



Talmid תלמיד a Hebrew word that means “a true disciple who desires to be what the Rabbi Jesus is.”

*Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did. 1 John 2:6 (NIV)*

VOLUME 8, ISSUE 6

JUNE 1, 2016

STUDY TO SHEW THYSELF APPROVED UNTO GOD, A WORKMAN THAT NEEDETH NOT TO BE ASHAMED, RIGHTLY  
DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH. 2 TIMOTHY 2:15



**Dr. Eddie Idefonso**

*West Los Angeles Living Word Christian Center  
Los Angeles, California*

*Professor, Covington Theological Seminary  
Executive Vice President and Dean of  
Covington Theological International Studies*

## What is the gospel of Jesus Christ? Part 6

### THE KINGDOM

On the entrance to the parking lot of a church, there is a bronze plaque with the immortal words of the missionary **Jim Elliot**: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” I love that quote because it captures so well both the cost and the reward of being a Christian.

There’s no doubt that becoming a Christian is a costly thing (**Luke 14:28**).

**Luke 14:28 (NASB)**

<sup>28</sup> “For which one of you, when he

wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?”

But it’s also true that the rewards of being a Christian are inexpressibly awesome. Forgiveness of sins, adoption as God’s children, relationship with Jesus, the gift of the Holy Spirit, freedom from sin’s tyranny, the fellowship of the church, the final resurrection and glorification of the body, inclusion in God’s kingdom, the new heavens and new earth, eternity in God’s presence, seeing his face—all these are the promises God makes to us in Christ. No wonder

Paul quoted Isaiah, saying,

**1 Corinthians 2:9 (NASB)**

<sup>9</sup> “But just as it is written, “THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND *which* HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.”

The Christian life is not just about making sure you avoid God’s wrath. Far from it! It’s about being in a **right** relationship with God, and ultimately enjoying him forever. That is to say, it’s about gaining what we cannot lose—becoming a citizen of his eternal kingdom.

From the moment a person becomes a believer in Jesus Christ, everything in his life changes forever. I know, I know—sometimes it doesn’t feel like that. There’s no heavenly confetti, and there are no trumpets, no angels singing (at least not that we can hear), but it’s

true nonetheless. *Everything* changes. God has “rescued us,” Paul says, “**from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His Beloved Son**” ([Colossians 1:13 NASB](#)).

## What Is the Kingdom of God?

The kingdom of God is an important theme in the New Testament. Jesus himself preached about it constantly, saying, “**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.**” [Acts 28:31](#) summarizes Paul’s ministry like this: “**Preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered**” ([Acts 28:31 NASB](#)).

The author of Hebrews exults in the fact that believers in Christ are “**Therefore, since we receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe**” ([Hebrews 12:28 NASB](#)), and Peter encourages his readers with the thought of being richly welcomed into “**For in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you**” ([2 Peter 1:11 NASB](#)).

Then in the book of Revelation, all the hosts of heaven erupt in praise: “**Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night.”** ([Revelation 12:10 NASB](#)).

But what is this kingdom, exactly? Is it a realm, a piece of real estate that God has special authority over? Is it the church? Is it here now, or is it something we’re waiting for, something that will come in the future? For that matter, who exactly is in the kingdom of God? Doesn’t God’s rule extend over everyone, regardless of whether he or she believes in Jesus? Aren’t we all in the kingdom, and can’t we all—regardless of whether we’re Christians or not—work toward the establishment of the kingdom?

Let’s try to get at some of these questions by noticing a few things that Scripture teaches about the kingdom of God.

## GOD’S REDEMPTIVE REIGN

**First**, the kingdom of God is God’s redemptive rule over his people. *Kingdom* is one of those words that brings along with it very strong connotations, and in this case those connotations tend to confuse. Usually when we think about a kingdom, we think of a particular plot of land with a well-defined set of borders. *Kingdom* is a geographical word for most of us. That’s not the case in the Bible, though. Biblically speaking, the kingdom of God is best understood as more a *kingship* than a *kingdom* as we usually use that word. God’s kingdom is therefore God’s rule, reign, and authority (Ps. 145:11, 13).

### Psalm 145:11 (NASB)

<sup>11</sup> “They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom And talk of Your power.”

### Psalm 145:13 (NASB)

<sup>13</sup> “Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And Your dominion endures throughout all generations.”

There’s another crucial word we need to add to our definition, though. As the Bible talks about it, God’s kingdom is not just his rule and reign. It is his *redemptive* rule and reign; it’s the loving sovereignty he exercises over *his own people*.

Of course it’s true that not one square inch of the universe, not one single person, is independent of God’s rule or somehow outside his authority. He created all, he rules over all, and he will judge all. But when the Bible uses the phrase “**kingdom of God**,” it usually refers very specifically to God’s rule over his own people, over those who have been saved through Christ. Thus Paul talks about Christians being transferred from the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of Christ ([Colossians 1:12–13](#)), and he is very careful to point out that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God ([1 Corinthians 6:9](#)).

### Colossians 1:12-13 (NASB)

<sup>12</sup> “Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.

<sup>13</sup> For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.”

### 1 Corinthians 6:9 (NASB)

<sup>9</sup> “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals.”

The kingdom of God, then, simply defined, is God’s

redemptive rule, reign, and authority over those redeemed by Jesus.

