

Focus on the Kingdom

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Who Is God and Who Is Jesus?

This is a question which no lover of God and His Scripture can afford to ignore. It is unfortunately a question which evokes powerful emotion, as different groups struggle to maintain a position against opposing ones. This ought never to be the case in Christian circles. We should all be committed to the Berean exercise of searching out the Truth in a prayerful and calm frame of mind.

At present an atmosphere of fear prevents honest and open discussion of these great biblical issues about the identity of Jesus and God. Such fear impedes reasoned discussion. If one is receiving a paycheck from supporters of a “what-we-have-always-believed” position on the Godhead, a conscious decision to put the love of truth ahead of money will be required. The truth of the words of Jesus is to be desired at all costs. Is that not what the Messiah stated almost constantly as he encountered would-be disciples?

History shows that majority views, not necessarily the truth, prevailed. The winners in church disputes were sometimes those who could exercise the most “clout.” Ecclesiastical dogmas came into being, not necessarily reflecting the truth of the Bible, but for reasons of party spirit and political intrigue. It is a well-established fact of history that the Council of Nicea in AD 325, which determined the basis of Church dogma relative to the nature of God and His Son, made its resolutions in the face of much honest objection from some of those present.

The history of the debate which resulted in Trinitarianism has been misrepresented. Dr. R.P.C. Hanson rehearses the story, as it has been *wrongly* told: “Early in the fourth century a wicked heretic called Arius started some highly unorthodox doctrine about the divinity of Christ. This dangerous heresy was soon answered, at Nicea in 325 AD, when the correct reply was given by the orthodox bishops, a reply which had always been available and which had for long been well known by all responsible theologians. But a small band of unorthodox, Arian bishops...were by their machinations able to overthrow the plans of the orthodox, prevent the obvious truth being openly acknowledged and prolong the controversy for another forty or fifty years. At the

end of this period the villainous [Arian] heretics were deposed, the suffering and virtuous orthodox reinstated and Catholic truth gloriously vindicated in the new version of the Nicene Creed.”

Professor Hanson then says: “This is a travesty of the truth.” It is in fact a completely unrealistic picture of what actually happened. “The fact is that when the Arian controversy broke out, nobody knew the correct answer to the question, ‘How divine is Jesus Christ?’...The vast majority of the theologians of the Church before the time of Origen, and many after his time, had taught and believed that the Son was produced by the Father for the purposes of creating the world...They would all have said that there was a time, or possibly a situation, when the Son or the Word was not [i.e., did not exist]” (*The Continuity of Christian Doctrine*, pp. 52-55).

When you pray, which God are you addressing? A God mysteriously composed of three eternal Persons? A God-Family of two eternal members? Or a God who is a single Divine Person who sent His unique Son to be Savior of the world? If you choose the latter option, what does it mean that God *sent* His Son? Did that Son have his origin as a created angel? Or did he originate in the womb of his mother? The following is a simplified account of the various options espoused over the centuries and currently.

Four Options in Christology (Who is Jesus?)

All views say he is the Messiah and Son of God, but differ in the definition of what “Son of God” means

Option 1: Jesus is the eternally begotten Son of God. He never had a beginning but was uncreated and coequal, of the same **essence** as the Father, and coeternal with Him. That **uncreated Son** became man by putting on **impersonal human nature** and entering Mary’s womb. As he did this, he was no less fully God than he had always been. He continued to be fully God, not subordinate to the Father. The baby was at the same time upholding the universe as God. He was also fully man and remains man now as well as fully God. *Traditional view of Roman Catholic and most Protestant churches based on the Councils of Nicea (325 AD) and Chalcedon (451 AD). In a modified form as Binitarianism, held originally by Worldwide Church of God and still by some offshoots.*

Option 2: Jesus is the **created Son of God**, that is, created just before the creation in Genesis 1. Only the Father is uncreated and eternal. The Son came into existence, was generated, before Genesis 1. That created Son took on human flesh in Mary. *The Arian view. Jehovah's Witnesses believe this.*

Option 3: Jesus is the Son of God **coming into existence by miracle in the womb of Mary** (Luke 1:35; Matt. 1:20; 1 John 5:18, not KJV). He existed before this only in the great Plan of God. Thus he is a uniquely begotten (created) human being, the second Adam and Son of God (Luke 1:35; Matt. 1:20). He was so filled with the spirit that he could say "If you have seen or heard me you have seen and heard my Father" who speaks through me. He is "the prophet like Moses from the people of Israel" (Deut. 18:15-18; Acts 3:22; 7:37) as well as the uniquely begotten **Son of God** and the **Man Messiah** of Luke 2:11; Psalm 110:1; 1 Timothy 2:5. *This is "Socinian" Christology, from the 1600's. The same view was held in the 1500's by Servetus and in the earliest post-biblical centuries by Paul of Samosata, Theodotus and the Photinians.*

