

# Focus on the Kingdom

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## Language Alert

Hebrews 1:5 says with reference to the Messiah: “To which of the angels did God say at any time, You are my Son, **this day I have given you being?** or, **I will be his Father**, and he will be my Son?” (Basic Bible in English).

The stark contrast between the Messianic Son of God and angels provides a rock-firm testimony to the fact that the Messiah was never an angel. This has not deterred the Jehovah’s Witnesses from encircling the globe with their teaching which *identifies* Michael the archangel with Jesus.

The biblical language provides a crystal clear prophecy of the *coming into existence* of the Son of God. The New Testament celebrates this marvelous event with transparent simplicity (see also Luke 1:35; Matt. 1:20; Acts 13:33, speaking of the begetting/beginning of the Son, while v. 34 speaks of his resurrection; I John 5:18, not KJV).

Recent talk about “gay marriage” points to the alarming ease with which the public allows completely new meanings to enter our precious language. Websters Dictionary is accepted as a standard for assessing what we mean by the various words we use to communicate with each other. But Websters has recently been violated, and no one seems to care very much. “Marriage” is a well established part of our vocabulary. It means the union of a male and female. That’s what it has meant from time immemorial. That’s what the dictionary says it means. Until recently we have all agreed to abide by that definition. On what authority, then, can that word now take on a new significance? Who has the right to alter the currency of language? Apparently marriage now means also the “union” of two members of the same sex.

With the alteration of the meaning of words comes an alteration in our thinking. Why, say many, should “marriage” have to mean what it always meant? They argue: We are people of progress. We must move with the times. “Marriage” is a beautiful word, and it will not take long for us to accommodate our thinking to the idea that “gay marriage” is something to be approved.

This current example of the perversion of language — the collapse of intelligent communication — in the interests of “progress” or modernity is rather

obvious. Less obvious is the extraordinary language by which churchgoers and Bible students contentedly define their most basic belief. Gathering on Sunday mornings week after week they have agreed to the notion that Jesus, the Son of God, was “eternally generated.” So say the creeds which have stood for centuries, and no one seems to give this remarkable pair of words a moment’s attention.

Nor apparently does anyone preach on this most fundamental tenet. Few seem to know that “eternal generation” was a term hammered out after centuries of ecclesiastical dispute: It was resolved, on pain of heresy, should one raise an objection, that Jesus, the Son of God was “begotten before all ages.” He was in other words “eternally begotten.” “There never was a time when he was not.” On that conviction your church probably takes its stand. But little is offered by way of exposition of that amazing phrase “eternal generation.”

Is that really what the Bible teaches? Does “eternal begetting” even have any meaning according to Websters or any other dictionary? How can anyone be “eternally begotten”?

The Bible is a book which speaks plainly about fathers and mothers, sons and daughters. It speaks of the one Creator of all things as “our Father.” It lists fathers as those who “beget” and children as those who are “begotten.” The word “son” is by far the most frequent Hebrew noun in the Old Testament (some 5000 times). Pick up your Websters or any dictionary. To beget means “to bring into existence, to give existence to, to cause to come into being, to engender, to procreate.”

Is that clear? When a person is begotten, he enters upon existence. “Begetting” points to origin and source. It is the word which marks the initiation of life. All sons and daughters are “begotten” by their fathers and born from their mothers. No exceptions, unless you are talking about Adam whose creation was from the dust of the ground (and Eve who had an abnormal beginning!). Because God gave existence to Adam, the Bible says that he was the “son of God” (Luke 3:22). God was his creator and father. God brought him into existence from non-existence. The

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life of Adam had a beginning in time and it was derived from the Father.

This is true too of the second Adam, Jesus. Exactly the same language is used of Jesus, the Son of God. He was begotten, given existence, originated, procreated. And it happened in history, in time. If a son is begotten, it follows inexorably that “there was a time when he did not exist.”

But that statement, in some circles, is enough to alert today’s “theology police,” who will smell a heresy and, with the sincerest of motives, inform you that you are not a Christian.

Truly the world of churches is in need of clear thinking about who Jesus is.

The plain language facts about “begetting” in the Bible have not prevented the theologians from inventing a meaning for “beget” which it cannot possibly have. They have said that in the sole case of Jesus, the Son of God, he was not just begotten but “eternally begotten.” What? “To beget,” remember, means to give existence to someone, to initiate their being. How then can one be “eternally begotten”?