## A KINGDOM COME

**Second**, the kingdom of God is here. When Jesus began his earthly ministry, he preached a stunning message: “**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand**” ([Matthew 3:2 NASB](#)). Actually, you could translate that as, “**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come!**”

We’ve already seen what a stunning claim Jesus was making with those words. The Jews had for centuries been waiting, hoping, and praying for the dawning of the kingdom, for the day when God’s rule would be established on the earth and his people would finally be vindicated. And now here was Jesus—this Nazarene carpenter-turned-teacher—telling them that the day they’d been waiting for was here.

Not only so, but he was claiming that the kingdom of God had been inaugurated *in him!* So in [Matthew 12:28 NASB](#), when the Pharisees accuse Jesus of driving out demons in the name of Satan, Jesus rebukes them and makes a staggering claim: “**But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.**” Do you see what he’s saying? Clearly, Jesus *was* driving out demons, and he was doing so by the Spirit of God. What he was claiming was that, finally, God’s promised deliverance of his people had begun. The kingdom had come.

What an awesome thought that is! Jesus’ incarnation was much more than just a kind visit from the Creator. It was the launching of God’s full and final counteroffensive against all the sin, death, and destruction that had entered the world when Adam fell.

You can see the war happening all over the story of Jesus’ life in the New Testament. King Jesus goes alone into the wilderness to face Satan—the one who had tempted Adam and thrown the world into corruption so many years earlier—and decisively defeats him! He touches the eyes of a man born blind, and light enters for the very first time. He stares into the sad blackness of a tomb and cries out “**Lazarus, come forth!**” ([John 11:43 NASB](#)) and death feels its grip on humanity begin to weaken as the dead man walks out.

And then above all, of course, sin itself was defeated

when Jesus cried out on the cross, “**It is finished!**” ([John 19:30 NASB](#)). And death’s grip finally failed entirely when the angel said—with a smile, I’m sure—“**And as the women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, ‘Why do you seek the living One among the dead?’ ‘He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee.’**” ([Luke 24:5–6 NASB](#)). Step by step, blow by blow, Jesus was decisively rolling back the effects of the fall. The rightful King of the world had come, and all that stood in the way of the establishment of his kingdom—sin, death, hell, Satan—was being decisively overcome.

What this means is that many of the blessings of the kingdom are already ours. So Jesus tells his disciples that he will send them “**another Comforter**,” the Holy Spirit, who will guide them, convict them of sin, and sanctify them. In the same way, Christians know even now what it is to have been adopted into God’s family and to be reconciled to him. Paul even says that in God’s eyes, we are already raised up and seated with Christ ([Ephesians 2:6](#)).

[Ephesians 2:6 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>6</sup> “**And raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.**”

That is an incredibly encouraging truth. But there’s something else, something equally important, that we must understand.

## A KINGDOM NOT YET COMPLETE

**Third**, the kingdom of God is not yet completed, and it will not be completed until King Jesus returns. Despite all that Jesus did to overthrow the powers of evil, he did not fully and finally establish God’s rule on the earth—at least not yet. The strong man was bound, but not destroyed. Evil was defeated, but not annihilated, and the kingdom of God was inaugurated, but not brought to full and final completion.

Jesus spoke of a future day when the kingdom would finally be consummated. On that day, he said, the angels “**The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness,**<sup>42</sup> and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”<sup>43</sup> “**Then THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.**” ([Matthew 13:41–43 NASB](#)). He also looks forward at the Last Supper to the day when he would

drink the fruit of the vine again with his disciples: **“But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom”** ([Matthew 26:29 NASB](#)).

Paul, too, looks longingly forward to the resurrection of the dead in eternity ([1 Corinthians 15](#)), and he tells the Ephesians that they have been sealed by the Holy Spirit **“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 1:14 NASB](#)).

Later he says that God has saved us **“so that *in the ages to come* He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus”** ([Ephesians 2:7](#)). Peter too speaks of a **“who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time”** ([1 Peter 1:5 NASB](#)), and the author of Hebrews tells his readers that they are **“All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth”** ([Hebrews 11:13 NASB](#)) and that they should look forward to **“the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God”** ([Hebrews 11:10](#)).

The great hope for Christians, the thing for which we long and to which we look for strength and encouragement, is the day when our King will part the skies and return to establish his glorious kingdom, finally and forever. That glorious moment is when everything in this world will be set right, when justice will finally be done, evil overthrown forever, and righteousness established once and for all. God promises:

[Isaiah 65:17-19 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>17</sup> **“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former things will not be remembered or come to mind.”**

<sup>18</sup> **“But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; For behold, I create Jerusalem for rejoicing And her people for gladness.”**

<sup>19</sup> **“I will also rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in My people; And there will no longer be heard in her The voice of weeping and the sound of crying.”**

And in that day, the prophet tells us,

[Isaiah 11:9 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>9</sup> **“They will not hurt or destroy in all My**

**holy mountain, For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea.”**

I used to think as a child that the Christian's destiny was to spend eternity in a never-ending disembodied church service. That was a scary thought! But it was entirely wrong. God intends to create for his people a new world, free of sin and death and sickness. War will end, oppression will cease, and God will dwell with his people forever. Never again will any of God's people suffer death, and never again will tears burn our eyes at a graveside. Never again will an infant live but a few days and then die. Never again will we mourn, or hurt, or weep. Never again will we long for home. For as Revelation tells us, God himself will wipe every tear from our eyes, and we will, finally, see his face!

