

# Focus on the Kingdom

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## John 3:16: Beware of a Vague Misunderstanding

by Kenneth LaPrade, Texas

“God loved the world in this way: that He gave His uniquely begotten Son, so that every person who believes in him should not perish but have the life of the Age to Come.”

—John 3:16, One God the Father translation (OGF)

In modern times John 3:16 is probably the most frequently quoted verse (**out** of context) from the whole Bible, as it adorns American sporting events (on posters) and is used repeatedly as a succinct summary by well-meaning, enthusiastic evangelists. While being a beautiful statement (in itself) concerning God’s overwhelming love to give His Son, and the ultimate goal involved, it can be used in a dangerously misleading way! The context of the Gospels forbids us from making this verse an instantaneous, easy formula for receiving salvation.

In order to fully grasp the intended meaning of this very familiar verse, the context of Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus about being “born from above” (or born again) must be carefully compared to the wider context of Jesus’ ministry to herald the Gospel of the coming Kingdom of God. The understanding of this **new birth** concept (in John chapter 3) must not be divorced from the all-important truth communicated by the parable of the sower (in Mark 4:13-20). There is no “believing in Jesus” if you don’t believe in his Gospel of the Kingdom.

“And he said to them, ‘Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand any of the parables? The sower sows the word’” (Mark 4:13-14).

According to Luke 8:10-11 “the word” means “the word of God” which is synonymous with “the secrets of the kingdom of God.” In Matthew 13:19 one can easily see that “the word” of Mark 4:14 is parallel to “the word of the Kingdom.” In all three of these versions of the parable of the sower, it is abundantly clear that the only valid response to the message of the Gospel of the coming Kingdom is the **last** of the four possible soil-types. In other words, instead of misunderstanding “the word” and having it quickly snatched away by the evil one; or actually receiving it with short-lived joy (but falling away due to tribulation/persecution on account of **the word**); or receiving it in a way that “the cares of the

world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful”; one can choose to be in the **fourth** category! One must receive the word of the Kingdom and understand it with a good, honest heart — and “hang in there,” persevering in actively **doing** what the message requires to the end of one’s life, continually **bearing fruit!**

In the following quote from a footnote (p. 245 of the One God, the Father, One Man Messiah Translation) some relevant connections are pointed out regarding John, chapter 3:

“Born from above, that is, with God as the author of this regeneration dependent on our belief in the truth [of the Gospel of the Kingdom] and repentance. Rebirth is thus the non-negotiable basis for becoming a Christian. In the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, spiritual rebirth is described as the new life springing from the seed of the Gospel (Luke 8:11). Thus with Nicodemus Jesus uses the biological metaphor, and with the public who heard the parable of the sower, the agricultural metaphor. These are beautifully combined in 1 Pet. 1:22-25 where being born again is based on the seed which is the Gospel [of the Kingdom]. Thus the NT contains a single united theology for becoming a believer. It starts with belief in Jesus’ Gospel of the Kingdom (Mark 1:1-2, 14-15).”

As readers are careful to consider the real context of Jesus’ figurative language in John, chapter 3, along with “seed” metaphors in the synoptic Gospels, and the whole New Testament theme of being “born again,” they can be aware that even the very immediate context of John 3:16 confirms the critical need for a genuinely proactive response: the determined effort of continuous repentant obedience, just like in the parable of the sower.

“And just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, in the same way the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that all who believe in him may gain the life of the Age to Come. God loved the world in this way: that He gave His uniquely begotten Son, so that every person who believes in him should not perish but have the life of the Age to Come. For God did not send His Son into the world for the purpose of condemning the world, but so that the world might be rescued through him. The person who believes in him is not condemned. But the one who does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed in the revelation and whole agenda of God’s uniquely begotten Son. This is the reason for condemnation: the light has come into

the world, and human beings loved darkness rather than light, because their activities were wicked. Every person who does wicked things hates the light and will not come to the light, so that his works will not be exposed. But the one who performs truth comes to the light, so that his works may be demonstrated as performed under God's direction" (John 3:14-21, OGF).

By simply keeping John 3:16 within its immediate context, one would not be guilty of misleading others into thinking that "believing in Jesus" refers to a mere nebulous, feel-good experience of the momentary mental acceptance that God sent Jesus. True faith in Jesus involves decisively coming to the light in one's activities. Coming to the light involves persistent choices to **change** and stop reverting to the previous actions of darkness. Baptism as an action of repentant commitment is a compatible, vital part of this obedient picture, as well as being a relevant part of the immediate context of these Scriptures (in John 3:22-30 and 4:1-3). To be on board in a growing, fruitful way will require that believers be overcomers when facing constant challenges (Acts 14:22).

