

The Sword AND Staff

"Preach the Word" (II Timothy 4:2) • "Feed the Flock" (I Peter 5:2)

Perfecting and Exercising Faith—No. 2

WHAT IS BELIEVED ABOUT GOD DETERMINES HOW HE IS TRUSTED AND THE KIND OF OBEDIENCE RENDERED



By JAMES E. GIBBONS—1535 Fairfield Drive
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● *"But without faith it is impossible to please him [GOD]: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6).*

THIS GREAT VERSE in that great chapter on faith in the Bible (Hebrews 11) makes a profound statement about faith. After asserting the importance and necessity of it in approaching God, the writer brings out the two facets of faith. (1) We must believe in the reality of God (*"that God is"*), and (2) we must trust this God who is real—*"believe...that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."* The first one, our concept of God, has a lot to do with the second, trusting Him (and to the extent that we do trust Him). What we believe about God determines how we trust Him and the kind of obedience rendered. It is that simple.

With these apparent observations in mind, we wish to go into more detail with this to point out some very simple, yet profound, truths. But before we do this, as background thought, let us check out some of the early references to God in the first books of the Bible. This is very interesting and rewarding.

BACKGROUND THOUGHTS ON THE VARIOUS NAMES FOR GOD Elohim (Plural) "Created" (Singular)

We are fittingly first introduced to God in Genesis 1:1 where it reads, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." The English translation gives no hint of this, but intriguingly the Hebrew word for "God," *Elohim*, is plural. At the same time the corresponding verb "created" is singular. Evidently, the plural, *Elohim* (in keeping with oriental usage), is used to stress the greatness and majesty of God (especially appropriate here in connection with creation). And in the fuller revelation of the New Testament, we learn that although God is one, yet He expresses Himself through three personalities (the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit). The plural reference here serves as a backdrop to the New Testament revelation, as well as verse 26, when God said, "Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness..."

"The LORD [JEHOVAH] God"

In the second chapter of Genesis another name is coupled with God in talking about deity, "the *LORD* God" (Genesis 2:5,7,9,16,18,19,21,22). Modern "scholarship" would try to tell us Genesis and the other books of the Pentateuch were pieced together from different sources. One way they try to identify supposed different sources, is by the different names used for God. But the idea of different sources would deny what is affirmed throughout the Bible, the Mosaic authorship of these books. A better explanation why different names were used is in the meaning of the names. They fittingly are used in what the writer would like to emphasize about God in the particular context.

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—THANK YOU—

Proverbially ***SPEAKING...***

***OBEDIENCE** is faith in action.*

If you search your soul and search the Scriptures, you will find salvation.

The best things in life have nothing to do with things.

You can give without loving (1 Cor. 13:3), but you can't love without giving (1 John 3:17,18; John 3:16).

Do the best that you can and you will always do better.

Happy is the man who knows his weakness for in knowing he can be on guard and thereby become strong.

Hope that is alive produces vibrant, purposeful living.

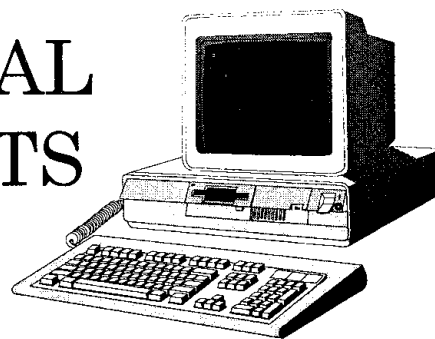
Being positive in nature, faith thrives in a positive atmosphere, but sometimes it takes the trials of a negative atmosphere to perfect it.

Stubbornness sanctified by the Holy Spirit becomes steadfastness.

When God gives a command, it is understood that anything and everything contrary to its fulfillment is forbidden (Genesis 3:1-3).

He who is lowly does not have to fear the heights of a fall (Proverbs 16:18). □

EDITORIAL COMMENTS



WARNINGS ABOUT MATERIALISM

IT IS OUR OBSERVATION and conviction that materialism is the besetting sin of the church today. This is no small matter. We are talking about another "god." Jesus strongly asserted, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24). Paul twice tells us that covetousness is idolatry, idol worship (Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 3:5). The first of the Ten Commandments plainly states, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3). In Deuteronomy 4:23 and 24 this is further emphasized, "Take heed unto yourselves, lest ye forget the covenant of the LORD your God, which he made with you, and make you a graven image, or the likeness of any thing, which the LORD thy God hath forbidden thee. For the LORD thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God." Revelation 21:8 reads, "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers [fornicators], and sorcerers, and *idolaters*, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."

Wealth within itself is not sinful. Abraham was a wealthy man and there were some men of means in the early church. But the possession of wealth is fraught with danger. It really takes a spiritual person to handle it. Jesus saw the besetting sin of the rich younger ruler and put him to the test (Matthew 19:16-24). He failed. He went away sorrowful. Jesus said that it was hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. He even said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." Although some supposed that gain was godliness, Paul said, "But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all [kinds] of evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Timothy 6:5-10). The wealthy church of the Laodiceans felt snug and self-assured, but the danger of materialism was paralyzing the church. The Lord said, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would that thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Revelation 3:14-20). The writer in the book of Proverbs, realizing the danger of wealth (and

poverty), said, "Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? Or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain" (Proverbs 30:8,9). This reminds us of Paul, when he said, "Having food and raiment let us be therewith content" (1 Timothy 6:8).

We are a spiritual being clothed in a material body. As human beings that have been given over to sin, this body becomes a battleground. Unless we keep the proper focus, and realize the spiritual is what really matters for eternity, we are in trouble. The Lord said, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth," and then he told about the rich farmer (Luke 12:15-21). Elders are to be examples to the flock, the rest of the church (1 Peter 5:3). In this respect, Paul lists their qualifications, among them being, "Not given to wine, no striker [violent person], not **greedy of filthy lucre** [money]; but patient, not a brawler, **not covetous** [lover of money]" (1 Timothy 3:3). Likewise, Christian women visibly are to show that they are not given over to materialism. Paul wrote, "In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; **not with** broided hair, or **gold**, or **pearls**, or **costly array**; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works" (1 Timothy 2:9,10). Then telling Timothy how to address the well-to-do generally, and then specifically, Paul said, "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all thing to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute [give], willing to communicate [share]; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life" (1 Timothy 6:17-19).

We call your attention to one more admonition and warning, which would be wise to ever keep before us. Materialism is the bottom line to much of what John says here. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 John 2:15-17). Amen! □

How to Solve Disagreements

ONE CHRISTIAN BROTHER heard another talking about him in a derogatory manner. So he went to the talebearer and said, "Please be kind enough to tell me my faults so that I may try to correct them." The talebearer agreed.

The Christian who had been injured said, "First let us kneel and pray that my eyes may be open to see my faults as you reveal them to me. Will you lead in the prayer?"

When the prayer was over, the man who had sought the interview, said, "Now proceed, my brother, with what you have noted in my life which has disturbed you." But the other answered, "After praying over it, it looks so little that it is not worth talking about. I realize now that by going around and talking about you, I have been serving the devil myself, and have need that you pray for me and forgive me for the wrong I have done to you."

