

# Which Gospel?

## Introduction

We are often exhorted in church to believe and preach the gospel. What is meant by gospel? Perhaps more importantly, which gospel (or gospels) are we supposed to follow and preach? Yes, there is more than one gospel in the Bible.

The English word *gospel* is only used in the New Testament and is derived from the Greek word *ūangelion*,<sup>1</sup> meaning *good news* or a *good message*. A related Greek word, *ūangelizo*, means to announce, proclaim, or preach good news or glad tidings. Therefore, when we read the word *gospel* in our Bible, we know it is talking about good news. There is more than one thing described as good news, however, so we need to understand the context in which the word *gospel* is used.

It is not uncommon to hear about the *gospel of Jesus*. What is being referred to? Is it talking about the good news *about Jesus* or the good news *preached by Jesus*? These are two different things. To further muddy the waters, the *King James Version* (KJV) and the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB) never refer to the *gospel of Jesus* in those words. There are similar names, as we will see, but I think it is important that we know what we're talking about—and using it in the proper context—when it comes to using Scripture in our service to God.

The purpose of this study is to see how the word *gospel* is used in Scripture and to demonstrate that there is more than one gospel. The various gospels will be identified and briefly described; other studies that provide additional information will be referenced as appropriate. Looking forward, we'll see that not all gospels apply to us as members of the body of Christ.

Before a person can begin to understand the different gospels and who they apply to, or truly understand anything in Scripture for that matter, one needs to be a child of God. We need to have the Spirit of God (the Holy Spirit) in us to understand the things of God (I Corinthians 2:12-13). So, how does one become a child of God?

The bad news is that everyone sins and falls short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). In fact, God considers us to be dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1-3). Therefore, we can't appease or please God in our natural condition (Romans 8:5-8). God, however, provided a remedy for our lost condition. His good news—the gospel of our salvation—is that His Son Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised again (I Corinthians 15:1-4). If we believe this gospel, then we are saved from the consequences of our sins by the grace of God and inherit eternal life in Christ (Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:4-7). God considers us to be in Christ, and He seals us in Christ by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:1; I Corinthians 12:12-13; Ephesians 1:13-14). From the moment we believe in our heart the gospel of salvation, nothing can separate us from God or His love for us (Romans 8:31-39; 10:9-10). **Do you believe that Christ died for you?**<sup>2</sup>

**Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached**

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<sup>1</sup> From *The Englishman's Greek Concordance of the New Testament* (G.V. Wigram).

<sup>2</sup> See the author's **Good News!** for more information on salvation.

to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. (I Corinthians 15:1-4)<sup>3</sup>

In Him [*Christ*], you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory. (Ephesians 1:13-14)

### How Many Gospels?

The two Bible versions I use most often for my own studies are the KJV and NASB. When writing up my studies I usually use the NASB because I have found it to be nearly as accurate as the KJV<sup>4</sup> and because it is translated in modern English. Because the KJV was the standard Bible version in my youth and the version from which we memorized verses, my primary concordance is the KJV-based *Abingdon’s Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. I also use my *New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* extensively because of my familiarity with the NASB. These are my sources for this study, along with my copy of *The Englishman’s Greek Concordance of the New Testament*.

As mentioned earlier, the word *gospel* only appears in the New Testament, and it is described in numerous ways. The gospel goes by names indicating what or who the gospel is about, as well as in terms that describe aspects or qualities of the gospel. The following names of gospels are as stated in the KJV, and all of the associated references are cited. When different, the equivalent NASB text is noted. You may note differences in the Bible versions you use.

#### Gospel Names

KJV	Reference	NASB
gospel of the kingdom	Matthew 4:23 Matthew 9:35 Matthew 24:14	same same same
gospel of the kingdom of God	Mark 1:14	gospel of God (refers to <i>the kingdom of God</i> in Mark 1:15)
gospel of the grace of God	Acts 20:24	same
gospel of God	Romans 1:1 Romans 15:16 II Corinthians 11:7 I Thessalonians 2:2 I Thessalonians 2:8-9 I Peter 4:17	same same same same same same

<sup>3</sup> All references are quoted from the *New American Standard Bible* (1996). Words in brackets are either equivalent words from the *King James Version* or, if in italics, were added by the author for clarification.

<sup>4</sup> I have found translation errors in both the KJV and NASB based on context rather than a working knowledge of ancient Hebrew and Greek languages. Where I believe errors occur, the translators inserted or replaced words or location names based on their understanding of what or who they thought a passage was talking about (which is understandable, especially considering that the original texts lacked punctuation as we know it) or current geography (instead of what existed at the time of writing, which they could not know).

KJV	Reference	NASB
gospel of Jesus Christ	Mark 1:1	same
gospel of Christ	Romans 1:16 Romans 15:19 Romans 15:29 I Corinthians 9:12 I Corinthians 9:18 II Corinthians 4:4 II Corinthians 9:13 II Corinthians 10:14 Galatians 1:7 Philippians 1:27 I Thessalonians 3:2	gospel same blessing of Christ same gospel gospel of the glory of Christ same same same same same same
gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ	II Thessalonians 1:8	gospel of our Lord Jesus
gospel of His Son	Romans 1:9	same
Christ's gospel	II Corinthians 2:12	gospel of Christ
gospel of peace	Romans 10:15 Ephesians 6:15	not in NASB same
gospel of the uncircumcision	Galatians 2:7	gospel to the uncircumcised
<i>gospel</i> <sup>5</sup> of the circumcision	Galatians 2:7	to the circumcised
gospel of your salvation	Ephesians 1:13	same
glorious gospel of the blessed God	I Timothy 1:11	same

The above table suggests that there is more than one gospel in Scripture. If so, are they all different gospels or do some gospels have multiple names? Do some gospels apply only to Israel, and others only to the members of the body of Christ? Are some gospels more general and directed to everyone without distinction? I will try to answer these questions, according to my understanding, in the following sections. You are encouraged to read the references and search the Scriptures for your own understanding.

### The Gospel of the Kingdom

**Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people.**  
(Matthew 4:23)

**The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.** (Mark 1:1)

The first mention of the word *gospel* in the New Testament<sup>6</sup> is in Matthew 4:23 where it says that Jesus was proclaiming *the gospel of the kingdom*. Prior to that time, John the Baptist was also preaching

<sup>5</sup> The word *gospel* was added by the KJV translators, which correctly conveys the meaning of the verse.

<sup>6</sup> The word *gospel* is in the titles of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in most Bible versions. However, the titles were added by the translators and are not from the original texts. In truth, this usage is incorrect because two gospels are described in these books, as will be discussed.

about the kingdom, and Scripture refers to the beginning of his ministry as the beginning of *the gospel of Jesus Christ*. So, we have proclamations about the good news of Jesus Christ and good news about a kingdom. Let's look into these gospels and see what they are about and if they are different.

## **The Gospel of Jesus Christ**

Because John the Baptist's ministry preceded that of Jesus, we'll address *the gospel of Jesus Christ* first. In Mark 1:2-6, the text explains who John the Baptist was and that, in accordance with prophecy, he was sent by God to prepare the way for Jesus Christ. Not only did John the Baptist preach about the kingdom, but he preached the good news of Jesus Christ.

