

The Gospel and the Second Adam: Recovering our Future Inheritance by Anthony Buzzard, 2024 Theological Conference

Paul is infuriated that his church members would be confused about the Kingdom of God, and when the Kingdom will be, and what it will mean. An understanding of God's Kingdom Gospel timetable was an essential part of grasping the Christian faith. Today issues about the millennium and so-called "amillennialism" are presented to the public as complicated. Paul, I think, would be horrified by such arguments, especially when the answers to such "problems" are presented as difficult! They are not difficult for those who are in tune with the Hebrew Jesus.

Let me start with Paul's horror at so-called amillennialism! 1 Corinthians 4:8 brings out the sharpest irony from Paul: "Some of you have become rich already! Some of you think you are kings already! I wish indeed that you were already **kings so that we could be reigning as kings with you!**" These words are amazingly revealing of Paul's thinking. They are no less instructive for us today.

It was Calvin, I hope you know, who was no lover of the saving Gospel of the Kingdom. When Jesus' own expertly instructed students asked the right question about if the time had now arrived for the Kingdom to be restored to Israel (Acts 1:6), Calvin showed how blind he was to the Gospel, by saying "there are as many errors as there are words in that question"! Calvin did not understand the Gospel of the Kingdom! The lesson for us today is: beware of Calvinism! It can mislead you.

The question in Acts 1:6 meant: "Has the time now finally come for the Kingdom of God to be restored to Israel?" Jesus had likewise said, "Look up, because the time of your redemption is drawing near" (Luke 21:28). The time meant was the time when **the whole world** would come under the supervision of the Messiah Jesus, assisted by his saints. Is that important? Could anything be more important? Acts 3:21 explained that Jesus must be retained in heaven until the time comes for the restoration of all things about which the whole Bible had spoken.

The public today generally does not know what the Kingdom of God is. And so it does not know what the Gospel is. It needs to know what the prophets of the Hebrew Bible had in mind. Luke 1:32 ("the Lord God will give Jesus the throne of his father David") was clear then, but today it is not. The public needs the same instruction.

The public has been told that the Gospel **is only** about Jesus dying on the cross for our sins, so that we can "get off the hook," and be forgiven. But that is only a half-gospel. The missing dimension of that gospel today is that no mention is made of the Kingdom of God. What people do not know, until you tell them, is that the destiny of man from Genesis on was that they were to inherit and possess the whole world, because the gracious God created the world for them, and He wanted to give it to them. Jesus knew that he was the Messiah destined to be heir of the world and to rule it for God and as God's image or representative. Jesus' mission was to recruit others now to be kings and priests and to rule the world - to succeed where Adam failed.

Jeremiah 27:5: "By My great strength and outstretched arm, I made the earth, and the people and animals on the face of the earth. I give it to anyone who pleases Me" (see also Dan. 4:17). Is that good news! What a generous God. That idea is repeated by Jesus in Luke 12:32: "Don't be afraid, little flock, because your Father is delighted to **give you** the Kingdom."

The Gospel then is about regaining our lost inheritance of the whole world! That inheritance was given to us all, potentially, by God at creation. It was given to Adam, but he failed. Paul is clear about the Gospel and your and my future and destiny. Jesus chose the concept "Kingdom of God" to summarize his determination to reverse what Adam has ruined!

Fact one to be grasped: In the future millennium the Devil will not be able to deceive the world a moment longer. So where is the Devil located NOW? According to Revelation 20:2-3 the Devil during the future millennium is going to be banished from this world to the Abyss. There, removed from the earth, he is going to be *under lock and key* “so that he cannot, from the beginning of that yet future millennium, deceive the nations any longer.” It would be a disastrous illusion to think that the Devil has *already* become no threat to any of us!

“Justification”

We need to think hard about how we are to become right with God, justified. How can we be right with God, as opposed to wrong with God? The very popular view is that the forgiveness achieved for us on the cross is the **whole story**. But let us see that justification is a term applicable to something *more* than the discharge of an accused person uncondemned. *The Pulpit Commentary* says:

“We must not restrict justification to deliverance from deserved penalty, but must attach to it the further idea of *inheritance*. As one writer has well remarked, ‘Justification is a term applicable to something more than the discharge of an accused person without condemnation. As in our courts of law there are civil as well as criminal cases, so it was in old time; and a large number of the passages adduced seem to refer to trials of the former [*civil*] description, in which some question of property, right, or inheritance was under discussion between the two parties. The judge, by **justifying** one of the parties, decided that **the property in question was to be regarded as his**. Applying this aspect of the matter to the justification of man in the sight of God, we gather from Scripture that while through sin man has forfeited legal claim to any right or inheritance which God might have to bestow upon His creatures, so **through justification he is restored to his high position and regarded as an heir of God.**”¹

