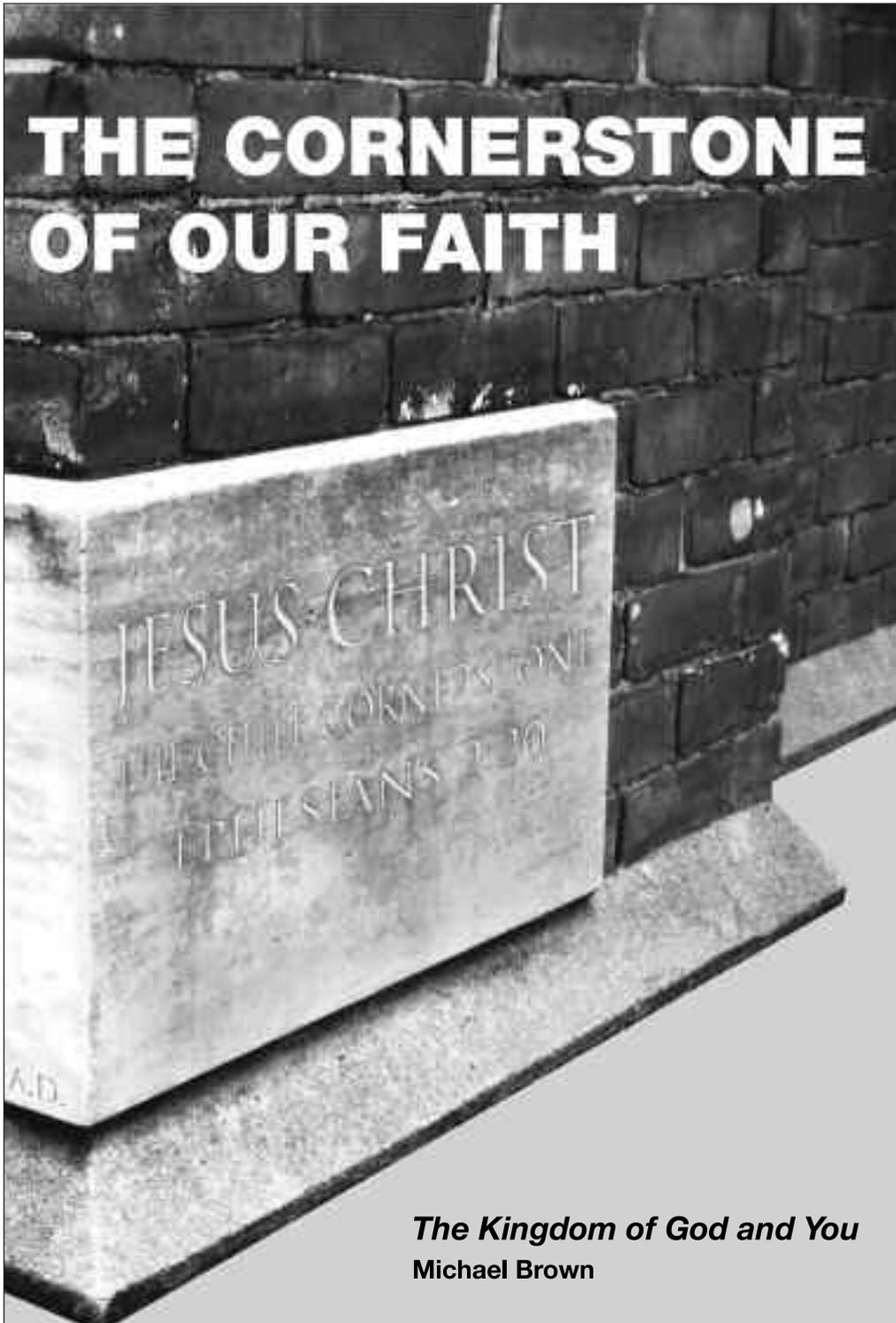


# THE CORNERSTONE OF OUR FAITH



JESUS CHRIST  
THE TRUE CORNERSTONE  
WHICH SEALS THE

*The Kingdom of God and You*  
Michael Brown

Published by 21st Century Christian

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## about the author

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Brother Brown holds a Master of Religion and a Master of Divinity from Lipscomb University as well as a Doctorate from Harding School of Theology. He also serves as a Senior Software Consultant for Marshall Space Flight Center (NASA) in Huntsville.

## how to use this study

Each lesson in this *The Cornerstone of Our Faith* study has four major parts.

Every lesson begins with an introductory section called **The Foundation**. In this section, the author will give background material to help prepare your mind and heart for God's Word.

