

# Focus on the Kingdom

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## The Simplicity of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God

The purpose of this study is to show that the Good News of the Kingdom of God is essentially simple. It is a message about a coming universal rule on earth and how you can take part in that world government. Jesus saw the announcement of that message as the chief purpose of his mission: **“I must preach the glad news of the Kingdom of God to the other towns as well, for that is what I was sent to do” (Luke 4:43).**<sup>1</sup>

Contrary to the cherished belief of nearly all churchgoers, the destiny of the Christian believer was never to “go to heaven” at death. In biblical terms his prospect is to be restored to life by resurrection at the time of Christ’s return to the earth, to be granted immortality, and then to rule with Christ *on earth*. This message is taught by both Old and New Testaments. Because it was well understood by the early church, it did not have to be stated on every page of the New Testament. It was also a potentially dangerous message, since it threatened the existing political order; hence a certain reticence about a coming Messianic government was observed by the New Testament writers. Nevertheless the rule of Christ and his saints is the underlying theme of Jesus’ preaching of the Good News about the Kingdom of God. The clarity of the message has been lost only because the Church defected from her loyalty to the Good News of the Messianic Rule, and replaced the Gospel of the Kingdom of God with ethereal promises of “heaven” when you die.

Much has been made of the Kingdom as already present in the ministry of Christ. No doubt that aspect of the Kingdom finds a place in the teaching of the New Testament. Yet a veil has been drawn over the all-important second act of the drama of the Kingdom: *the return of the Messiah in power, to inaugurate a universal government*. Attention has traditionally been focused on an indefinite salvation, beyond space and time. Such a promise of “heaven” would have been meaningless to Jesus and his contemporaries. No Hebrew, rooted in the Old Testament, would have

entertained such a concept. There is not a shred of evidence that Jesus intended to overthrow the hopes of all the Old Testament prophets. Indeed, the New Testament names him as the one sent to confirm the promises made to the fathers (Rom. 15:8) — and the fathers expected to inherit the earth (Ps. 37:9, 11, 22).

No wonder then that a leading New Testament scholar states that “Heaven is never in fact used in the Bible for the destination of the dying” (J.A.T. Robinson, *In the End God*, p. 104). It is therefore important that the inquiring Christian find out what reward is promised to him, so that he may prepare himself appropriately. That reward is intimately bound up with the message of the Kingdom of God, preached by Jesus and later by Paul and the early Church. The message may be presented in language which a child would have no difficulty in grasping; hence the beauty of a Gospel accessible to all at all times. No special theological training is required for understanding the Good News; rather it must be accepted with the mind of a child.

The biblical story of the Kingdom of God and the Christian’s part in that coming Kingdom is outlined below:

The prophets of the Old Testament foresaw a time when God would overthrow all human governments of the present evil age (Gal. 1:4) and replace them with a government led by a Messiah (an anointed king):

“And in the days of these kings [the executives of human government existing at the time of Jesus’ future Coming] the God of heaven shall set up a Kingdom never to be swept away, with a sovereignty that shall never pass to others; it shall break all these kingdoms to bits and make an end of them, but it shall stand forever. The Great God has told the king [Nebuchadnezzar] what is to happen in the future: the dream is certain and its meaning sure” (Dan. 2:44, 45).

“Then in my vision by night I saw a figure in human form coming with the clouds of heaven, coming up to the primeval Being, from whom he received dominion, glory and a Kingdom, that all nations, races, and folk of every tongue should serve

<sup>1</sup> All quotations are from Moffat unless otherwise indicated. However, the term Kingdom has been retained where Moffat has “Reign.”

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him. His dominion is a lasting dominion, never to pass away, and his Kingdom shall never be overthrown. The Kingdom and dominion and the might of all kingdoms *under heaven* shall be given to the Saints of the Most High, a people whose Kingdom is a lasting Kingdom to be served and obeyed by all dominions” (Dan. 7:13, 14, 27).