Option 4: Jesus is the same Person as his Father. The One God is manifested in three phases, or modes. *Oneness Pentecostals believe this. This view was condemned as Sabellianism or Modalism by the Trinitarians.*

In the following three charts we offer you a pictorial account of how the Son of God has been viewed by the differing parties. The key to understanding these is the question about *when the Son of God came into existence*, or whether he was always in existence and had no beginning. For those espousing the view that Jesus did *not* begin in the womb of Mary, selected texts from Paul and John have been the basis for the defense of that position.

The second chart suggests that a Son of God who antedates his own conception does not correspond to the Son of God of the Bible. This may appear to be a shocking idea, but we recommend some protracted meditation and search of the biblical evidence. Remember always the extraordinary power of a belief inculcated over many years by beloved teachers. It is hard to consider a paradigm shift, but this may be necessary as well as liberating. In chart two we list the principal verses pointing to the origin of the Son of God in history in the womb of his mother Mary. The reference to John 1:13 as a possible indication of this view may not be immediately clear. The fact is that quotations of this verse from four sources earlier than any of our extant NT manuscripts read as follows:

"who was born not of the will of man..." It is argued by a number of experts that this reading is likely to be original. It would point to Jesus, not Christians, as the one who was supernaturally begotten. It would be, in other words, a direct testimony to John's belief in the supernatural origin of the Son in Mary. This would be in exact harmony with the plain statements in Matthew 1:16, 18, 20 and Luke 1:35 about how Jesus the Son of God began his existence.

The question put by Jesus to his students — and remember that Christians today are equally the disciples of Jesus — was "Who do you say that I am?" The danger of misunderstanding was most real. To imagine a Jesus who is not the Jesus of the Bible is a trap laid for the gullible, the uninstructed and unwary. We are supposed to relate to the actual Jesus of history, now ascended to heaven. On no account are we to invent our own picture of who *we* think Jesus was and is. An idol does not have to be a figure in metal or stone. It can also be the creation of our own imagination. Paul therefore warned that the Devil's technique was to proclaim "another Jesus, another spirit and another Gospel." The Devil's technique was subtle. It would not serve his purpose to deny the existence of Jesus, spirit and Gospel. It would be more effective to present a distorted Jesus, spirit and Gospel. He would maintain the biblical terms but alter their content and meaning. "I believe in the Son of God" would then not be a biblical confession unless it were known *who* that Son of God is. Hence Jesus' pressing question, "Who do *you* say that I am?"

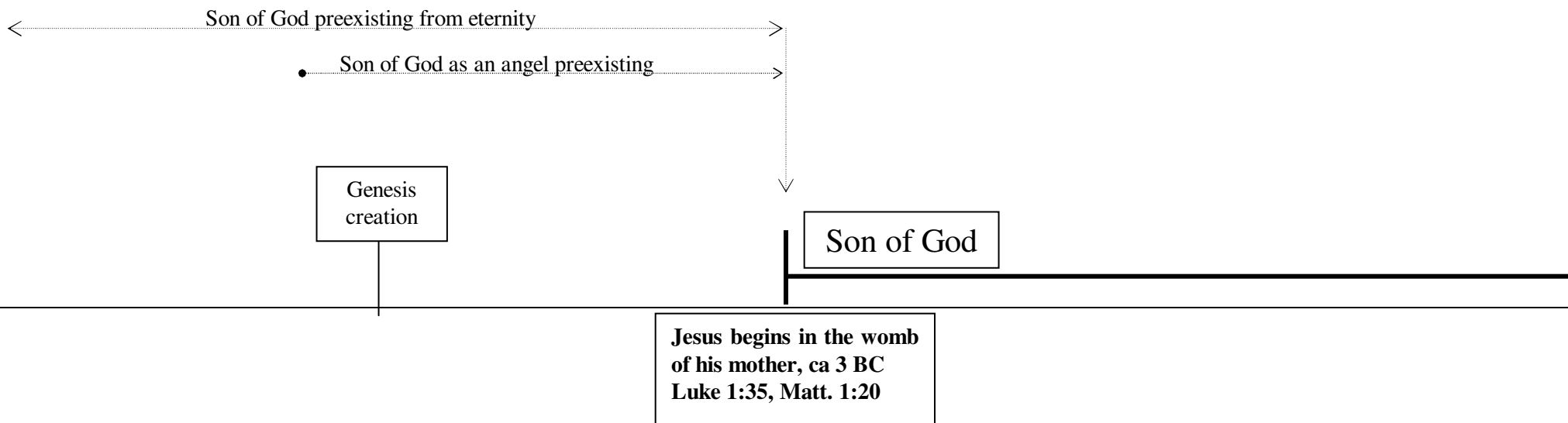
Our **third chart** shows how the proposition "Jesus is God" as distinct from the biblical confession "Jesus is *the Son* of God" bases itself on three Old Testament passages, a few verses from John and Paul, and isolated verses in Hebrews and Revelation. It can make no appeal to Matthew, Mark, Luke or Acts in which not a word is said about Jesus "preexisting himself." The whole idea of "preexistence" (how can you be before you are?) is fraught with problems and complexity. But it was, we contend, the creation of a **pre-historic Son of God** by post-biblical theologians which plunged the believers into a chaos over the identity of Jesus from which the churches have never yet recovered.