Another Scriptural context with similar vocabulary, in terms of contrasting walking in the light with the ruts of life in darkness, is 1 John 1:5-2:2. After initially repenting by believing in the Gospel of the Kingdom (Mark 4:11-12), not vaguely repenting of anything we think is wrong, and truly coming to the light (while turning away from the activities of darkness), believers might still trip up and be seduced by sins that get them off track. Nevertheless, we are wonderfully invited to **not give up** on our commitment — when we have mistakenly veered away from the light. Instead of being "in denial" and lying to ourselves (and others) by pretending to still be on track, we can humbly confess our sins while confidently realizing that our trustworthy God (through the blood sacrifice of Jesus) forgives us our sins and washes us clean from all that is not right within us. God is being totally fair when He forgives us and washes us in this way, due to the extensive effect of Jesus' perfect sin offering!

Despite our trying circumstances and our human weaknesses, our reliable God and His faithful Son have our backs, as we refuse to quit persevering in the biblical, loving lifestyle — according to the Gospel of God's coming Kingdom. ✧

## Don't Miss This One!

*The Only True God: A Study of Biblical Monotheism*  
by Eric H.H. Chang

A Book Review by Barbara Buzzard

"Where there is belief in more than one person who is God, that is polytheism by definition."

Rarely do I find a book with so much riveting content in its introduction that I can write a review based solely on that — but this is one such book. (And rarely do books have introductions of 41 pages!)

I also wanted to make readers aware of the fact that this volume is available free online — **theonlytruegod.org** You will be the richer for having read it. It is a must-read for all Christians who desire to defend the faith.

Author Eric Chang opens by stating that Jesus used the word "monotheism" when he said, "This is eternal life: that they know You, the only [*monos*] true God [*theos*], and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3). He notes this as central to the heart and mind of Jesus, the very foundation of his teaching. How then could this foundational element be viewed by our current society as non-essential?

"Jesus' words are so clear that no complicated linguistic techniques are needed to explain them. What Jesus states with crystal clarity is that there is only one God, the One he called 'Father,' and asked his disciples to call upon Him in the same way...Jesus speaks of himself as the one sent by 'the only true God.' It should therefore, have been perfectly obvious to anyone truly listening to what Jesus said that if the Father is the one and only true God, then no one else can also be God alongside Him."<sup>1</sup>

### The Fundamental Problem

"But the fundamental problem created by elevating Jesus to the level of deity is that a situation is created in which there are at least two persons who are both equally God; this brings Trinitarianism into conflict with the monotheism of the Bible."<sup>2</sup>

Chang explains that when the church cut its connection with its Jewish roots, believers lost understanding of the meanings of terms and concepts once well known. This loss had serious consequences when it came to the origin and meaning of "the Word." And then followed some pretty desperate measures to dignify ideas foreign to the text, and to impress, and to twist verses into something other than was intended.

<sup>1</sup> *The Only True God, A Study of Biblical Monotheism*, Eric H. H. Chang, 2009, Xlibris, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4

“The later Gentile church however, failed...to distinguish in significance between ‘Lord’ as applied to Jesus and ‘LORD’ as applied to God.”<sup>3</sup> And thus, says Chang, Trinitarianism was born, but with an extremely serious consequence: the Father was sidelined or marginalized as Jesus was worshipped as God. Chang then asks perceptively: “Are we really monotheists as we suppose ourselves to be?”<sup>4</sup> He makes the point that Jesus lived and taught as a monotheist but that we as disciples seem to have veered off course.

“Trinitarian Christians like to rank themselves among Jews and Muslims as monotheists. The problem is that neither Judaism nor Islam recognizes Trinitarian Christianity as truly monotheistic, regardless of Christian claims.”<sup>5</sup>

### The Gospel Cannot Be Preached to Muslims and Jews

Eric Chang was himself a devoted Trinitarian for over 50 years, having been a pastor, church leader and teacher for 40 years. While pondering the question of how Muslims might be reached with Jesus’ Gospel of the Kingdom, he came to the full realization that it couldn’t happen. This was his “Aha!” moment. They won’t hear the Gospel because it doesn’t come from a foundation of monotheism. This stark and shocking reality made Chang conclude that the Gospel *cannot* be preached to Muslim and Jewish nations! Hand in hand with that, Chang saw that he needed to re-evaluate whether his own Christianity was monotheistic. He concluded this: “When I examined my own thoughts, I too realized that my Trinitarianism was at root incompatible with Biblical monotheism.”<sup>6</sup> I say, praise God for an honest man!