When that government assumes power, the nations will lay down their arms and learn the ways of peace:

“In after days it shall be that the Eternal’s hill shall rise towering above every hill and higher than the heights. To it shall all the nations stream and many a folk exclaim ‘Come, let us go to the Eternal’s hill, to the house of Jacob’s God, that He may instruct us in His ways, to walk upon His paths.’ For instruction comes from Zion and from Jerusalem the Eternal’s word. He will decide the disputes of the nations and settle many a people’s case, till swords are beaten into ploughshares, spears into pruning hooks; no nation draws the sword against another; no longer shall men learn to fight. For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Eternal as the ocean-bed is full of water” (Isa. 2:2-4; 11:9).

The Messiah, God’s chosen representative, will become King of the whole earth:

“The Eternal your God arrives with all His Holy angels...On that day He shall set His feet on the Mount of Olives...Then shall the Eternal be King over all the earth. The Eternal on that day shall be the one God, and His worship the one worship” (Zech. 14:4, 5, 9). “His dominion shall be from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth” (Zech. 9:9, AV).

The birth of Jesus of Nazareth is the decisive event in the unfolding of the divine plan. Of Jesus it was said that he was the one destined to rule over the House of Israel forever:

“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God. The Lord will make him a King, as his ancestor David was, and he will be King of the descendants of Jacob forever; his Kingdom will never end” (Luke 1:32, 33).

Taking up this same theme, Jesus preached this Good News (Gospel) of the Kingdom of God, and proclaimed that in his ministry that Kingdom had drawn near. The King of the coming Kingdom was present on earth. His message was that people should change their minds (repent), receive forgiveness for their wrongdoing, believe the message of the Kingdom of God, and, in faith, obey the laws of that Kingdom.

“The time has now come; God’s Kingdom is near. Repent and believe the Gospel” (Mark 1:15). “If you

want to get into Life, keep the commandments” (Matt. 19:17).

Although the Kingdom was present in its King, Jesus, the establishment of the Kingdom was still in the future. Thus the Church must continue to pray “Thy Kingdom come,” and hope for the Kingdom’s arrival with Christ at his (second) coming (2 Tim. 4:1).

The King’s followers, the disciples, who recognized Jesus as the Messiah, were promised a definite reward in the coming New Age. That reward was to receive immortality and to reign with the Messiah in his Kingdom. With him they were to be the executives of a world government:

“Peter said, ‘We have left our all and followed you. Now what are we to get?’ Jesus said to them, ‘I tell you truly, in the new world, when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me shall also sit on twelve thrones to govern the twelve tribes of Israel...It is you who have stood by me through my trials; so, as my father has assigned me royal power, I assign you the right of eating and drinking at my table in my Kingdom and of sitting on thrones to rule the twelve tribes of Israel’” (Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30).

On one occasion when Jesus was approaching Jerusalem, the people expected the Kingdom to appear immediately. Jesus took this opportunity to explain that he must first depart and later return to establish his Kingdom. In harmony with his promises, Jesus pictured himself as a nobleman who expected to leave the earth for a far country (heaven), there to receive a Kingdom and to return. At his return his servants were to be rewarded with positions of rulership over cities, while those who refused to accept him as King would be destroyed (Luke 19:11-27).

Jesus’ message was accepted by very few of his Jewish compatriots. Though they knew that God had promised one day to send the Messiah, they refused to believe that Jesus was that promised King. Thus the Messiah was put to death by the religious and civil authorities of his day. After he had lain for three days and nights in the grave, God restored him to life, and he was seen alive by his disciples.

“He died...he was buried, he rose on the third day. He was seen by Cephas (Peter), then by the twelve; after that he was seen by James, then by all the Apostles, and finally he was seen by myself (Paul)” (I Cor. 15:3-8).

As we have seen, Jesus had promised to come back to the earth, to inaugurate the worldwide government foreseen by all the Old Testament

prophets. Speaking to his disciples just before his crucifixion, he described events leading up to his future Coming, and finished by telling them: “And then shall be seen the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and glory...So when you see all this happen, be sure that the Kingdom of God is at hand” (Luke 21:27, 31).