The second part of each lesson is called **The Cornerstone**. This section is always the heart of every lesson. The Bible is explored in detail to help us understand the text. Those who are accustomed to hearing African-American preaching can hear this section "preach." God's Word is powerfully presented so that all can understand.

The next section of each study is critical for the Word to fulfill its intended purpose. It is called **The Inscription**. Just as people take note of inscriptions on cornerstones or monuments, each lesson is written so as to drive home a point worth remembering and a principle worth following. It offers the encouragement to change attitudes or behaviors to align better with God's Word. To *know* the Bible is one thing; to *do* it is another.

Every lesson ends with a series of thought-provoking **Discussion Questions** that help you explore God's Word on a personal and a congregational level. These questions provide opportunities for group discussion and participation. Teachers can tell by the responses whether their students have really come to grips with the lesson.

## **introduction**

The main focus of this study is understanding the concept of the kingdom of God and the implications of it upon the lives of its citizens. The objective is to provide a more comprehensive understanding of and appreciation for the kingdom.

No study of the kingdom of God, or study of the Scriptures in general, should lead to mere intellectual stimulation. Therefore, this study places significant emphasis on the joys and responsibilities of kingdom citizenship.

Upon completion of this study series, Christians will be well-equipped for a complete life experience with the Lord and with one another. In addition, Christians will have a more keen perspective of the common events and experiences of life in this world.

## **author's note**

The kingdom of God is a comprehensive yet life-changing concept. It is at the center of everything that God has done, is doing, and will continue to do in this world. It is a divine undertaking that is open to all to share.

However, the kingdom of God is greatly misunderstood. Though some have viewed it too narrowly, others have not really considered it at all. In this study we open our minds to this divine institution. It is a study that will challenge us to evolve our thinking from Christian religion to Christian relationship.

I hope this study will move you to greater depths of understanding of God's kingdom and broader experiences of kingdom life. This study is designed to nurture the spiritually young and reinvigorate the spiritually mature in kingdom understanding and living.

## God's Eternal Purpose

*Genesis 1:26*



Perhaps you have given casual or deeper thought to the question, “Why am I here?” Perhaps this question has expanded to thoughts of what God is doing in the world. Though the unbeliever, the agnostic, or even the atheist may consider these as moot questions, the Christian can rejoice in God’s divinely provided written answer.

An understanding of the meaning of our lives and God’s work in this world requires an understanding of the kingdom of God. Though the phrase is often heard, its meaning is frequently missed.



The Genesis account presents the reader with a worldview. A person’s worldview is a framework for understanding past, present, and future events. It allows one to make sense of what is happening in the world. The Christian worldview begins with God as the eternal agent and sustainer of all existence. It sees God as active in time and guiding the world into eternity.

Redemption, in theological terminology, is the release from the power that owned us. The Scriptures personify sin as our owning power before Jesus came to set us free (Romans 6:4-6; Ephesians 1:7; 2:1, 2).

### **In the Beginning**

Our understanding of the kingdom of God begins with a proper theological lens. The term “theology” can turn us away. Though it is a deeply complicated discipline, we can sum up its definition quite easily. Theology is the study of God. It involves our understanding of God. For our purposes in this lesson, theology is defined as how we understand God and His work in this world.

It is helpful to have an overall perspective of God and His work in the world. Everything that God has done, is doing, and will do as it concerns the kingdom is a direct result of who God is and how He exists.

An understanding of God begins with His triune nature. This means that God exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is known as the “Godhead.” This is what is meant by the doctrine of the Trinity. Though God exists in three distinct persons, He is still one.

How does God exist as three, yet one? Within the Godhead, there is diversity. There is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Holy Spirit. Each is a distinct person, yet the three exist as one. Though there is diversity in the Godhead, this diversity exists in unity. The Father is always in union with the Son, and the Son is always in union with the Holy Spirit. There is perfect harmony in the Godhead.

The Scriptures capture this thought of unity in the Godhead for us in the scene of the baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3:13-17). In that scene, Jesus (God the Son) is being baptized. God the Father speaks words of approval. The Holy Spirit ap-

pears in the form of a dove. Another such reference to the Godhead as three unified, but distinct, persons is revealed in the Great Commission Jesus gave to His disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). Jesus instructed that those who would come to Him in faith should be baptized into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This means that the baptized persons would enter into relationship with the Godhead.