The answer is that on the laws of established language, biblical and otherwise, such a thing is impossible. It is sheer contradiction. You cannot give existence to something which already *has* existence. You cannot bring into being what already has being. “Eternity” describes what is outside of time. Begetting means bringing into existence at a point of time. “Eternal begetting” means an “unbeginning beginning,” “beginningless beginning.” These are phrases which communicate nothing and are therefore meaningless.

Yet they are the mainstays of the structure of the historic Church’s teaching about who Jesus is.

Churchgoers by the millions are committed to believing whatever it is “eternally begotten” communicates, but what if this amounts to nothing? Worse than that, what if eternal begetting is a verbal impossibility? Then the creed has uttered words without meaning as well as contradicted the Bible. You cannot be “eternally begotten.” What if this term obstructs the glorious truth that the Messiah was really and truly a member of the human race — a suitable pioneer and model for the rest of us?

“Eternal begetting” removes the Son of God from history and reality. It leaves the brain in a fog. It is an abuse of the known laws of language. Unless of course you agree to garble the meaning of words as when one speaks of “gay marriage” — the union of a male and female which is in fact a union of two males or two females.

It is not without good reason that the theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg objects to the impossible idea that a son can both have a beginning and not have a beginning: “Sonship cannot at the same time consist in preexistence and still have its origin only in the divine procreation of Jesus in Mary” (*Jesus, God and Man*, p. 143). In other words, it is nonsense to say that the Son began to exist if you mean he has always been in existence. Pannenberg rightly maintains that “virgin birth” stands in irreconcilable contradiction to the Christology of the **Incarnation**. In plain language, the biblical teaching that the Son of God received his existence in time and space, by miracle (Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:35) is entirely incompatible with the notion that the Son of God had *no beginning* — that he was “eternally begotten.”

Do Trinitarians realize that they are committed to this sort of unfathomable language? One of their leading exponents wrote: “Jesus is God only begotten, proceeding by **eternal generation as the Son of God from the Father in a birth that never took place because it always was**” (Dr. Kenneth Wuest on John 1:18). This statement, we think, is the inevitable result of abandoning the established meaning of words.

### How Did This Language Battle Arise?

During the second and third centuries a theological battle raged over the Person of Christ. Bishop Arius, starting from the statement that “We must either suppose two divine original essences, without beginning and independent of each other, and so substitute a dyarchy for a monarchy; or we must not shrink from asserting that the Logos *had a beginning of his existence* — that there was a time when he was not.”<sup>1</sup>

Arius very logically looked for a time at which the Son began to exist. He held that the Son was created, that he was a finite being, that there was a time when “he was not.”

Our view is that Arius fixed on the wrong moment for the coming into existence of the Son. Arius moved the beginning of the Son into pre-history. This was destructive of Matthew 1:18-20 and Luke 1:35.

For the opponents of Arius, under the leadership of Athanasius, here was a dangerous denial of the essential Deity of Christ. Professor Sanday described the conflict over who Jesus is as “the greatest **of all the crises** in the history of ancient Christianity.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A.H. Newman, *A Manual of Church History*, Vol. I, p. 327ff.

<sup>2</sup> W. Sanday, *Christologies Ancient and Modern*, p.

Arius was defeated, and what prevailed as the “orthodox” understanding rejoiced in its victory as a triumph of truth over error. “The Spirit of God led the Church into the truth and Arius’ position was condemned at the Council of Nicea in 325. The Council declared the essential Deity of the Son and his equality with both the Father and the Holy Spirit. It defined **the eternal generation of the Son** as ‘the communication of the one eternal essence of deity by the First Person to the Second Person, in a manner *ineffable, mysterious, and abstracted from all earthly and human peculiarities.*’” And, we should add, in words unrecognized by any dictionary or the Bible!

### **What Sort of Person Was This God-Man of the Councils?**

The decision of Nicea led to a mass of questions about the nature of this Son of God, whose beginning had been declared (contrary to the Bible) an “eternal generation.”

The Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) claimed that it was presenting the Person of Christ as the prophets had depicted him from the beginning. But not everyone was convinced that the Old Testament had foreseen a God-Man Messiah. The Old Testament revealed nothing of a Person with two natures when it spoke of the coming Messiah. One objector wrote: “Divine substance and nature, ontological equality with God, were not involved in Messiahship at all. No ideas were found in the OT which could lead to philosophies of Triunity in God or of two natures blended in one person.”<sup>3</sup>

### **The Biblical Picture: A Human Messiah**

Genesis 3:15 is a prophecy pure and simple about a human Messiah. He was to be the seed of the woman. In Genesis 49:10 Jacob foretells: “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to him shall the gathering of the people be.” Jacob refers here to a human Messiah. Balaam prophesied of the Messiah, giving no hint of God becoming man: “I shall see him, but not now; I shall behold him, but not near. There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and shall strike the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth” (Num. 24:17). Moses described him as an Israelite prophet in whose “mouth the very words of God would be heard” (Deut. 18:15-18; Acts 3:22; 7:37).