**And he was preaching, and saying, "After me One [Jesus Christ] is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals. I baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." (Mark 1:7-8)**

What was the good news about Jesus Christ? The good news was that He was the Son of God and that He was coming. Of course, Jesus was already alive when John the Baptist began His ministry, but God had not yet revealed who Jesus was until He was baptized by John. Furthermore, Jesus was the prophesied Messiah (the Christ) and Savior of Israel (Daniel 9:25-26; John 1:41; 4:25-26). He was spoken of in veiled terms throughout the Old Testament and was now in the presence of His people Israel.

**In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; and a voice came out of the heavens: "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased." (Mark 1:9-11)**

**And He [Jesus] said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ [Messiah] to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures. (Luke 24:25-27)**

Therefore, the first good news proclaimed to the people of Israel was that their promised Messiah was coming, and that He was Jesus Christ, the Son of God. What was He coming to do? He was coming as King, but king of who and what? This is what *the gospel of the kingdom* is about. The gospel of Jesus Christ, or the good news *about* Him, is an integral part of the gospel of the kingdom. Before we go any further, here are some things to consider about the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom. Did Christ establish a kingdom? No, but why not? What happened? Was the gospel of the kingdom a false hope? No, it wasn't, as we shall see.

## **The Kingdom of Heaven**

As said in Matthew 4:23, Jesus proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom to the people (His people) of Israel. It was the same proclamation that John the Baptist made, and the same proclamation that Jesus instructed His disciples to make (Matthew 10:5-8). Jesus described this kingdom in great detail throughout His ministry. Let's look at a few verses in Matthew, Mark, and Luke to see what this kingdom is called.

**Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 3:1-2)**

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

**Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”** (Mark 1:14-15)

**But He [Jesus] said to them, “I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose.” So He kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.** (Luke 4:43-44)

For reasons I do not understand, the kingdom that was being preached was referred to as *the kingdom of heaven* in Matthew and *the kingdom of God* in equivalent verses in Mark and Luke. When this is the case, the verses are speaking of Israel’s promised kingdom on earth, where their Messiah would reign as King of kings. We will see later that the *kingdom of God* is also used in an entirely different sense.

So, what was the gospel of the kingdom preached by John the Baptist, Jesus, and His twelve disciples? The good news was that Israel’s long-promised kingdom was at hand, or imminent. As foretold by the prophets, the people of Israel were looking forward to when they would be gathered into their promised land and would be ruled by a righteous descendent of King David, saved from oppression by their enemies (Ezekiel 36:22-36; 37:15-28; Jeremiah 33:14-16).

All Israel had to do to receive their kingdom was to believe the good news that it was imminent and to repent of their sins and be baptized (Mark 1:4, 14-15; Luke 24:46-47; Acts 2:37-39; 3:18-26). In accordance with prophecy, that process would include the righteous cleansing of Israel and time of great tribulation. However, the prophetic clock (i.e., fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies regarding the last days<sup>7</sup>) started with the birth of Jesus (Matthew 1:18-23), followed by the appearance of John the Baptist to prepare the way for Jesus (Matthew 3:1-3), and subsequently by the appearance of Jesus to His people (Matthew 4:12-17). We need to remember that all of the events recorded about Jesus and His ministry to His people, including His birth, death, and resurrection, were in accordance with prophecy (Luke 24:44-47).

It is important to realize that the kingdom of heaven that was preached is about Israel’s earthly kingdom and not about heaven itself. As Jesus conducted His ministry throughout Judea, He explained what the promised and imminent kingdom would be like. Many of His recorded statements in Matthew began with the words such as “the kingdom of heaven is like” or “the kingdom of heaven is likened [*may be compared*] to” (e.g., Matthew 13:24, 31, 33). Jesus promised Peter that he would be the leader of the twelve disciples, and that they would sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 16:13-19; 19:28). Christ Himself will rule from Jerusalem—actually New Jerusalem (Revelation 21)—not only as King of the Jews but as the King of kings (Matthew 27:11; Revelation 17:14; 19:16; 21:22-24). It is also important to realize that during the first 1,000 years of the kingdom (until all of God’s enemies are defeated and judged—Revelation 20:7-15) that sinful nations will reside outside of the promised land

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<sup>7</sup> See the author’s **The Mystery (God’s Secret Plan)** for a summary of fulfillment of prophecies concerning the last days.

and that their kings will come to New Jerusalem to pay homage to Christ the King<sup>8</sup> (Revelation 21:24; 22:15).

This heavenly kingdom on earth is described extensively, both physically and experientially, throughout Scripture; except, however, in Paul's epistles. He did not tell us about life in the kingdom because we will not be a part of it. However, Paul briefly summarized some of the things that will happen after the rapture and during the time of great tribulation to help us understand that the rapture will occur *before* the fulfillment of prophetic events of the great tribulation (I Thessalonians 5:1-11; II Thessalonians 2:1-12).<sup>9</sup> Not until Revelation 21 is the kingdom referred to as New Jerusalem, but this city is the subject of prophecies concerning the kingdom beginning with the garden of Eden, which is a type (figurative or foreshadowing example) of the kingdom (Ezekiel 36:35). A few of the aspects of this kingdom are listed below:

- The *unoccupied* miraculous city will descend out of the heavens as the bride of Christ<sup>10</sup> onto a reconstructed world—a result of God establishing a new heaven and new earth<sup>11</sup>—after God's judgments during the great tribulation that will result in a reconfiguration of the earth's surface (Jeremiah 30:23-24; Revelation 6:12-17; 8:7-12).
- Its layout, which will be exceedingly larger than that of Israel during the Old Testament (as apportioned to eleven tribes of Israel), will be *three* dimensional (a cube), with the length of each side being approximately 1,400 – 1,500 miles (Revelation 21:15-16). The height component *may* have something to do with the light of Christ that will illumine the world—there will be no night, at least in the holy city but perhaps in the entire world as it is configured at that time (Revelation 21:22-25; 22:5).
- It will be surrounded by a wall built on a foundation of precious stones and that will have twelve gates (Revelation 21:12-14, 17-21).
- Christ the Lamb of God will reign over the city and the nations of the world (Matthew 25:31; Revelation 21:22-24). All of the nations that are spared by God during the great tribulation will continue to be sinful and will reside outside of New Jerusalem. Christ will rule them with a rod of iron (Psalm 2:9; Revelation 12:5), and the kings will pay homage to Christ who will be the King of kings (Psalm 2:10-12; Revelation 21:24).

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<sup>8</sup> The magi who followed the star to the residence of Jesus were seeking the King of the Jews in order to worship Him and present gifts (Matthew 2:1-2, 11). They were a type (foreshadowing representative) of the rulers of the nations outside of New Jerusalem who will go to the holy city to pay homage to Christ, the King of kings, whose light will illumine the world (Revelation 21:24-26). The star the magi followed was likely a type of the miraculous light of Christ during the millennium.

<sup>9</sup> Paul explained these things because false brethren were erroneously teaching the Thessalonian brethren that the rapture either wouldn't occur or had already occurred, and that they would have to experience the great tribulation (I Thessalonians 4:13; II Thessalonians 2:1-3). Similar false teaching continues today.