There is unity, equality, diversity, fellowship, and peace (*shalom*) within the Godhead. God exists in total harmony. It is from this foundation that humanity was created. We were created to mirror the relationship of the Godhead. This is really a staggering thought. God created us male and female – thus we are diverse (Genesis 1:27). God created us equal regardless of our diversity. God created us to have fellowship with the Godhead, and with each other. God created us in peace. His design for us was to share in the relational *shalom* that exists within the Godhead.

When Satan confronted Eve, he led her into a chain of events that reversed the human experience God originally intended. His deceptive words encouraged her to break God's command (Genesis 2:16, 17; 3:1-6). She in turn encouraged Adam to do the same (Genesis 3:6). As a result of this act of disobedience, all humanity forfeited the paradise God had provided. Estrangement, chaos, and depravity became the lot of humanity (Genesis 3:9-13). Adam hid from the Lord, indicating estrangement from God. The relational *shalom* experienced earlier in the garden is now fractured by blame and mistrust. Sin's slippery slope quickly descended into murder and polygamy (Genesis 4:1-15, 23, 24). Depravity deepened as humanity continued walking away from God (Genesis 4:16; 6:5, 6).

Today, our world is consumed with gender, racial, and cultural divisiveness. Humanity continues on a downward spiral that keeps us from experiencing the life we were created to

enjoy. However, God has not stood by idly watching us drive ourselves toward total destruction. In the wake of humanity's fall, He initiated the way to restore His original creation intent of having humanity reflect the equality, diversity, and relational *shalom* of the Godhead.

### **Redemption History**

When we speak of “redemption history,” we are speaking of how God has worked in human affairs for the purpose of redeeming humanity. Though God had every right to abandon and/or destroy His human creation, He issued a gracious plan to restore fallen humanity – reconciling us with Him. Having promised humanity's redemption, God moved to begin creation anew by sparing Noah (Genesis 6:5-22). God then moved to call a nation from among humanity spared through the flood. This was initiated in the call of Abram (Abraham, Genesis 12:1-3). Through the seed of Abraham, God called a nation and gave them His law to live by (Exodus 20:1-17). In giving Israel His law, God was really conjoining them to the same relational concept that humanity had from creation. Our human fore-parents were given law (Genesis 2:15-17). The rule of God demands law for His subjects. Though God created us equal with one another, we were not created as His equals. Being in His kingdom requires living under His law. However, His law is always our freedom. Living in this paradox is the key to living a fulfilled life (Deuteronomy 10:12, 13).

God's redemptive work continued from the forming of a nation, Israel, to the coming of God the Son into the world. This mission of Jesus was to call a people of God that would be forgiven, cleansed, justified, sanctified, and glorified (Mark 1:15; Matthew 16:13-18; Romans 8:29, 30). These people are variously referred to as the church, the church of the firstborn, the church of God, the church of the living God, the body of

Christ, and the kingdom of God. Other references are also used in the New Testament to refer to this community of Christ. They are under God's rule in this life. They share in a foretaste of the full sense of being a people of God in eternity.

We praise God for His promise to redeem fallen humanity (Genesis 3:15). We praise Him for sending the One to crush the head of humanity's destroyer. His promise, in the wake of humanity's fall, introduced the concept of a divine, transcendent kingdom that can be experienced on earth. It is within this kingdom that we begin to enjoy the life we were created to experience.



Gaining an understanding of the big picture gives us an appreciation for what God has done and is doing within time. It allows us to see the importance of continuing to respond to the Lord in faith – seeking to be obedient to His demands upon our lives (John 14:15; 15:14).

We can never afford to minimize or dismiss the fact that citizenship in the kingdom demands obedience to the king. It is only as we are obedient that we can enjoy the fruit of divine citizenship in time and in eternity.

God's establishment of His kingdom on earth was not an afterthought. He intended this in eternity before the creation of the world. He foreknew of humanity's fall. His response was a readied one. Though we can never fully comprehend these concepts, we can rejoice that the kingdom is here and open for all who would seek it.

## Questions for Discussion

1. How do we best define “relational *shalom*”?
2. What are some examples of relational *shalom*?
3. What is redemption?
4. How was God’s sparing of Noah still an act of grace, despite Noah’s goodness (Genesis 6:9)?
5. What does God’s provision of law teach us about being in His kingdom?
6. How do we best understand being free, yet being under God’s law?
7. What are some examples of God’s commands for our good?
8. Why is our definition of what is good for us often different from God’s definition of good?
9. In what sense did Jesus destroy our destroyer?
10. Why is our experience in the kingdom today only a fore-taste of what comes in eternity?

## *For Further Thought*

1. Discuss the significance of God’s promise of redemption (see Genesis 3:15).
2. Discuss why we still struggle with satanic power even though Jesus has already come.