

# Focus on the Kingdom

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Anthony Buzzard, editor

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## The God of Jesus

by Peter Barfoot

Is the phrase “the God of Jesus” scriptural? In Ephesians 1:17, the apostle Paul writes of “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory.” It was clear to Paul that the God of Jesus is the Father of glory. Beginning his letter to the Ephesians, Paul blesses “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” In closing, he blesses them with “peace...and love with faith, from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 1:3; 6:23).

In John 20:17 Jesus tells Mary, “I ascend to my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.” In John 17:3 Jesus refers to his Father as “the only true God.” Jesus was a unitarian believer in the One God.

Those who believe in the doctrine of the Trinity say that a denial of an eternally preexistent “God the Son” diminishes Jesus by stripping him of divinity. But one can reject the doctrine of the Trinity and yet still affirm Christ’s “divine nature” by pointing to his unique origin as Son of God. When the “power of the Highest” overshadowed Mary, the “Son of the Highest” was begotten (Luke 1:32, 35). God declared His fatherhood of Jesus when He called him, “My beloved Son” (Matt. 3:17). Christians too are to be filled with the fullness of God (Eph. 3:19).

Some believe that Jesus Christ was a “mere man” — no different from any other — except that he was sinless. They diminish Christ. In standing against the error of the Trinity they sometimes reduce the status of Jesus. There is no need to overreact. The inspired writers of the New Testament speak of Jesus in superlatives. The exiled John’s graphic figures of speech describe an otherwise indescribable risen Lord! (Rev. 1:14-16).

Jesus is “the image [icon] of the invisible God” (in whom we see the Father clearly); “the brightness of His glory” (mirrored on our faces); and “the exact image of His person” (stamped on us, leaving a lasting impression)! How can we not rejoice in our wonderful Lord?

We should not think that God is more exalted when His Son is diminished. What son’s accomplishments do not reflect well on the person of his earthly father? How much more, then, is the Father of Jesus glorified when we praise the spotless life, excellent works and selfless sacrifice of his Son? And his revelation of the secret of immortality in his Gospel of the Kingdom (II Tim. 1:10).

“And whatsoever you shall ask in my name I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.” (John 14:13).

The spirit of God opens up truth concerning God and his Son, but only to the genuine seeker after Truth. It certainly is a matter of perception, something like buying a new car and then seeing so many of the same make and model on the road. We find the One God of Jesus where we had never seen Him before. We are encouraged and inspired by the Bible, but only when the Lord “opens our eyes” to how little we know, do we realize how much we’ve missed.

An example of this lack of perception is how we either see or don’t see the significance of 1 Corinthians 8:6, which clearly informs us that “there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.” How is it possible for the “one Lord” to be seen as co-equal with the “one God”?

Tradition answers that the One God is comprised of three Persons: a co-equal Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We should never underestimate the ability of tradition to accommodate Bible truth before veiling it in mysticism.

How many hours in how many months over how many years did the theologians of the Church debate the question about Jesus’ part in sending the spirit? The eastern and western church actually excommunicated one another over this question! A quick look at Acts 2:33 would have resolved the issue immediately: “Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he [Jesus] has shed forth this, which you now see and hear.” The words of Jesus in John 16:7 confirm that the Spirit proceeded from the Father and the Son.

We find it difficult to believe that the same Martin Luther who defied the Church of Rome in stating “the just shall live by faith” actually referred to the book of James as “an epistle of straw” and was openly and actively anti-Semitic.

We are horrified to learn that the great Calvin could order Servetus, a brother in Christ, to be burned to death at the stake (slowly, on green wood). What terrible heresies did Servetus profess? He taught that the rite of infant baptism and the Church’s belief in the Trinity were unscriptural.

My belief is that Christians in years to come will see the doctrine of the Trinity for what it is: the product of a gathering of bishops convened by Constantine the Great

to unify the teaching of the Christian Church in the disputed matter of the Godhead. Under pressure, some bishops capitulated against their better judgment and the matter was settled. It was set in stone and used to “club” others into conformity.

Only when the Church accepts 1 Corinthians 8:6 as the true definition of the Godhead will it be able to proclaim to the Jews: “The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is also the God of Jesus — your Messiah and ours!” Around the globe two strong forces are locked in conflict: the Spirit of Christ and the spirit of antichrist.