I particularly love Chang’s description of the changes he found it necessary to make: “To my surprise, once I began to put aside my own prejudices and preconceptions and re-evaluate each text to see what it is actually saying, and not how we as Trinitarians had interpreted it, the message which emerged from the text proved to be different from what I had supposed it to be. This was especially true of John 1:1. Because of my deeply entrenched Trinitarianism, this process resulted in a long struggle (and a lot of hard work) to get to the truth of the Biblical message.”<sup>7</sup> Sadly, I know of too many who have not had the courage to take the steps he did, nor the honesty to admit being wrong.

Chang speaks of thinking he was alone in his beliefs, and his surprise at finding that Hans Kung had

previously declared the doctrine of the Trinity to be unbiblical.” In fact, Kung had this to say: “Indeed, throughout the New Testament, while there is belief in God the Father, in Jesus the Son and in God’s Holy Spirit, there is no doctrine of one God in three persons...no doctrine of a ‘triune God,’ a ‘Trinity.’”<sup>8</sup> The systematic theologian, Kuschel, after an in-depth study, came to the same conclusion.<sup>9</sup>

### A Modicum of Critical Thinking

Chang makes a brilliant point when he explains that in India there are three gods more important than all the rest. He then asks this: “If those in India who worship these three supreme gods are called polytheists by Christians, in what way is the Christian Trinitarian concept fundamentally different from the Indian?...Indoctrination has the powerful effect of making us insist that Trinitarianism represents monotheism — something which true monotheists like the Jews and the Muslims reject. If we still have a modicum of logical thinking left in us we would see that: if there is *God* the Father, *God* the Son, and *God* the Spirit, then, obviously, there are three Gods according to this dogma. Yet we seem unable to face up squarely to the plain fact of the matter! Here we see the power of indoctrination and its capacity to overpower logical thought.”<sup>10</sup>

Chang’s book includes 12 appendices and a Scripture index, for a total of 668 pages. It is a real tome for a Bible student and an invaluable tool for research. Chang studied at the Bible Training Institute in Glasgow, Scotland, as well as London Bible College, and he graduated from the University of London. He ministered in Canada where two dozen churches sprang up from the original small fellowship. I regret to say that he died in 2012. I would like to have known him. However, I do know something of his character from the boldness of this book and I think he possesses something of the clarity that he so admires in Jesus.

### Demotivation

Note this insightful thought: “Apart from this difficult problem of practically having to re-learn how to read the Bible in a new light, that of monotheism, there is also the demotivating factor of reckoning with the external pressures of being labeled a ‘heretic,’ which is intimidating for most Christians. **That someone who proclaims that the Bible is monotheistic because it is the word of ‘the only true God’ can be labeled a**

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 14

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 16

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 19

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 22

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 23

<sup>8</sup> Hans Kung, *Christianity: Essence, History, and Future*, p. 95.

<sup>9</sup> *Born Before All Time? The Dispute over Christ’s Origin.*

<sup>10</sup> *The Only True God*, pp. 24, 25

**‘heretic’ by the Gentile church shows just how far the church has strayed from the word of God.**<sup>11</sup> This is a hugely important point — which Chang terms demotivation.

Many who “stumble” upon the truth of who God is are totally shocked when they take it to their pastor and brethren. Rather than rejoicing in what they found, they find that they are warned to back off and go no further. They have entered dangerous territory (i.e. thinking!). After all, the church councils decided these important matters years ago. Read about the incredible goings-on, violence, political intrigue, murder and mayhem, bloodthirsty mob-like behavior, and out-of-control clergy in *Jesus Wars: How Four Patriarchs, Three Queens, and Two Emperors Decided What You Would Believe for the Next 1,500 Years*.<sup>12</sup>

Isn’t it interesting that a church council was necessary? There were no councils needed to decide about the virgin birth, the resurrection, baptism, etc.