The disagreement disappeared.—*Selected* □

**"Where Does He Dwell?"
THE HIGH AND HOLY ONE**

● *"For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."*
—ISAIAH 57:15

WHEN ASKING this question, we usually expect to receive an answer of certain territorial bounds. Yet, due to the nature of God, such bound cannot contain Him. Therefore, Isaiah declares that He "inhabiteth eternity." There are certainly no bounds there. He always has been and He always will be. Time does not contain Him. He is revealed in the first chapter of the Bible and is still there in the last, when the pen of inspiration ceases. Not even one moment of the eternal ages has been without, or will be without, this Inhabitant.

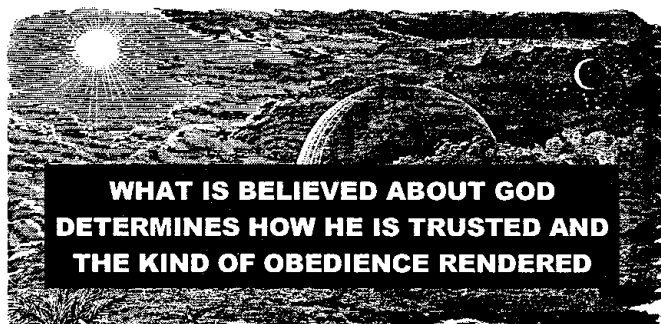
Isaiah also reveals that He abides "in the high and holy place." We would expect that of the "High and Holy One." This speaks of heaven, the habitation of His throne: "Unto thee do I lift up mine eyes, O thou that sittest in the heavens" (Psalms 123:1). We are taught to pray, "Our Father who art in heaven" (Matthew 6:9).

Perhaps most important to us is the fact that He dwells "with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit." He is so great as to fill eternity, yet so condescending as to dwell in a penitent soul. Such is illustrated often in the New Testament: the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15); of the contrite and humble publican (Luke 18:9-14); and the example of Peter, who became so very useful to the Lord, when he learned this lesson.

"And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord...And he went out, and wept bitterly"
(Luke 22:61,62).

God is never satisfied until He finds a home in the human soul. However, there is one soul that He will never inhabit: that of the proud, the impenitent, the self-righteous. Does He dwell in your heart? □

—*Leroy Sedgwick*



**WHAT IS BELIEVED ABOUT GOD
DETERMINES HOW HE IS TRUSTED AND
THE KIND OF OBEDIENCE RENDERED**

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"I AM THAT I AM"

In Isaiah 42:8, God strongly asserts, "I am the LORD: that is my name..." When God called and commissioned Moses from the burning bush, He revealed Himself as "I AM THAT I AM," and then instructed Moses to say to the Israelites, "The LORD God of your fathers...hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial to all generations" (Exodus 3:14,15). Although it looks like God had earlier identified Himself to Abraham as "the LORD" (Genesis 15:7), it seems this term had not been commonly used, for Exodus 6:3 reads; "I am the LORD: and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name JEHOVAH [the LORD] was I not known to them."

The Covenant Name of God

The name "LORD" (also rendered "JEHOVAH") appears to have come directly from the expression "I AM THAT I AM." It means the Eternal, Self-Existent One. It is the covenant name of God in His personal and continuing relationship with man. Moses, when telling of the creation of man in the second chapter of Genesis, very appropriately identifies God as "the LORD God." This emphasizes God's personal relationship to man who was being created in God's image, as well as letting Israel know that the God of Israel was the God of creation. And, as a matter of interest, this name rendered "LORD" and "JEHOVAH" (always in capital letters) and sometimes suggested to be YEWEH, was the name of God whose pronunciation has been lost. Out of deep respect the personal name of God was not spoken by the Jews, just a substitute word, and with time the exact pronunciation was no longer remembered since initially the written Hebrew language had only consonant stems.

"The Almighty God"

The appellation "God Almighty" (*El Shaddai*) is one that is used repeatedly throughout the patriarchal age (Genesis 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3; 49:25) and is even found in the concluding pages of the Bible (Revelation 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7,14; 19:6,15; 21:22). It was the dominate expression in God's dealing with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Exodus 6:3). It is first recorded in Genesis 17:1 when Abraham was 99 years old. God, speaking from the perspective of the Almighty One who would be able to bring it about, as-

sured Abraham that within a year he would father a son in his old age (and from this a great nation would come). And the simple expression "the Almighty" is also many times used as a stand-alone designation for God in the Old Testament. How appropriate it is to speak of God as the Almighty.

**WHAT IS BELIEVED DETERMINES
TRUST AND OBEDIENCE**

Now with these thoughts behind us, and as we let them serve as sort of a foundation, let us get back to our original premise. What we believe about God, or even whether we believe, determines our trust in Him and has a direct bearing on the kind and quality of obedience rendered. That being the case, we need to have the proper concept of God. This study is very simple, but the truths are far reaching. We become like the God we worship. There are many implications. Many of the things we point out will overlap.

God Is

"*God is.*" This is the first of several great and simple statements we wish to notice. God had identified Himself to Moses from the burning bush as, "I AM THAT I AM." This is an emphatic declaration and statement in the first person singular of the existence and reality of the person speaking. God is the Uncaused First Cause behind every cause. Things just didn't "happen" by chance. The Psalmist wrote, "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God" (Psalms 90:2). To the Athenians, Paul added, "For in him [God] we live, and move, and have our being..." (Acts 17:28). Whether we like it or not, believe it, or even know it, this is true. This simple fact should get our attention, arousing our interest to know more about this great truth (and our relationship to it).

God Is Spirit

Man is made in the "image" and "likeness" of God (Genesis 1:26). What is this image and likeness? It cannot mean the physical body that is seen, as idolatry is strongly condemned in the Scriptures. Idolatry comes from the word "idol" that comes directly from the Greek word *eidōs*, which means that which is seen. And although so much of the Old Testament religion involved the external and ritual, the God they worshipped was not physical. That which was physical actually served as an antitype of the spiritual revelation that was to follow in the New Testament. Jesus told the woman at the well, "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. *God is a Spirit:* and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and truth" (John 4:23,24). In a post resurrection appearance Jesus told his disciples that "a spirit hath not flesh and blood" (Luke 24:39). God's essence and being is in the realm of spirit, and that being the cause He is invisible

to the physical eye (Colossians 1:15; 1 Timothy 1:17; John 1:18). Therefore, man being created in the "image" and "likeness" of God has reference to the part of man that is spirit and is in the realm of the spirit. We are a spirit clothed with a body.

Yes, God is Spirit. Our relationship to Him is on that basis, and consequently on the basis of faith. Paul said, "For we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). Yet it is said of Moses, as he responded to God through faith, that he was "seeing him who is

WHICH MAKES MORE SENSE?



invisible" (Hebrews 11:27). The apostle Paul also asserted that "we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18).

The Old Testament antitypes prophetically foreshadowed that which is spiritual. Christ came into the world to "seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). His kingdom is a spiritual kingdom, the "kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 4:17; Matthew chapter 13), not a physical one. A person must experience a spiritual birth to get into this kingdom (John 3:3-5; Matthew 18:3). And as Jesus said, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24), not with emphasis upon temples and cathedrals of man (John 4:20-24; Acts 17:24-29). Peter wrote, "Ye also, as lively [living] stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). Paul likewise wrote, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reason-

able [rational, spiritual] service [worship]. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Romans 12:1,2).