God wants to give Jesus and us the world as our inheritance and possession. The first command of Jesus to us is: Repent and believe in your potential to possess the Kingdom of God. That is the Gospel (Mark 1:1, 14, 15). This is the *beginning* of the Gospel. That is where according to Jesus the Gospel starts. Is that not exactly what Hebrews 2:3 says: “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which had its **beginning** and foundation in the teachings and word of Jesus”? “What is man,” says Hebrews, “that you are mindful of him? You made him [man] a bit lower than the angels, but you crowned him with honor and glory...But we do **not yet** see everything subjected to him” (Heb. 2:7-8). The timetable is all important!

Defining the Gospel

What is the Gospel about the coming Kingdom?

“Now it will come about that in the last days, the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established as the chief of the mountains, and will be raised above the hills; and all the nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the house of the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that He may teach us concerning His ways, and that we may walk in His paths.’ **For instruction will go out from Zion**, and the message of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he will settle disputes between the nations, and will judge disputes for many peoples. They will hammer their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nations will not take up the sword against other nations, and never again will they learn war” (Isa. 2:1-4; Mic. 4:1-3).

¹ *Pulpit Commentary*, Vol. XVIII, pp. 121, 122, citing Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament*, p. 161, emphasis added.

“In the days of those kings [represented by Daniel’s image] **the God of heaven will set up a Kingdom** which will never be destroyed, and that Kingdom will not be left to another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever” (Dan. 2:44).

“He [the Messiah] will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will **give him the throne of his ancestor David** [2 Sam. 7:14-16], and he will be king over the house of Jacob forever” (Luke 1:32-33).

This is the Bible gospel and good news of salvation, which is so absent from current gospels of “sin management.” Yes, it is great to be forgiven, but forgiven for what? So that you can inherit the world, which is God’s gift to those He chooses to give it to, provided we choose to believe in the Message.

The author of a series of explanatory sermons on “Essential Christianity” asked in 1894 (and we ask the same question now in 2023): “Have you seriously pondered the fact that Jesus Christ was always preaching ‘the Kingdom of God,’ and that in the model prayer which he gave us, he taught us to pray always that his Kingdom might come (Matt. 6:10)? In the present day men are always talking about the ‘Church’...In view of this modern practice, is it not startling to be reminded that in the model prayer there is no reference to the to the ‘Church,’ whilst the reference to the ‘Kingdom’ is prominent and pronounced? So far as the record goes, Christ referred to the Church only twice...On the other hand, he speaks of **the Kingdom** not less than one hundred and twelve times.”

The same author went on to point out that “One of the most mischievous and fatal mistakes ever made in Christian history was the mistake of St. Augustine, who identified the Kingdom of God with the Church...But the Church is no more the Kingdom of God than the British army is the British Empire. It is high time for all Christians to ponder the long-lost teaching of Christ with respect to the Kingdom of God.”²

It has been our contention that a loss of clarity regarding the Kingdom of God must directly affect our comprehension of Jesus’ saving Gospel Message — the Christian Gospel. The Kingdom of God is, as we have seen, the principal subject of all that Jesus taught (Luke 4:43, etc.). There can, therefore, be no question of our responding to his call for repentance and belief in the Gospel Message about the Kingdom (Mark 1:14-15), if we do not know what he meant by the Kingdom of God. Any appeal for us to accept “the Gospel,” when no reference to or explanation of the Kingdom of God appears, must be defective, since it omits an essential and foundational part of the saving Message offered and commanded by Jesus and the Apostles for repentance and belief (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:43; Acts 8:12; 19:8, 28:23, 31).

If perhaps we have vaguely imagined the Kingdom to be a synonym for the Church, the community of the faithful, we will have to examine the biblical evidence to see if the Kingdom can possibly be confined to a reign of God in the present time, either in our hearts or in the body of believers as a whole. If we have been talking about “heaven” as the goal of the Christian, we will have to repent and begin to speak instead, as Jesus always did, of the coming Kingdom of God.