<sup>10</sup> Contrary to traditional teaching, believers today are *not* the bride of Christ mentioned in verses 2 and 9 of Revelation 21. We are members of His body and are one with Him (I Corinthians 12:12-13; Galatians 3:27-28), and are already seated with Him in the heavens at the right hand of God (Ephesians 2:4-6). Paul never said that we will occupy a city in heaven or return to earth in a city. In fact, there is no such promise for anyone in Scripture.

<sup>11</sup> It is often taught that the new heaven and new earth will be established after the great white throne judgment. However, the events of Revelation 21 and 22 occur *before* that judgment—the book of Revelation is not written in chronological order. Those chapters describe the millennial kingdom, during which sin and the nations reside outside of New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:24; 22:15). There are no prophecies outside of Paul's letters that describe what will happen after the final judgment at the great white throne.

- It will have dwelling places and a (one) street of gold (John 14:1-3; Revelation 21:21).
- It will become occupied by the believers since Adam who died with a kingdom hope (they will be resurrected),<sup>12</sup> by the believers who will survive the great tribulation (Matthew 10:22-23; 24:13-14), and by those who will be born in the city during the 1,000-year kingdom (Isaiah 65:23). Members of the body of Christ saved during this dispensation of grace have no promise to occupy the millennial kingdom.
- There will be no sin or death inside the city (Revelation 21:4, 27). It will be perfect just as the garden of Eden was made in perfection. Everyone will live according to God's will because they will have the law of God written on their hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27).
- The resurrected twelve apostles will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:27-28; Luke 22:28-30). As judges, their role may be that of overseers because there will no sinful activities in the holy city for them to judge.
- The people of God who survive the great tribulation will enter (alive—fully physical but sinless bodies) into the kingdom (Matthew 25:31-34), will marry and have children (Isaiah 65:17-23), and will cultivate the land in some manner (Isaiah 65:21-22; Jeremiah 31:1-5; Ezekiel 34:29; 36:29-30, 34).<sup>13</sup>

At the end of the millennial reign of Christ—the first 1,000 years of the kingdom—Satan will be released from the bottomless pit<sup>14</sup> and will lead the nations in a final battle against New Jerusalem; he and the nations will be defeated by the fire of God from heaven and he will be cast into the lake of fire at that time and for eternity (Revelation 20:7-10). This will be followed by the judgment at the great white throne, when all those who died without Christ will be raised from the dead, judged by Christ as guilty for their works (their works will be judged as unrighteous because of their sin), and cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15).

*After* the judgment at the great white throne, Christ will hand the kingdom over to God the Father (I Corinthians 15:20-28). This truth was revealed only by the Apostle Paul. Furthermore, *after* the kingdom is handed over to God, all those in Christ, both in heaven and on earth, will be gathered together in Christ. This truth, also, was disclosed only by the Apostle Paul and was referred to as the mystery of God's will (Ephesians 1:9-10). This place *may* be New Jerusalem on earth because the kingdom was prophesied as an everlasting kingdom (Luke 1:32-33; Ezekiel 37:24-28); however, only the first 1,000 years are described in Scripture, during which time sin will still exist in the world.

Brethren, all those who have been, and will be, saved during this dispensation of grace have no promise to reside in this kingdom, at least not for the first 1,000 years of it. Our hope is a heavenly hope with no physical conditions or constraints (Colossians 1:3-5; I Corinthians 15:50-57; I Thessalonians

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<sup>12</sup> This is the prophesied first resurrection (Revelation 20:4-6; Ezekiel 37:11-14; John 6:39-44; 11:24).

<sup>13</sup> The children of God who died with the kingdom hope (but *not* members of the body of Christ who die with a heavenly hope), will be resurrected and will enter into and live in the kingdom. They will apparently have physical bodies like Jesus had after His resurrection—physical yet spiritual (John 20:19-27; Luke 24:36-43), and will not marry or have children (Matthew 22:29-30).

<sup>14</sup> Satan will be cast into the bottomless pit after being defeated at the battle of Armageddon at the end of the great tribulation (Revelation 20:1-3).

4:13-17).<sup>15</sup> If we believe that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised again, then God considers us to be His children (Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 3:26), we are members of the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:12-13; Galatians 3:27-28), and are already citizens of heaven, seated in Christ at the right hand of God (Philippians 3:20-21; Ephesians 2:4-7).

We are not going to occupy New Jerusalem in heaven and then come down to earth for Christ's millennial reign. If it were so, then it seems certain that the Apostle Paul would have said something about it to prepare us for it. Some teach that it wasn't necessary for him to talk about us living in the millennial kingdom because it had already been revealed in Scripture. That logic doesn't hold true, however, because Paul was the apostle of the Gentiles (Romans 11:13), who had no knowledge of God's dealings with, or plans for, Israel. Therefore, if God had intended for the believing Gentiles in this dispensation to occupy New Jerusalem, then Paul would have told them so. We must be careful not to claim the promises of God that are directed specifically to His nation Israel.

### **Other Names for the Millennial Kingdom**

We have seen that the promised kingdom is referred to as *the kingdom of heaven* in Matthew and as *the kingdom of God* in equivalent verses in Mark and Luke. The millennial kingdom is referred to as the kingdom of God once in the book of John when Jesus explained to Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, that a person must be born again to enter into the kingdom (John 3:1-6). It is called by other names in the New Testament, however.

The millennial kingdom is referred to by Christ as *the kingdom of their Father* (God) in Matthew 13:41-43. He also called it *My Father's kingdom* in Matthew 26:29. It also seems certain that Peter is referring to the millennial kingdom when he tells the kingdom brethren about entering into *the everlasting* (eternal) *kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* (II Peter 1:10-11). When Jesus was entering Jerusalem on a colt, the people shouted out that blessed is the coming *kingdom of our father David* (Mark 11:9-10). They were referring to the promised kingdom where the righteous offspring of King David—Christ—would rule over Israel (Ezekiel 34:23-24; 37:24-28; Jeremiah 30:8-9).

## **Other Kingdoms**

### **The Kingdom of God**

*The kingdom of God* has two meanings in Scripture, and the meanings are determined by the context in which the name is used. We have already looked at its use regarding the prophesied kingdom on earth. However, it is also used to refer to the overall realm of God. Although Christ will be King of kings when He rules from New Jerusalem, God the Father is already King of kings and the Lord of the heavens and the earth (I Timothy 6:15-16; Matthew 11:25; Psalm 47). The passage in I Timothy is often taught as a reference to Christ as being the King of kings, but the context is describing God the Father who will bring about the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ and whom no man has seen or can see (see

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<sup>15</sup> Whether through resurrection or through the rapture, our bodies will be changed to be like that of the body of our Lord's glory (Philippians 3:20-21; I Corinthians 15:35-54). Apparently, this will be like His spiritual body after His ascension (as He is in the presence of God) and not like His physical body after His resurrection.



also I Timothy 1:17). Paul never refers to Christ as our King in his letters (Romans through Philemon) to the members of the body of Christ—us.