Really, what do you say in response to all that? One thing, I think: Oh, Lord Jesus, come quickly!

I'm always a little amazed when I see people talk about all these promises—the new heavens and new earth, the heavenly city into which nothing evil ever enters, the world emptied of death, war, and oppression, the resurrected people of God living joyfully before his face forever—and then they look up from those promises and say, “Okay, let's go make that happen!”

The fact is that we as human beings are not going to be able to bring about the establishment and consummation of God's kingdom. Despite all our best—and genuinely good—efforts to make the world a better place, the kingdom promised in the Bible will only come about when King Jesus himself returns to make it happen.

That's a crucial thing to remember, for at least a couple of reasons. First, it protects us from a wrong and ultimately deceiving optimism about what we will be able to accomplish in this fallen world. Christians will certainly be able to bring about some changes in society. It's happened before in history, and I have no reason to doubt that it is happening in places even now and that it will happen again in the future. Christians have done and can still do massive good in the world—good that will commend God and Jesus Christ to the world.

But I think the biblical story line forces us to recognize that until Christ returns, our social and cultural victories will always be tenuous, never permanent. Christians will never bring about the kingdom of God. Only God himself can do that. The heavenly Jerusalem **comes down from heaven**; it is not built from the ground up.

Even more importantly, remembering that the king-

dom will only be established when Jesus returns rightly centers our hopes, our affection, and our longing on Jesus himself. Instead of looking to some human power, some human action, some human authority, or even our own effort to set everything right, we look to heaven and cry out with the apostle John, “**Even so, come, Lord Jesus!**” Our longing for his return increases, our prayers to him grow more fervent, and our love for him deepens. In short, our desires and hopes center firmly—and rightly—not so much on the kingdom as on the kingdom’s King.

## A RESPONSE TO THE KING

**Fourth**, inclusion in the kingdom of God depends entirely on one’s response to the King. Jesus could not have been clearer about this. Over and over, he makes a person’s response to him and his message the single determining factor in whether that person would be included in his kingdom. Think about the story of the rich young ruler. “**What must I do to inherit eternal life?**” the man asks. And Jesus’ answer, finally, is “**Follow me,**” which for that man meant turning away from his trust in his own wealth and believing in Jesus (**Mark 10:17, 21**).

**Mark 10:17 (NASB)**

<sup>17</sup> “**As He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and asked Him, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”**”

**Mark 10:21 (NASB)**

<sup>21</sup> “**Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, “One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”**”

Time after time, Jesus says that God will draw a bright line through the middle of humanity, separating the saved from the unsaved. And the one thing that will make the difference between the two is how they responded to King Jesus. That’s the point of the story of the sheep and the goats in **Matthew 25**. In the end, the difference between “**Come**” and “**Depart from me**” is how each person responded to Jesus as he was presented by his “*brothers*,” that is, his people.

And, of course, what makes it possible for us to be Jesus’ people in the first place is his death for us on the cross. That’s the really astonishing thing about Jesus, not just that he was King or that he in-

augurated a kingdom of love and compassion. Really, that’s not that astonishing at all; every Jew knew that was going to happen someday. No, what was really astonishing about the gospel of Jesus was **that this King died to save his people, that the Messiah turned out to be a crucified Messiah.**

The Jews had hoped for centuries for a messianic King to come and rescue them. They also had hopes for a suffering Servant of the Lord (prophesied by Isaiah), and they even had a vague expectation of a divine “**son of man**” who would appear at the end of the age (**Daniel**). What they never fathomed, though, was that all three of these figures would turn out to be the same man! No one ever pulled those three strands together—at least not until Jesus.

Jesus, however, not only declared himself to be the fulfillment of Israel’s messianic hopes (that is, the King), but also constantly referred to himself as the divine “**Son of Man**” from **Daniel 7**.

**Daniel 7:13 (NASB)**

<sup>13</sup> “**I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him.**”

Even more, Jesus said of the Son of Man that he came “**to give his life as a ransom for many**” (**Mark 10:45**), which points unmistakably to the suffering Servant of the Lord in **Isaiah 53:10**.

**Mark 10:45 (NASB)**

<sup>45</sup> “**For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.**”

**Isaiah 53:10 (NASB)**

<sup>10</sup> “**But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.**”

**Do you see what Jesus was claiming?** He was saying that He Himself fulfilled—all at the same time—the roles of the Davidic Messiah, the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, and Daniel’s Son of Man! Jesus took the divine nature of the Son of Man, joined to it the substitutionary suffering of the Servant, and finally combined all that with his messianic role. By the time Jesus finished gathering together all the threads of Jewish hope, this King was infinitely more than the earthly revolutionary the Jews were hoping for. He was the divine Servant-King,

who would suffer and die for his people to win their salvation, make them righteous in his Father's eyes, and bring them gloriously into his kingdom.

In light of all that, it's no wonder that Jesus makes entrance into his kingdom depend solely on whether a person repents of sin and trusts in Him and His atoning work on the cross. When Jesus talks about "**the gospel of the kingdom**," His point is not just that the kingdom has come. It is that the kingdom has come *and* you can be included in it if you are united to Me, the King, by faith that I alone can save you from your sin.