The author we cited above went on to tell us about the roots of Jesus’ conception of the Kingdom: “I think there can be no doubt where Jesus Christ found and nourished his doctrine of the Kingdom. He found it in the book of Daniel, and especially in Daniel 7. There are many evidences that the book of Daniel was one of the favorite books of Jesus Christ, one of the books which he diligently and deeply studied during the years of peaceful obscurity in Nazareth before his stormy public ministry began. He makes several references to Daniel, and when the book of

² Hugh Price Hughes, *Essential Christianity*, p. 57-59.

Daniel is once understood, it throws a flood of light upon the numerous parables in which our Lord described the Kingdom...Jesus declared again and again that the Kingdom was the first object of his life to proclaim, and, he asserted, it ought to be the first object of our lives to promote. He summed up all our duties in the ever memorable command to ‘seek **first** the Kingdom of God and His righteousness’ (Matt. 6:33).³

Taking our cue from the book of Daniel, we may easily establish the fact that the Kingdom of God (or Kingdom of Heaven) is a real, external empire. Not only this, it is to be an empire which will seize power suddenly and dramatically from the world’s governments which precede it; and it will be administered by “the Son of Man” (Dan. 7:13-14) and “the saints” (Dan. 7:27). On no account, from the evidence of Daniel, could it be an invisible reign established only in the hearts of believers. Its political dimension as well as its location on earth is unmistakably clear. It is equally obvious that the Kingdom of God described by Daniel has not yet appeared.

We read: “And in the days of these kings, the God of Heaven will establish a Kingdom [in the New Testament, the Kingdom of God or Kingdom of Heaven] which will never be destroyed, and that Kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever” (Dan. 2:44). In the next verse the impact of the Kingdom is likened to a stone crushing the “iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold” of former world empires. The certainty of this shattering event is based on what “the great God has made known to the king” and what “will take place in the future. The dream is true, and its interpretation is trustworthy” (Dan. 2:45).

“Then the sovereignty and the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be **given** to the people of the saints of the Most High. **Their** Kingdom will be an everlasting Kingdom and all dominions will serve and obey **them**” (Dan. 7:27, NRSV).

The Kingdom of God is evidently an empire, exercising sway over all nations. It will come to power on the earth (“under the whole heaven”) and its establishment will be by a catastrophe, an international upheaval resulting in a complete political reorganization. The administration of the Kingdom will be in the hands of “the Son of Man” and “the saints.” A recurring theme of the New Testament (but infrequently preached) is that Jesus and his followers will be the executives of the new world government — the Kingdom of God (Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:28-30; 1 Cor. 6:2; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26; 3:21; 5:10; 20:4). To be a saint in the New Testament is to be one appointed to rule with the Messiah in the coming Kingdom.

Jesus’ Announcement of a Coming Crisis

In the light of this background information, Jesus’ public proclamation of the nearness of the Kingdom of God must be understood as a warning about a great future crisis in history. The stupendous event foreseen not only by Daniel, but by all the other Hebrew prophets, demanded an immediate repentance and reformation of lifestyle. The point of the call for repentance, “for the Kingdom of God is at hand” (Mark 1:14-15), was simply that a place **as an executive with Jesus in the Kingdom** would be granted only to those found living in faithful obedience to God. The threatening element in the proclamation of the Gospel can be seen from John the Baptist’s appeal for a “U-turn” in conduct, private and national, because the Kingdom of God was “at hand” (Matt. 3:2). Referring to Jesus, John says: “His winnowing tool is in his hand, and he will thoroughly clear his threshing floor; he will gather his wheat into the barn, but he will burn up the chaff with fire which cannot be put out” (Matt. 3:12). Matthew describes this message in exactly the same words as he summarizes the teaching of Jesus. Both agents of God’s Gospel-word, John and Jesus,

³ Ibid, p.59.

called for repentance (Matt. 3:2; 4:17). The message contained both a threat and a promise — sudden death as the appalling consequence of persistent unrepentance, and the glory of the future Kingdom for those who had heeded the message and prepared themselves accordingly. This simple theme governs the entire New Testament. There are two possible destinies for human beings — “the barn or the bonfire.” Either one enters the Kingdom at Jesus’ return, or one is destroyed and not granted the possession of the Kingdom. Hence the critical warning element in the Christian Gospel.

Underlying the call for repentance was the well-known concept of the “Day of the Lord” predicted by the Old Testament prophets. This day of terrible divine wrath is equated in the New Testament with the Second Coming of Jesus (the Parousia) to establish the promised Kingdom. Thus in the well-known parable of the tares, the good seed represents “the children [disciples] of the Kingdom and the tares are the children of the Evil One. The enemy who sowed them is the Devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. Just as the tares are gathered up and burned up, so it will be at the end of the age...Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, listen!” (Matt. 13:38-43).