### On Trial

“The NT is not a polytheistic or Trinitarian document which we are now trying to explain monotheistically. If we were doing this we would have to justify our actions or defend our case. But it is precisely the reverse that is true. In regard to the NT, it is Trinitarianism that is on trial: it will have to explain why it has taken the monotheistic Word of God and interpreted it in polytheistic terms, thereby utterly distorting its fundamental character.”<sup>13</sup> Great point, and very indicative of the biblical illiteracy which pervades our land. When truth is heard, it is regarded as heresy. In coming to terms with how this has played out, Chang offers this memorable picture:

“But are Trinitarians not monotheists? As Trinitarians we argued that we are monotheists, not polytheists, because our faith is in one God in three persons. We closed our eyes (and ears) to the fact which should have been perfectly obvious: If the Father is God, and the Son is God, and the Spirit is God, and all three are coequal and coeternal, then the conclusion is inescapable that there are three Gods. So how did we manage to maintain that we still believe in one God? There was only one way: *the definition of the word ‘God’ had to be changed* — from ‘Person’ to a divine ‘Substance’ (or ‘Nature’) in which the three persons share equally.”<sup>14</sup>

Only at our very great peril do we mess with the definition of God. It is not as though He has not told us Who He is; it is that we have not listened. Chang traces

Christianity’s break with Biblical monotheism to the second century and cites James Dunn as to the parting of the ways.<sup>15</sup>

### Two Gods?!

Chang sums up: “God was now no longer one personal Being but a group of three coequal persons...Hear, O Church, the Lord your God is THREE.”<sup>16</sup> Chang is utterly appalled at the daring of Origen who said: “We are not afraid to speak in one sense of two Gods.”<sup>17</sup> It was at that time, says Chang, that the floodgates of polytheism under the thinly disguised veil of “Trinitarian monotheism” were thrown open.

“‘God is Spirit’ (John 4:24) as Jesus said, yet we do not hesitate to declare that God’s Spirit, the Spirit of the Lord, the Holy Spirit, is actually a different person from Him. The tragedy is that as Trinitarians we have become so accustomed to this sort of teaching that we are no longer capable of seeing its absurdity. Surely, we assure ourselves, we are not that stupid. The problem is not stupidity but spiritual blindness.”<sup>18</sup>

### In a Nutshell

In a nutshell, this is what happened historically: “The church leaders at Nicaea finally (there was considerable tension among them) came up with what we know as the Nicene Creed in which the Deity of Jesus was declared to be what Christians must believe. *On what was the declaration based?* This is the important question that needs to be asked. Was it based on the Bible, or at least on the NT? *No, there is not a single reference to the Bible anywhere in this creed.* So on what authority was it based? It was based on the authority of these church leaders, who considered themselves as acting in God’s Name on behalf of His church.”<sup>19</sup> Frankly, it is hard not to put this whole paragraph in bold type, but I shall restrain myself. This story, however, is one of the best kept secrets of all time. And the apathy that accompanies it ensures that it remain a secret. Chang sees it as a matter of life or death, a true faith or a false one.

One of the powerful strengths of this book is that Chang has been able to view this subject, about which he writes so cogently, from the inside out, as it were. Having worshipped the Trinity for years, he is able to describe his journey in a dramatic and forceful way. I think that there is a spiritual interplay which happens

<sup>15</sup>James Dunn, *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways, AD 70 to 135*.

<sup>16</sup>*The Only True God*, Chang, p. 32

<sup>17</sup>J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 129.

<sup>18</sup>*The Only True God*, p. 35

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 38, emphasis mine

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p. 27, emphasis mine.

<sup>12</sup> by Philip Jenkins.

<sup>13</sup> *The Only True God*, p. 30

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* p. 30, emphasis added.

when a person begins to “see.” I think that at that point, he can choose to see further, or not. The choice is his. I thank God that Eric Chang chose to see and to come out of his spiritual blindness, thereby helping others to see.

### Polytheism

“Where there is belief in more than one person who is God, that is polytheism by definition. What we need to realize is that Trinitarianism is in essence, therefore, a different faith from Biblical monotheism.”<sup>20</sup> These are such stark and sobering words to end with, and yet so profound and, I believe, wise. This is a very powerful book. I must commend this man for his boldness and clarity and indeed, the risk to his reputation, for being willing to be named a heretic. We hear much about “junk science.” Chang has exposed some “junk theology.” He has written a stunning book. May we all be blessed by this labor of love. ✧

## The Vital Importance of the New Covenant

“I covenant with you to give you a Kingdom as my Father covenanted this with me” (Luke 22:28-30).