Therefore, being a citizen of Christ's kingdom is not a matter of just "living a kingdom life" or "following Jesus' example" or "living like Jesus lived." The fact is, a person can be a self-professed "Jesus-follower" or "kingdom-life liver" and still be outside the kingdom. You can live like Jesus lived all you want, but unless you've come to the crucified King in repentance and faith, relying on Him alone as the perfect sacrifice for your sin and your only hope for salvation, you're neither a Christian nor a citizen of his kingdom.

The way to be included in Christ's kingdom is to come to the King, not just hailing him as a great example who shows us a better way to live, but humbly trusting him as the crucified and risen Lord who alone can release you from the sentence of death. At the end of the day, the only way into the kingdom is through the blood of the King.

## A CALL TO LIVE FOR THE KING

Fifth, to be a citizen of the kingdom is to be called to live the life of the kingdom. In [Romans 6](#), Paul calls Christians to recognize that they have been rescued from the dominion of sin and brought into the kingdom of God.

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

### **Romans 6:4-11 (NASB)**

<sup>4</sup> "Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

<sup>5</sup> For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection,

<sup>6</sup> knowing this, that our old self was cruci-

fied with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin;

<sup>7</sup> or he who has died is freed from sin.

<sup>8</sup> Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him,

<sup>9</sup> knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him.

<sup>10</sup> For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.

<sup>11</sup> Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus."

When we are brought by faith into the kingdom of God, the Holy Spirit gives us a new life. We become citizens of a new kingdom, and subjects of a new King. Because of that we also have a new obligation to obey that king, to live in a way that honors him.

That's why Paul says:

### **Romans 6:12-13 (NASB)**

<sup>12</sup> "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts,

<sup>13</sup> and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin *as* instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God."

Until Christ returns, we his people continue to live in this sinful age, and our King calls us to live a life that is worthy of the kingdom to which he has called us ([1 Thessalonians 2:12](#)), to "**shine like stars**" in a crooked and depraved generation ([Philippians 2:15 NASB](#)).

### **1 Thessalonians 2:12 (NASB)**

<sup>12</sup> "So that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory."

### **Philippians 2:15 (NASB)**

<sup>15</sup> "So that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world."

It's not at all that living the life of the kingdom brings us into the kingdom. It's that once we have been brought into the kingdom through faith in the King, we find ourselves with a new master, a new law, a new charter, a new life—and therefore we begin to *want* to live the life of the kingdom.

The Bible tells us that in this age, the life of the kingdom is worked out primarily in the church. Did you ever think about that? The church is where God's kingdom is made visible in this age. Look at [Ephesians 3:10–11](#):

**Ephesians 3:10-11 (NASB)**

<sup>10</sup> “So that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.

<sup>11</sup> *This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord.*”

The church is the arena in which God has chosen, above all, to showcase his wisdom and the glory of the gospel. As many have put it before, the church is the outpost of God's kingdom in this world. It's not correct to say that the church *is* the kingdom of God. As we've seen, there's much more to the kingdom than that. But it *is* right to say that the church is where we *see* the kingdom of God manifested in this age.

Do you want to see what the kingdom of God looks like, at least before it's made perfect? Do you want to see the life of the kingdom lived out in this age? Look at the church. That's where God's wisdom is displayed, where people who were formerly alienated are reconciled and united because of Jesus, and where God's Holy Spirit is at work remaking and rebuilding human lives. It's where God's people learn to love one another, to bear one another's burdens and sorrows, to weep together and rejoice together, and to hold one another accountable. Of course it's not perfect, but the church is where the life of the kingdom is lived and showcased to a world desperately in need of salvation.

### *Pressing On through Darkness*

Of course, it's just that desperate need of the world to be saved that makes living as a citizen of Christ's kingdom in this age so hard. To the world, Christians are threatening, and it has always been that way. In the days of the early church, the declaration “Jesus is Lord!” was a seditious and blasphemous rejection of the emperor's authority, and they killed Christians for saying it. Today, the declaration “**Jesus is Lord**” is an intolerant and bigoted rejection of pluralism, and the world reviles us for it.

Never in Scripture is the life of the kingdom—

the struggle to remain faithful to the King—said to be easy. Jesus promised that his followers would face persecution, that they would be reviled and mocked and even killed. But even in the midst of all that, we Christians press on because we know that there is laid up for us in God's presence an inheritance beyond anything we could ever imagine.

In the last book of **J. R. R. Tolkien's** magnificent epic *The Lord of the Rings*, the heroes of the story come to the darkest part of their journey. They've traveled a thousand miles and come finally to the evil land that has been their goal, but for several different reasons, everything seems lost now. Yet in that darkest moment, one of the heroes, Sam, looks into the black sky. Here's what **Tolkien** writes:

*“Far above the mountains in the west, the night-sky was still dim and pale. There, peeping among the cloud-wracks above a dark tor high up in the mountains, Sam saw a white star twinkle for a while. The beauty of it smote his heart, as he looked up out of the forsaken land, and hope returned to him. For like a shaft, clear and cold, the thought pierced him that in the end the Shadow was a small and passing thing: there was light and high beauty forever beyond its reach.”*

That is one of my favorite moments in the story, because it is right there that Tolkien, who himself professed faith in Christ, points us to where we find the courage to press on through darkness. It comes from hope. It comes from knowing that our present sufferings are indeed a small and passing thing, and that, as Paul said, they truly are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us when our King returns.