God is One

Moses, addressing the Israelites, said, "Hear, O Israel: **The LORD our God is one Lord**: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deuteronomy 6:4,5). This truth is so great that the Lord Jesus mentioned it in his teachings (Luke 10:27; Matthew 22:37). Paul further highlighted it when he said, "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, **the only wise God**, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Timothy 1:17). God is one, not many. Therefore, He is to be the object of all of our love—i.e., "with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." What is our concept of God? Have we made the one true God a lesser deity, with many competing other "gods" in our lives? Are we like the Athenians in Acts 17? If we really believe that God is one, we should respond and act accordingly with our undivided devotion to Him.

Also since God is one, His plan and laws for mankind are one. The apostle Paul wrote, "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, **One God and Father of all**, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph. 4:4-6). Man-made denominations are contrary to the New Testament. Man has no authority to start another "church," a denomination, or other religion. Even as God's physical laws are the same anywhere and everywhere you go in this world, His spiritual laws are the same. The law of gravity and other laws of nature are the same the world over. We can't change them. Therefore, since God's spiritual laws likewise are one and unchangeable, we should be "endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3), practicing the unity of God's one plan (and earnestly contending for the faith, Jude 3).

God Is A Moral Being

It is clear from the very first pages of the Bible that God is a Moral Being. And man created in God's image and likeness is expected to be moral, too. Incorporated into the Old Testament Law were the words, "Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy" (Leviticus 19:2). These very words are brought over into the New Testament, when Peter admonishes, "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation [behavior, the way you live]; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:15,16). God is a Being of Moral Perfection and His Character is the law of the universe. How unlike the "gods" of Greek mythology who supposedly lived on Mt. Olympus. The Greek gods were even more immoral than the people. It is no wonder that Paul usually found a

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cluster of Gentile proselytes in connection with the Jewish synagogues (Acts 13:16,42,43; 17:1-4). They saw that the God of the Jews, the God of the Bible, was superior in every way to their mythological concepts of deity.

Since God is the Ultimate Moral Being, and we are created in His image, we are expected to practice morality and are held accountable for wrongs committed. We will face God in judgment. With this in mind, after Peter quoted the Old Testament command to be holy as God is holy, he further admonished, "And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear" (1 Peter 1:17). With similar thoughts in mind, and in view of the New Testament, the writer of Hebrews said, "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:28,29).

So God is not just a moral pushover, indifferent to what we do. "...It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27; Romans 6:23). "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10). In view of this, let us be right with God and live accordingly.

God Is Almighty, God Is All-Knowing

The apostle Paul strongly affirms in Romans 1:20, "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead [Godhood]..." We see evidence of Almighty Power and Supreme Intelligence in the creation all about us. God identified Himself as "the Almighty God" to Abraham (Genesis 17:1). Appeal is made by the early church in prayer to God's Almighty Power and Omniscience in Acts 4:23-31. Peter and John, after being threatened by the authorities in Jerusalem, were released and returned to their own company. Carefully notice the account as we highlight it.

"And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, *Lord*, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ...For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done..."

As we said, appeal is made to God emphasizing His Power and Omniscience in anticipation of having their prayer answered in what they were about to ask.

First, as they addressed God as the One who created everything, appeal is made to His power. And in addressing Him in this connection, they call Him "Lord." In the language of the New Testament this is not the common word used for Lord (*Kurios*). Rather, it is *Despota*. This word makes its way into the English language as "despot" with a bad connotation. However, in the New Testament it is not necessarily bad, simply meaning an absolute ruler. So God, absolute, Almighty, with all things in His hand, is the One who can answer their prayer. Second, God, All-Knowing, is implied in the quotation from David and in the foreknowledge of what would happen to Christ. It was believed that such a Being could answer their prayer, and He did!

And He is there to hear our prayers, too. Paul directs the Ephesians to this thought when he said, "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (Ephesians 3:20). With the Power and the Omniscience coupled in Romans 8:26-31, Paul wrote, "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself [Himself] maketh intercession for us...And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose..." And the next verse emphasizes God's foreknowledge of everything, even our salvation. God knows all about us. With such knowledge and blessed assurance we can approach the throne of grace.

God Is Love

The simple statement, "*God is love*" is found in 1 John 4:8 (and 16). Following this statement, we read, "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (4:9,10). God's love is wonderfully evident, even before John 3:16 and this marvelous passage, in just the simple and basic things of life. God makes the "sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). But His love manifested in Christ dying for us and bearing our sins, is the greatest of all. From the human perspective, Jesus said, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). But from the viewpoint of God becoming flesh and doing this, it is even more wonderful. We are saved from the wrath of God through the love of God.

How are we to respond to this Divine Love? "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). We respond in kind. Then Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Earlier he had said, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34, 35). John in his epistles repeatedly refers to this. He

also said, "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also" (1 John 4:20,21).

This love is manifested in forgiveness, kindness and deeds of benevolence. Paul wrote, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children" (Ephesians 4:31,32; 5:1). And going a step further, John asks, "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:17,18).

Beloved, let us be the embodiment of love.

Concluding Words

We could say many other things under the theme and headings of this article. What has been said has simply been selective, not exhaustive. It is awesome and mind-boggling to think about God. As we learn about Him, we become believers. Then believing, genuine faith produces trust and obedience. And the only way that we can acceptably respond to such a Being who is Almighty, All-Knowing, etc. is with our all. He must be the Lord of all in our lives, or He is not Lord at all. As we trust Him, yielding our all, we find "that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). Our lives will then be complete, as we were made by Him and for Him in His image and likeness. With a sense of security and well being we will live with eternity in view. Praise be to His Name! □

A Series Involving the Bible and Prophecy...

**Jesus Reveals
Nature of Kingdom**

By DAVID VAUGHN ELLIOTT
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THE JEWS of Jesus' day believed their prophets had foretold a kingdom that would be physical and nationalistic. We can hardly blame them. Many of the prophecies appear on the surface to predict glorious days for the physical nation of Israel. Even Jesus' apostles viewed the kingdom in that light.

But wait! The twelve apostles did not even understand that Jesus had to die on the cross to take away the sin of the world! What is more basic to the Gospel than that? Yet, they missed it. Their prophets certainly foretold Jesus' suffering for sin. In ad-

dition, Jesus himself plainly told them ahead of time. Yet, they still missed it. When Jesus died, the disciples did not praise God for the great sacrifice of the Lamb of God. No, indeed. They thought it was all over. No wonder, then, that they had no idea of the true nature of the kingdom of God.

A true Christian needs to accept God's own interpretation of His prophecies. "No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation" (2 Peter 1:20). Therefore, we must study the Gospels. We must hear King Jesus. We must interpret Old Testament kingdom prophecies in the light of New Testament explanations.

The Sermon on the Kingdom



Yes, we usually call it "the Sermon on the Mount." However, the location of the sermon is immaterial. The content is what matters.