Jesus had said the same thing to the Jewish authorities: “And what is more you will all see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming in the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:62).

After the Messiah’s death and resurrection the disciples were naturally interested to know when the promised Kingdom would begin:

“After his sufferings he had shown them that he was alive by a number of proofs, revealing himself to them for forty days, and discussing the affairs of the Kingdom of God...Now when they met they asked him, ‘Lord, is this the time you are going to restore the Kingdom to Israel?’ But he told them, ‘It is not for you to know the course and periods of time that the Father has fixed by his own authority’” (Acts 1:3, 6, 7).

The same message about the Kingdom of God was taken up by the Apostles, who announced that at an appointed time the Messiah, who had been resurrected from the dead, would come back to rule the world. He would remain in heaven “till the period of the great Restoration. Ages ago God spoke of this by the lips of His holy prophets” (Acts 3:21).

Paul warned the people of Athens that God “has fixed a day on which He will judge [or rule] the world justly by a man whom He has destined for this. And He has given proof of this to all by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:31).

In times of severe difficulty, when he was being ill-treated by the authorities, Paul longed for the time when the Christian disciples, now known as the Church, would enter their promised Kingdom with the Messiah: “Would to God that you had ascended the throne, that we might also reign with you!” (1 Cor. 4:8, Weymouth).

For the present the lot of the Christians was to be “treated as the scum of the earth, the very refuse of the world” (1 Cor. 4:13). But one day they would be kings, and they should have known this: “Do you not know that the saints [i.e., the Church] are to manage the world? If the world is to come under your jurisdiction, are you incompetent to adjudicate upon trifles?” (1 Cor. 6:2-3; cp. Dan. 7:18, 22, 27).

Shortly before his death, Paul reminded Timothy of a well-known Christian saying, which summarized

the hope of the church: “If we endure, then we shall reign with him” (2 Tim. 2:12).

Indeed, the basis of the Christian message was “the coming world of which we speak” (Heb. 2:5).

The last book in the New Testament records a vision given by the Messiah to his servant John, to show in detail what would happen at the time of the Messiah’s return to the earth to establish his Kingdom. The purpose of this book of Revelation is: “To show Christ’s servants what must come to pass very soon...Blessed are they who hear the words of this prophecy and lay to heart what is written in it” (Rev. 1:1, 3).

John reminds his readers that the Messiah “is coming on the clouds, to be seen by every eye, even by those who impaled him, and all the tribes of the earth shall wail because of him” (Rev. 1:7).

Then Christ encourages the churches by reminding them that their suffering will one day come to an end. It is their destiny to rule the nations with Christ:

“And to the victor, the one who obeys my commands to the very end, I will give authority over the nations. And he shall be their shepherd, ruling them with a rod of iron...and his power over them shall be like that which I myself have received from my Father” (Rev. 2:26, 27, Weymouth).

The Christians have been chosen out of all the different nations to reign on earth. The Messiah “has been slain” and by his blood he has purchased for God “men out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,” and has “formed them into a Kingdom to be priests to our God, and *they shall reign on earth*” (Rev. 5:10, Moffat, Weymouth).

Such teaching is of course in perfect agreement with Jesus’ promise to the meek that they would inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5), and with the New Covenant established by the death of Jesus, by which he *covenanted* with the disciples to share his coming Kingship with them: “So I *covenant* to give you, as my Father has *covenanted* to give me, a Kingdom” (Luke 22:29).<sup>2</sup>

Later in John’s vision of the future (the book of Revelation), he sees the arrival of the Messiah, the final overthrow of all the human governments, and their replacement by the Kingdom of the Messiah: “The rule of the world has passed to our Lord and his

<sup>2</sup> Cp. Michael Wilcox, *Savior of the World, The Message of Luke’s Gospel*, p. 192: “Under the terms of that new covenant, it is you who henceforth will be the twelve rulers of the new Israel (Luke 22:30).”

Christ and he shall reign for ever and ever” (Rev. 11:15).

Such an event has never yet occurred. It is only at the Second Coming that Jesus begins to reign worldwide: “When the Son of Man comes in his glory...*then* he shall sit on the throne of his glory” (Matt. 25:31).