“Fear not, little flock; your Father is delighted to give you the Kingdom” (Luke 12:32; Dan. 7:18, 22, 27 — all nations will obey the saints).

“I have made the earth...and I will give it to the one who is pleasing in My sight” (Jer. 27:5).

### How is Paul able to be pro-law and anti-law?

The answer is in the difference between law in the **letter** and law in the **spirit**.

Romans 7:6: “We have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in the **newness** of the **spirit** and not in the **oldness** of the **letter**.”

“The Lord is the spirit, and where the spirit of the Lord is there is freedom” (2 Cor. 3:17).

“The Law is holy, and the commandment [cp. covenant] is holy, righteous and good...The Law is spiritual (Rom. 7:12, 14).

Romans 3:21-29: “Now **apart from the Law**...faith of and in Jesus for all who believe...Boasting is excluded. But what kind of law? Works? **No, by a law of faith**/belief, so a man is justified [right with God] apart from the works of the Law. God is God of Jews and Gentiles.”

This is the “**obedience of faith**” (note the framing of the book of Romans by 1:5: obedience of faith through grace, and 16:26: obedience of faith). So there is “**the law of faith**” (Rom. 3:27) and “**the obedience of faith**,” and “the doers of the Law will be justified”

(Rom. 2:13). “The Gospel was preached ahead of time to Abraham” (Gal. 3:8).

But this is the law in the **spirit** and not the **letter**; otherwise all males would have to get circumcised (Gen. 17: everlasting covenant) and keep the Sabbath (everlasting covenant in Ex. 31).

Romans 1:1-2: The Gospel of God (cp. Mark 1:14-15) was promised by His prophets in holy Scripture.

Circumcision was the sign of the everlasting covenant, *but* it is no good if you do not practice the Law; so a man who is not circumcised but who keeps the Law is better than a circumcised Jew! (Paul is undermining the Old Covenant here.) You may have the letter of the Law and circumcision, but without Christ you are not going anywhere. Now see the radical difference between Genesis 17 and Galatians 5:3-4: “If you get circumcised [in the flesh] you will have to keep the whole Law, and you are severed from Christ and fallen from grace.”

Circumcision has now moved, in the new covenant, to circumcision of the heart, and the Law is spiritual and not in the letter.

“You have become obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed” (Rom. 6:17).

“Until the Law sin was in the world” (Rom. 5:13), so the Law was not there at the beginning. Ten-commandment Law was given to Israel and *not* to the people before that time (Deut. 5:3). It was in order to remember the Exodus (Deut. 5:15).

“The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus [in the new covenant] has set you free from the law of sin and death...so that the requirement of the Law [spiritualized and a spiritual law] would be fulfilled in those walking by the spirit [of the risen Christ, who is also the historical Christ]...The mind set on the spirit is life and peace” (Rom. 8:2-6; cp. John 6:63). Things of the spirit are the things of Christ.

“Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to all who believe” (Rom. 10:4). Moses writes of the man who practices righteousness which is based on the Law in the letter. But righteousness based on faith is by hearing the Gospel of the Kingdom (Acts 8:12, etc.) and believing the report of the Gospel (Isa. 52:7; Gal. 3:2). Hearing Christ and believing the word of Christ (Rom. 10:17) — believing the word of the Kingdom preached by Jesus — is what counts as foundation.

Romans 10: Jews have zeal but are destroyed for lack of the right knowledge (v. 2). Jews are enemies of the Gospel but beloved for the father’s sake (11:28).

Romans 14: Foods and days are secondary. “Nothing is unclean unless you think it is: all things are clean” (v. 14). Paul is not teaching the food laws of Leviticus 11 here.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 40

“Christ was a minister of the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God [the Gospel of the Kingdom] to confirm the promises made to the fathers, and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy...to achieve obedience from the Gentiles...the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the mystery made known to all the nations (Rom. 15:9-18; 16:25).

See how you can twist all this: You can appeal to obedience and “the Bible” and pull people away from Christ and back to Moses. *Or* you can pull them away from Christ by reducing the Gospel to the cross, leaving out the Kingdom of God Gospel of Mark 1:14-15.

Ultra-dispensationalism does this acutely, reducing the faith to the late letters of Paul only. Dispensationalism separates Paul from Jesus, pulling people beyond Jesus and to a twisted Paul.