It appears that all references to the kingdom of God in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and the first part of Acts (Acts 1:3; 8:12) are referring to the prophesied kingdom on earth. Although Jesus' discourse with Nicodemus (John 3:1-15) was about being born again, His ministry was about proclaiming His coming kingdom; a person had to be born again prior to entering into the kingdom. However, every time Paul referred to the kingdom of God in his letters and as recorded in Acts, he was talking about God's heavenly realm and not the prophesied kingdom (e.g., Acts 14:22; 19:8; 28:30-31; Romans 14:16-17; I Corinthians 15:50; II Thessalonians 1:5).

## The Kingdom of Christ

The Apostle Paul also mentions *the kingdom of Christ and of God* (Ephesians 5:5) and *the kingdom of His dear* (beloved) *Son* (Colossians 1:13). In these verses and their associated passages, Paul was writing to those who were already members of Christ's—and God's—heavenly realm. This is the heaven of which we are already citizens and where we reside in Christ at the right hand of God. It may also be *the third heaven* that Paul was miraculously caught up into to receive revelations from Jesus Christ (II Corinthians 12:1-2).

In the Ephesians passage (Ephesians 5:1-21), Paul was exhorting the brethren to conduct their lives as befitting children of God. Paul was reminding the Colossian brethren in Colossians 1:9-14 that God had rescued them from the domain of darkness (sin and death—Ephesians 2:1-7) when He saved them and that they, too, should walk worthy of their salvation.<sup>16</sup> Finally, Paul also referred to the heavenly realm as *His* (God's) *heavenly kingdom* in II Timothy 4:18.<sup>17</sup> Although the millennial kingdom will originate from heaven as New Jerusalem and will be ruled by Christ the King, it is never referred to in Scripture as *the kingdom of Christ* or the *heavenly kingdom*.

## The Gospel of the Grace of God

We have seen that there are two gospels in Matthew through early Acts: 1) the gospel of Jesus Christ that is about Him being the Son of God and the promised Messiah of Israel; and 2) the gospel of the kingdom regarding the good news of the imminent establishment of Christ's millennial kingdom on earth. The Apostle Paul's message wasn't about Christ as our Messiah or about the millennial kingdom. However, Paul spoke of many gospels, all but one falling under the umbrella of *the gospel of the grace of God*.

**But I [Paul] do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.** (Acts 20:24)

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<sup>16</sup> See the author's **Walk Worthy** that addresses how we should live in response to what God did for us through Christ.

<sup>17</sup> I believe that this verse is referring to God's heavenly kingdom because it's followed by *to whom (Him) be glory forever and ever. Amen*. All other verses with a similar phrase refer to God the Father—we are to give Him the glory (e.g., Romans 16:27; Galatians 1:3-5; Philippians 4:20). See the author's **Who Do We Worship?** for more information on this subject.

There is much about the Apostle Paul and his message that is unknown or misunderstood by many brethren. The kingdom required twelve apostles (including Matthias who replaced Judas by the will of God—Acts 1:15-26). After Israel's continued rejection of God and His Son, culminated by the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:51-60), God saved Saul (soon after known as Paul), His leading enemy, and appointed him as the apostle of the Gentiles (Acts 9:1-16; Romans 11:13; Galatians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1; I Timothy 1:15-16). This appointment of another apostle wasn't needed to fulfill God's prophetic plan. However, as God already knew from the beginning that His people would reject His Son, He already had a plan—a secret plan—developed before the world began and ready to reveal in due time. It was now due time and Paul was chosen to be the dispenser of the gospel of the grace of God (Ephesians 3:1-12) just as Moses was chosen to be the dispenser of the law of God (aka *the Law of Moses*). In doing so, God temporarily set Israel and its kingdom promises aside (i.e., the kingdom of heaven was no longer imminent), which is a condition that remains to this day (Romans 11:25-32).

Paul referred to this secret plan of God as *the mystery*. This mystery had been kept secret in God since *before* the world began—there is not even a hint of it outside of Paul's letters (I Corinthians 2:6-10; Romans 16:25-27; Colossians 1:25-27). It contrasts with God's prophetic plan, which had been spoken of since the world began (Luke 1:68-75; Acts 3:17-26). The mystery is based on the finished work of Christ at the cross: His death for our sins, His burial, and His resurrection through which we are reconciled to God, justified, glorified, and sanctified (Romans 5:1, 8-11; 8:29-30; 15:16). Indeed, our Lord's death, burial, and resurrection were prophesied (Luke 24:25-27), but the full and eternal ramifications of His work on the cross were not made known until revealed through Paul.

**Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages [world] to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. (I Corinthians 2:6-8)**

**Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past [since the world began]. (Romans 16:25)**

More information on the mystery and its many aspects is provided in the author's **The Mystery (God's Secret Plan)**. However, it might be helpful at this point to explain its source. The twelve apostles were instructed by Jesus during His ministry on earth and after His resurrection, but prior to His ascension. Paul, however, was instructed by the risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ starting with his salvation (Acts 9:1-16). Paul refers to other revelations to him by Christ in his letters (Acts 20:24; Galatians 1:11-12; II Corinthians 12:1-4; Romans 16:25; Ephesians 3:1-5). He emphasized that he did not learn the message that he preached from the twelve apostles or any other man (Galatians 1:11-12), but that Jesus Christ was the author of both the gospel of the grace of God (aka the gospel of the uncircumcision—discussed later) that was entrusted to Paul and the gospel of the kingdom (aka the gospel of the circumcision) that was entrusted to Peter (Galatians 2:7-8). Furthermore, Paul was the only

person to whom Christ revealed the word of God after His ascension, and the revelation of the mystery fulfilled (completed) the revealed eternal plan of God (Ephesians 3:8-11; Colossians 1:25-27).<sup>18</sup>

The gospel of the grace of God is probably the centerpiece of the mystery. So, what specifically is the good news? Among other things, the good news includes the following changes from God's prophetic plan:

- We are saved by the grace of God through faith apart from works (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:4-7; Romans 4:4-5). Salvation prior to this gospel was based on faith *plus* works—works were evidence of a person's faith (Mark 1:4; 16:16; Matthew 19:20-22; Acts 2:37-37-38, 44-45).<sup>19</sup>
- We are no longer under the Law of Moses (Romans 6:14). The Law, because it is righteous, actually convicted us and condemned us to death (Galatians 3:10-14; II Corinthians 3:6). Thankfully, God took it out of our way by nailing it to the cross with Christ (Colossians 2:13-14).<sup>20</sup>
- There is no difference between Jews and Gentiles (Romans 10:12). The Jews—the people of God's chosen nation of Israel—do not have any advantage with God in this dispensation of grace. God views everyone as being equally sinful (Romans 3:9)—we are all unrighteous—and everyone has equal access to God through faith in Christ's death for our sins, His burial, and His resurrection on our behalf (Romans 3:21-23; 10:8-13).
- Through our Lord's death for us, God broke down (removed) the wall dividing mankind (Jews and Gentiles) from Him; God has reconciled us to Himself through the shed blood of Christ (Ephesians 2:11-18).

There is so much more to the gospel of grace, but these things are truly good news for us. Let's look at some other references to gospels that are specific parts of the gospel of the grace of God.