## **CORAM DEO** **(Before the face of God)**

*The New Testament is in the Old concealed;  
the Old Testament is in the New revealed.*  
—Augustine

Please remember that in this study I am concerned with the big picture of Hosea, not the minute details. Our interest is in why and how the parts fit together to advance the revelation of the Christ and the gospel, rather than a technical exegesis to interpret all the specific parts. There are commentaries for that. So while I acknowledge that all the problems of interpretation may not be resolved, it is my prayer that throughout this study the Lord Jesus Christ will be evidently set forth and that the Holy Spirit will lead into truth by showing Christ and glorifying Him.

## JUST THE FACTS

The Bible did not fall to earth from heaven complete and leather-bound. Different men—all of whom were inspired by the Holy Spirit—wrote the Old Testament over a period of about a thousand years. But each one lived in his own time and place; each one reflected and addressed the specific issues of his day. The truths of the Bible are universally and timelessly relevant, but they were first given to a specific people at a specific time to meet specific needs. The ultimate objective of our Bible study is to understand those universal and timeless truths and to apply them to our specific times and needs. An important part of Bible study is to learn what we can about the author, his times, and his particular circumstances. So here are just some facts about Hosea—the man and the book.

## HOSEA: A MESSIANIC MAN

**Hosea**, the prophet, shared his name with other prominent characters in the Bible—some good, some not so good. Names are often significant in the Old Testament, certainly more so than they are in our culture. For us a name is a means of getting someone's attention or distinguishing and identifying one person from another. What a name means is sometimes a point of curiosity or a cute motto for a plaque or coffee cup, but hardly an element that conveys essential information about a person. My parents named me Edward (“wealthy guardian of truth”), not because they were making a theological assertion but because for whatever reason they liked the name. Now years ago my wife bought me one of those coffee cups with an inscription that supposedly defines *Edward*, but it says nothing about the Hebrew etymology of the name and instead has some flattering aphorism that I can only wish were true. The point is we use names without necessarily thinking about what the name means. In the Scripture, however, names often made a statement.

Names sometimes conveyed something about the nature, character, or behavior of the one so named. “**You shall call His name JESUS: for He will save His people from their sins**” ([Matthew 1:21 NASB](#)). That *Jesus* means “**Jehovah saves**” is certainly a significant statement given the purpose of the Savior's birth. Interestingly, the Greek name for Jesus corresponds to the Hebrew name *Joshua*, which is a lengthened form of *Hosea*, meaning “**salvation.**” Joshua, the successor to Moses, sometimes went by the shorter name **Hoshea** ([Numbers 13:16](#); same as Hosea in Hebrew) and certainly his

career of delivering the nation victoriously into the Promised Land corresponded to the name. But, on the other hand, Hoshea was also the name of Israel's last king, who ironically delivered the defeated nation into exile from the Promised Land ([2 Kings 17:6](#)). So what's in a name, after all?

Whether or not Beerli and his wife named their son *Hosea* either in hope or in anticipation of what he would do when he grew up is ultimately irrelevant. That Hosea's name means “**salvation**” is not a clue to the meaning, theme, or purpose of his prophecy, but it nonetheless is a fitting appellation to sum up his prophecies that so wonderfully declare God's sovereign grace in dealing with the undeserving. Salvation—that's a statement! Whether intentional or not, his name encapsulated his message.

**Hosea's** name says a lot, but it doesn't say it all. There is more to a man than his name—even when the names are as transparent as those of Old Testament characters. Much of Hosea's message relates to his personal life that became such a public one. But before considering the intimate details of that connection, we need to go over some basics about his office and place of employment or ministry that will help shape our understanding of the significance, sobriety, and authority of his message.







**Pastor C. Gary Fleetwood**  
*Chime Bell Baptist Church*  
*Windsor, South Carolina*

*Professor, Covington Theological Seminary*  
*Aiken, South Carolina Extension*  
*Dean, Covington Theological Seminary*  
*Country of Romania*

## **Hebrews 13 – Overview**

### **Part 2**

**Hebrews 13:8-15** is the final exaltation of Christ in Hebrews. Up to this point, almost the entire letter has been consumed with exalting the person of Christ and His high priestly ministry to believers. It is the largest continual exaltation of Christ found anywhere in the Scriptures. It reached the pinnacle of what it was saying in **Hebrews 9:12**. There the author stated that Jesus Christ, after He had been crucified and resurrected, took His actual blood into the very presence of God and it was in that final act that He **“obtained eternal redemption”** for all that believe. It is this intense, passionate, and concentrated presentation of Christ that simply dominates and controls the entire letter. What is important to understand in all of this is simply that what the writer does by exalting Christ to the level that he does is that he summons every believer to an unqualified commitment and faithfulness to Christ. It is because of the unparalleled magnitude of Christ’s sacrifice on their behalf that they are constantly called to commit their lives to becoming fully devoted followers of Christ. If a believer can act as if Christ’s sacrifice has no substantial meaning for their life and virtually no bearing on how they live, then of all people they are to be the most pitied.