Similarly, John sees a door open in heaven “and a white horse appeared. Its rider was named ‘Faithful and True’ — one who in righteousness executes judgment and wages war...He is clad in a raiment which has been dipped in blood and his name is the WORD OF GOD...From his mouth there comes a sharp sword with which he will smite the nations. And he will himself be their shepherd, ruling them with a scepter of iron...And on his raiment and on his thigh he has a name written: ‘The King of kings and Lord of lords’” (Rev. 19:11-16, Weymouth).

But first an angel descends from heaven. He seizes the Dragon, that old Serpent who is the devil and Satan (the Devil is at present deceiving the whole world, Rev. 12:9; the whole world lies under his power, I John 5:19). Now John’s vision shows that the situation will be totally reversed. The Devil is to be flung into an abyss and be shut up “to prevent him from seducing the nations any longer” (Rev. 20:3). Then, true to the promises of Jesus to his disciples, John sees thrones with people sitting on them and “the power to rule” is given them:

“They came to life and reigned with the Christ for a thousand years...This is the first resurrection [which occurs at Christ’s Second Coming, 1 Cor. 15:23]. Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection...They shall be priests of God and rule with him during the thousand years” (Rev. 20: 4-6).

In this way the promise of rulership first made by Christ to his disciples (Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30), and confirmed by Paul (1 Cor. 6:2; 2 Tim. 2:12), finally comes to pass. When the Reign of the Messiah and his followers begins, mankind will enjoy an age of universal peace, which, on his own, he has never been able to achieve.

The justice of the triumph of the saints over their enemies was well expressed by Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, circa 170 AD:

“It is fitting that the Reign of God should be in the hands of Christ and his Saints, for it is just that in the very creation in which the Saints toiled and were afflicted and were tried in every way by suffering, they should receive the reward of their suffering, and that in the very creation in which they were killed for the love of God, they should be revived again; and that

in the very creation in which they endured servitude they should also reign. For God is rich in all things, and all things are His. It is fitting therefore that the creation itself, being restored to its primeval condition, should without qualification be under the dominion of the righteous” (*Against Heresies*, Bk. 5, Chap. 32, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 1).

Some 1800 years later a contemporary preacher expresses his surprise that the biblical Christian hope is in general neither preached nor believed by those claiming adherence to the Christian faith:

“We shall dwell in glorified bodies on the glorified earth. **This is one of the great Christian doctrines that has been almost entirely forgotten and ignored. Unfortunately the Christian Church — I speak generally — does not believe this, and therefore does not teach it. It has lost its hope**, and this explains why it spends most of its time in trying to improve life in this world, in preaching politics...But something remarkable is going to be true of us according to the Apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 6:1-3: ‘Dare any of you having a matter against another, go to law against the unjust and not before the Saints? Do you not know that the Saints shall rule the world?’...**This is Christianity. This is the truth by which the New Testament Church lived.** It was because of this that they were not afraid of their persecutors...This was the secret of their endurance, their patience and their triumphing over everything that was set against them” (Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Commentary on Romans*, pp. 72 75, 76, emphasis mine).

In the face of all the evidence, the reader is invited to give serious attention to the Gospel summons of Jesus the Messiah in Mark 1:14, 15: “Repent and believe the Good News *about the Kingdom.*”

Through the death of Christ the believer may receive forgiveness for his sins. The Christian life is one of preparation for the coming Kingdom of God to be established at the Return of Jesus. The goal of the Christian life is expressed by John in Revelation 3:21 and 2:26: “I will grant him a place with me when I sit on my throne, just as I also won the victory and sat down with my Father in His throne...I will give him authority over the nations and he shall shepherd them with a rod of iron, as vessels of pottery are broken in pieces; just as I also received this authority from my Father” (freely translated from the Greek text).