The prophet Isaiah foretold the coming of the Messiah and he speaks of him as human, though fully empowered to represent God as Immanuel. When the man of God is giving Ahaz a sign from the Lord, he declares: “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14), meaning that the One God would be active in the Messiah, His Son: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6). No Jew could have imagined that God would be born. And the title “mighty god” is accurately defined by the standard lexicon of the Hebrew Bible as “divine hero, reflecting the divine majesty.” The Messiah was to be a unique, supernaturally gifted Israelite.

Jeremiah similarly described the mighty activity of God to be demonstrated in the Messiah: “Behold, the days come, says the Lord, that I will cause to be born to David a righteous Branch, and a King will reign and prosper, and will execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely: and this is his name by which he will be called, THE LORD IS OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS” (Jer. 23:5, 6). When the Messianic Kingdom arrived the city of Jerusalem was likewise to assume the name THE LORD IS OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS (Jer. 33:16). But no one imagined that the city was to be God!

In the second Psalm the kings of the earth are seen in revolt against the Lord and His Messiah, the one of whom it is said: “You are my Son, today I have begotten you” (Ps. 2:7). David spoke prophetically of the resurrection of the Messiah: “For You [God] will not leave me in Hades; neither will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption” (Ps. 16:10). The twenty-second Psalm reveals that he who can be the victim of a crucifixion, is necessarily a human being capable of death. God, being God, is immortal and could not qualify as the human sacrifice for sin. That Messiah was to be the only begotten of the Father (Ps. 22:20, “darling”).

The Old Testament portrait of the coming Messiah has nothing at all to say about the eternally begotten Son of the post-biblical creeds. ✧

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<sup>3</sup> H.E. Fosdick, *The Modern Use of the Bible*, p. 234.

## Gabriel Versus Orthodoxy

The message of the angel Gabriel recorded in Luke 1:35 has proven to be an embarrassment to the traditional understanding of the nature of Jesus: Gabriel says nothing at all to support the idea — held by churches as the hallmark of orthodoxy for centuries — that Jesus was *the eternal Son of the Father* giving up his existence in heaven in order to become man.

The doctrine of the Incarnation which has dominated Christian thinking since the fourth century is strangely absent from the thinking of Luke who records for us the miraculous conception of Jesus, the Messiah. Luke says not a word about any preexistence of the Savior. He actually contradicts the long-held notion that the conception of Jesus was not his beginning, but only a continuation of life in a different, earthly form.

The tension between tradition and what Scripture reports in Luke 1:35 is fully recognized by leading theologians. It is time for Bible readers to reflect on this extraordinary difference between what Gabriel and Luke taught and what has been received as biblical — often without the exercise of intelligent questioning and examination.

Here is Gabriel's announcement to Mary about the distinguished Son she is going to bear:

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you; and *for this reason* your offspring will be called holy, the Son of God.”

As all recognize, this was a divine communication letting Mary know that she had been chosen as mother of the long-promised Savior-Messiah. She was to understand that her pregnancy would be initiated by miracle. Consequently — as a direct result of God's intervention — her child would be “holy, the Son of God.”

### Objections to Traditional Teaching About an Eternal Son

According to cherished views about the nature of Jesus, his Sonship dates not from around 3 BC but from *eternity*. This has been the core belief of Christendom for nearly 1600 years. He has *always* been the Son of God, just as he has always existed. As eternal Son he was the Second Member of the Triune Godhead.

It is surprising that Bible readers concern themselves so little with the business of verifying this cardinal tenet of their faith. Orthodox commentators on the Bible are often refreshingly honest in admitting

that no such doctrine of *eternal Sonship* is to be found in Scripture.

Writing as a Trinitarian, James O. Buswell, once dean of graduate faculty, Covenant College and Seminary, St. Louis, states:

“The notion that the Son was begotten by the Father in eternity past, not as an event, but as an inexplicable relationship, has been accepted and carried along in Christian theology since the fourth century...We have examined all the instances in which ‘begotten’ or ‘born’ or related words are applied to Christ, and **we can say with confidence that the Bible has nothing whatsoever to say about ‘begetting’ as an eternal relationship between the Father and the Son**” (*Systematic Theology*, p. 111).