Christians cannot just treat Christ as if He is irrelevant to their life and as if what He has done does not really affect how they live that much. It is a casual, indifferent, lackadaisical, lethargic commitment to Christ in the modern church that is such an insult to the person of Christ. To treat the sacredness of who He is as if it is unimportant is a tragedy of the greatest measure that seems to pervade so much of the modern Christian culture. Believer’s lives are simply a reflection of what they truly think about Christ. Everything of any value in the Christian life comes from Christ. He is the single and most unique focus of all of the Scriptures. He is the central focus of the Christian life. He is the One who divides the sheep from the goats, the committed from the uncommitted, and the spiritually alive from the spiritually dead. Whatever it is that God wants to do in a believer’s life or whatever He wants to provide to them, it is always through the person of Jesus Christ. In Him all the **“fullness of the Godhead dwells”**.

So, here in **Hebrews 13:8** the believer finds that **“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever”**. What He was before is exactly what He is today. What He is now is exactly what He will be forever. He never changes. He is the same **“yesterday, today, and forever”**. He will always be the Savior. He will always be the Creator (1:2). He will always be **“upholding all things by the Word of His power”** (1:3). All things will always be **“in subjection to Him”** (2:8). He will always be the One who **“sanctifies”** (2:11). He will always be a **“merciful and faithful High Priest”** (2:17). He will always be the One who is **“able to aid those who are tempted”** (2:18). He will always be **“faithful”** (3:2). He will always be able to **“sympathize with our weaknesses”** (4:15). He will always be our **“High Priest forever”** (5:6). He will always be the **“author of eternal salvation”** (5:9). He will always be a **“surety of a better covenant”** (7:22). He will always **“continue forever”** (7:24). He will always have an **“unchangeable priesthood”** (7:24). He will always be **“able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him”** (v7:25). He always **“lives to make intercession”** for those who believe in Him (7:25). He will always be the **“Mediator of a better covenant”** (8:6). His blood will always be able to **“cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God”** (9:14). He will always be **“the Mediator of the new covenant”** (9:15). He will always **“appear in the presence of God for us”** (9:24). He will always be the One who **“bears the sins of many”** (9:28). He will always be the **“High Priest over the house of God”** (10:21). He will always be the **“author and finisher of our faith”** (12:2). No wonder the author says here in **Hebrews 13:8** that **“Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever”**. He never changes, He

never alters, and He never varies. The word “**same**” means that He is immutable – unalterable, unchangeable, fixed, binding, permanent, final, irreversible, indisputable, absolute. There is not one single thing about Him that will ever be different than what it always has been and always will be. He never varies or fluctuates. He is always and forever the same.

Because He is the same, the nature of the Christian life never changes. The promises never change, the warnings never change, and the call to faithfulness never changes. His call on the believer’s life will always be the same. It will never, never change. His call for the Christian to deny themselves, take up His cross, and follow Him every single day of their life will never ever change. If the believer labors and is heavy laden, they can come to Him and He will give them rest. That will never change. The Christian life never changes from generation to generation or from culture to culture. One of the subtle delusions of the modern church is their idea that as the culture changes that the church needs to change with the culture. Many believe that the church needs to stay in step with the culture that surrounds it. However, it should be understood that the church will never be in step with the culture that surrounds it. Why? It is because the message of the cross and the need for salvation will never change. The way of salvation will never change because Jesus Christ never changes. The gospel that Peter preached is the gospel that the modern church is to preach. The doctrine that Paul taught is the doctrine that the modern church is to teach. The commands given to the early New Testament believers are the same commands that believers are to follow today. What it means to be a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ has never changed – nor will it change. Why? It is because “**Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.**”

It is critical to appreciate and understand that it is the unchanging nature and character of Christ that is the very anchor of a believer’s soul. It is the simple fact that He never changes and is always the same that provides the foundation for their approach to Him. He is always able to save and always able to aid. He is always faithful. His Word is always true. His love and care for a believer never wavers and is never lessened in any way. His salvation always saves to the uttermost. His omnipotence is always being used for their benefit and His glory. He never, ever changes. He is always the same, and it is for that one element of His being that the Christian can always come to Him with great and unflinching

confidence. His will is always the best thing for their life. His word is always telling them exactly what they need to know. No wonder the author declares in [Hebrews 4:16](#) that believers should “**come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need**”. This is the message of Hebrews. This is exactly what the author has been saying. This has been His unchanging message from the very beginning to this very verse. He is consumed, addicted with, and obsessed with exalting the person of Christ. If there is anything that the church needs in this pragmatic, selfish, indifferent, and lethargic spiritual climate, it is a fresh and exalted view of the person of Christ. He is the sum total of the Christian life, but somehow the church of the living God has systematically reduced Him to a cosmic genie that meets all of its self needs and selfish desires. The church is not consumed with the glory of Christ. It is consumed with its own personal glory, with its own personal wants and desires, and in the process the One who it needs the most has been dispositioned to a place of subservience to man rather than the high and exalted position of the Creator God who is the Lord over all things.