This outstanding sermon begins with the famous beatitudes. And, what are they? They are blessings related to the kingdom. The sermon opens with these words: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). Those who are humble, those who recognize their spiritual poverty—the kingdom belongs to them.

As they close, the beatitudes dwell on the theme of persecution. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (5:10). The kingdom of God belongs to those who are willing to suffer, without retaliation, for their faith in Christ. It is for those who put principle before pleasure, who stand up for righteousness at any cost.

The kingdom of heaven requires holiness of life. "Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (5:20). The scribes and Pharisees were the religious leaders of the Jews. According to Jesus' statement, these Jewish leaders would not be in the kingdom. This means the kingdom is neither based on nationality, nor on mere religion. The kingdom is only for those who are truly righteous in the eyes of God.

(Continued on Next Page)

Jesus Reveals Nature of Kingdom

(Continued from Previous Page)

Again, in 6:33, Jesus taught that godliness is interconnected with the kingdom. "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." In the context, there is a contrast between the material and the spiritual. Jesus called on His followers to make righteousness their top priority, more important than food and clothes. Yes, God promises to take care of the material; but that is if we put the spiritual first. God's kingdom is about spiritual concerns.

Entrance into the kingdom depends upon one's relationship to Jesus. "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (7:21). We usually look at this as indicating that merely calling on Jesus' name is not enough to enter the kingdom. True. However, do not overlook the fact that calling Jesus Lord is a necessary prerequisite to entry. As Jesus clarified elsewhere: "No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). Neither Jew nor Gentile can enter the kingdom apart from making Jesus the Lord of their life.

"The Kingdom of Heaven is Like..."

To help his disciples understand better the true nature of God's kingdom, Jesus told many parables. Matthew 13 records seven of them: the sower, the tares, the mustard seed, the leaven, the hidden treasure, the pearl of great price and the dragnet. All but the first begin with these words: "the kingdom of heaven is like..." Nor is the first really different, for Jesus' explanation of it begins thus: "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom." When his disciples asked Him why He spoke in parables, Jesus replied, "because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (verse 11).

These mysteries, first and last, relate to a spiritual kingdom. They tell how the kingdom is enlarged by planting the Word of God in people's hearts. It is hearts that are "captured." Some will accept, others will reject. Some will first accept and afterward reject the Word of God because of persecution, and "the cares of this world." The parables warn that the Devil also sows seed and that his followers will live in the midst of "the sons of the kingdom" until "the end of the age." Then, the angels will "separate the wicked from among the just."

We rightly connect all the above ideas with the gospel message of salvation. And Jesus connected the gospel to the kingdom of heaven. Mark 1:14 says that Jesus began his ministry "preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God." The gospel and the kingdom are not two different topics; they are one and the same.

Aside from Matthew 13, there are many other parables of the kingdom recorded in the Gospels. Take for example Matthew 22:1-14, which opens thus: "The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding." Entrance into the kingdom of heaven is by way

of invitation. An appeal is made. No one is forced in. No one enters automatically, whatever the nationality may be. Each individual—male or female, young or old, American or African, rich or poor, Jew or Gentile—each individual makes a personal decision to accept or reject the invitation to enter the kingdom.

Peter Promised Keys of Kingdom

It is widely known that Jesus gave "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" to Simon Peter. However, it is not so widely understood what was meant by these "keys." It is certainly true that he who holds keys controls entry. But, entry into what?

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BIBLE QUESTIONS

(Random Questions Over the Bible)

1. The sons or children of Heth were also called what?
2. Which one of the Hebrew patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob) is the only one mentioned as farming beyond being a shepherd?
3. What land was inhabited by Esau and his descendants?
4. Who were the inhabitants of this land before Esau and his descendants?
5. In particular, why were the Israelites condemned to wander **forty years** in the wilderness before they could enter the Promised Land?
6. In what two places in the Old Testament are the Ten Commandments listed?
7. Where was Joseph buried many years after his death when the children of Israel went into the Promised Land?
8. When Samuel died, where was he buried?
9. The "land of Shinar" is another designation for what country or region?
10. Why was Daniel cast into the den of lions?
11. Which O. T. prophet spoke of Israel as a "backsliding heifer"?
12. What hostile army is pictured as invading Israel in the book of the prophet Joel?
13. What three pairs of Jesus' disciples had the same name?
14. Where are the only two times the word "church" is found in the four gospel accounts?
15. What prominent Old Testament figures appeared with the Lord Jesus when he was transfigured?
16. What good friends of Jesus lived in Bethany just outside of Jerusalem?
17. Where were the followers of Christ first called Christians?
18. What is the meaning of the word "mystery" as used in the New Testament?
19. What man in the New Testament was called "the beloved physician"?
20. What whole epistle in the New Testament has suffering as its underlying theme?

(NOTE: Answers found elsewhere in this issue of the paper)

READERS'

...Response

APOLOGY: Please accept our humble apology for slowness in getting correspondence answered. "We" have no staff of secretaries, etc. to handle such, and this is done by the "editor" as time allows. Be it known that you are sincerely appreciated. ☐

FLORIDA:

■ "Thank you for continuing to put out such good, solid Biblically based teaching..."

"I've found your articles on 'perfection' quite interesting...I've enjoyed your balanced take on this subject and hope you can continue to make available such good material for years to come..."

SOUTH CAROLINA:

■ "Please send me 1997-1998 bound volume of *THE SWORD AND STAFF* and *POEMS OF THE SOUL AND PROVERBS*..."

"I really have enjoyed *THE SWORD AND STAFF* for many years! Please keep the good work up!"

TENNESSEE:

■ "I very much appreciated the last publication of *THE SWORD AND STAFF*...Your publication has brought to heart things everyone needs to reconsider as they follow Christ. Keep up the good work." (E-mail)

■ "I have neglected to write you for a long time, but I wanted to tell you how much I enjoy *THE SWORD AND STAFF*. Several years ago I came across a copy of it at church and we have been receiving them for sometime now. Enclosed is a monetary gift...to help in the publishing..."

KENTUCKY:

■ "Enclosed is a small offering for sending me *THE SWORD AND STAFF*. It has so many good answers to many of my questions..."

VIRGINIA:

■ "Please, forgive me for not sending contributions more often. I really enjoy the poetry, articles, Bible Questions and also the Barbs. In fact, it's all something to look forward to. Thank you."

■ "God bless you for sharing God's Word in such a straightforward and understandable manner. You truly love the Lord and faithfully proclaim the gospel message in your publication.

"I pray for you and the other ministers of the gospel. I pray for those in authority. I pray for each individual Christian that we all would love God with all our heart, strength, mind and soul. I pray that we will strive to love each other as God loves us. I pray that we will reflect Christ in our lives in such a way that America will become a nation after God's heart.

"God bless you and the Holy Spirit be with you until God calls you home or Jesus our Savior returns."

PENNSYLVANIA:

■ "I was deeply impressed (to repentance) by several of the articles in your latest issue of *THE SWORD AND STAFF*..."

OHIO:

■ "I am thankful for your good Biblical teaching. Please add these to your mailing list..."