## The Gospel of Christ

I made a point at the beginning of this study that there is not really a *gospel of Jesus* as such in Scripture, but that there are similar names with different purposes. We saw in Mark 1:1-8 where John the Baptist began the ministry of *the gospel of Jesus Christ* regarding the imminent appearance of Israel's prophesied Messiah (the Christ). This is the only reference in the so-called gospel accounts (Matthew through John) of such a gospel, but Jesus Christ is confirmed as the Son of God and as the

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<sup>18</sup> The book of Revelation is about the revelation of Jesus Christ, but He communicated it to John *through* His angel (Revelation 1:1-2) and not directly as He did with Paul. Furthermore, the book of Revelation fills in the final details of the prophesied last days (which began with the birth of Jesus) and covers the time after the rapture through to the final judgment at the great white throne at the end of the 1,000-year (millennial) kingdom. The book of Revelation has nothing to do with the revelation of the mystery or the gospel of the grace of God.

<sup>19</sup> If Noah had acknowledged that God would send a great flood but had decided that building an ark on dry land was a bit too much to ask, then his faith would have been in vain (not sincere; worthless) and he would have died in the flood. If Abraham had believed God that he would be the father of many nations and yet decided that God was asking too much to sacrifice his son Isaac, then he would have been counted as unrighteous. If people during Christ's earthly ministry repented of their sins but figured that water baptism or adhering to the Law of Moses were not necessary, then their repentance was in vain. Obedient works were proof of a person's faith prior to the gospel of grace.

<sup>20</sup> This truth was first revealed through Paul. Jesus had commanded His disciples to continue obeying the Law of Moses (Matthew 23:1-3; 28:19-20) and the record in Acts verified that they did (Acts 21:17-21).

Savior and King of the Jews throughout these books. It doesn't apply to us today because we are not waiting for Christ the Messiah to come and save us and to establish His kingdom for us.

Paul, on the other hand, has much to say about *the gospel of Christ*, which also goes by the names of *the gospel of His Son*, *the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ* (KJV), and *Christ's gospel* (KJV). Refer to the table near the beginning of this study for the associated references. The focus of this gospel is what Christ accomplished for us at the cross, which is the basis of the gospel of the grace of God.

**Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.** (Philippians 1:27)

## The Gospel of Salvation

Closely related to, and perhaps a different name for, the gospel of Christ is the gospel of salvation. The good news is that despite being dead in sin, God sent His Son to die for our sins. By believing in what Christ accomplished for us at the cross, we are saved from the consequences of our sins and God considers us to be righteous in Christ (II Corinthians 5:21; Romans 4:4-5; 5:18-19). Please bear with me as I repeat the following passages that are provided at the beginning of this study:

**In Him [Christ], you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.** (Ephesians 1:13-14)

**Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.** (I Corinthians 15:1-4)

If someone were to ask about the gospel of salvation or how to be saved, the answer is concisely provided in I Corinthians 15:1-4 (and repeated in the same sense throughout Paul's letters). The gospel of Christ and the gospel of salvation are part of the revelation of the mystery to and through the Apostle Paul. Christ's death for our sins was not God's *Plan B* to address the sinfulness of mankind. His sacrifice for us was planned by God from the very beginning. In fact, all believers of all ages (dispensations) were and will be saved by Christ's redemptive work at the cross, although this was not known until revealed through Paul (Romans 3:21-26). Now, in this dispensation of grace, it is the good news of salvation for us to believe by faith. Important components of the gospel of Christ and the gospel of salvation, much of which have already been discussed but bear repeating for this context, include:

- Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Romans 1:1-6). This was also preached as part of the kingdom message but for a different purpose. Jesus was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel (Matthew 15:24; see also Matthew 10:5-7), which were those of His people who would become convicted of their sins and would subsequently repent and be baptized for the remission of sins (as opposed to self-righteous people like the Scribes and Pharisees). Gentiles would be blessed through redeemed Israel (Acts 1:7-8, Isaiah 49:6; Micah 4:1-3; Genesis 12:1-3). Now, through

the gospel of salvation, we learn that Christ, the Son of God, died for everyone without distinction.

- Christ was sinless but became sin on our behalf (II Corinthians 5:21).
- Everyone is equally guilty before God, and everyone, whether Jew or Gentile, male or female, or slave or free person, has equal access to God through faith in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection for us.
- Those who believe the gospel of salvation are made children of God and heirs in Christ (Romans 8:16-17), are made members of the body of Christ—we are one with Him (Galatians 3:26-28), have been raised up with Christ and are in Him at the right hand of God, and are sealed by the Holy Spirit—nothing can separate us from the love of God (Ephesians 1:13-14; Romans 8:31-39). Furthermore, when we believe the gospel of salvation, God counts us to be righteous in Christ and He glorifies, sanctifies, and justifies us because we are in Christ (Romans 5:1, 8-11; 8:29-30; 15:16).
- When we believe the gospel of salvation, we are transformed from being spiritually dead in sin to being alive in Christ (Ephesians 2:1-6). Furthermore, we are made complete in Christ (Colossians 2:9-10).
- When we believe the gospel of salvation, we become ambassadors (representatives) of Christ (II Corinthians 5:20). As such, we are exhorted to walk worthy of our salvation (Ephesians 4:1-3; Colossians 1:9-12).

**For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.** (Ephesians 2:8-9)

We also obtain the sure (certain) hope of eternal life upon belief of the gospel of salvation (Titus 3:4-7; Romans 6:23). All believers of all ages also looked forward to eternal life, so this gospel gives us the same hope. Prior to the revelation of the mystery and the gospel of grace, however, those who believed the message of God looked forward to being resurrected to live forever in the promised land (kingdom) of Israel (Ezekiel 37:11-14, 24-28; John 6:39-44). In the meantime, those people are residing in a perfect place referred to as *Abraham's bosom* or *paradise* (Luke 16:19-23; 23:42-43); they will not be with Christ until they are resurrected into His kingdom. As members of the body of Christ, on the other hand, we are already in Christ at the right hand of God and are promised that when we are absent from the body (through physical death) we are at home with our Lord (II Corinthians 5:6-9). Furthermore, we look forward to the so-called rapture when we are either resurrected or caught up to be with our Lord (I Corinthians 15:50-52; I Thessalonians 4:13-17). Unlike those saved with a kingdom hope, we will not participate in the intermediate step of residing in paradise. All believers have the promise of eternal life, however, and all children of God will be brought together in Christ after the judgment at the great white throne (as will be discussed later).

Many believers point to Pentecost as the beginning of the so-called church age, a name most commonly used instead of the age or dispensation of grace (Ephesians 3:1-12; Colossians 1:25-27).<sup>21</sup> However, no church was started at Pentecost—thousands of believers were *added* to the existing kingdom church that Jesus referred to as *the little flock* (Luke 12:31-32; John 21:15-17; Acts 1:13-15). In

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<sup>21</sup> Calling this dispensation of grace *the church age* is appropriate if we are talking about the church which is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23). This church, of which all brethren today are members, started with the salvation of Paul (I Timothy 1:15-16).

fact, *there was no gospel proclaimed by Peter and the others at Pentecost*. Instead, they rightfully accused the people (Jews and Jewish proselytes) of killing their Messiah (Acts 2:22-23). They were responsible for His death, but God had raised Him from the dead as prophesied (Acts 2:24-36). They were to repent for killing Him and were to be baptized for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:37-38). There is nothing in Peter's message about Jesus dying for their sins or salvation by believing in His death for them.<sup>22</sup> Brethren, this is an important point, because the gospel of salvation was first revealed by the Apostle Paul. Consequently, the church of today, which is the body of Christ, began with Paul—it is a result of the gospel of grace.

