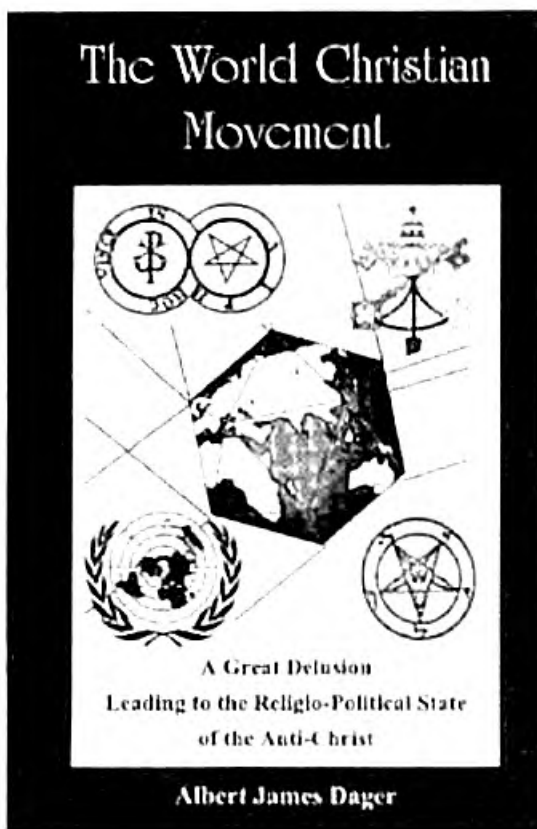
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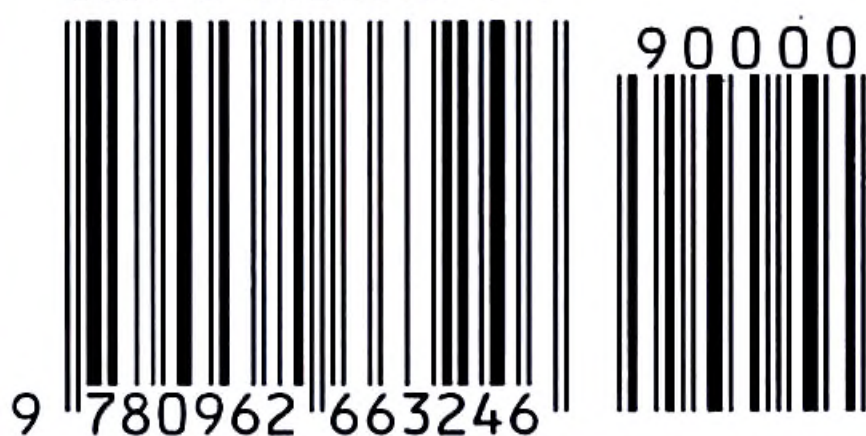
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Albert James Dager is founder of Media Spotlight, a biblical analysis of religious and secular media. Media Spotlight was the first ministry of international proportions to address the issues in the mass media—both secular and religious—that are affecting the lives of Christians.

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