■ "I love *THE SWORD AND STAFF* very much. I've been reading the Bible for going on fifty years. I understand your teaching. You make it clear and plain."

■ "Enclosed is my check to help you continue your great work for our Lord! Each issue is excellent. I learn from each issue and am so pleased that I am on your mailing list for *THE SWORD AND STAFF*..."

■ "Enclosed please find a check...It is but a small token of our appreciation and belief in your ministry. We are grateful for your hard work in sharing God's never-ending truth. May He continue His blessings.

"It is through His grace and mercy that we are yours in Christ."

INDIANA:

■ "Please remove our name from your mailing list. Thank you!"

■ "A golden pen award for the articles 'Perfecting and Exercising Faith' and 'Jesus Announces Arrival of Kingdom.' Looking forward to second, (third?), (fourth?), on both."

■ "Enclosed find my contribution for your awesome publication. Please put me on the mailing list of *THE SWORD AND STAFF*. Its content blessed me and filled me to the brim. I thank God for you and your desire to reach out with God's Word..."

ILLINOIS:

■ "May God richly bless you and yours with a special blessing of health, wisdom, guidance and financially bless you that you and yours may continue putting out the Word of God just as it is from the Bible.

"It's a blessing to receive *THE SWORD AND STAFF*. A great job you are doing for our Lord and Savior."

■ "You wrote an article on 'calling on the name of the Lord' in Volume 37, Number 4. I would like a copy of that article, as I have somehow lost mine. If you have written anything else on this topic, or the issue surrounding baptism today, I would like to receive copies.

(Continued on Next Page)

READERS'...Response

(Continued from Previous Page)

More and more we in the Midwest are running into Baptists in Restoration clothing! We do need all the good Biblical 'ammunition' we can get!"

In the last issue of this paper we said that "church of God" was the most common "name" (expression; the church has no "John Doe" name) used in the New Testament having to do with the church as such, being found nine times (KJV). We correctly gave the references: Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 10:32; 11:22; 15:9; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:13; and 1 Timothy 3:5. But we counted wrong. It comes to eight times. Then the plural, "churches of God," is found three times in addition to this (1 Corinthians 11:16; 1 Thessalonians 2:14; 2 Thessalonians 1:4).—**Editor** □

ARKANSAS:

■ "Enclosed is my check to help you folks do the wonderful work that you have been sending out all over the world. Thank you so very much and I pray that you will continue with God's blessings."

LOUISIANA:

■ "Please send me the two volumes of *THE SWORD AND STAFF* [checked] and one copy of *POEMS OF THE SOUL AND PROVERBS*...I want to share these publications with a new convert. Thank you so much for the good work you are doing."

TEXAS:

■ "Please continue sending me your newsletter. I enjoy it so much."

■ "I received my copy of *THE SWORD AND STAFF* yesterday and continue to enjoy every one. You do a great deal of good in building up the church. I thank God for you. Please continue to send me *THE SWORD AND STAFF*..."

KANSAS:

■ "Please remove my name from your mailing list for *THE SWORD AND STAFF*. Thank you!" (E-mail)

OKLAHOMA:

■ "Thank you for your fine Biblical teachings. We enjoy them so much. It's refreshing with all the other things being taught today, such as the 'Left Behind' series. God bless you."

NEVADA:

■ "THANKS for a great magazine! I think it is one of the best I have found so far. I hope you are not a very old man and will continue to produce this paper for many years to come..."

"I especially liked your article on the eldership. If ever the church needed to think carefully about these things, it is now. Sometime, would you please explain what a 'pastor' is supposed to do in the church? Sometimes we raise up 'overseers' who just 'oversee,' but are timid, ignorant, or unqualified to 'pastor.' This grieves and concerns me very much. I believe we need to love and es-

teem and hold up good elders and appreciate their difficult job, for I have seen what happens when the job is not done well or at all. We need more young men to aspire to become 'pastors'! (I mean, the Bible term for pastor, overseer or elder).

"I also appreciated very much your recent words about reactionaries and also about Romans 14. Very timely, always..."

"Thanks, and keep up the good work..." (E-mail)

OREGON:

■ "Please remove our church name from your mailing list. Your prompt attention in deleting our order would be appreciated."

WASHINGTON:

■ "Please remove us from your mailing list. Thank you."

UNITED STATES:

■ "I have been following your writings on the web site and I enjoy the articles and they are very helpful..." (E-mail)

■ "Someone gave me a 1998 copy of *THE SWORD AND STAFF* and it had a great article on 'God Has Spoken.'

"Here...the ideas that come from the pulpit are hard for me to answer. Maybe you can help me answer the following:

1) 'Since everyone can see a different conclusion by looking at the same set of facts, we should stop telling everyone that' such and such is the truth on a topic.

2) That is just 'our perception' of the truth.

3) Everyone brings to the Bible text his own set of 'baggage' and it is therefore impossible to ever agree. Therefore, we should be 'more open' to things.

"Now I have never heard this stuff. Can you spare a little wisdom this way?... (confused conservative)" (E-mail).

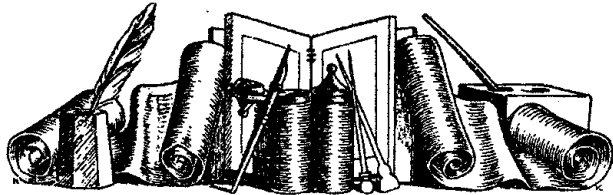
TRUTH, RELATIVE OR ABSOLUTE?

Answer: Yes, we live in a world that, if we take what we hear seriously, can be very confusing. America is the great melting pot. People with different backgrounds and beliefs have been thrown together, and the end result, with the modern humanistic mentality, is that they become homogenized, losing their distinctive identities and beliefs. Truth becomes relative and subjective, so we won't have to say that anyone is wrong. It is just a personal matter. What is truth to one person may not be truth to another. The academic world in our universities is plagued with this way of "thinking." In the public school system, rules (like in math) are not to be imposed as absolutes, but discovered so that they are the personal truths of the student (the new math). So, whether in math or any other subject, one from his own human experience works out his own personal creed of life (which is truth to him, being largely relative, but not necessarily truth to someone else). At the same time he must be nonjudgmental of others. But, we must remember, that 2 + 2 is still 4. Right? This is an absolute. Nothing else will work in the work-a-day world. And, likewise, I believe there are spiritual absolutes. Otherwise our hope is on shaky grounds.

Yes, I believe that all of us have our own set of mental “baggage.” Yes, I believe that we must ever remain humble in our pursuit of truth (if we don’t, we will never embrace it) (James 1:21). Personally, I came out of a denomination that had its human creed book and practiced sprinkling for baptism (and the “baptism” of infants). As I studied and accepted all of God’s Word to be a simple New Testament Christian, there were a lot of concepts and cumbersome, unscriptural “baggage” that I had to discard. We should continually keep our thoughts under the limelight of the Word of God, which is truth (John 17:17), to be sure that we are actually following God in truth. We need to recognize and accept truth as we learn it. The modern mind is too much like an old barn door. Leave it open all winter, and the hinges will become so rusted that we will have a hard time closing it. Too many times the modern mind is so open, and has been that way for so long with so much passing through it, that it is hard to close it or even recognize the truth when it comes along. The Bible talks about receiving the “love of the truth” that we might be saved (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12) (And love rejoices in the truth, 1 Corinthians 13:6). Yes, God would have “all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge [*epignosis*, full knowledge] of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4).