## **Other Names for the Gospel of Grace**

### ***The Gospel of God***

Paul refers to *the gospel of God* on five occasions in his letters. In Romans 1:1-6, he said that he was called as an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God. In this passage, the good news begins by proclaiming that Jesus Christ was the prophesied Son of God and descendant of David. At first glance this declaration was similar to that of *the gospel of Jesus Christ* in Mark 1:1, 7-8. However, it goes much further by proclaiming that Christ was declared to be the Son of God through His resurrection (instead of through His baptism—Mark 1:9-11) and that this gospel would bring about obedience through faith among the Gentiles. Therefore, *the gospel of God* proclaimed in this passage is the introduction to the full gospel of the grace of God that Paul describes in the book of Romans and throughout his letters.

The other times Paul wrote of the gospel of God refer to his message in general, so it is simply a shortened version of the gospel of the grace of God (Romans 15:16; II Corinthians 11:7; I Thessalonians 2:2, 8-9). In his first letter to Timothy, Paul reminded him that he (Paul) had been entrusted with *the glorious gospel of the blessed God* (I Timothy 1:11), and that Timothy, also, was entrusted with it (I Timothy 6:20-21).

The Apostle Peter referred to *the gospel of God* in I Peter 4:17. He was not addressing the gospel of the grace of God because he was committed with the gospel of the kingdom (also called the gospel of the circumcision that is described later), and his letters were written to kingdom-believing Jewish brethren to encourage them in their suffering for Christ as they waited for His kingdom. His reference to the gospel of God, therefore, was about the overall good news of salvation through Christ's resurrection and that the brethren were secure in God despite their suffering (I Peter 1:1-9; 4:12-19).<sup>23</sup>

### ***The Gospel of Peace***

Paul refers to *his* gospel (Romans 2:16; 16:25; II Timothy 2:8), which is the gospel of the grace of God, as the gospel of peace in Romans 10:15 (KJV) and Ephesians 6:15. The gospel of grace is, indeed, the gospel of peace, but in what sense?

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<sup>22</sup> It was prophesied that Christ would bare *the sin of many* through death (Isaiah 53:11-12), but the context was for His people Israel because of their sin. Furthermore, there was no prophesied proclamation that people would be saved by believing in His death for their sins.

<sup>23</sup> By the time Peter wrote this letter he understood that salvation was because of the resurrection of Christ (it was still faith plus works for the kingdom brethren to whom Peter was writing, however, because they still had to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins). He and the other apostles learned this truth from Paul who was a friend of Peter and who probably wrote the letter to the Hebrews (Galatians 1:18; II Peter 3:14-16)

When the angels praised God for the birth of Jesus, they announced peace on earth (Luke 2:8-14). However, there wasn't suddenly peace because of His birth; the people of Israel and the world as a whole will know peace *only* when Christ rules in His kingdom as the Prince of peace (Isaiah 9:6-7).<sup>24</sup> Therefore, the prophesied peace of Christ's reign will be a political peace. During His millennial reign there will no wars, even though everyone in the nations outside of New Jerusalem will still be living according to their sin nature and worshiping their own gods (Micah 4:1-5).<sup>25</sup> This is why Christ will rule with a rod of iron; He will judge the nations and their people as needed (Psalm 2:9; Revelation 12:5). Despite the miraculous presence of Christ and New Jerusalem, however, they will not repent and turn to God, and will be ready to be organized by Satan for battle against the holy city when he is released from the bottomless pit (Revelation 20:7-9). *This isn't the kind of peace that the gospel of peace is about.*

Through the revelation of the mystery and the proclamation of the gospel of grace, we learn that all mankind was separated from God because of our sin. God had raised up a people for Himself (Jews), but they proved to be just as sinful as everyone else.<sup>26</sup> However, God provided a means of atonement for their sins and access to Himself. The vehicle for atonement was the Law of Moses that explained everything that God considers to be sin and the associated sacrifices, offerings, and observances to atone for their sins and to please God. If they endeavored to obey the Law of Moses by faith, their faith and associated works of obedience were counted as righteousness. What they didn't know was that the atonement of their sins was based on the *future* redemptive work of Christ at the cross.

The Law of Moses was (and is) perfect—it revealed the righteousness of God. Because it is perfect and we aren't, it condemned us to death. Through Paul, we learned that it killed us (II Corinthians 3:5-6). It was a barrier between us and God, and Christ's work at the cross broke down that barrier (Ephesians 2:11-22). We are no longer enemies of God—we are at peace with Him (Romans 4:23 – 5:2). Whereas Peter accused the people of Israel for killing their Messiah, Christ's death is proclaimed as good news in this dispensation of grace—God has made peace with us despite our sinfulness. The gospel of peace, therefore, has to do with the good news that God took the Law out of our way and made peace with mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. Everyone who believes in Christ's work at the cross for us is at peace with God and are full heirs of God through Christ (Romans 8:14-17). We are no longer children of wrath, but children of God (Ephesians 2:1-3).

**Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction [access] by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. (Romans 5:1-2)**

**But now in Christ Jesus you [Gentiles] who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the**

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<sup>24</sup> The angels' proclamation was prophetic in that there will be peace on earth when Christ reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords. Jesus confirmed during His ministry that He didn't come to bring peace at that time, because there would be severe judgment of Israel and the nations before He reigns as king (Matthew 10:34-36).

<sup>25</sup> There will be death among the people outside of New Jerusalem because of their sin nature. However, because the nations will reap the blessings of Christ's reign, a person who dies at the age of 100 will be considered to be young (Isaiah 65:17-20).

<sup>26</sup> From the beginning, mankind worshiped the creature (the creation) rather than the Creator. Even when God raised up a people for Himself and gave them His Law (the Law of Moses), they were continuously obstinate and disobedient, trying to prove their own righteousness but condemning themselves in sin. Romans 1:18 – 3:20 provides a brief history of the sinfulness of mankind and of Israel, thus establishing the need for a Savior.

**barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. (Ephesians 2:13-18)**

So, the gospel of the kingdom included the good news of the political peace that Israel (and the nations by association) would know during Christ's millennial kingdom. This is not the hope for us in this dispensation of grace—we don't have a promised kingdom waiting for us.<sup>27</sup> The gospel of peace explains a fundamental truth of Christ's work on the cross for us: we have peace with God if we believe the gospel of salvation—we are no longer His enemies. There is another kind of peace described in Scripture, though not directly linked to the gospel of peace, that seems appropriate to address here for edification purposes.