It is crucial to note that the coming of the Kingdom of God, in which the righteous are to “shine like the sun,” is placed at the future end of the age. At the same time as the appearance of the Kingdom, the wicked will be “cast into the furnace of fire.” “The Kingdom of their Father” (i.e., the Kingdom of God), in which the righteous appear in glory, is evidently a coming new world-order introduced by a judgment at which the wicked perish. The Kingdom in these texts is certainly not a kingdom of the present time, much less a “rule of God in the heart.” It has yet to appear at “the end of the age.” All of this fits admirably with the Kingdom described by Daniel 2 and 7, and it is evident that Jesus derived his teaching from that book.

These simple facts are confirmed by the context in Daniel from which Jesus’ reference to the shining forth of the righteous is found: The words are part of Daniel’s prediction of the resurrection of the dead (Dan. 12:2-3). It is when “many of those who are sleeping in the dust of the ground awake to the life of the coming age.” It is then, **at that time, that** the righteous “will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven and like the stars” in the Kingdom of God (Dan. 12:3). We note that the righteous according to Jesus (Matt. 13:43) are “those who cause many to gain understanding and make many righteous” (Dan. 12:3). It is “by his knowledge that My Servant makes many righteous” (Isa. 53:11). These are most important texts describing the Christian life.

The Longstanding Aversion to the Jewishness of Jesus

Commentators often display their dislike of Jesus, the Christ, when they are confronted with the Savior’s Messianic outlook. We can most easily illustrate this antipathy to the Messianic Kingdom (and thus to the Gospel of the Kingdom) by citing a school of thought which denies that the book of Revelation derives its inspiration from Jesus Christ. Unfortunately those who belong to this school of thought begin by misunderstanding Jesus and his message of the Kingdom. They then accuse Jesus (in the Revelation) of contradicting their misconception! It appears that unbelief carries with it an inevitable penalty: “If you will not believe, neither will you understand” (Isa. 7:9, LXX). It is possible to be given over to the power of our own sin.

We cite evidence of the fact that Jesus’ message in the book of Revelation, and thus his whole Messianic outlook, has been rejected by many:

“One book requires notice by reason of its peculiar character and of its influence on Christian eschatology [teaching about the future], namely the Revelation of John...Most of the visions contain so little that is specifically Christian [although given by Jesus Christ!] that it has been

seriously questioned whether they were not appropriated entire from Jewish sources with only a superficial adaptation to Christian use. Whatever degree of literary originality may be allowed the author, the matter is Jewish throughout. The resurrection of the saints to enjoy the thousand-year reign of the Messiah; the war of Gog and Magog at the end of the millennium, and their destruction; the general resurrection and the last judgment; the new Jerusalem descending from heaven in all its glitter of gold, even to the river of life and the trees bearing monthly crops of new fruit and medicinal leaves, are the trite ideas and imagery of Jewish eschatology...with its corporeal resurrection and its millennial reign. [These were] brought over into the church and found acceptance...among ignorant Christians. In the second century millenarian eschatology [belief that the saints will rule with Christ for a thousand years] was orthodoxy in Asia Minor and the wide regions which took their theology from that source; it is the faith of Irenaeus. It has survived through all the vicissitudes of theology, and over and over again, has broken out in epidemics of enthusiasm.”⁴

We may applaud this excellent summary of what the book of Revelation expects in the future, while marveling at the cavalier fashion in which the great Truths of the New Testament are dismissed as non-Christian and Jesus’ vision is dismissed as “trite.”

It is a little-known fact that the “founding fathers” of large sections of Protestant Christianity also found the Message of Jesus recorded in the Revelation unacceptable:

“Luther at first (Preface in Translation of New Testament, 1522) expressed a strong aversion to the book [of Revelation], declaring that to him it had every mark of being neither prophetic nor apostolic...He cannot see that it was the work of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, he does not like the commands and threats which the writer makes about his book (22:18, 19), and the promise of blessedness to those who keep what is written in it (1:3; 22:7), when no one knows what that is, to say nothing of keeping it, and there are many nobler books to be kept. Moreover, many Fathers rejected the book... ‘Finally, everyone thinks of it whatever his spirit imparts. My spirit cannot adapt itself to this book, and a sufficient reason why I do not esteem it highly is that Christ is neither taught nor recognized in it, which is what an Apostle ought before all things to do.’