No wonder in [Hebrews 13:9](#) the author warns these believers about the tragic consequences of being “**carried about with various and strange doctrines**”. One of the enemy’s most subtle efforts against Christians is to move them away from sound doctrine. One of his primary weapons against the believer and against the church is to get them to believe in doctrines and beliefs that are untrue and without biblical support. It is amazing how quickly the church falls for novelty. Once it loses the foundation and integrity of Scripture within the church, it is just a short time from there to spiritual neglect, indifference, mediocrity, and unbelief. What false doctrine does is render a believer ineffective. Unless they have the truth, they have nothing of any value to offer anyone. The truth matters. It matters a lot. The problem with most false teachers is that they seem very likable and very sincere. No one wants to listen to someone they do not like or someone that they do not feel is sincere. Most false teachers have a great deal of charisma about them, so sometimes it is difficult to believe that they would teach something that is not true – they seem so sincere and so genuine. However, purity of doctrine is the enemy’s target because he understands that bad teaching always results in bad living. That is why it is so important for the church to be sound in doctrine. When a church lacks strong doctrinal teaching, the people are left to no more than their feelings about how life should be lived. Paul encouraged Timothy in [1 Timothy 4:6](#) with these words,

**1Ti 4:6** **If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed.**

The verb to “**not be carried about**” is in the imperative mood and is an actual command. It is a verb that means to be carried along as if someone were in a stream with a strong current. It means to be driven rapidly along. The context of its usage means that it is something that happens in the believer’s mind. I.e., it is the idea that the individual hears something that is somewhat strange and varied, but they continue to give it some credibility in their mind, and before they know it they have been swept away and consumed by it. They become attracted to the wrong thing. It is like so many of the young people who get attracted and eventually addicted to some of the horrendous video games. Just consider the strange doctrine of “holy laughter”? Whole segments of Christianity were swept up in this strange doctrine. There is absolutely nothing in the Bible that could ever even come close to developing such a strange doctrine and phenomena. The whole “health and wealth gospel” and the “name it and claim it” doctrines are still running rampant in many segments of Christianity today. These doctrines are spiritually repulsive. They fit right in with **1 Timothy 4:1** which states,

**1Ti 4:1** **Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,**

God never intended that believers be carried away with novel and alien teachings which constantly arise in opposition to the Christian faith. The living, eternal Christ continuously channels the grace of God to those who trust Him, and all that these strange doctrines do is lead believers away from Christ. **Ephesians 4:14** says,

**Eph 4:14** **that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,**

The word “**various**” is a word that means varied, diverse, manifold. It is the idea that these false doctrines come in every kind of shade, color, style, and character that is possible. Just think of all of the false doctrines propagated by the Mormons or the Catholic Church (selling indulgences, purgatory, the Queen of heaven, as an example) or by the Jehovah Witnesses. They are virtually endless. The charismatic teachers are noto-

rious for developing strange doctrines that seem to have no correlation whatsoever to any integrity relative to the handling of the Scriptures. The writer also calls these doctrines “**strange**”. It refers to something that is foreign and unknown, as someone coming from another country. In this case it clearly refers to something that is foreign and unrelated to the true Christian faith. In the early church these false and unbiblical doctrines just abounded, and nothing has changed. They still abound in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, in the overall context of Hebrews, the obvious “**various and strange doctrines**” were those that were undermining the person and the work of Jesus Christ. For instance, there was the doctrine of Gnosticism which said that Jesus was only a phantom. The whole issue of whether or not someone is open and privy to strange and crude doctrines is something that God takes very seriously because it is something that undermines and demeans His Son. Believers need to make sure that they are willing to take very seriously the teaching of Hebrews about the preeminence of God’s Word and the supremacy of Jesus Christ.

Now, in coming to **Hebrews 13:10-14**, it is without any question one of the most difficult passages in all of the New Testament to approach. It must be kept in mind that nearly 30-35 years after the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ that there was no room in a meaningful spiritual realm for material sacrifices, animal offerings, sacred meals, or hallowed altars. All of that was gone. It is over and finished. It no longer had any meaningful purpose. What those things would do would be to easily lead the believers away from the one great aspect of their faith – namely that Jesus Christ died for them. It is the shedding of His blood that saves, not some ritual or some worldly sacrifice. There is only one sacrifice that really matters, and it is the sacrifice that Jesus Christ made on the believer’s behalf.

In order to gain an understanding of its message to believers, it is critical to appreciate to whom the author is writing. Now, that may seem somewhat obvious, but the multitude of interpretations that surround this passage make the approach to it even more critical. In v10, the author says “**We have an altar...**” The “**we**” of v10 are the believers to whom he is addressing this letter, and there is an obvious contrast here between the “**we**” and “**those who...have no right to eat**”. The author is clearly contrasting two very different groups. The other major point to immediately see is that he is talking about the Day of Atonement. How is that known? Well, it is because it was only on the Day of Atonement that the priests could not eat off of the altar. Normally, they could eat the remains of the sacrificial animals, but on the Day of Atonement they were not allowed to eat of the sin offerings that were being sacrificed. The actual remains of the animals that were sacrificed had to be burned outside the camp. I.e., they could not keep burn-

ing the remains on the actual altar. Obviously, the animals that were being sacrificed on the Day of Atonement were a type of Jesus Christ where the blood of the animals would be taken into the Holy of Holies by the High Priest, and then the bodies of the animals were taken outside of the camp for their final disposition and burned in their entirety (v11). All of the offerings were presented to God.