According to this theologian there is a complete absence of any biblical support for the dogmatic teaching “accepted and carried along since the fourth century” that Jesus was the Son of God *before his conception*. If so, then the central doctrine of the Incarnation of the preexisting eternal Son of God has been a vast mistake, a perversion of Scripture.

Such statements as Dr. Buswell's ought to alert us to the danger of accepting from tradition, without careful search in the Bible, a notion about Jesus affecting so drastically his relationship to the Father and his identity as a man. It must be obvious that a person whose divine Sonship begins in the womb of his mother is of a different class from one who has throughout all eternity past been the Son of God. This latter idea is the main prop of the doctrine of the Trinity.

A well-known commentator, Dr. Adam Clark, also finds no hint of the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Jesus in the Bible. Commenting on Luke 1:35 (cited above) he says:

“We may plainly perceive here, that the angel does not give the appellation of *Son of God* to the divine nature of Christ; but to that *holy person or thing* (*‘to agion’*) which was to be born of the virgin by the energy of the Holy Spirit...Here I trust I may be permitted to say, with all due respect to those who differ from me, that the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ is, in my opinion, antisciptural and highly dangerous; this doctrine I reject...”

The learned Doctor goes on to give five reasons why the idea of Jesus' eternal Sonship is both non-biblical and impossible. We cite the last of these:

“Fifthly. To say that he was begotten from all eternity is in my opinion absurd; and the phrase *eternal Son* is a positive self-contradiction. Eternity is that which has no beginning, nor stands in any

reference to time. Son supposes *time, generation and Father*: and time also antecedent to such generation. Therefore the conjunction of these two terms, *Son and eternity*, is absolutely impossible, as they imply essentially different and *opposite ideas*.”

Adam Clark was joined in his objections to this main pillar of orthodoxy by two other theologians. Professor Stewart stated:

“The generation of the Son as divine [i.e. before his birth], *as God*, seems to be out of the question: unless it be an express doctrine of revelation: which is so far from being the case, that I conceive the *contrary is plainly taught*.”

A fellow scholar, Dr. Watts, the famous hymn writer who abandoned Trinitarianism, added his opinion:

“I know no text which gives Christ, considered as God, the title, ‘the Son.’”

Another voice of protest comes to us from the seventeenth century. The celebrated poet, John Milton, was known for his opposition to traditional dogma. In his *Treatise on the Son of God and the Holy Spirit* (p. 4) he wrote:

“It is impossible to find a text in all Scripture to prove the eternal generation of the Son.”

Without an eternal Son of God, the Trinity collapses. Sir Isaac Newton and John Locke labored likewise to expose the impossible concept of an “eternally begotten Son.”

### Contemporary Objections

Distinguished Roman Catholic commentators of the present time do not find any teaching about eternal Sonship in Luke’s record of Gabriel’s visitation to Mary:

“In the commentary I shall stress that Matthew and Luke show no knowledge of preexistence; seemingly for them the **conception was the beginning (begetting) of God’s Son**” (Raymond E. Brown, S.S., *The Birth of the Messiah*, p. 31).

He speaks of Luke’s and Matthew’s accounts of the origin of Jesus:

“God’s creative action in the conception of Jesus...begets Jesus as God’s Son. Clearly here divine sonship is not adoptive sonship, **but there is no suggestion of an Incarnation, whereby a figure who was previously with God takes on flesh**” (*Ibid.*, p. 141).

Raymond Brown gives us a minute examination of Luke 1:35 and explodes the whole notion that Luke thought of Jesus as the Son of God **prior to** his conception. Luke, the historian and theologian, has most carefully documented the truly orthodox view of

the beginning of Jesus Christ. The truth is found in the precise wording of Luke’s account of Gabriel’s message to Mary, which we now examine again.

### The Causal Link

Here is the critically important information about Jesus given to Mary by the angel. In response to Mary’s question about her impending motherhood, Gabriel responded:

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and power from the Most High will overshadow you. *Therefore* the child to be born will be called holy — Son of God.”

Raymond Brown comments on the important word “therefore”:

“It involves a certain causality...[which] has embarrassed many orthodox theologians, since in preexistence Christology a conception by the Holy Spirit in Mary’s womb does not bring about the existence of God’s Son. Luke is seemingly unaware of such a Christology; conception is causally related to divine sonship for him” (*Ibid.*, p. 291).

