

KINGDOM SPIRIT



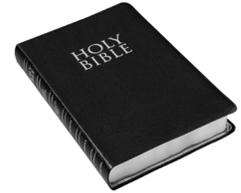
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“SEEK YE FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD”

Matthew 6:33



Issue 812

THE GOSPELS

(Several attempts have been made to write a harmony of the gospels but probably none have met everyone's satisfaction, perhaps because it was not God's intent that they should be dealt with in this manner. Dr. Bullinger, in his Companion Bible makes the point that though several of the events listed by one of the writers will appear to be repeated by another, it is likely in some cases that they were separate events, though very similar in nature. For our purposes, while absolute accuracy is not totally necessary, a harmony of these four books will help us put as many events as possible in at least some chronological order. I have used The Gospel of History by Charles A. L. Totten as a guide to attempt to put events in as close to chronological sequence as I can.)

As you will recall, King Herod, an Edomite, had obtained the favor of the Roman government to appoint him king over all Judea. It is during his reign then that we pick up our written story again with Luke 1. Luke tells us of a certain priest named Zacharias whose job it was to burn incense in the temple for a given period of time each year. He and his wife Elizabeth, also a descendent of Aaron, were quite old and had no children. As Zacharias was performing his duties one day in the temple, and angel appeared unto him telling him he and his wife were to have a baby son and they were to name him John. He was to be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from

his mother's womb, and would cause many in Israel to turn to God. Zacharias doubted and asked for a sign, which the angel granted. The sign given was that he would be unable to speak again until the baby was born. As he came out of the temple that day, he was unable to speak. Elizabeth did indeed become with child when he returned home. When she was in her sixth month, the angel Gabriel visited another woman, a young virgin named Mary who lived in Nazareth, a city of Galilee.

Gabriel told Mary she would become with child also, even before she was to be married (she was engaged to a man named Joseph) and would have a son in her virginity whom she was to name Jesus. She was told, **“He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David; and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.”** (Luke 1:32-33) When she questioned how this was to happen since she was still a virgin, Gabriel told her, **“the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.”** (Luke 1:35)

Elizabeth and Mary were cousins and the angel told Mary about Elizabeth. Mary then went to see her. At the sound of Mary's salutation, the babe jumped in Elizabeth's womb and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, confirmed what the angel had told Mary. Mary then proclaimed a thanksgiving and ended it by saying, **“He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of**

his mercy; as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed forever.” (Luke 1:54-55)

When John was born to Elizabeth, Zacharias was again able to speak and being filled with the Holy Spirit, he prophesied concerning Jesus and his own son, John. Of Jesus, he said that God had visited His people and redeemed them; He had raised up a horn of salvation from the house of David, **“to perform the mercy promised to our father, and remember his holy covenant, the oath which he swear to our father Abraham,”** (Luke 1:72-72) that He would deliver them from their enemies and that they might serve God without fear. John was to be called the Prophet of the Highest as he was to prepare the way before Him.

At that time, the Roman Caesar, Augustus, made a decree that every person had to be registered. This had to be done in everyone’s home city, so if you were away from there it required your return for the registration. Joseph, to whom Mary was espoused (engaged), had considered putting Mary away and not marrying her when he found she was with child, but had gone ahead and married her after he had been visited by an angel who told him she had not been unfaithful, but was with child by God. Though he married her, he did not consummate the marriage until after the baby was born. Bethlehem was his home city, so he and Mary returned to Bethlehem from Nazareth for the required registration. It was while they were there that the time came and the baby Jesus was born.

Confirmation, or a second witness, of the birth and the fact that this was the Christ was made to some shepherds, as they watched over their flocks nearby, by an angel and a multitude of heavenly host. The sign given them was that they would find Him wrapped in swaddling clothes in a manger. When they found Him as they were told, they made it known all around what they had been told and what they had found.

God’s law requires that after the days of purification for the mother are completed, the new baby is to be sanctified unto God. (Exodus 13:2, 12,15) When Joseph and Mary did this in the temple in Jerusalem, an old man, whom God

had told would not see death until he had seen the Lord’s Christ, came into the temple at the same time. He took the child into his arms and blessed God. He told Mary, **Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”** Anna, a very old prophetess came into the temple at that moment and also recognized the child for who He was; gave thanks unto God and spoke of him to all that looked for the redemption in Israel.