However, the real emphasis of the passage occurs in v12-13 where it says that Jesus Christ had to suffer outside of the gate and that believers are to be willing to do the same. Well, what does that mean for the modern Christian? How do they interpret that without over spiritualizing it? It was because Jesus Christ taught the truth about God, about man, about sin, and about the only way of salvation that He was despised and rejected by men and taken outside the city gates and crucified. It was outside of all of the religious paraphernalia, outside of the temple, outside of all of the religious trappings of that day. Jesus was never a part of the religious system of that day. Religion is deadly! If what someone wants is to be respected by the world and if what they want is to be admired by the religious setting that surrounds them, then most likely they will not experience much meaningful grace in their life. So what if someone could have the biggest crowds and the biggest steeples and have the most television programs. So what if they could have the most buildings and the most programs and the largest choirs and the largest staff. So what? Where does any of that fit into the record of the New Testament? Where does any of that even have a smattering of New Testament attention? Listen to how Paul addressed the church at Thessalonica and see if any worldly achievements in the eyes of man would have mattered one iota to Paul. In [1 Thessalonians 1:6-8](#), Paul gave this encouragement,

**<sup>1Th 1:6</sup>And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, <sup>7</sup>so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. <sup>8</sup>For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.**

The only thing that seems to afflict many segments of modern Christianity is the hunger pains that they have to endure at noon time on Sunday. Somewhere along the way the church has to decide who it is that they really want to please. The church can never

approach what it means to be a New Testament Christian if all that they want to do is to stay within the comfortable confines of modern Christianity. It is a Christianity that often times seems to have lost its spiritual moorings and understanding of what it really means to be a committed follower of Jesus Christ. A genuine follower of Christ cannot just stay within the comfortable confines of modern religion. Why? It is because the cross is found outside the gate and outside all of the comfortable trappings that are called religion. [Hebrews 13:13](#) says,

**Heb 13:13 Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.**

Jesus has forever made it clear that following Him means rejection by the world. In His last words to His disciples in [John 15:18-19](#), Jesus said this to His disciples,

**Jn 15:18 "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. <sup>19</sup>If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.**

If they choose, believers can stay within the comfortable confines of modern religion, but it is seriously doubted if they will ever find Jesus there. The modern church has found a way to feel comfortable about what it is doing. It has built secure religious walls around the church so that too much is not demanded of believers, but in so doing they are very often ignoring God's real purposes for their life and for their churches. Christians can stay inside the walls of the church if they want, but the real courage comes when they take the church outside of its walls where things are not as safe. It is there that they "bear His reproach" – there outside the safe confines of the well-honed machine called religion. It is outside the gate that all of that really takes place.

#### **ENDNOTES**

<sup>1</sup>Zodhiates, 1115.

<sup>2</sup>Zodhiates, 1191.

<sup>3</sup>Zodhiates, 1022.

<sup>4</sup>Brown, 257.

#### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**


Brown, Raymond. *The Message of Hebrews*. Edited by John R.W. Stott. Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982.

Zodhiates, Spiros. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*. Revised Edition, 1993. Chattanooga, Tennessee: AMG Publishers, 1992.

**Covington**  
 Dr. Steve Sullivan, President  
**Theological Seminary**  
*Conservative in Theology : Liberal in Love and Service*

Quality education through home study for those who cannot attend a campus setting.

Associate, Bachelor, Master and Doctorate Degrees offered



Areas of study Available:  
 · Theology  
 · Bible  
 · Pastoral  
 · Christian Education  
 · Counseling  
 · Music  
 · Ethnic Studies  
 Accredited by ACI

**Training Leaders  
 Impacting Eternity**

For more information contact us today: P.O. Box 176, Rossville, GA, 30741  
 Located at 1168 Cross St, Fort Oglethorpe, GA, 30742  
 Ph: 706-866-5826 Fax: 706-861-3550 Email: registrar@covingtonseminary.org  
 To request a catalogue give us a call or email: info@covingtonseminary.org

## International Extension Schools

- The North Andros Bible Institute
- Barbados, Bahamas
- Covington Theological Seminary of Brazil
- Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- Covington Theological Seminary of Chile
- Talagante Santiago, Chile
- The Ghana Baptist Institute & Bible College
- Accra, Ghana
- Covington Theological Seminary of Honduras
- Tegucigalpa, Honduras
- Covington Theological Seminary of Gudiwada
- Krishna-Andhrapradesh, India
- The International Extension of Indonesia
- Jakarta, Indonesia
- Covington Theological Seminary of Indonesia
- Papua, Indonesia
- Blue Mountain Baptist Bible College
- Ogbomosho, Oyo State, Nigeria
- Covington Theological Seminary of Pakistan
- Lahore, Pakistan
- Covington Theological Seminary of the Philippines
- Bohol, Philippines
- Covington Theological Seminary of Romania
- Susani, Romania
- Covington Theological Seminary of South Africa
- Johannesburg, South Africa
- Covington Theological Seminary of Zimbabwe
- Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe

*The Talmid is published by:*



*West Los Angeles  
 Living Word Christian Center*

6520 Arizona Avenue  
 Los Angeles, CA 90045 USA  
 (310) 645-2522 or (310) 665-0137

Email: [admin@wlawcc.org](mailto:admin@wlawcc.org)  
 Web Site: [www.wlawcc.org](http://www.wlawcc.org)