The critical point is this: Luke, reporting the angel’s words, gives the reason and basis for Jesus being the Son of God. It is **because of** the supernatural intervention by God which creates a miracle in Mary’s womb. It is *this* which brings into being the Son of God. He is to be holy because he is the creation of God acting through the Holy Spirit. The divine sonship of Jesus is traced to a historical event, the virginal conception, which took place in Mary. Luke thereby rules out a Sonship which has existed for all eternity past. Luke, therefore, did not believe in the doctrine of the Trinity!

Noting the striking difference between Luke’s understanding of the Sonship of Jesus and the view which became orthodox in post-biblical times, Raymond Brown refers to the work of another Roman Catholic theologian. The latter notices the discomfort felt by commentators who find it impossible to square the words of Luke with the traditional view about an eternal Son.

### Footnotes Which Deserve to Be Headlines

In a long treatise on “The Annunciation and Biblical Mariology” (p. 59), the Jesuit theologian P.S. Lyonnet remarks that:

“The first principle of interpretation is to recognize and make clear what the writer *meant*.”

He follows with a section entitled, “What Luke certainly affirmed.” What Luke says of Jesus is that his miraculous birth will give joy to the world and that he will be great and charged with an important

mission from God. He will derive holiness from the moment of his conception.

“It is because Jesus is to be conceived by a virgin mother, in whom the Holy Spirit will be uniquely present. It is for that reason (‘that is precisely why’) the child will be called holy, the Son of God...the causal link is emphasized.”

In a footnote deserving the widest press (fn. 6, p. 61) Lyonnet then speaks of the difficulty — indeed embarrassment — which Luke causes many theologians. They try to reconcile Luke’s view of the origin of Jesus with what they have accepted as orthodoxy:

“Most modern exegetes, finding in Luke’s statement a *disagreement with their theology*, attempt to give to the word ‘therefore’ an interpretation which eliminates or weakens this ‘embarrassing’ causal link.”

In other words these exegetes add to Luke’s statement a thought which is not there, namely that the virginal conception will only *make known* what is already a fact: the already existing eternal Sonship of the Savior. That is not at all what Luke believed.

Raymond Brown agrees with his colleague Lyonnet that such efforts at side-stepping the obvious intention of Luke are unsuccessful.

What we see here is a clash of two systems, the biblical and post-biblical definitions of the Son of God.

“I cannot follow those theologians who try to avoid the causal connotation in Luke’s ‘therefore’...by arguing that for Luke the conception of the child does not bring the Son of God into being, but only enables us to call him ‘Son of God’ who already was Son of God” (*The Birth of the Messiah*, p. 291).

The idea that a Person can both exist in eternity and then come into existence is logically impossible. The Bible speaks of the begetting, which means coming into existence, of the Son of God in several passages. In no case is anything said of a begetting in eternity. Such abuse of language would anyway be impossible in Scripture, which is to be interpreted according to the historical-grammatical method. Jesus was begotten as the Son of God in the womb of Mary (Matt. 1:20: “that which is conceived [the Greek says “begotten”] in her is from the holy spirit”). I John 5:18 (see modern translations) refers to the Son of God as begotten in the past, that is as described in Matthew 1:20 and Luke 1:35 (“the holy thing begotten”). A son is by definition begotten, that is, brought into existence. A son cannot be a son unless he is brought into existence by his father. “Eternal Sonship” is as

contradictory as a square circle. The Bible does not recognize an “eternal Son.”

### Summary

Luke and Matthew leave no doubt that Jesus came into being as the Son of God *at his begetting and subsequent birth*. Luke’s careful link between the miraculous conception and the resultant divine sonship of Jesus destroys the age-old tradition that Jesus was Son of God from eternity. James Buswell (whom we cited earlier) described the doctrine of the “eternal generation” of the Son as “inexplicable” as well as entirely unbiblical.

Professor Stewart declares that the church fathers of the fourth century “involved themselves in more than a Cretan labyrinth by undertaking to defend the eternal generation of the Son.” Tragically, nearly all denominations live under the shadow of the unscriptural idea that Jesus was the eternal Son of God. The orthodoxy of Gabriel and Luke has been replaced by a different view. If the title “God the Son” never appears in Scripture, we may well ask what churchgoers are doing when they celebrate him in religious meetings. Is it not time for Jesus, *the Son of God who came into existence by miraculous conception*, to be reinstated at the center of our attention? It was *this* Son of God who was promised as the Messiah. Of him God assured David: “He [your descendant] *will be My Son*” (2 Sam. 7:14; Heb. 1:5). David was not promised “human nature” as his descendant, nor an already existing person, but one who, from the moment of his conception, would be the Son of God.