“Later (1534) Luther finds a possibility of Christian usefulness in the book...but he still thought it a hidden, dumb prophecy unless interpreted, and upon the interpretation no certainty had been reached after many efforts...He remained doubtful about its apostolicity, and (in 1545) printed it with Hebrews, James and Jude as an appendix to his New Testament, not numbered in the index...Zwingli [a leading Reformer] regarded Revelation as ‘not a Biblical book,’ and even Calvin, with his high view of inspiration, does not comment on 2 and 3 John and Revelation.”⁵

Readers should reflect on the remarkable fact that churches have continued to give their allegiance to Calvin and Luther, despite the former’s hesitancy about the Apocalypse and the latter’s obvious refusal to heed the warnings of Jesus given in the Revelation: “I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy in this book...if anyone takes away from the words of this book of prophecy, God will take away that person’s share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book” (Rev. 22:18-19).

This hardly sounds as if the book could be safely relegated to an appendix! The book of Revelation, as is well recognized, draws together the strands of Old Testament prophecy and describes the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth at the Second Coming of Jesus. It is the fitting climax to the expectations of both Old and New Testament, depicting the triumph of the Kingdom of God over a hostile world.

⁴ G.F. Moore, *History of Religions*, p. 144-145.

⁵ “Revelation,” *Hastings Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. IV, p. 241.

The Kingdom of God announced by Jesus will finally come to power on earth when the seventh angel sounds his trumpet:

“The kingdom of this world [note that none of the present nations are the Kingdom of God now] has now **become** the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Messiah; and he will reign to the ages of the ages...You have assumed power and have **begun** to reign. [Cp. Ps. 97:1 and 99:1: “The Lord has begun to reign.”] The nations were angry, but Your righteous fury has come, and the time has come for the dead to be judged. The time has come to give to Your servants, the prophets, their reward, as well as the saints, and those who fear Your name, both small and great. And the time has come to destroy those who destroy the earth” (Rev. 11:15-18).

This is the Kingdom of God announced in the Gospel Message, and the Kingdom for which Christians are to pray, “Thy Kingdom come!” It is not widely recognized that in so praying, Christians anticipate the overthrow of human governments, in order that peace and harmony may prevail across the globe. One fact is unmistakably clear in the New Testament: the Kingdom of God will come only as a result of a divine intervention bringing to an end the “present evil age” (Gal. 1:4).

A Future with No Substance

The following inquiry was addressed to a representative of the clergy in a Presbyterian magazine. The response illustrates the unwillingness of many to face the stark reality of Jesus’ warnings about the future:

“Q. Why are there so few sermons in our churches on the second coming? Is this part of our belief or not?

“A. Not all Christians think alike on matters of theology, but it would be hard for someone to feel at home in our tradition, who did not understand God as the One who has come, who is present (Christ is risen) and who is yet to come in whatever form the future winds up taking. To literalize the second coming is to ruin both its beauty and its significance. To ignore it is to avoid what may be the most important part of the Gospel we know about since the past and the present, relatively speaking, are brief, while tomorrow borders on the forever.”

An appropriate reaction to this answer appeared in a later issue of the magazine:

“I compliment the Rev._____ for his illusive non-answer to what I am sure was a serious question concerning the second coming of Jesus Christ. If I understand his answer, he said, in effect, ‘We don’t all agree. But if you want to be comfortable in our fellowship, you will need to agree that Jesus is coming again, but not really — for if you actually believe in the second coming you will ruin both its beauty and its significance. Yet you can’t ignore it because it is in the future.’”

This approach to the New Testament doctrine about the future is typical of much of what has gone under the name of Christian teaching over many centuries. It has been hard for many to detect the trick being played with words, when an outright rejection of the biblical doctrine of the Kingdom is veiled by impressive “theological” language. What much traditional theology has done to the Second Coming should not be graced with the term “spiritualize.” It has *evaporated* the return of Christ. The whole vision of the prophets and the whole Gospel of the Kingdom is in jeopardy if its dominant future element is removed.

The Future Kingdom of the Gospel

While Jesus’ leading phrase “Kingdom of God” remains unclear, the Gospel itself is obscured. Perhaps it is this uncertainty over the meaning of Jesus’ proclamation about the Kingdom that has caused evangelicals to drop all reference to the Kingdom of God in their definition of the Gospel,

and to rely on what they think is a full account of the saving message: the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. It is customary to appeal to Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15:1-5:

"Now I declare to you, brothers and sisters, the gospel which I preached to you, which you received, on which you stand firm, by which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance [literally "among the first," NASV margin] what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas and then to the twelve...Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you believed."