According to Matt. 2, wise men from the east, apparently familiar with astronomy (see Psa. 19:1-6), had recognized through the stars that Jesus was born and came to Jerusalem inquiring about Him that they might pay homage to Him. When Herod, the king, heard they were there and why, he became quite alarmed and questioned the chief priests and scribes about this child. They quoted the prophet Micah to him in that he had stated that the ruler of Israel would come forth of Bethlehem. (Micah 5:2) Herod then called the wise men to him and questioned the exact time the star appeared cluing them of Jesus’ birth and asked them to let him know where the child was when they found Him. But when they found Jesus and had presented their gifts, they departed another way so as not to see Herod. Herod became very wroth and commanded that all male children from two years old and under (based on when the wise men said they saw the star) be put to death in Bethlehem and the surrounding area. Joseph, having been warned by an angel, had already taken the child and his mother to Egypt where they stayed until Herod’s death. He then took his family back to Nazareth in Galilee.

Luke 2 tells us that at the age of twelve, Jesus astonished those in the temple as He listened and questioned the teachers in the temple. Virtually everything that has happened to Jesus to this point was in fulfillment of specific prophecies spoken several hundred years before. We do not have Biblical history about Jesus from this point until He was 30 years old.

The time came for John, who became

known as John the Baptist, to begin his ministry of preparing the way for Jesus. He came forth from the deserts and preached the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins saying, **“Repent ye for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”** (Matt. 3:2) Many came out to him including the hated publicans (tax collectors) and soldiers and John counseled with them all, but when the Pharisees and Sadducees came to him, he called them **“a generation of vipers,”** and told them they would have to show the fruits of repentance and not just go on saying they were descended from Abraham, thus they didn’t need to repent.

When John was asked if he were the Christ that the prophets had foretold, he answered, **“I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable.”** (Luke 3:16-17)

Jesus then came to John, while John was baptizing at the Jordan River, and asked to be baptized. John expressed his unworthiness to baptize Jesus, but at Jesus’ insistence, John baptized Him. As He arose from the water, the Holy Spirit descended on Him like a dove and a voice from heaven said, **“thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased.”** (Luke 3:22)

Jesus then went into the wilderness where He fasted for forty days. He was then tempted in the three basic lusts of the flesh (spoken of in I John 2:16) by the devil or that which was adverse to Him. These lusts were the lust of the flesh, or that of personal comfort, pleasure and security; the lust of the eyes, or that of authority; and the pride of life, or power. He withstood these fleshly temptations and having done so returned to Galilee where His fame began to spread as He taught in the synagogues.

His first real miracle was the turning of water into wine at the request of His mother at a wedding feast. (John 2:1-11) Some of His first

disciples were disciples of John who had followed Jesus after John had testified of Him to them. His ministry began in earnest at Passover time with a major clash between Himself and the money changers and those who sold animals for sacrifices in the temple. He drove them out of the temple with a whip and poured out the money of the changers and threw down their tables. He commanded that they take their animals out of the temple and not make the house of His Father a house of merchandise. Some questioned His authority and asked for a sign signifying His authority. His answer didn’t really help them in that He said, **“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”** (John 2:19) They knew not that He spake of His own body, but Jesus was really giving this sign to His disciples so they would know and believe when He was raised from the dead.

Before we get into the real meat of Christ’s ministry, let us pause for a brief glimpse of the writers of the four Gospels and the point of views from which they wrote. Matthew was an apostle of Christ’s and wrote from a firsthand, personal experience and also from a good knowledge of prophesy. He combined the actual with the prophecies so that we might know the marvelous unity of the two. He presents Christ as Jehovah’s king.

Mark was not an apostle, but was an intimate friend of, or even possibly a son of the apostle Peter. He writes from a historical viewpoint looking more at the results than the actual events. He presents Christ as Jehovah’s servant.

Luke may never have seen Jesus though we find later he was a friend and companion of Paul. Luke searched out the story of Jesus from eyewitness accounts and conveyed them by letter to a friend of his who had apparently studied much and was expectant of the events of Christ’s life. Luke writes the story in order that his friend, Theophilus, might be assured to the accuracy of his expectations. He presents Christ as Jehovah’s man.

John, another apostle, was concerned that all should believe Jesus and in believing, have

life through His name. His writings concentrate on the last 6 months of Christ's ministry and life, especially the last week. He is more concerned that the evidence he presents draws the reader close to Jesus spiritually, than he is that he present all the details of Christ's life. He simply says, believe. He presents Christ as Jehovah Himself.

We'll continue with the ministry and life of Jesus as presented by these four writers in our next issue. JRL

FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness is a subject discussed quite frequently in Scripture as well as among Christians today. However, it is usually thought of in the sense of God's forgiveness of us. I believe forgiveness to be one of, if not the most important subject in Scripture, thus one that we need to be very familiar with. More especially, we need to be familiar with God's requirement that we should be forgiving of others, ourselves.