Absolutes are repugnant to the fuzzy mentality of the modern mind. But our hope is not built on doubts or “maybe so’s.” We need to heartily embrace the truth, being doubly sure that it is the truth, then speak it forthrightly in love and humility with a sense of assurance and authority. A stable Christian life and eternity are in the balance.

These thoughts I share with you. Be encouraged in the Lord, who is truth (John 14:6), and who also said, “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).—**J.E.G.**



■ “A friend of mine is in a...discussion with...a strong believer in infant baptism. She would like to know just what Scripture teaches against this...Any ideas from you would be great. I have been a reader for about 30 years and really enjoy *THE SWORD AND STAFF*. We use it in our church...” (E-mail)

Infant Baptism Doesn’t Make Sense

Answer: To an observant student and one who believes the Scriptures, infant baptism doesn’t make sense. The New Testament teaches that faith and repentance must precede and accompany baptism (Mark 16:16; Acts 8:35-37; Acts 2:38). It teaches that baptism (immersion in water, Acts 8:38,39; Romans 6:4) is for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16). An infant is eliminated as a “candidate” for baptism because in-

fants are not capable of believing. Infants are eliminated as “candidates” for baptism inasmuch as they do not have the capacity to repent, not having the awareness nor guilt of sin to repent of (repentance is a change of heart, a change of mind). Consequently, in the light of these considerations, they are eliminated as proper subjects for baptism. Baptism is for the remission of sins. Infants are sinless, they are innocent, and there is no discernment of sin and consequently no guilt (and thus they are not accountable). So, how could an infant be baptized for the “remission of sins.” There are none to be remitted. They belong to God until they come to that age of accountability. Do you remember what Jesus said? “Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for *of such is the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 19:14). He also said, “Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become *as little children*, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3).

Infant baptism was introduced in a less enlightened age, removed from the days of the early church, by superstitious men who believed that through birth we inherit the guilt of the sin of Adam. Although an infant doesn’t have the capability (nor capacity) to believe and repent, nor the need to be baptized, these errant teachers thought baptism would somehow rectify the supposed, but nonexistent, problem. However, infants and little children are not accountable to God. They already belong to God, “for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” The Scriptures say that Jesus would “save his people from *their* sins” (Matthew 1:21), not Adam’s sin. Men were told to “repent...and be converted that *your* sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19), not Adam’s sin. Ezekiel 18:20 reads, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.” To say that we inherited Adam’s sin would make our Lord a sinner since on the human side his genealogy goes all the way back to Adam (Luke 3:23-38).—**J.E.G.**

MEXICO:

■ “My name is...I have been reading *LA ESPADA Y EL CAYADO (THE SWORD AND STAFF)* in Spanish since I am Mexican and the articles you write have been a lot of help to me.

“We meet in my house to search the Bible but I don’t want to teach error. For that reason, for me it is urgent that you guide me with material (books or topics that I can make use of to teach here in my home where we meet). I am not denominational, because it is not Biblical.

“I await your reply as soon as possible. God bless you.” (E-mail, translated)

BRAZIL:

■ “It was a great pleasure to receive the first issue for the year 2001 of *THE SWORD AND STAFF*. It was

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READERS'...Response

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especially significant, as I am now so far from the United States...

"Thus, your paper comes as a great encouragement to me on this mission field, and I pray that the Lord will continue to bless your efforts."

NEW ZEALAND:

■ *"I have linked to a couple of your [web site] articles onto Beyond Protestantism if that is all right with you, brother?" (E-mail)*

AUSTRALIA:

■ *"God bless you and your ministry. We really love to get your magazine and find it a tremendous blessing."*

PHILIPPINES:

■ *"...May the good Lord we serve continue using more fellow Christians to back your efforts in publishing this paper financially, and with our prayers, too. It's the best study material coming to us, a real aid to the study of the Bible, rightly divided..."* □

Jesus Reveals Nature of Kingdom

(Continued from Page 8)

The keys are mentioned solely in Matthew 16:19. The context reveals that the prime topic of consideration was the identity of Jesus. The populace had many views; but Peter had it right when he said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (verse 16). In reply, Jesus spoke of the church and the kingdom of heaven in the same breath. There is no indication that Jesus was changing subjects. He certainly appears to equate His church with "the kingdom of heaven."

Notice what Jesus connected with the keys. "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (verse 19). Peter would be using the keys to bind and loose "on earth," (not in heaven, as the foolish jokes would have it). Also, two chapters later, Jesus tells all the disciples, "whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven" (18:18). Thus, it is not only Peter who will be binding and loosing, but rather, all the apostles.

The idea of "binding" is spelled out in Matthew 23:2-4. "The scribes and the Pharisees...bind heavy burdens, hard to bear." The "binding" here is obviously what religious teachers tell their followers they must do. Jesus told the apostles, "Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven." The apostles' word would be divinely authoritative.

While all the apostles were to be involved in binding and loosing, only Peter was to be given the keys of the kingdom. Keys open doors. Once open, others can enter. Thus, Christ chose Peter to open the doors of the kingdom. Peter was to be the first one to tell the people of Israel what was required of them to enter the kingdom of God on earth. This can be no other but the church of Jesus Christ, which in the previous verse

Jesus said He was going to build. It is an elementary fact of Scripture that Peter preached on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Peter again used the keys for the Gentiles in Acts 10. Peter was the designated preacher to open the doors to the kingdom of God. Those doors have now been open for nearly 2000 years. (Look for more regarding the actual beginning of the kingdom in the next article.)

Jesus Refused to Become Their King

If Jesus had in mind setting up a physical kingdom, there was no better time than after the feeding of the 5,000. The Jews were so stirred up that "they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king" (John 6:15). Far from seizing the opportunity, Jesus "departed again to the mountain by Himself alone." When the crowds found Him the next day, Jesus preached a powerful sermon, contrasting the physical with the spiritual.

"Jesus answered them and said, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life...I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world...Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life...It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and *they* are life' (John 6:26-63).

The net result? "From that *time* many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more." From what time? From the time Jesus refused to become their physical king. From the time Jesus probed deep into their minds and hearts to uncover their true inner materialistic hearts. From the time Jesus scorned politics with its earthly concerns, choosing rather to preach to them about eternal life. From the time Jesus refused to become a king like David and Solomon over physical Israel. From that time, many disciples—disillusioned—turned their backs on Jesus.

The Disciples Were Not Soldiers

At the time of the "triumphal entry," the fervor of the Jews was raised once again. The crowds shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David! *Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!*...Blessed is the kingdom of our father David That comes in the name of the Lord!...*Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the LORD!*" (Matthew 21:9; Mark 11:10; Luke 19:38) They acclaimed the King, the son of David and the kingdom of David as all coming right then. They believed that Jesus was fulfilling the Old Testament kingdom prophecies.