Because God has made peace with us and brought us to Himself by His grace, we are also able to know and experience the peace of God in our daily lives (Philippians 4:4-9). Therefore, not only do we have peace *with* God, He has enabled us to know the peace *of* God. This isn't a concept or truth limited to believers in this dispensation of grace. All the children of God in all ages have had the ability to realize the peace of God when they yielded to His will. Although he didn't know what the outcome would be, Daniel knew the peace of God when he disobeyed the king's decree by praying to God because he knew he was faithfully serving God (Daniel 6:10). Although David's life was often in danger, deep down he knew the peace of God and relied on God for his strength (Psalm 4:8; 119:165). When Jesus ministered to His people, He exhorted the people to cast their worries on Him so they would know the peace of God (Matthew 11:28-30). It is God's desire that we recognize the sovereign will of God (He is in control—Romans 8:26-30; Philippians 1:6; 2:12-13), yield the members of our body as instruments of righteousness (Romans 6:12-13), and walk worthy of our salvation (Ephesians 4:1-3; Colossians 1:9-12). By doing so we will know the peace of God that passes all understanding.

**Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable [honest], whatever is right [just], whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell [think] on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me [Paul], practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:6-9)**

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<sup>27</sup> It saddens the author that every Christmas season we hear sermons and sing carols about the peace associated with Christ's birth and declare Him as our King. Brethren, the peace proclaimed at our Lord's birth did not occur then and will not occur until He establishes His kingdom. He will be King of the Jews and the King of kings, but He is not our King today. Proclaiming *the true meaning of Christmas* (which means different things to different people) makes His birth just a *feel-good story* that is easy to disregard because the world knows there is no peace on earth and that Jesus isn't reigning as King. In God's eternal plan, the hidden purpose or meaning (until revealed by Paul as part of the mystery) of our Lord's miraculous birth was that it led to His death for our sins so that we can be saved from the consequences of our sins and have eternal life in Christ (Titus 3:4-7; II Corinthians 5:21; Romans 3:21-26).



## ***The Gospel of the Uncircumcision***

After many years during which Paul had been preaching the gospel of grace to the Gentiles in cities beyond Israel, Paul, Barnabas (a Jewish coworker), and Titus (a Gentile coworker) went to meet with the spiritual leaders (apostles) of the kingdom brethren in Jerusalem (Galatians 2:1-10; Acts 15:1-29). Paul went to defend his ministry against false accusations perpetrated by false brethren who had spied on Paul and his coworkers. At the time of this meeting, James the brother of Jesus was the leader of the kingdom church in Jerusalem instead of Peter whom Jesus appointed be the leader of the twelve apostles in the kingdom. This change in authority was significant in that it was a demonstration of the interruption of God's prophetic plan for Israel.

Paul related his message about how God was working among the Gentiles, and Peter supported Paul's testimony by reminding the Jewish brethren how God had worked through Peter regarding the salvation of the Roman centurion Cornelius and his family and friends (Acts 15:6-11). Afterward, the Jewish leaders recognized that God, indeed, was working through Paul to teach the Gentiles. This was also very significant because the Jewish leaders knew that the Gentiles were to be blessed through Israel, and yet they were now being blessed despite Israel's continuing rejection of God and their Messiah Jesus Christ.

The Jewish leaders acknowledged that Paul had been entrusted with *the gospel of the uncircumcision* (as written in the KJV) just as Peter had been entrusted with the *gospel of the circumcision* (Galatians 2:7-9).<sup>28</sup> The NASB and other Bible versions say *the gospel to the uncircumcised* (Gentiles) and *to the circumcised* (Jews). However, column notes in the NASB indicate that the literal translation is *of the uncircumcision* and *of the circumcision*. There is a vast difference implied by this wording, and I believe that the KJV text and the NASB column notes are the correct translations.

If the NASB translation is correct, then it implies that Paul was teaching the same gospel to the Gentiles that Peter was teaching to the Jews. This definitely was not the case because Peter and the twelve apostles were instructed by our resurrected Lord to continue teaching the gospel of the kingdom<sup>29</sup> while Paul was instructed by our ascended and glorified Lord to teach the gospel of the grace of God. Therefore, the gospel of the uncircumcision is another name for the gospel of the grace of God, while the gospel of the circumcision is another name for the gospel of the kingdom. The gospel of the circumcision is the one gospel that Paul mentioned in his letters that isn't a part of the gospel of the grace of God.

Brethren, the Apostle Paul never preached the gospel of the kingdom. It is true that he went to the Jewish synagogues first when he entered Gentile cities, and it is true that he reasoned with the Jewish worshipers about the good news that Christ was the Son of God and the One prophesied as Israel's redeemer (Acts 13:15-37; 17:1-3). He was stating the facts of Christ to people who had been given the prophecies of God concerning Him through the Law and the prophets. However, he didn't follow this

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<sup>28</sup> God used the procedure of circumcision, beginning with Abraham, to separate His people from the remainder of the world (Genesis 17:7-14). Circumcision was then incorporated into the Law of Moses (Leviticus 12:1-3). In the context of Galatians 2, the word *circumcision* was used to describe the Jews, while *uncircumcision* described everyone else (the Gentiles) who were not descendants of Abraham and under the Law of Moses (Ephesians 2:11).

<sup>29</sup> The twelve apostles were operating under the commands of the so-called great commission (Matthew 10:5-7; 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:45-49; John 20:21-23; Acts 1:4-8). The record in early Acts demonstrates that they were following those commands (e.g., Acts 2:37-47; 3:17-26).

introduction of his message by telling the people to repent for killing their Messiah and to look forward to His return to establish His kingdom as the twelve apostles preached. Instead, he explained that we have forgiveness of our sins through belief in Christ's work on the cross for us and that we are free from the bondage of the Law of Moses (Acts 13:38-39)—he taught them the gospel of grace. Thankfully, some of the Jews in the synagogues believed Paul's message of grace and formed the core of the churches he established in the Gentile cities (Acts 17:4; 18:8). Most of the Jews, however, rejected Paul's message, and it is recorded for us in three instances that, because of their rejection, God was turning to the Gentiles (Acts 13:44-46; 18:4-6; 28:24-28).<sup>30</sup> The Gentiles who overheard Paul's messages, on the other hand, were thrilled to learn that they were included in God's plan of salvation through Christ (Acts 13:48-49).

### Qualities of the Gospel

Paul described the gospel of the grace of God with the following distinct qualities and, without going into too much detail, I'll provide what I think they mean.

- *The blessing of the gospel of Christ* (Romans 15:29 [KJV]). This is translated as the *blessing of Christ* in the NASB, which seems to imply a different meaning. I'm not sure what this verse means, but I'll provide a possible explanation assuming that both translations are referring to the same thing. Paul was telling the brethren in Rome that he planned to see them on his way to Spain, and I believe that he was conveying his confidence that he would preach to them the fulness of the gospel of Christ (aka the gospel of grace) through which we are blessed.<sup>31</sup>
- *The mystery of the gospel* (Ephesians 6:18-20). Paul asked the Ephesian brethren to pray for him so that he would boldly speak the truth of the mystery of the gospel. As discussed earlier, the gospel of grace is part of the revelation of the mystery by Jesus Christ to Paul. It had been a secret hidden in God (and not veiled in prophetic Scriptures) since before the world began. The revelation of the mystery and the gospel of grace actually fulfilled (completed, or made full) the word of God, and Paul was chosen by God to reveal it to the world.
- *The faith of the gospel* (Philippians 1:27-30). In this passage, Paul exhorted the Philippian brethren to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, and that in doing so they stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel. This exhortation was meant to help them endure the consequential persecution they would incur (see also II Timothy 3:12). Paul refers to his message—the gospel of the grace of God—as *the faith* (Romans 1:5; 10:8-10; Galatians 6:10; I Timothy 1:2; II Timothy 4:7). I believe that the faith of the gospel, therefore, is referring to the truth of the gospel of grace, for which we should stand firm.