The following texts should regain the prominence they deserve, as truths central to the Christian Gospel:

“And the Bereans were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the Word [Message] with all readiness of mind, and searched the

Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed” (Acts 17:11, 12). “Do you not understand that the saints are going to manage the world?” (1 Cor. 6:2). “One day a King shall reign in justice with princes that rule uprightly” (Isa. 32:1). “When anyone hears the Message *about the Kingdom* and does not understand it, the Devil comes and snatches away the Message which was sown in his heart, so that he cannot *believe and be saved*” (Matt. 13:19; Luke 8:12, NASV). “When they believed Philip as he preached the Gospel *about the Kingdom of God* and the Name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12, NASV).

“The seed is the *Message of the Kingdom*...You are born again not from corruptible seed but from incorruptible seed, from the living and enduring word of God, and this is the word which was preached to you *as the gospel*” (see Luke 8:11, 12; Matt. 13:19; I Pet. 1:23-25). ✧

## Conditional Immortality (the sleep of the dead): So What?

David Burge, New Zealand

People often ask me, “What difference does it make? Why is Conditional Immortality important?” Actually, the difference is fundamental. It affects every area of Christian doctrine. Below is a brief comparison of some of the areas of difference between **Conditional Immortality (CI)** and what I will call **Natural Immortality (NI)**.

**As to Scripture:** CI says the Bible can be understood as is — death means death, life means life and so on. NI says the Bible must be interpreted by an “insider” — death means torment, life means bliss, etc. This affects such things as our understanding of the Atonement, of sin and its penalty. What are the wages of sin? (Rom. 6:23). Did God threaten Adam with death or eternal torment? (Gen. 2:17). And so on...

**As to Human Nature:** CI says we are “living creatures” of dust, totally dependant on God. NI says we have an immortal soul, an eternal spirit, some “spark of divinity” within us.

**As to Death:** CI says death is the “last enemy” (1Cor. 15:26) to be defeated only when Christ comes again. NI says death is a doorway to the spirit world, a “promotion to glory,” even a friend to be welcomed. NI actually accepts the devil’s lie: “You shall not surely die” (Gen. 3:4).

**As to Resurrection:** CI says resurrection is recreation; we are “made alive again” (Rom. 8:11) by the breath of God. NI says resurrection is the immortal soul reentering the body (this is reincarnation!) and almost irrelevant to what is today presented as our eternal hope (“Heaven” when we die). Only CI truths give our resurrection hope the central place it has in Scripture. Some prominent Reformers seemed to have grasped this truth. “We shall all sleep until he comes and knocks on our little grave, saying, ‘Dr. Martin, get up!’ Then I shall rise up in a moment and I shall be eternally merry with him.” So says Martin Luther. “If the souls of the righteous be in heaven, tell me why they be not in as good case [condition] as the angels be. And then what cause is there of the resurrection?” asks Tyndale. Unfortunately the Reformation stalled before coming to truly Conditionalist convictions.

**As to the Second Coming:** CI puts Christ’s return at center stage. Apart from his own resurrection and eventual return, the dead in Christ are lost. We who in this life have put our hope in Christ are to be pitied (1Cor. 15:18, 19). By contrast NI puts death at center stage. But if the dead are enjoying their reward even now, the Second Coming is a matter of little or no consequence. No wonder much of the Church has lost its passion for Christ and his coming as king. The great hope to which the Bible — Old Testament and New — looks is now seen by many as irrelevant at best and divisive at worst.

**As to Life and Immortality:** CI says life in immortality is a gift to believers only, to be conferred when Christ comes again. NI makes immortality a natural endowment bestowed on all people (so everyone must spend eternity somewhere). This strikes at the core of the Gospel: The issue is not, “Where will you spend eternity?” but “Will you spend eternity alive or dead?”

**As to Judgment Day:** CI says on this climactic day all humanity will receive their just reward. NI says humanity has received or will receive their reward at death. Is this justice, to receive one’s reward (especially one’s punishment) *before* one is judged? Surely not! This manmade, concocted scheme makes the biblical judgment into something of an anti-climax at best and a perversion of justice at worst.

**As to “Hell”:** CI says “Hell” is the place of the final destruction of the wicked, and the end of all evil. NI says “Hell” is the place of unending conscious torment for lost immortal souls.