Our **fourth chart** invites your attention to the broad question of God's salvation Plan and Program — a clear "premillennial" pattern: Jesus is destined to return to the earth to inaugurate a thousand-year rule of peace on earth. During that time he and the saints will administer a world order based on justice and righteousness. ✧

Son of Man in Daniel, foreknown/preexisting in God's plan (1 Pet. 1:20)

— The word

Isa. 44:24: The Son of God was not with Yahweh at creation.



==== = No Son before birth of Jesus

———— = Preexisting Son?

Son of God
“eternally begotten”

IMAGINATIVE STORY
The “halo” added to the
historical Jesus, turning
him into coequal God

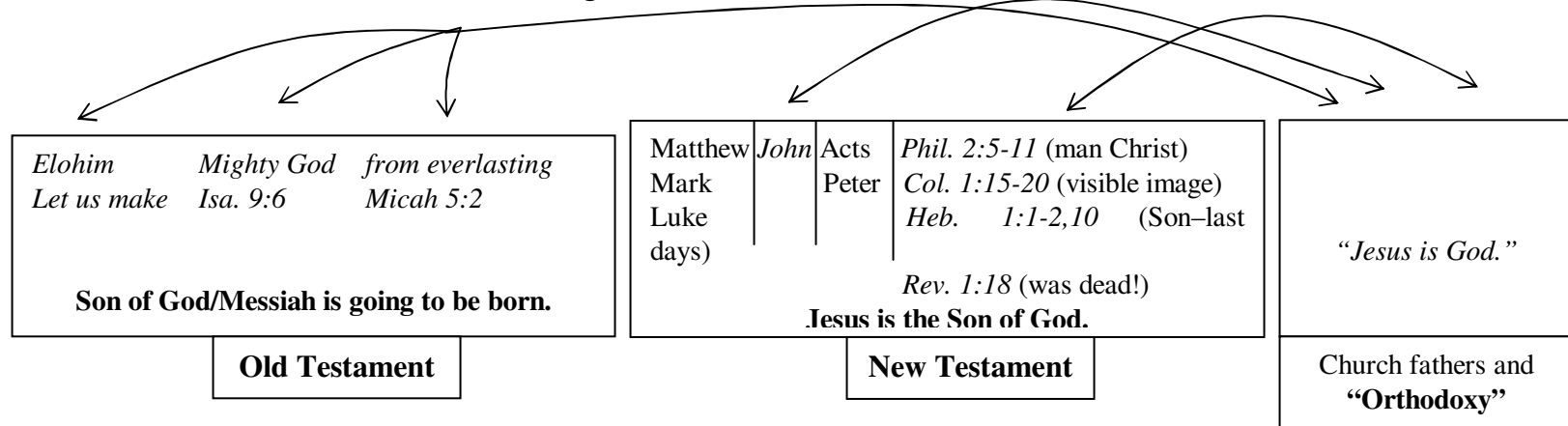
BIBLICAL STORY

**Son of God
begotten in
Mary**

Luke 1:35
Matt. 1:18-20
1 Jn 5:18
perhaps Jn. 1:13
Ps. 2:7
Heb. 1:5
Acts 13:33

NO BIBLICAL SUPPORT

How Jesus Was Turned into God



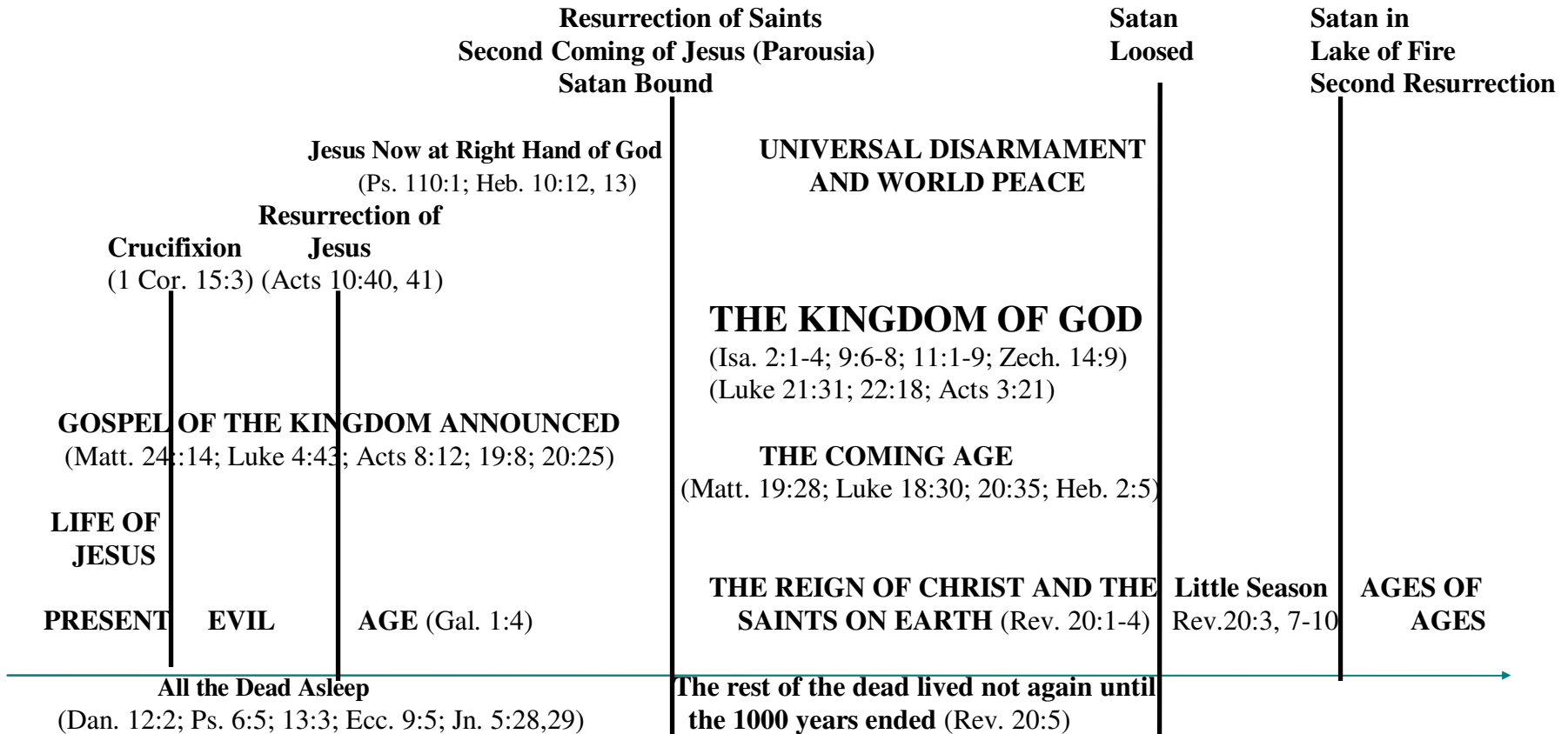
Ignoring:
 20,000 singular pronouns
 Scholarly consensus that there is no Trinity in the OT
 Jews were unitary monotheists
Elohim does not have a plural meaning when referred to God. A single pagan god is also called *Elohim*.
 Psalm 110:1 says Messiah is not God
 50 statements that God was the sole creator, unaided (Isa. 44:24)
 Mistranslation in Micah 5:2. Should read “from ancient times,” not “from everlasting” (KJV).
 “Mighty God” = divine hero (Brown Driver Briggs *Lexicon of OT Hebrew* “el”)

Ignoring:
 There is no occurrence of word “God” which means “God in Three Persons”
 ὁ θεός (God) = Father of Jesus, over 1300 times
 Jesus is the Messiah, the lord *adoni* (not *adonai*) of Psalm 110:1. *Adoni* is never in all of its 195 occurrences a title of Deity. Psalm 110:1 is the controlling Christological text of the NT (see Acts 2:34-36 and “my lord” in Luke 1:43; “Lord Jesus,” “Lord Christ,” Luke 2:11, “Lord Jesus Christ.” multiple times)