The Jews knew the close relationship between David and Jesus—between David's kingdom and Jesus' kingdom. However, they did not know that the **nature** of the two kings and the **nature** of the two kingdoms were very different. The relationship was

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“Ryan, You Be Jesus!”

A MOTHER was preparing pancakes for her sons, Kevin, 5, Ryan, 3. The boys began to argue over who would get the first pancake. Their mother saw the opportunity for a moral lesson. “If Jesus were sitting here, he would say, ‘Let my brother have the first pancake, I can wait.’” Kevin turned to his younger brother and said, “Ryan, you be Jesus!”

(And a lot of adults would prefer that someone else be Jesus, too).—*Selected* □

BARBS... with a Point

RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES not based in fact are delusion.

He who expects little, and does nothing, will not be disappointed.

If we cannot see the forest for the trees, perhaps we need to step back and get a better view of things.

Self-induced emotional “hype” is not the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The favorite pastime of some brethren is fussing and picking one another apart in the name of religion.

You cannot leave God out of your life then expect Him to let you into heaven.

If it is easy for you to “fly off the handle,” you are not the best tool for the Master’s use (better get your “handle” fixed).

Sometimes people who are real sensitive don’t make much sense.

If your religious life revolves around some human personality, and not solely that of Christ, you may be involved with a cult.

Elders should exercise leadership, not lordship, (1 Peter 5:3) over the church.

It is racism of the cheapest and rankest sort when played upon by politicians, whether in a negative way or even a positive way, for selfish political gain.

If you leave God out, you “strike out” even before you get up to bat.

You do not hear complaints of “cramming it down their throats” from people who are hungering and thirsting after righteousness.

When life gets threadbare, it is easy to become unraveled.

There is something wrong with our concept of grace if it does not motivate and move us to good works (Ephesians 2:8-10; 1 Corinthians 15:10).

If you must have the last word, let it be an “amen” at the end of a prayer.

Better reconsider if you think that you are “burned out” on religion; there is another place that has not burned out and where “the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:43-48).

Going the course of least resistance is what makes men and rivers (and churches) crooked.

Preacher, in preaching remember that the apostle Paul said, “we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord” (2 Corinthians 4:5)—**GET YOURSELF OUT OF THE PICTURE!**

A person must really be small of stature if he has to put someone down to make himself seen.

If you present yourself as a painted sex object (Jeremiah 4:30; Ezekiel 23:40; Proverbs 6:25), you may find it hard to let your light shine (Matthew 5:16) through a face smothered with makeup (1 Tim. 2:9,10).

Reality is not always the truth; it is things as they are, but not necessarily how they should be.

Although a polluted substance may be emptied from a container, impure residue remains; likewise, to think evil thoughts defiles the mind, although the thoughts are no longer there.

You are a selfish person if you are trying to live your life without God.

The Bible speaks of walking in the light (1 John 1:7), not just doing nothing, basking in the light. □

Jesus Reveals Nature of Kingdom

(Continued from Previous Page)

one of ancestry and one of God’s direct involvement. However, the nature of the two was quite different.

The week of the “triumphal entry” was one filled with rapid and dramatic change. Finally, Jesus stood before the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate. Pilate asked Jesus, “Are You the King of the Jews?” Jesus offered a powerful, definitive reply. “My kingdom is not of this world.” He further clarified the relationship between His kingdom and the current political situation by saying, “If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.” (John 18:33,36).

Jesus’ kingship and kingdom were fundamentally different, not only from that of Rome, but also from that of David. David **did** fight that he might “not be delivered” to the Philistines (remember Goliath?), to the Amalekites, the Jebusites, the Moabites, the Syrians, the Ammonites and the Edomites. David, like many of the Old Testament heroes we teach our children about, was a man of violence, blood and war. David fought for a physical kingdom. He conquered Jerusalem. He greatly extended his earthly domains. David had his “mighty men of valor fit for war.”

Jesus, in dramatic contrast, refused to take up arms either to save his life from the Jews or to rescue Jerusalem from the Romans. “My kingdom is not of

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Jesus Reveals Nature of Kingdom

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this world.” Jesus pointedly declared that His kingdom was not one that expands and takes control by force of arms. Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome, represented in the great-image dream of Daniel 2, all came into power by force of arms. Not so God’s kingdom, which was to start as a small stone that was “cut out without hands.”

If the Son of David were to set up a kingdom like David’s, He would have fought and thrown the Romans out of the Promised Land. No matter what the kingdom prophecies seem to be saying in their Old Testament context, they must be interpreted in the light of Jesus’ declaration to the Roman Governor: “My kingdom is not of this world. IF My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight” (emphasis supplied). Jesus’ kingdom does not have soldiers; it is neither defended nor extended by force of arms. Jesus’ kingdom is a spiritual kingdom.

Pilate clearly understood Jesus’ words, for Pilate then told the mob, “I find no fault in Him” (John 18:38). If Jesus were claiming to be king of a temporal kingdom, that would be treason against Caesar and Rome—sufficient cause to put Jesus to death. When Pilate said, “I find no fault in Him,” Pilate clearly confessed his own understanding of the spiritual nature of Jesus’ kingdom.

The mob cried out, “Crucify Him!” Pilate tried every way He could think of to release Jesus, “but the Jews cried out, saying, ‘If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar’s friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar’ ” (John 19:12). The chief priests cried, “We have no king but Caesar!” (verse 15) With that, Pilate desisted and turned Jesus over to them to do as they wished.

We say the Jews did not understand. However, there was something they most assuredly did understand. The Jews could see that Jesus was not going to set up an earthly kingdom (like David’s earthly kingdom). They could see that Jesus wanted no part of attempting to oust the Romans from Jewish soil. They could see that Jesus was neither a Zealot, nor a patriot, nor a subversive.

It is “unthinkable” that Jews in Jesus’ day would yell, “We have no king but Caesar!” That was an absolute, bold-faced lie! The only reason they would yell such a fabrication is that they were desperate to get rid of this “man” who preached at them rather than become the political king they expected he would be. They hated Caesar. But they hated Jesus more than Caesar because Jesus failed to take up their cause to rid the land of Caesar. Jesus refused to set up a physical kingdom like David’s. Jesus did not comply with their understanding of the kingdom prophecies.

Kingdom Not Essentially Jewish

Less than a week before the mobs cried out for His crucifixion, Jesus had revealed some very important truths by way of the parable of the vineyard (Matthew 21:33-46). The owner of the vineyard placed vinedress-

ers in charge of it. In due time, the owner sent servants to collect the fruits, but the vinedressers dealt cruelly with them, wounding some, killing others. Finally, the owner sent his own son and the vinedressers killed him. It does not take much Bible understanding to discern that the owner represents God, the servants represent the Old Testament prophets and the son represents Jesus. And the vinedressers? Who could they be but the Jewish nation as a whole, or the Jew’s religious leaders in particular? “Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them.”

Jesus told the chief priests, elders and Pharisees, the Jewish “clergy” as it were, “the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it” (Matthew 21:43). Jesus simply told them, paraphrased in popular language, “If you don’t want it, I’ll find someone else.” The rejection of the kingdom by the Jewish leaders would in no way change God’s plans. Daniel had prophesied (2:44), “In the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed.” No conditions. No dependency upon Israel’s response. Others more worthy could take their place. “The God of heaven **will...**” (bold emphasis supplied). A study of the rest of the New Testament (*see next article*) confirms that the God of heaven **did**.

