

## BASIC BIBLE PRINCIPLES

# WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

*“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mk. 16:15,16).*

*“But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12).*

*“For I [Paul] am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16).*

*“And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed” (Gal. 3:8).*

The word ‘gospel’ means ‘good news or tidings’. It comes from the Greek word *euangelion*, which occurs 101 times in the New Testament. Although the word ‘gospel’ is a New Testament word, its roots are firmly fixed in the Old Testament. As Galatians 3:8 (see above) shows, the gospel was preached thousands of years before Jesus was born. To understand the good news preached by Jesus and his disciples, the good news taken by Paul out into the Roman Empire, the good news we receive today, we must appreciate that its origins are to be found at the beginning of time. Indeed, the Apostle Peter states that the gospel he preached had been preached “since the world began” (Acts 3:21). The four references above set out clearly the importance of the gospel and give a framework for understanding it:

- to believe the gospel brings salvation
- to disregard the gospel brings damnation
- if the gospel is believed then baptism must follow
- the gospel message is information about the Kingdom of God and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ
- the hope of salvation is available to all men and women of all nationalities
- faith (belief) that God will accomplish His purpose of bringing salvation through Jesus comes through hearing the gospel message
- the gospel we receive today is the same gospel that Abraham believed 4,000 years ago.

### **The gospel in both Old and New Testaments**

The writings of the Apostle Paul show clearly that the gospel message existed before he began his ministry. Before the Lord Jesus Christ was born it was spoken of by the prophets of the Old Testament, preached to Israel in the wilderness and believed and acted on by Abraham (Rom. 1:1,2; 2 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 4:2; Gal. 3:6-9).

The New Testament describes the gospel as “the hope of Israel”, and Paul and all those who accepted and believed this gospel identified their faith with that of Abraham and faithful men and women in Israel of old (Acts 26:6,7; 28:20; Rom. 4:11; Gal. 3:29).

The work of Jesus was “to confirm the promises made unto the fathers: and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy” (Rom. 15:8,9). The gospel/good news is that God through Christ fulfils the promises to Abraham and Israel, and thus opens up a way of salvation, that all men and women might have eternal life in His Kingdom on this earth (Acts 13:32-39).

Resurrection from the dead, a physical experience, is the great hope enshrined in the promises of God, and faith in this is at the heart of the true gospel (1 Cor. 15:20-26; Ps. 71:20,21; Isa. 26:19; Jno. 11:21-27). Abraham had faith in the resurrection from the dead, as Hebrews 11:13-19 shows. Two incidents in his life especially demonstrate this. Genesis 15 shows

Abraham asking, “whereby shall I know that I shall inherit [the land]?” (v. 8), and he is reassured that, even though he will die “in a good old age”, God has made a covenant with him to give him his eternal inheritance (vv. 15,18). Genesis 22 contains the story of Abraham being prepared to offer his son Isaac, and in so doing demonstrating his faith in resurrection from the dead (Heb. 11:19).

### **The things concerning the Kingdom**

When Philip preached the gospel to the people in Samaria, “the things concerning the kingdom of God” were an important part (Acts 8:12). It was necessary for people to know and understand about the Kingdom prior to being baptized. This Kingdom was the one that Abraham believed in and looked forward to, being described in the promises made by God to him (Gen. 12:1-3; 13:14-17; ch. 15). Abraham expected the Kingdom to be on the earth, as can be seen from Romans 4:13: “For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith”. Stephen, the first martyr, points out that Abraham still awaits the fulfilment of the promises made by God concerning the earthly Kingdom: “He [God] gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet He promised that He would give it to him for a possession” (Acts 7:5). Hebrews 11:39,40 confirms that Abraham will inherit this earthly Kingdom along with faithful believers at a future time.

Jesus “went about . . . preaching the gospel of the kingdom”, as did his disciples (Mt. 4:23; Lk. 9:2,6,11). When he was born, the message of the angel was, “the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end” (Lk. 1:32,33). Here is the link to the descendants of Abraham, showing that the Kingdom will be an everlasting Kingdom reigned over by Christ. Jesus taught his followers to pray, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Mt. 6:10), having the same expectation as that of Abraham. Along with his teaching, Jesus performed miracles, which gave a cameo of what the Kingdom will be like. The blind received sight, the deaf heard, the lame walked, disease was cured; he even raised the dead. The poor were justly treated and the hungry fed. Even the wind and waves obeyed his voice. His teaching showed men and women how to live and worship. This was a foretaste of the Kingdom spoken of by the prophets (Isa. 35; Ps. 37:11; 72; Mic. 4:1-4).

### **The things concerning the name of Jesus Christ**

To live for ever in this wonderful Kingdom it will be necessary for death to be overcome. Death is a punishment for sin, and every one save Christ deserves to die (Gen. 3:17-19; Rom. 5:12). As Paul says, “the wages of sin is death”; but he goes on to say, “. . . but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). That is why Christ says, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad” (Jno. 8:56). Abraham looked forward to the time when the Son of God would make it possible for death to be overcome through his sinless life. Hebrews confirms that Jesus came to put away sin, and in his sacrifice our sins are forgiven (Heb. 9:11,12,26; 10:10). Jesus did not die instead of us, but his sacrifice is the means by which our sins are forgiven and we can be made immortal (1 Cor. 15:3,4,20-23). Paul teaches that it is belief in the things of the Kingdom and the work of Jesus that leads to baptism into the saving name of Jesus (Rom. 6:1-6), and in baptism we are linked to Abraham and his faith (Gal. 3:26-29).

So the gospel that has been preached for thousands of years holds out to all men and women the hope of eternal life in God’s Kingdom on the earth reigned over by Jesus Christ.

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