The legalists, insisting on calendar and food laws, pull people in the opposite direction, back under Moses and the old system. They are drawn back under a covenant which is bondage according to the model of Hagar. The true new covenant is modeled by the freedom of Sarah (Gal. 4). ✧

## Some Remarkably Challenging Statements about Death in View of What Is Commonly Taught

The celebrated *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*:

“No biblical text authorizes the statement that the soul is separated from the body at the moment of death” (Vol. 1, p. 803).

Isn't the separation of soul from the body at death taught by nearly every church?

Well-known British theologian and Bible scholar J.A.T. Robinson says: “It is still an almost universally cherished belief that the immortality of the soul is a tenet of the Christian faith, despite the fact that it rests on assumptions which are fundamentally at variance with the biblical doctrines of God and man.”<sup>21</sup>

“‘Heaven’ is never in fact used in the Bible for the destination of the dying.”<sup>22</sup>

But isn't “heaven” the term used by millions of churchgoers as the place they hope to go to at death?

The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*:

“We are influenced always more or less by the Greek Platonic idea that the soul is immortal. Such an idea is utterly contrary to the Israelite consciousness and is nowhere found in the Old Testament. The whole man dies, when in death the spirit goes out of the man. Not only his body but also his soul returns to a state of death [*this is true of the faithful dead as well as the wicked — they all fall asleep in death*]. Therefore the Old

<sup>21</sup> *In the End God*, 1968, p. 91.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104-5.

Testament can speak of the death of one's soul. Death is a place of darkness, cut off from the land of the living...Death is also a place where God is no longer praised or thanked (Ps. 6:5; 115:17). Death is where the dead are unconscious, do no more work, take no account of anything, possess no knowledge or wisdom...The dead are asleep (Job 26:5; Prov. 2:18; 9:18; 21:6; Ps. 88:11; Isa. 14:9).”<sup>23</sup>

The *Word Biblical Commentary* on Daniel:

“The Old Testament's standard way of envisaging dying and coming back to life is by speaking of lying down and sleeping, then of waking and getting up. The former [dying] is an extreme form of the latter [sleeping], which thus provides the metaphor for it (2 Kings 4:31; 13:21; Isa. 26:19; Jer. 51:39, 57; Job 14:12). Further, dying means lying down with one's ancestors in the family tomb, with its non-material equivalent, Sheol; so coming back to life would mean leaving such a ‘land of earth’ (cp. also Ps. 49; 73). The image presupposes a restoring to life of the whole person with its spiritual and material aspects.”<sup>24</sup>

This way of understanding death is also a prophecy (Dan. 12:2) of what happens when we die in the NT period and onwards until today. There has been no change in the meaning of death. In Jesus only is there a promise of resurrection from the state of death. This will happen when he comes back to establish the Kingdom of God on earth (1 Cor. 15:23: “those who are Christians will be resurrected at his coming”).

Popular ideas promoted in church have disregarded this biblical understanding of death and resurrection. They have made Bible reading for millions frustrating and confusing. “A passion for truth to be saved” (2 Thess. 2:10) is the only remedy, even at the cost of losing some friends. ✧

## Wise Words about the Kingdom

“In Revelation the eternal messianic Kingdom is placed *on a renovated earth* so that Christ comes to his people on earth rather than gathering them to a heavenly abode.”<sup>25</sup>

Now this amazing admission from Bishop N.T. Wright: “In one sense, I have been working on this book on and off for most of my life. Serious thought began, however, when I was invited in 1978 to give a lecture at Cambridge on ‘The Gospel in the Gospels.’ The topic was not just impossibly vast; I did not understand it. I had no real answer, then, to the question of how Jesus' whole life, *not just his death on the cross* in isolation, was somehow ‘gospel.’ Fifteen subsequent years of

<sup>23</sup> Vol. 2, p. 812

<sup>24</sup> John Goldingay, *Word Books*, p. 307.

<sup>25</sup> David Aune, *Word Biblical Commentary, Revelation 17-22*, p. 1069, emphasis added.

teaching in Cambridge, Montreal and Oxford have convinced me that this question...is worth asking.”<sup>26</sup>

But the question is just as mystifying to millions of Bible readers. This ought not to be so.