When Jesus returns, one body comprised of both Jew and Gentile — but inseparable in faith and in confession of the One True God and His Son, Jesus Christ — will rise to meet the Lord in the air, and then descend with him to rule the nations.

“And so shall we ever be with the Lord.” ✧

## Kingdom Message Seen in Latest Scholarship

By Paul Fiorilla

The term “modern scholarship” in the biblical field is loaded, in large part because it conjures images of world-weary professors digging up artifacts, trying to poke holes in the Christian faith.

And while sometimes that is true, it remains a fact that faith has to meet standards of historical veracity and that the Christian faith depends on the canonical words of Scripture. In recent decades, discoveries of troves of ancient literature including the Dead Sea Scrolls and Nag Hammadi Library have proven a boon to the historical field and led to the production of countless books by scholars.

Some scholarship no doubt is produced in a proverbial left field, but some of it is extraordinarily valuable to believers of the Abrahamic faith. Recently published books that share the premise that Jesus was first and foremost a preacher of the Kingdom of God include James Tabor’s *The Jesus Dynasty* and Bart Ehrman’s *Peter, Paul, and Mary Magdalene: The Followers of Jesus in History and Legend*.

*The Jesus Dynasty* provides a compelling storyline that fits hand-in-glove with the teachings of the *Focus on the Kingdom* newsletter in many ways. Tabor, a prolific writer and researcher who is the chair of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, starts with Jesus’ ancestry. He mines the genealogies in Matthew and Luke to theorize that Mary’s line contained both Davidic and priestly blood lines, which would be important in fulfilling his call as Messiah.

According to Tabor, who cites Old Testament passages and the Essene writings in the Dead Sea Scrolls, apocalyptic Jews of the day were looking for a two-pronged Messiah. One was to come from the priestly line

and the other from the Davidic line. “In text after text we read about not one but two Messiahs who are to usher in the Kingdom of God,” Tabor writes. In Tabor’s telling, John the Baptizer was a key actor who has largely been overlooked by the Church. He says John and Jesus set up shop as a team, preaching repentance before the coming Kingdom of God. “The Hebrew Scriptures were full of promises that God in the ‘last day’ would raise up a King of the line of David who would be instrumental in throwing off foreign rule and establishing an independent Kingdom of Israel, thus inaugurating the New Age of peace and justice for the entire world,” Tabor writes.

A key part of the story is Tabor’s recognition that the Kingdom was “not a sentiment or ethereal concept...This was not a kingdom ‘in’ heaven, but the idea of the rule of heaven breaking into human history and manifesting itself on earth. It was understood in a literal way, nothing less than a revolution, a complete overthrow of the political, social and economic status quo” (italics his). Also: “This revolutionary message, ‘the good news of the Kingdom of God,’ predicted the radical apocalyptic reversal of society from top to bottom.”

Jesus selected 12 disciples — among them at least three of his four brothers — as a cabinet who would be in literal charge of the affairs of this state. It has largely been believed — mostly based on the reading of John 7:5: “for even his brothers did not believe in him” — that Jesus’ family was against his mission. (Tabor alleges without any support that the verse is a late interpolation.) However, Tabor claims that the apostles James, Jude, Simon and Matthew are Jesus’ brothers.

The assertion that Jesus’ brothers were part of his inner circle, and took over the group after his death, is a key piece of evidence. This was a thoroughly Jewish enterprise with much importance placed in lineage. That Jewishness was glossed over by later Christians who wrote Jesus’ family out of the picture, gave leadership of the Church to Peter and emphasized Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles.

The New Testament is, however, quite clear that Peter and Paul were key leaders of the Christian mission and that they preached the same Gospel of the Kingdom.

It is undisputed that James was appointed leader of the early group of followers in Jerusalem immediately after Jesus was executed. After James was murdered some three decades later, oversight of the Church was given to another Jesus’ brother, Simon. Until the Jewish rebellion against Rome, the followers of Jesus largely considered themselves as devout Jews.