**As to God’s Character:** Following on from this, CI says “eternal torment” distorts the biblical view of

justice (can any sin committed by a finite human being over a finite period of time merit an eternity of unending, unrelenting pain?) and makes God out to be a worse monster than any human sadist. CI allows God to be loving and merciful at the same time as He is just.

**As to Evangelism:** Again, CI says “eternal torment” is not credible — it puts more people off Christianity than it “scares into heaven.” The Biblical threat of death to all who persist in rebellion against their legitimate sovereign is however a credible and therefore a powerful motivating force.

**As to the Hope of Heaven:** CI goes hand in hand with the Biblical view of our hope as a resurrection to eternal life in immortality as “royal sons and daughters” ruling in the Kingdom of God on earth. NI only perpetuates the unbiblical notion that the Kingdom of Heaven is in Heaven when we die.

**As to God’s Final Victory:** CI says there will come a time when evil is finally defeated and God will be “all in all” (1Cor. 15:28). NI says there will always be a corner of the universe that exists in rebellion against Him and His will.

**As to Who Christ Is:** CI says Christ is “the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25) — the source of life itself — and that this is proven by his own resurrection from the dead. NI while formally acknowledging the above truth makes Christ a mere umpire of souls, sorting out eternal lodgings for already immortal souls. CI paints a much grander picture of Christ and his work. We await a literal, personal, visible return of Christ in power and glory to resurrect the sleeping dead, to destroy evil and evildoers, and to reign forever on a renewed heaven and earth!

**Conclusion.** I do not question the sincerity of those who hold to the NI view. I do however believe that there are fundamental differences between what the Bible teaches and what goes for Christianity today. I do also believe that the doctrines known as Life Only in Christ or Conditional Immortality are an essential part of a fully biblical understanding of life, death and human destiny. ✧

### **A Leap of Faith: How Truth Liberates** Jennifer Talbott, Columbus, Ohio

**M**y walk has been a difficult one. I was born in a small town in northeastern Ohio. I was raised by a very loving mother and a non-existent father. My dad left when I was around twelve. I was not sad that he was gone until he decided about a year later to move to Colorado. I would not see him again for several years. My mother then married a

physically and mentally abusive man who was also an alcoholic and used drugs. They were married for 3½ years until she could not take it anymore. My sister had moved to Colorado with my father because of it and my brother has never fully recovered from the mental torture he endured.

I started my search for God when I was very young. I began with a Presbyterian church with my mom and sister. The only things I remember are the big red doors and the purple carpet. I also attended a Catholic church with my great-grandmother from time to time. I remember being sort of scared there. Neither made much of an impression on me at all. A Nazarene church opened up at the end of my street so I started walking there with my sister. I went there for maybe a year or two but I can’t say I learned anything.

I grew up with two very good friends and they asked my mother if they could start taking me to their church. It was a Methodist church and it was big and beautiful. All the people there dressed really nicely and most were doctors, lawyers, or teachers. I went there off and on for about five or six years. When I was thirteen, I was asked if I wanted to be baptized. Why not? I didn’t really know what that meant. I knelt down in the front of the church and the pastor touched my forehead with water and asked me a few questions and that was that. I knew I was supposed to feel something special but I really didn’t. I had no idea what I had just done. Once I was in my early teens I started going to a youth group. I soon became very disgusted with the way the other kids acted. There was a great deal of gossip and I felt looked down upon by them. Soon I quit going. I no longer wanted to be part of that group. I don’t think I learned anything in those five or six years except the books of the Bible and a few songs. It all seemed very hopeless. So I gave up. I just didn’t care to go to any church anymore. I spent some of my toughest years without God on my side and I’m surprised I’m around to talk about it today. I did a lot of really dumb things when I was younger. I drank a lot and smoked a lot. I was bored and didn’t know that to do with my life.