Professor Emeritus of World Mission, Charles Taber: “I read with great interest the nine statements attempting to answer the question, ‘What’s the Good News?’ (*Christianity Today*, Feb. 7, 2000). I am amazed and dismayed to find not even a passing mention of the theme which was the core of Jesus’ gospel...the kingdom of God” (letter to *Christianity Today*, April 3, 2000).

Then did they mention the Gospel?

“In Acts...’the Kingdom of God’ was still the general formula for the substance of Christian preaching.”<sup>27</sup>

This formula is absent from evangelical tracts promoting salvation.

On the lips of Jesus the term “Kingdom of God” unquestionably summarized the very heart of his Message.

“The Kingdom of God is the central theme of the teaching of Jesus, and it involves his whole understanding of his own person and work.”<sup>28</sup>

Luke 4:43 is repeated by Paul in Acts 20:24-25 where Paul defines his own ministry given by Jesus. The Gospel of the grace of God (v. 24) = the preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom (v. 25).

“The kingdom announced by the Messiah who is the Son of Man is possible only through his death and will be finally and fully realized on earth only at his glorious return. This is indeed the heart of the gospel.”<sup>29</sup>

“The Son of God came **to give us an understanding** so that we might know God” (1 John 5:20).

“**By his knowledge** the righteous one, my servant, will make many righteous” (Isa. 53:11). ✧

## Comments

“I am in the midst of reading your book, *The Amazing Aims and Claims of Jesus*. It’s a wonderful, well-written book that’s a real eye opener. I thank our Father daily that He led me to your writings. Although I was a believer in the resurrection, it was heaven as my home. This is what I preached 40+ years because it’s what was drilled in me at Bible college and seminary. I wish I could go back and tell all those people the Truth,

<sup>26</sup> *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 1996, p. xiv, emphasis added.

<sup>27</sup> *Hastings Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. II, p. 855.

<sup>28</sup> Alan Richardson, *Theological Word Book of the Bible*, p. 119.

<sup>29</sup> Donald Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary, Matthew 1-13*, p. 214.

what joy now fills me. My hope is that I can be forgiven for my error in preaching the wrong ‘gospel.’” — *Alabama*

“Just to update on our little mission here [in prison]. We have 9 men who have come to know the Truth of One God, and Jesus as the only begotten Son of God, but not God the Son. These men are so excited. We meet every Sunday outside — rain, cold. We get under an eave of a roof to keep the rain off us. We sing, pray, look into God’s Word. On sunny days we sit at a picnic table and have our church service. It’s a blessing to see these men hungry for the Word of God and the Truth. Many of these 9 men are going to other men with their Bibles and sharing the Truth. I’m so proud of them.” — *North Carolina*

“I offer prayers of guidance and blessings on you each day. I am a 70yr old man coming from a Hebrew background as an ‘Orthodox Jew’ and for the last 12 years I’ve been studying daily for answers to the conflicts and inconsistencies in the English translations. (I have 21 Bibles in my library; some are Hebrew on one page with English on the facing page with esoteric/exoteric teaching below the text on that page.) Recently, i.e. in the last three weeks, by the direction of the Ruah Hakodesh [spirit of G-d] I have been led to your teachings for which I am extremely grateful. It’s impossible for a Hebrew to accept the false doctrine perpetuated by Pauline Christianity when they claim that J’shua was God, may it never be. I had worked out much of your own philosophy but it is strengthening, to say the least, to have support as it were from your own interpretations of the Messianic Scriptures that allow me to fully understand how the Hebrew Y’shua fulfills the coming Kingdom of YHVH without me being an apostate.” — *Arizona*

“I like reading your book about the Kingdom of the Messiah. I’m a Bible teacher from the Philippines. I lead several groups here.” — *Philippines*

“We would like to express our gratitude and appreciation for your publication *Focus on the Kingdom*. The articles reflect your dedication and commitment to the Gospel and fundamental truth.” — *Michigan*

“After reciting the Lord’s prayer at primary school in England, during morning assembly throughout the 1980s, it seemed very simple that in this prayer Jesus was teaching us to pray to God our Father only. It was only much later in my twenties after reading up on theology that I discovered to my horror that the Trinity was so prevalent in Christianity, and that it was more than just a figurative account but polytheist. On buying my first Bible I gasped at the sight of the phrase ‘Triune God’ in the introduction! (Collins ESV Bible). I could do nothing more than delete this erroneous adjective with a pen for fear of what might otherwise happen.”

— *Italy*