An important key to understanding Paul's fine statement about his own Gospel Message is found in the little phrase *en protois*, "amongst things of primary importance" (v. 3). The point is that it was the resurrection of Jesus which some of the Corinthians were beginning to doubt: "How do some among you say there is no resurrection of the dead?" (1 Cor. 15:12). In response to *this particular crisis of belief*, Paul reminds his audience that the death and resurrection of Jesus are of absolutely fundamental significance in the Christian Gospel. Without the death of Jesus to gain forgiveness for all of us, and without his return from death to life through resurrection, there can be no hope of salvation in the coming Kingdom.

It is a dangerous mistake, however, to argue from this text that the facts about Jesus' death and resurrection formed the whole message of the Gospel. Paul is careful to say that these central facts were preached "among matters of first importance" (v. 3). This, however, was not the entire Gospel. There were other things also, of equal importance in the Gospel, namely the announcement about the Kingdom of God (Acts 8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31). We recall that Jesus had proclaimed the Kingdom long before he spoke of his death and resurrection (Luke 4:43; cp. Luke 18:31-34) — a fact which proves that the Kingdom of God is not a synonym for the death and resurrection of Christ.

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

The Kingdom has the principal place in the New Testament Gospel Message in addition, of course, to the equally essential preaching of the death and resurrection of the Savior. It is a serious mishandling of the Bible to place 1 Corinthians 15:1-5 in conflict with the massive evidence for the central importance of the Kingdom of God in the pre- and post-resurrection proclamation (Luke 4:43; Mark 1:14, 15; Matt. 4:17; Acts 8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31, etc.).

The Gospel Hope

The loss of the Kingdom of God from the Christian Gospel stems from the loss of the biblical view about the future which formed so vital a part of original Christianity. In the New Testament, hope (the second of the trio of Christian virtues: faith, hope and love) is directed towards the glorious Messianic future. "Hope may be defined as desire of future good, accompanied by faith

in its realization...Faith has regard equally to past, present and future, while no doubt in Scripture referring mainly to the future. Hope is directed only to the future.”⁶

A clear hope was instilled into the mind of the believer when he heard the Gospel message about the Kingdom: “We heard about your **faith** in Messiah Jesus and your **love** for all the saints, **because of the hope** stored up for you in heaven. You heard about **this hope** in the word of the truth, that is, the gospel...just as you learned it from Epaphras” (Col. 1:4-7). “When you heard the message of the truth — the gospel of your salvation — you believed it and were sealed with the holy spirit of the promise, which is a downpayment on our inheritance” (Eph. 1:13-14). A few verses later Paul prays that “you may know **the hope** to which He has called you, the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints” (Eph. 1:18). It is critically important for believers to know that they are invited to rule with Messiah on earth in the coming New Order.

In these verses it becomes clear that the future hope was part of Paul’s Gospel. Apostolic evangelism went **beyond the promise of the forgiveness of sins and faith in Jesus’ death and resurrection**. It put before the convert the promise of inheriting the Kingdom of God at the return of Christ. A Gospel message, therefore, which is not pledged to the future fact of God’s coming intervention to overthrow all human government and grant the Kingdom to the Church, is not the Gospel of the New Testament. The hope which the Colossians learned when they heard the Gospel is of such significance that Paul speaks of “the faith and love which **spring from** the hope” (Col. 1:5, NIV). It is “because of the hope” (Col. 1:5, NASV) prepared for them in heaven that the Colossians are to develop faith and love in the spirit. We should note that their hope of inheriting the Kingdom of God is “stored up in heaven.” This is typical of the Jewish belief that all the good things of the future are already prepared in heaven for the faithful, waiting to be revealed on earth at the coming of the Messiah (see 1 Pet. 1:4-5).

In the light of these facts, the definition of evangelism needs modification as follows: *To evangelize is to spread the Good News that God has planned as the goal of history to establish His Kingdom on the earth when Jesus returns; that Jesus now offers forgiveness through faith in his Kingdom Gospel and his atoning death and resurrection. For all those who believe the Gospel message and obey him (Acts 5:32), he grants the promise of his spirit now as a “down-payment” to empower them in the present life in preparation for positions of rulership with Christ in the Kingdom to be inaugurated at his return.*

Blessed indeed and holy are those who take part in the first resurrection and who will reorder the world with Jesus for a thousand years and beyond (Rev. 20:6; 22:5).

⁶ “Hope,” *Hastings Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. I, p. 583.