Let's begin with some basics to try to lay a foundation for our study of this most important subject. The word "forgive" is translated from 3 different Hebrew words in the Old Testament, each with a little different meaning. Likewise, 3 different Greek words are translated "forgive" in the New Testament.

The Hebrew word "nasa" or "nacah" means "to lift up or lift away." When Jacob died, his eleven sons were fearful of what Joseph would do to them because of what they had done to him as a young man. Gen. 50:16-17 tells us **"And they sent a messenger unto Joseph, saying, Thy father did command before he died, saying, So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive (nasa), I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive (nasa) the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father. And Joseph wept when they spake unto him."**

"Calach" or "Salach" means "to forgive or to send away, let go." Solomon, in his prayer of dedication of the temple, prayed this in I Kings 8:35-36, **"When heaven is shut up, and there is**

no rain, because they have sinned against thee; if they pray toward this place, and confess thy name, and turn from their sin, when thou afflictest them: Then hear thou in heaven, and forgive (calach) the sin of thy servants, and of thy people Israel, that thou teach them the good way wherein they should walk, and give rain upon thy land, which thou has given to thy people for an inheritance."

"Kaphar" means "to cover, (fig.) to expiate or condone, to placate or cancel." In the latter part of Jeremiah 18, Jeremiah has had about all he can take of the men of Judah not heeding the word that God had given Jeremiah to proclaim and their efforts to kill him. He says in vs. 23, speaking to God, **"Yet, LORD, thou knowest all their counsel against me to slay me: forgive (kaphar) not their iniquity, neither blot out their sin from thy sight, but let them be overthrown before thee; deal thus with them in the time of thine anger."**

In the New Testament, we find the Greek word, "aphiemi" which means "to send forth or away." This is the word most often used in the N.T. As part of what we refer to as the Lord's Prayer, we find in Matt. 6:12, **"And forgive (aphiemi) us our debts, as we forgive (aphiemi) our debtors."**

"Apoluo" means "to free fully, i.e. (lit.) relieve, release, dismiss." Jesus, in giving instructions to His disciples, says in Luke 6:37, **"Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive (apoluo) and ye shall be forgiven (apoluo)."**

"Cherizomai" means "to grant as a favor or to be gracious to." Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, says in chapt. 4:32, **"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving (cherizomai) one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven (cherizomai) you."**

To sin against someone, or against God is to create a debt. It may be easier to understand forgiveness if we think of sin, or trespass, as a debt as we continue our study.

Forgiveness is rooted in God's law.

First, if someone damaged another person, through theft, physical harm, accident, or even murder, the person committing the damage was to be brought to trial before the judges and the priests. If he is found guilty, a sentence providing for the restoration of the damage, with the exception of non-restorable crimes such as murder, rape, etc., in accordance with the law was pronounced on the person. However, the victim had the prerogative of commuting the sentence if he or she so desired. This even applied to murder where the revenger of blood (usually a family member of the victim) could either kill the murderer or have him released. There was no pressure on the victim to forgive the aggressor, however, he had that option.

Second, if a person became over burdened with debt (could be from the requirement of restitution mentioned above), he could sell himself, or his creditor could sell him for the debt that he owed. Every seventh year, his master had to release him for that year of rest, but he had to go back to continue to serve his master until either he had worked off his debt, or until the year of Jubilee, every 50th year. At the Jubilee, whether he had been subject to his master 1 year or 49 years, he was to be released free of debt and could return to his own land. All debt of whatever kind was to be released or forgiven. There were no options.

Third, if a person committed a sin, he could bring a blood sacrifice to the priest. The priest would pour a portion of the blood out under the altar, thus depositing the man's sins under the altar, and covering it with the dust of the ground. These deposited sins would increase throughout the year so that once a year the high priest would offer a sacrifice and take part of the blood and sprinkle it on the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies. This was done on the day of atonement and thereby the sins of whole nation would be forgiven.

I think most of us understand that Jesus Christ offered Himself on the cross to forgive us of our sins so that we no longer have to go through the ritual of offering a blood sacrifice

every time we sin and then an offering by the high priest once a year to atone for the nation.