According to Tabor, this group continued to preach the imminent manifestation of the Kingdom of God, evidenced by the books of the New Testament written by Jesus’ brothers James and Jude. Both of those books — James in particular — focus on the core ethical teachings

of Jesus found in the Sermon on the Mount that were in line with the Kingdom movement and not on the theology of justification by faith that is so prominent in Paul's writings. "Neither John nor Jesus had any idea of beginning a new religion, but both lived as Jews according to the Torah or Jewish Law," Tabor says.

Such an analysis, sadly, pits Paul against his brother believers and destroys the unity of the Christian faith revealed in New Testament scripture. Paul's theology is in line with that of Jesus and his brother apostles, though he uses different terminology.

At the core of Tabor's book is the idea that there is a true message of Jesus that has largely been lost over the years. For him, the corruption began with the Apostle Paul, who began preaching a belief system focused on salvation by faith that was based on "visions" he had of Christ, not on teachings of the other apostles. Paul explicitly says in his letter to the Galatians that he avoided the apostles for three years following his visionary experience. Tabor sees Paul as one who basically set up a competing form of what became Christianity. Ideas of Jesus' divinity, the atoning nature of his death and the celebration of the Last Supper — Tabor notes that eating flesh and drinking blood would have been offensive to any Jew, even as a symbol — emanated with Paul. Tabor sees even within the New Testament letters a struggle between Paul and the apostles who knew and lived with Jesus.

Here we see the dangerous side of this form of modern scholarship. The so called struggle between Paul and the others is a figment of Tabor's imagination and a product of the fundamental fact that he does not believe in the resurrection of Jesus.

In the end, Tabor strives to find the authentic legacy of Jesus through textual and historical clues previously known but not put together. These authentic teachings come from what is known as the "Q" document, which is derived from the stories and sayings — such as the Sermon on the Mount — that are found in Matthew and Luke, but not Mark. Many theologians patch these verses together to form a collection of sayings that the gospel writers used in addition to Mark. This collection is widely believed to have been an early gospel, called "Q," that has been lost.

What happened to Jesus' first followers? Tabor sees them in a largely forgotten group called the Ebionites, or "poor ones," in Hebrew. They are known mainly through writings of early "orthodox" church writers who branded them as heretics. Ebionites saw Jesus as human, observed Jewish laws, maintained salvation by works as well as faith and rejected entirely the letters of Paul.

Ehrman — a fundamentalist-turned-agnostic and popular author who chairs the department of religious studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

— also views Christianity as shaped by Paul at the expense of the apostolic movement. Ehrman's book presents a history of Peter, Paul and Mary viewed through a similar perspective as Tabor's, in which there is fierce disagreement between Peter and Paul that has been papered over by the author of the book of Acts. In this theme, Acts is written to create a history that smoothes over the differences between the two fundamentally opposite sides.

However, Ehrman recognizes the apocalyptic nature of Jesus' mission, and he neatly sums up his teachings this way: "One of the key aspects of Jesus' teaching is that those expecting the imminent arrival of the Kingdom of God need to prepare by living in ways that are appropriate to it. Life in the Kingdom will reflect God's own values, such as love, justice, and freedom. Those values should be reflected in how the followers of Jesus' message live in the present. In the future kingdom there will be no hatred, and so Jesus' followers should love each other now. In the future Kingdom there will be no loneliness, and so Jesus' followers should visit the widows and orphans now. In the future kingdom there will be no poverty, and so Jesus' followers should sell their possessions and give to the poor now. In the future kingdom there will be no hunger, and so Jesus' followers should feed the hungry now. In the future kingdom, there will be no sickness, so Jesus' followers should heal the sick now. In the future kingdom there will be no demons, and so Jesus' followers should cast out demons now. In the future kingdom there will be no war, and so Jesus' followers should work for peace now. In the future kingdom there will be no injustice, and so Jesus' followers should fight injustice now. The future Kingdom could begin to be realized here and now, as Jesus' followers begin to implement its values and standards in the present."

For all its appeal to Abrahamic believers, Tabor's book also will disappoint, as he explores theories about Jesus' human father and burial place, which he believes exists. The book's storyline contains a host of arguable suppositions. He assumes, for example, that the ancient Qumran outpost was inhabited by Essenes who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls, a position that is increasingly unpopular among archaeologists. His reconstruction of historical events, as impressive as it is, is somewhat glib, even in areas where no proof exists.