This promised Son has never been anyone else but “the one Mediator between God and mankind, *the Man Messiah Jesus*” (I Tim. 2:5). This is the mature Christology of apostolic Christianity and it accords perfectly with the truth announced by Gabriel to Mary that she was to bring into being, under the influence of Holy Spirit (which is God’s creative power at work), the Son of God and Son of David. May this truly human Jesus be hailed as Messiah and Savior in all quarters of the world. May he also come soon to establish his wonderful reign of peace across the globe.

It is a tragedy when the historical Messiah, Son of God, is replaced by another figure, one who was mysteriously and inexplicably “coequal with the Father” and generated in eternity, a concept which is foreign to the Bible writers. Christians should embrace the Jesus of history and of the Bible, the Son who could say, in a sense not possible for any other human person, “God is my Father.” He is thus the

uniquely begotten Son. We are invited to become his brothers by being supernaturally born again and claim Jesus as brother and Savior. He, after all, is “the firstborn among many brothers.” ✧

“We all stand in danger of seeing in the Bible, or anywhere else, only those things our prior experiences or convictions dispose us to see. And for some this is where *study* of the NT becomes nearly impossible. They already have their minds made up about their religious commitments, and therefore about the NT too. They will read it for additional strengthening of what they already think. But they are not open to a mode of *study* that might call into question their established outlook...It is dangerous for our convictions to function as censors of the text’s message to us” (Yarborough, *Encountering the NT*).

## Comments

“I came across your articles on the Trinity on the web, and would like to express my thanks to you for making me have a re-look at the subject. I had never bothered to investigate the Trinity teaching, taking for granted that whatever I had learnt about it is the absolute truth. Now I’m not so sure.” — *Singapore*

“I want to let you know I have listened as often as possible to your Focus on the Kingdom program. I wanted to thank you for providing so much truth, which I was not aware of. I feel so much more confident about my beliefs than I ever have before.”

— *California*

“Please allow me to simply express my appreciation for you and your website — most valuable resources to those who have recently received the true word of the Kingdom (after years of involvement with some other gospel), such as myself.” — *New Jersey*

“I wanted to update you as to what has been happening with our message of Biblical Unitarianism. The response has been *tremendous* and we have had at least four people accept the message, who are now attending our congregation, and others who are still pondering it. Our congregation is determined to bring this message to everyone we can. We have just recently spoken with a local synagogue about having dialogue between them and ourselves. We were not received well at first, but when it was explained to them that we are not like other Messianic congregations who believe in the Trinity, but that we believe in the One true G-d and that Y’shua is not G-d, we were welcomed with open arms. With your books

and the groundbreaking work that you have done, you have been instrumental in our work with the Jewish community here in Erie. We are the first congregation that I know of that has been able to break down this wall between the two communities, traditional Judaism and the Messianics. This is groundbreaking! We are thrilled at the doors this will open to us and the possibilities of causing the Jewish community of Erie to be jealous for their own Torah and their Mashiach Y’shua. I believe we have an opportunity that no other congregation has had in millenniums! I feel I can now reach my people with the good news of HaShem and his Mashiach. With your help we have been able to break through a wall that has been standing since the early beginnings of the *kehillat* [community]. Todah rabbah [thanks so much] for your help. *Baruch HaShem!* You have no idea how wonderful this is for us. The possibilities are endless and with the help of HaShem we will continue to go forward in teaching, outreach and practice. After all, ‘If the casting away of Israel be the reconciling of the world, what shall be the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?’ (Rom. 11:15).” — *Pennsylvania*

## Thirteenth Annual Theological Conference

April 23-25, 2004, McDonough, Georgia

Preparations are under way for our annual gathering of all who rejoice in the One God of Israel and in His Son, the Messiah. All are cordially invited. We are expecting increased numbers and are proposing to hold the meetings a few miles south of Atlanta Bible College in the new facilities recently built for Cornerstone Church of God. We are grateful to Pastor David Riley for making this fine building available.

Visitors are expected from Austria, Australia and the UK, and we invite all those of you who kindly read *Focus on the Kingdom* each month.

Details of accommodations will be given later. Hampton Inn at McDonough will offer favorable prices close to the conference. A block-booking rate will be secured and we will arrange for your transportation from Hartsfield International Airport. We will propose a registration fee inclusive of transportation and four catered meals. This will allow for participants to go out on their own for just one of the meals. More details about how to register later.