However that forgiveness comes with a price, or a requirement that is incumbent on us to pay. Before we discuss this price, or requirement, let me acknowledge that there will be immediate valid protests saying that salvation is free, it is a gift. To this, I certainly agree, but here is where we need to understand the difference between justification and sanctification. For far too long in Christendom, the words "salvation" and "saved" have been used quite loosely, without clear definitions of what is actually meant. To far too many people, if a Scripture verse cannot be related in some way to salvation, then it is usually ignored. Failure to see the whole picture is going to be the cause of, as Scripture says a number times, **"weeping and gnashing of teeth."**

Paul's epistle to the Roman church, if studied in its entirety, gives us a very good picture of what "salvation" really consists of. If we use the word "salvation" to encompass all that is involved in developing an eternal relationship with our Father, then I believe we need to break it down into 3 steps, or plateaus; "justification," "sanctification," and "glorification." In the first 5 chapters of Romans, Paul explains "justification." He tells us why it is needed, **"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."** (Rom. 3:23) Paul explains in Rom. 5:12 that because Adam sinned, he became mortal, i.e. he would die. This death or mortality then came upon all men; then he says that because we are mortal, or that we die, we sin.

Paul explains that "justification" is being made righteous. This does not mean that we will become totally righteous at some point, but rather that by imputation (being reckoned or accounted) we will appear so in the eyes of the Father as He will look at us through the righteousness of Jesus Christ rather than what we actually are. Being righteous is the only way we can appear before the Father. Paul explains that this righteousness is obtained by faith in Rom. 4:22, i.e. believing we are sinners and that we can be righteous

through what Christ has done for us, not by anything that we can do of ourselves.

In Rom. 5:18-19, Paul tells us, **“Therefore as by the offence of one (Adam’s sin) judgment came upon all men to condemnation (mortal death); even so by the righteousness of one (sacrifice of Christ on the cross) the free gift (justification) came upon all men unto justification of life (eternal life).**

So ultimately, all men will receive justification, some in this life and the rest after the judgment. Those that do so in this life have their names written in the Lamb’s book of life which qualifies them to escape the lake of fire as mentioned in Rev. 20. Justification, then is the first step, or plateau, of salvation in its totality. The result of justification is perpetual life, though some will begin this perpetual life ahead of others.

Paul then begins to explain the next step in chapt. 6, “sanctification.” Sanctification means to separate, or be set apart. Learning to pattern our life after Christ is the key to sanctification. Paul asks in chapt. 6:1, **“Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?”** He then gives a resounding answer in the next verse. **“God forbid.”** He then spends most of the rest of the epistle telling us how we should live, not from the standpoint of a list of laws that require our obedience to the letter, but rather principles such as judgment, mercy and faith. Certainly these principles include the law, but application of the law using these principles is what God expects of us. The result of being sanctified is obtaining the **“prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus,”** (Phil. 3:14), obtaining the rewards of overcoming (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26-28, 3:5, 12, 21), and being in the first resurrection (Rev. 20:4-6).

This leads us to the 3rd step or plateau of salvation, “glorification.” Speaking of being baptized as a symbol of our death and burial, Paul says in Rom. 6:5, **“For if we have been planted (baptized or united) together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.”** If we are resurrected, or changed if we are still living at His coming, after being

sanctified, we will have a body like that of Jesus after His resurrection. If you go back into the gospels to see what that was, you will see that Jesus, instead of being limited to the physical realm as we are now, was equally at home in both the physical and the spiritual realm. I believe this is what we are promised, a glorified body. Not everyone will advance through each of these steps, or plateaus of salvation. Some will face the judgment only having their names written in the book of life. Others will receive their glorified bodies and will reign a thousand years with Christ before the final judgment as we’re told in Rev. 20. Others will reach none of these plateaus in this life, but will only reach them after the judgment.

For the benefit of our study, I want us to concentrate on the sanctification. When I say that forgiveness comes with a price, or requirement, I want us to understand that I am not talking about justification. I am talking about sanctification, something that we have to work towards. In working to be sanctified, we are striving to be overcomers, to be in the first resurrection. So when we read in Matt. 12:31-32, **“Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world (age), neither in the world (age) to come.** we are actually discussing qualifications of an overcomer, not justification, or salvation as it is commonly spoken of.

In teaching His disciples to pray, Jesus said in Matt. 6:12, **“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.”** and then He follows up in verses 14-15, **“For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”** I believe that Matt. 12:31-32 and Matt. 6:14-15 are talking about the same thing.