With regard to both Tabor and Ehrman, it is clear that they are inaccurate with regard to differences between Paul and the apostles. They blame Paul for founding concepts such as Jesus' divinity, a view that scholars including Anthony Buzzard have ably demolished, and discount the many similarities between the teachings of Paul and Jesus. It is probably true that differences in the early Jesus movement have been

downplayed over the years by church authorities, but it's far from clear that the differences were so stark. The apostles had to learn the new arrangements which God and Jesus introduced in the New Covenant. Much of this is recorded in the writings of Paul.

Another problem comes from the use of Scripture. Tabor and Ehrman veer back and forth, using some verses as an accurate source while discounting others from the same passage. It is mystifying how they can confidently claim that one Bible verse is critical truth while discounting the next as conjured out of whole cloth.

Still, the fact that the ultimate conclusions of Tabor and Ehrman differ from Abrahamic faith doesn't rule out their value as resources. But these scholars are historians and *not believers* and so their contribution is limited. It is a heartening at least that scholars are increasingly recognizing the centrality of the Kingdom of God to the teachings of Jesus.

Establishing facts that support the faith is an important first step. In that regard, books such as *The Jesus Dynasty* demonstrate the promise — and the difficulty — in spreading Abrahamic faith. If Jesus and his disciples preached an imminent Kingdom of God that didn't come in their time, that leaves open the possibility that they were wrong entirely, the positions taken by Tabor and Ehrman.

In the end, these scholars arrive at unbelief! One characteristic of the religious of all stripes is that most believers tend to exalt the logic of their own views as they exaggerate the flaws in the positions of others. It's easy to note the inherent contradiction in the competing orthodox beliefs that the Bible is inerrant yet the Hebrew prophets were metaphorical figures who were essentially wrong about what they wrote. Or the illogic of the orthodox view that we have an inspired Scripture with 66 books in which not a single one explains the nature of God as Triune!

It is less easy to confront the difficulties in one's own faith, although faith can rarely grow without challenge. With that in mind, Tabor in particular, and also Ehrman, provide an important service by laying a factual foundation favorable to Abrahamic believers, even if one disagrees with their conclusions. Neither Tabor nor Ehrman believe in the resurrection of Jesus nor the miracle of the Virgin Birth. ✧

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## Luke and the Resurrection

A measure of disagreement has arisen over the chronology of the Passover week in which Jesus died for our sins and the sins of the world. Luke has given a rather straightforward account of the day of Jesus' resurrection. He lets us know, while dealing with a different subject, his method of counting days. He reports Jesus as saying, "I cast out demons and perform cures

today and tomorrow, and the third day I reach my goal" (Luke 13:32). The reckoning is inclusive: "today, tomorrow and the third day." Luke had already recorded Jesus' statement about his own resurrection: "The Son of Man must suffer...and be killed and be raised up on the third day" (Luke 9:22). "On the third day he will rise again" (Luke 18:33). He must be crucified and "on the third day rise again" (Luke 24:7). In harmony with these plain statements Luke notes that Jesus was put to rest in the tomb on preparation day and that his friends rested on the Sabbath day according to the commandment — a reference to Saturday. Then on the first day of the week, Sunday, they came to the tomb (Luke 23:54-24:1).

Consistent with this account Luke completes the story by telling us that the disciples who met Jesus on Sunday "hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21). Their hopes were fading because "today [Sunday] is the third day since these things happened." The things in question were the crucifixion of Jesus: Jesus had said to them, "What things?" (Luke 24:19). They replied "...how our rulers delivered him up to death and crucified him" (Luke 24:20). Then they say: "Today is the third day since these things [the crucifixion] happened" (Luke 24:21). Sunday is of course the third day since Friday. Luke's calculation follows his earlier statement in Luke 13:32 (above): "Today, tomorrow and the third day." In reverse: Today [Sunday], yesterday and the third day since Sunday = Friday.