I moved to Columbus in 1993 to be with my sister. Her husband died very young from cancer. I was not here very long before I met my first husband. He told his friends the night he met me that he was going to marry me and, sure enough, a year later I was married. We were married for six years and together we bought a house, a boat, started a business, and made a lot of friends. We also partied a lot. Even though he was raised in a very strict, southern Baptist household, we never went to church. He pretty much

felt the way I did about church. We didn't feel like we belonged. During our third year of marriage I was finally blessed with the news that I was pregnant. I was very excited but I was not sure that my husband was. The pregnancy only lasted a couple months and I miscarried. I was devastated! My husband said that it's all a part of life and he moved on. A couple years later we were divorced. He cheated on me as my father had with my mother.

I met my current husband through the woman that my ex-husband is now married to. Confusing? We met shortly after I lost the baby and became very good friends. He could make me laugh and was so fun to be around. He went to the Church of God Abrahamic Faith. Abrahamic who? I was very curious though about his beliefs and started to ask questions. Why didn't they celebrate any holidays? You don't go to heaven when you die? What was this? Not that I was an expert but I had never heard of anything like that! Those couple of years when my ex-husband and I were drifting apart, I started going to my new friend's Bible study. I enjoyed it. It got me thinking a bit, but when I got divorced the group broke up and I didn't see him for a couple of years. Then we were brought back together when he ran into my roommate. We have been together ever since. He was not going to church much when we first started dating. But he has always had very strong beliefs and a great love for God. When he realized that he wanted to be with me for the rest of his life he panicked. He had been putting other things before the Lord and promised himself that he would not do that anymore. He would try and try to get me to go to his church but I didn't want to. I had had enough of churches. I was afraid of what they believed and I didn't understand it. He never gave up on me though. He would not marry me if I would not be baptized.

I had always hated to read but a friend of mine gave me a good book once and I was suddenly hooked. I don't know why I had such a change of heart but now I love to read. She later gave me a book about the rapture and I could not put it down. I loved the story but it really scared me. I did finally start going to church with my husband and now, after all those years of church after church, it started sinking in. Hard! I started to realize how much I needed God and needed Jesus to be my Savior. Jesus did what he did for me and look how I have repaid him all these years! I never thought a person could walk around for 31 years with their eyes shut but I now know it's possible. One day in church, the minister was talking about how God does not hear the prayers of the unrighteous. Wait a

minute. I was baptized! Or was I? Did I accept Jesus into my heart? Did I ask him to forgive my sins? Did I continue to repent of my sins? No, I did not. I went home that day and fell to my knees and sobbed. I cried and cried because I couldn't believe these last few years when I had been praying my heart out, He never heard a word! I had a long talk with my husband and he told me that everything I have had to go through has eventually led me to God. I only needed to learn the basic gospel and things would get easier day by day. I don't know if God could hear my prayers but I think He knew my heart. He knew I was searching for Him all these years. It just took one slap in the face to wake me up. I can't get over how much I have learned these last couple of years. I love to study and learn new things. I love church and I really didn't think I would ever say that. The truth is really very easy if you think about it. I praise God every day for leading me down this path. I am eternally grateful for my husband Ted who showed me there is a better way to live. We have been so blessed and I pray we continue to be blessed. ✧

### 14<sup>th</sup> Theological Conference

Please plan on attending our next Theological Conference, Friday, April 29 - Sunday, May 1, 2005. This is an international gathering of enthusiastic Bible students and truth-seekers coming together from many different backgrounds for mutual edification and encouragement. The nature of the conference as a "theological conference" definitely does not mean that it is a heavy "academic" exercise. Papers on important biblical topics are presented, there is opportunity for interaction with the speakers, and there is much scope for enjoying shorter "faith stories" from other participants. The event is held near Atlanta in a comfortable setting with easy access to the airport.

### Intensive Class Offered

Atlanta Bible College will offer a three-day intensive course, "The Kingdom of God as Gospel," to be taught by Anthony May 2-4, 2005 following the Theological Conference. The classes will be held at Cornerstone Bible Church, the same location as the Theological Conference. Times will be 9.00-12.30 and 1.30-5.00 Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. Tuition \$238 for credit, otherwise \$185, plus textbook.