With this much ground work, we will discuss our subject in more detail in our next issue, God willing. I pray you will see its great importance to each of us. JRL

METEORITE CRATER

Recently, my wife and I had occasion to visit the Barringer Meteorite Crater just off of I-40 in Arizona. This was our second visit because we found it hard to absorb the immensity of it in just one visit. Scientists estimate that a meteor 150 feet across weighing approximately 300,000 tons impacting the earth caused this crater. The crater is nearly 1 mile wide and 570 feet deep with the wall that was pushed up around the edge being 150 feet above the surrounding plain. Scientists calculate that the meteorite was traveling

at 28,600 miles per hour when it impacted with the earth. The force of the impact would be equal to 2.5 megatons of TNT, or about 150 times the force of the atomic bomb that destroyed Hiroshima, Japan in 1945. There are other theories of what caused the crater, but research

in the early 1960's have confirmed that it was a meteorite that caused the crater. We're told that there are thousands of meteorites that impact the earth each year, but most weigh 1/4 pound or less. One the size of the Barringer meteorite are thought to only occur once every thousand years. Possibly the most recent impact was a mysterious explosion that devastated an area in Siberia approximately the size of the state of Rhode Island in 1908.

The reason this crater fascinated me is

that there are a number of miracles reported in Scripture that could very well have been miracles of timing rather than content. By this I mean that our Father in heaven may very well have used what we today call natural disasters to bring about the results He desired at the location in question. I'm not sure that science has yet to be able to even begin to estimate the terrific power that can be and has been released by some of these "natural disasters" such as meteorite impacts, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, hurricanes and typhoons, etc. If and when the power of these types of things is used to bring about a "miracle" in another part of the earth, the miracle is not so much what happened, but that it happened exactly when it did. I do not intend at all to diminish the miraculous work of our Father in heaven when I say that, but rather if these events were used by our Father, then they very strongly enforce His sovereignty in my mind. For example, these meteors



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have been traveling in space for thousands of years and to have one impact the earth at just the right moment to cause something else to happen that appears to us to be a miracle event tells me that God planned it all from the very moment of creation. Sovereignty doesn't get much stronger than that.

There are a number of events that we see that could have been caused by the terrible force of one of these so called natural disasters. To list a few examples, please look at Joshua 10. Here 5 Amorite kings, after hearing of how Joshua had destroyed Jericho and Ai, and how the Gibeonites had made peace with Israel, confederated to destroy the Gibeonites. But because the Israelites had made a treaty with Gibeon promising protection, it was necessary that Joshua and Israel had to go help the Gibeonites against these five kings.

God promised Joshua that He had delivered the five kings into Joshua's hand and a great slaughter ensued with more of the Amorites being killed by great hailstones from heaven than by the sword of the Israelites. As the day began to draw to a close, The Israelites were not done, so Joshua prayed in verse 12, **"Then spake Joshua to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in the book of Jasher? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day. An there was no day like that before it or after it, that the LORD hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the LORD fought for Israel."**

For this to happen would probably mean that the earth would have to shift on its axis. Scientists believe that this has happened and even predict that it is likely that it will happen again fairly soon. It this is what happened, what would have caused it to do so? We don't know, but the possibility of a terrific earthquake, a major volcanic eruption or the impact of a large meteor are certainly possibilities. If one of these things happened in another part of the earth but caused the sun to appear to stand still over Gibeon, this is what I mean about it being a miracle of timing.

Another example is found in II Kings 20. King Hezekiah was very sick and about to die. The prophet Isaiah came to him and told him to

set his house in order because he was going to die. Hezekiah prayed begging the LORD to not let him die. The LORD heard his prayer and instructed Isaiah to back to him and tell him that He would heal him and add 15 years to his life. When Isaiah told him this, Hezekiah asked Isaiah what would be the sign that the LORD heal him. Starting in verse 9, **"And Isaiah said, This sign shalt thou have of the LORD, that the LORD will do the thing that he hath spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten degrees, or go back ten degrees? And Hezekiah answered, it is a light thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees: nay, but let the shadow return backward ten degrees. And Isaiah the prophet cried unto the LORD: and he brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which it had gone down in the dial of Ahaz."** Here again, the length of the day was extended, this time by about 40 minutes. We are not told how God did this, but again, I believe it possible by some catastrophic event somewhere else that had that effect in Jerusalem.

In Matthew 27, when Jesus died on the cross, we're told in verse 51, **"And behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent."** We're told here that there was an earthquake, but again it was a miracle of timing. There are several events like these such as the waters being pushed back as the Israelites crossed the Red Sea during the exodus from Egypt and also as they crossed the Jordan River as they entered the land of Canaan that might be explained by such natural forces timed just right by our LORD. It is not something we can prove but it is something to think about. **JRL**