New language: Church fathers:
 Jesus came *through* Mary
 NT: begotten *from* and *in* Mary
 Moses was “prepared from the beginning of the world to be mediator” (Testament of Moses, Pseudepigrapha)
 “God created the world on behalf of His people” (Testament of Moses)
 The new creation is through Jesus and God made the world with Jesus as the occasion of creation. God created alone (Isa. 44:24) and He rested, not Jesus, from His work (Heb. 4:4).
 “Polytheism entered the faith camouflaged with Justin Martyr” (L. Coffey)

THE CHRISTIAN GOOD NEWS

(Luke 4:43; 8:1; Acts 8:12; 19:8; 20:24, 25; 28:23, 31)



Incomprehensible “Church-Speak”

The single greatest weakness in the whole theory that “Jesus is God,” a coequal, uncreated Person of the Triune God, lies in the question about the Son of God’s beginning and origin. In order to believe in the Trinity one must subscribe to the idea that the Son of God had **no beginning in time**. According to the language of the creeds of Roman Catholics and nearly all Protestant churches, the Son of God was “eternally generated,” or “generated before all ages.” This concept derives from the church father Origen, c. 185-254. It was clear to all that Jesus is called the Son of God. A son is one generated or begotten by a father. But since the biblical Son of God, Jesus, was held to be an **eternal being**, God, the second member of the Trinity, it was required by church members to believe that the Son of God was “eternally generated” (contradicting Ps. 2:7; Matt. 1:18, 20; Luke 1:35; 1 John 5:18, not KJV).

The phrase “eternal generation” needs to be carefully inspected by students of the Bible wishing to build their faith on Scripture. Does it make any sense? Do the words “**eternal generation**” bear any intelligible meaning? Or are they simply sounds produced by the voice with no meaning? Take any dictionary and look up the word “generate.” It means “to bring into existence,” “to cause to exist.” It describes what happens when a father generates or begets a child. If, then, a child is **brought into existence**, it follows of course that the child was *not* in existence before. You cannot come into existence or receive existence, i.e., be generated or begotten, if you are *already* in existence. A leading theologian of our time puts it this way: “**Sonship cannot at the same time consist in preexistence and still have its origin only in the divine procreation of Jesus in Mary**” (Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man*, p. 143). In plain language, you cannot at the same time **come into existence** as the Son of God if you have already been in existence as the Son of God.

“Eternal generation,” which lies at the basis of the so-called “orthodox” views of Jesus’ Sonship, presents us with an unintelligible notion. To be generated means to come into existence. “Eternal” describes what is outside time and has no beginning. One might just as logically speak of “square circles,” or “round triangles.” To be “eternally generated” would mean that one has a “beginningless beginning.”

Unfortunately church members have not given these central biblical issues much thought. They know they are supposed to believe that “Jesus is God,” and

they may or may not know what that entails. Probably they have not realized that it means that the Son of God they claim as Savior was “**eternally generated**” — “very God of very God,” as the creed states.

Luke and Matthew do not present any such “eternally generated” Son of God. In fact they rule out any such possibility in the case of Jesus. Luke 1:35 says that *because of*, and based on the miracle of God’s procreating act in Mary, Jesus will be the Son of God. He is the Son of God, not surprisingly, because God and not Joseph was his father. The Father created the second Adam, the Son of God, not, like Adam, from the dust, but within the human biological chain — from Mary, a descendant of the royal family of David (see 2 Sam. 7:14-16; Luke 1:32-35; Matt. 1:16-20).✧

Comments

“I was raised in the Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod) and my husband of 50 years was Catholic. To make a long story short it was my son who put me in touch with your writings. I have your book *The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity’s Self-Inflicted Wound* and I have been reading many back issues of *Focus on the Kingdom*. I have gained a wealth of knowledge from them and look forward to reading many more of your letters. I am 72 and all my life I have searched for truth, feeling that something was missing or not right. I told my son yesterday that from now on I will be reading Scripture in a new light. I have said for years that I am sure that Jesus is most sorrowful at what man has made of his word/gospel. I’m sure he doesn’t recognize his church as he intended it to be.” — *Arizona*

“Your studies are so enlightening and I am very thankful and happy that in my search for biblical truths, God has led me to your publication and reading material. It has given my spiritual life a great boost.” — *Wisconsin*

“When I came across your assertion that *adoni* is never used in reference to Almighty GOD, I was amazed. To verify this I used BibleWorks. I searched on the Hebrew word *adoni* as found in Psalm 110:1, and sure enough it listed 195 occurrences in 163 verses.” (*The writer went on to list all 195 occurrences of adoni, the title in Psalm 110:1 telling us that the Messiah is not God.*)

The 13th annual Theological Conference at Atlanta Bible College will be April 23-25, 2004. All are welcome. Please mark your calendars.