Earlier that day, Jesus had already told the religious leaders of Israel, “Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him” (Matthew 21:31,32). Once again, we see that the kingdom of God has to do with righteousness and faith. It is altogether a spiritual matter. Neither color of skin, nor nationality—not even Jewishness—had anything to do with being a part of it. It was, and still is, a matter of the heart and spirit.

Kingdom Essentially Spiritual

What is the nature of God’s kingdom? Listen to the King: “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:14). What a rebuke to the disciples. They thought Jesus had too many important things to do to be bothered with little children. However, Jesus said that child-like-ness is the very spirit He wants in His kingdom.

Shortly before that, “the disciples came to Jesus, saying, ‘Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven’ (Matthew 18:1-3). Physical birth could not do the job. Greatness, as men measure it, is out of the picture. Did we catch it? It is a matter of being “converted” and becoming like little children. That is what the kingdom of heaven is all about.

Jesus had told the Pharisee Nicodemus that birth as a Jew would never, by itself, obtain entrance for a Jew

into the kingdom of God. Jesus said, “unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God...unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:3,5). Jewishness would never do it. Religiousness would never do it. Theological education would never do it. An emotional experience would never do it. Simply accepting Jesus into the heart would never do it. Praying the sinners’ prayer at the conclusion of the little tract would never do it. No amount of man-made religion would ever do it. No proofs of Jewish nationality would ever do it. “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” The King has spoken.

“Not of this World”

From the ministry of John the Baptist to Jesus’ declarations before Pontius Pilate, the kingdom was repeatedly described as a spiritual one. John, Jesus and the twelve preached repentance as a condition for entering the kingdom. John taught that ancestry from Abraham was insufficient. Jesus told Nicodemus that physical birth would not give anyone a ticket into the kingdom—that entrance into the kingdom required a birth of water and Spirit.

Jesus taught that the kingdom is spread by the preaching of the Word of God and that sons of the kingdom are peacemakers who endure persecution without taking up arms. He taught that the kingdom has nothing to do either with the cares of this world or with material wealth; but on the contrary, that those are elements that seduce men away from the kingdom.

Jesus refused the offer of the Jews to become their physical king like David. Jesus refused to let His disciples defend Him with swords. Jesus made it very plain to the politician Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world.” It is a spiritual kingdom. □

Note by author: *This is the third article regarding prophecies of the Messianic kingdom and their fulfillment. Look for more in future issues.*

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Shut Up in A Theological Box

STRONG admonitions and warnings about casting off faith and going back on the Lord are found throughout the book of Hebrews. One such admonition is found in Hebrews 10:35-39. It reads, “Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.”

A person can get himself all shut up in a theological box, making it really hard for him to understand and accept Scripture for what it really says. This is true of

the Scripture above. Kenneth S. Wuest, who is identified as “Teacher Emeritus of New Testament Greek The Moody Bible Institute” in his volumes titled *Wuest’s Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, had this to say about Hebrews 10:39,

“The ‘shrinking back’ ones are said to be shrinking back to perdition. The word ‘perdition’ is the translation of *apoleia* which means ‘utter destruction,’ and in this context means ‘the destruction which consists in the loss of eternal life; eternal misery, perdition,’ which is the lot of those who would renounce their professed faith in Messiah as High Priest and return to a dependence upon the abrogated sacrifices for salvation. The Word of God is very clear in its statements to the effect that a person once saved can never be lost. Therefore, this person who draws back to perdition must be an unsaved person.”

It sounds like he has on Calvinistic glasses with a Calvinistic filter. *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary* identifies Calvinism as the doctrines of “John Calvin (1509-64) including election or predestination, limited atonement, total depravity, irresistibility of grace, and the perseverance of the saints.” This Calvinistic thinking surfaces in Wuest’s word studies above when he said that “a person once saved can never be lost” (the perseverance of the saints). Even though the writer of the book of Hebrews, speaking to Christians, said that they could draw back unto perdition and be lost after becoming a Christian, Wuest says this can’t mean Christians because they can’t be lost after having once been saved. But the writer just said it. Prejudice really enslaves one’s thoughts.

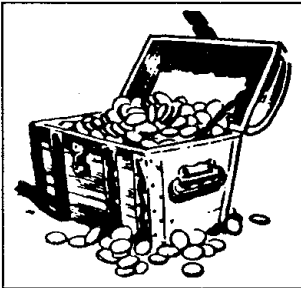
The writer of the book of Hebrews, in his warnings and admonitions, repeatedly makes it plain that a Christian can cast off his faith, be lost and not receive the everlasting reward. How else can the following references be explained? They are very simple. And there are others.

- “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him?” (Read the context, 2:1-4)
- “But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, **IF** we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end” (3:6).
- “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God...For we are made partakers of Christ, **IF** we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end” (3:12,14).
- “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God...” (12:14,15). (Continued on Next Page)

In the last issue of this paper we had a little article, “How the Apostles and Other Christians Died.” Perhaps we should have said “traditional views as to how they died.” Aside from the Scriptures we cannot speak with complete authority.—*Editor*

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**Answers to:
BIBLE QUESTIONS**

1. Genesis 23:3-10; 26:34 (27:46); 2. Genesis 26:12; 3. Genesis 32:3 (36:6-9); 4. Genesis 14:6 (36:21); 5. Numbers 14:33,34; 6. Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5; 7. Genesis 50:25,26; Joshua 24:32; 8. I Samuel 25:1; 9. Daniel 1:2 (II Chronicles 36:5-7); 10. Daniel 6:4-17; 11. Hosea 4:16; 12. Joel 1:1-7; 2:25; 13. Simon, James, and Judas (Jude) (Luke 6:13-16); 14. Matthew 16:18; 18:17; 15. Matthew 17:1-5; 16. John 11:1-36 (Luke 10:38-42); 17. Acts 11:26; 18. "Mystery," translated from the Greek word, *musterion*, means secret or hidden (with revelation being the opposite in its meaning). It does not mean something beyond our understanding, as the English word implies, but something not revealed, hidden (Romans 16:25,26); 19. Colossians 4:14; 20. I Peter. ☐

Shut Up in A Theological Box

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Yes, we believe that God will do his part in keeping us. Peter tells us in 1 Peter 1:5 that Christians "are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." Yes, but please notice. God keeps us through our faith. By this means we tap on to the power of God. But the writer of Hebrews says that we can cast off our faith. Our being "kept" is conditional. We are still a free moral agent with responsibility and accountability. Calvinism is a very reactionary and radical doctrine, coming out of the Dark Ages. Paul speaks of the "manifold wisdom of God" (Ephesians 3:10). Let us recognize that there are many folds and facets to God's wisdom, and accept every one of them as we accept all of the Word of God for what it actually says.

This little article is not intended to disparage the personal piety of Mr. Wuest, nor to diminish the value of much of his writings when he speaks on practical matters, but we couldn't help but be amazed by the sectarian entrenchment in his thinking and mindset. *J.E.G.* ☐

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