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<sup>30</sup> Other than several thousand Jews who did believe (Acts 2:41; 4:4), the people and spiritual leaders of Jerusalem and Judea as a whole rejected Christ. When Paul went to the synagogues in Gentile cities, most of the Jews and their spiritual leaders also rejected Christ. Therefore, in accordance with His eternal plan, God temporarily blinded Israel to His truth and set them and their promises aside (Romans 11:25-29). Beginning with Paul, God ushered in the dispensation of grace by revealing His message of grace to Jews and Gentiles without distinction (Ephesians 3:1-12).

<sup>31</sup> Incidentally, Paul made it to Rome as a prisoner, was later released and ministered to the Jews and the brethren (Acts 28:17-31), and finally imprisoned again and put to death (Philippians 1:12-14; II Timothy 4:6-8). There is no evidence in Scripture that he made it to Spain (known at the time as the Roman colony of Hispania) prior to his final imprisonment in Rome; however, we don't know for sure.

- *The word of truth of the gospel* (Colossians 1:3-6). Paul was thankful to God that the word of truth of the gospel was bearing fruit and increasing among the Colossian brethren. The word of truth of the gospel may be referring to the same thing as the faith of the gospel. Throughout his ministry Paul had to defend his apostleship and message, both to the kingdom believers in Jerusalem and the people to whom he ministered (Acts 15:1-11; II Corinthians 11). Why was this? It was because what he was teaching was new to the kingdom brethren—it wasn't what Jesus had taught them and wasn't in accordance with prophecy. As for the people he ministered to, some of the Jews who heard his message may have struggled the same way as those in Jerusalem (unbelieving Jews rejected it entirely), and the Gentile brethren often exhibited their pride and jealousy—they wanted to disregard or usurp his authority (I Corinthians 4; Philippians 1:15-17). On the other hand, Paul was thankful to God for the Colossian and Thessalonian brethren (and others) who received his message as the word of God—the truth of God (Galatians 2:5; Ephesians 1:13-14)—rather than as the word of man (I Thessalonians 2:13).
- *The hope of the gospel* (Colossians 1:21-23). Paul exhorted the Colossian brethren to be steadfast and not move away from the hope of the gospel. When we read the word hope in Scripture, we need to understand the context in which it is used—sometimes it is referring to something that is certain instead of something that a person hoped might occur (Romans 5:1-2; 15:13; Galatians 5:5; Ephesians 1:18-21; Colossians 1:25-27; I Thessalonians 5:8; Titus 1:1-2). In this passage, Paul was reminding the Colossian brethren that prior to salvation they were slaves of sin and alienated from God—they were without hope (see also Ephesians 2:11-13; I Thessalonians 4:13). As believers, however, they were reconciled to God through the death of Christ and were considered to be holy and blameless before God (see also Ephesians 1:3-8). This message of the grace of God was a certain hope that they could count on and was a reason to stand fast (unwavering) in the faith.

We also see *the everlasting* (eternal) *gospel* preached by an angel of God as recorded in Revelation 14:6-7, but it has nothing to do with the gospel of grace. This angelic proclamation appears to be referring to the glory of God and His sovereignty, which is eternal. This will be good news to the believers in the time of great tribulation because they will know that God's judgments on the nations and earth are about to begin, thus setting the stage for Christ's return to earth to establish His kingdom. It will be bad news, however, for those who will not heed this gospel—they will not fear God and will be judged by Him.<sup>32</sup>

## Summary

As we have seen, there is more than one gospel in Scripture. All of the various names of gospels actually fall under two primary gospels: *the gospel of the kingdom* and *the gospel of the grace of God*. The gospel of the kingdom also goes by the names of the gospel of the kingdom of God and the gospel of the circumcision, and includes the gospel of Jesus Christ that is about Him being the Son of God and

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<sup>32</sup> Most people will reject this eternal gospel about the glory of God because they will have already rejected the gospel of the kingdom that will be preached by the chosen disciples of Christ during the time sometime after the rapture and before God's judgments during the great tribulation (Matthew 24:14; Revelation 7:1-8; 14:1-5).

Israel's Messiah. This gospel was preached by John the Baptist, Jesus while He was on earth, and His twelve apostles, and was directed to the people of Israel beginning in Jerusalem.

The gospel of the grace of God was part of the revelation of the mystery to Paul by our risen, ascended, and glorified Lord Jesus Christ. It also goes by the names of the gospel of God, the gospel of Christ, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, the gospel of His Son, Christ's gospel, the gospel of peace, the glorious gospel of the blessed God, and the gospel of the uncircumcision. Furthermore, it includes the gospel of our salvation. This gospel was preached by Paul and his coworkers, first to the Jews in the synagogues of Gentile cities, but was primarily directed to the Gentiles because Paul was appointed by God as the apostle of the Gentiles.

Some of the differences between the gospel of the kingdom and the gospel of grace of God have been discussed in this study, including the following:

- The gospel of the kingdom is the good news about Israel's promised earthly kingdom with Christ reigning as the King of kings, whereas the gospel of grace is about the good news of God bestowing salvation and eternal life on all who believe in Christ's work on the cross for us.
- To be saved under the gospel of the kingdom a Jew had to repent of his sins and be baptized for the remission of sins (faith plus works), whereas under the gospel of the grace of God we (no difference between Jew and Gentile) are saved by believing the gospel of salvation. The good news for us is that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised again; we are saved by the grace of God apart from works.
- A believer under the gospel of the kingdom was still required to be obedient to the Law of Moses, whereas under the gospel of grace the Law was taken out of our way because it was nailed to the cross with Christ.
- The gospel of the kingdom was set aside when Israel was set aside because of its unbelief, and was replaced by the gospel of the grace of God that is still God's administration today.

There are many other differences involving such things as baptism, prayer, the work of the Holy Spirit, possessions, etc. The author's study **Two Messages of Our Lord Jesus Christ** provides more discussion about these differences.

Hopefully, when the reader hears or reads something about the gospel, he or she will question in his or her mind which gospel is being talked about and if it is the gospel that applies to us today in this dispensation of grace. Too often the gospels are mixed up or used out of context, and the good news of the grace of God is watered down or lost in the confusion. We need to endeavor to rightly divide, or accurately handle, the word of truth so that we can be good ambassadors for Christ by standing firm in the gospel of the grace of God and walking worthy of our salvation.

**Be diligent [*endeavor*] to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling [rightly dividing] the word of truth. (II Timothy 2:15)**

**Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (II Corinthians 5:20-21)**

**Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord. (I Corinthians 15:58)**

**Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**

(Ephesians 4:1-3)

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