None of this would have been problematic, if Bible readers had taken note of the very Jewish idiom involved in the expression "three days and three nights" found in Matthew 12:40. To us English speakers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century that expression would mean a period longer than from Friday evening to Sunday morning. But what then of the rabbinical statement (around 100 AD)? "A day and a night constitute a season of time, 24 hours. And a *part* of such a season of 24 hours is to be counted as a *whole* season" (Rabbi Eliezer ben Azaryah).<sup>1</sup> Strack Billerbeck add that a part of a month or a year is reckoned also as a whole month or year. Similarly a 12-hour season of time can mean a *part* of that period. If then we read Matthew 12:40 in its Jewish context it does not mean three full days and nights. Thus we avoid contradicting Luke. ✧

## The Events of Passover Week

It is wise in Bible study related to the life and teaching of Jesus to *start* with the Synoptic accounts. John, who no doubt had access to the Synoptic records, gives us supplementary information, which of course does not contradict Matthew, Mark and Luke. According to the first three gospels Jesus ate the Passover

<sup>1</sup> See Strack Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash*, Vol. 1, p. 649.

supper at the statutory time (see Matt. 26:17; Mark 14:12, 14; Luke 22:11). Matthew 26:19 says explicitly, “they prepared the Passover.” After nightfall on Thursday evening (it was now 15<sup>th</sup> Nisan) Jesus and his disciples ate the Passover. The Synoptics agree on this basic information. This plain evidence is for us to accept and believe.

How then does John’s gospel fit the sequence of events provided by Matthew, Mark and Luke? In John 13:27-29 the disciples thought Jesus was telling Judas to buy items for the feast. Some think that the killing and eating of the lamb must not yet have taken place. But John refers to the remaining days of the whole of the festival (John elsewhere refers to Passover and means the complete eight days, including the initial eating of the lamb).

The day on which Jesus and his disciples were celebrating the Passover, and Jesus was instituting the Lord’s supper, was the 15<sup>th</sup> Nisan, itself a High Day. The Jews still observe the same day and eat the Passover lamb on the night following the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> day.

Jesus ate the Passover at the same time as the Jewish nation. The weekly Sabbath (Saturday) was the next day. Because that important weekly Sabbath (Saturday) was the Sabbath which fell in Passover *week* (see below), it was essential to obtain what was needed for the festival season, in view of that approaching Sabbath (Saturday).

John 18:28 reports that the Jews in the early morning of Friday (15<sup>th</sup> Nisan) did not want to enter the palace. Their desire was to be “clean” and able to “eat the Passover.” But this does not have to refer to the eating of the lamb (which had occurred the evening before) but eating the *continuing* festival meals. John refers to the whole feast as Passover, not just the first day. Deuteronomy 16:3 mentions eating the Passover festival food for the whole period of seven days.

John 19:14 refers to the day of Jesus’ crucifixion as “the Preparation of the Passover” (as the Greek reads and several translations render correctly). There is strong evidence to suggest that “Preparation” is the standard word for Friday, and we do not find it being used for the eve of a festal day other than the weekly Sabbath. Another word for the day before an annual *festival* occurs in Jewish literature. This is *proeortos*. The standard word for the day *before Saturday Sabbath* is *paraskeue* (preparation), and Mark 15:42 and Judith 8:6 call this *prosabbaton*, i.e., Friday.<sup>2</sup> The NIV thus correctly renders John 19:14 as “the day of Preparation [Friday] of Passover week.” William Tyndale in 1534 translated: “It was the Sabbath even [eve, evening before Saturday]

<sup>2</sup> The evidence may be examined in C.C. Torrey’s article “The Date of the Crucifixion according to the Fourth Gospel” (*Journal of Biblical Literature*, 50, 1931, p. 54).

which falls in the Easter feast.” John 19:31 then describes the following day (Saturday): “the day of that Sabbath [Saturday] was a special day.” The reference is not to an annual feast day, but to the weekly Sabbath falling in Passover week. By “Sabbath” John means Saturday. John nowhere refers to annual festival days as Sabbaths and in the New Testament “Sabbath” means Saturday (see for example Col. 2:16, 17).

Some have wondered how the crucifixion could have occurred on an annual holy day (the 15<sup>th</sup> Nisan). The Mishnah (*Sanhedrin* 11:4) insists that the execution of a rebellious false teacher, as Jesus was taken to be, should be carried out on one of the three principal feasts. The point was that “all the people should hear and fear” (Deut. 17:13). In his celebrated *Eucharistic Words*, Jeremias states that “the passion narratives of the New Testament portray no incident which could not have taken place on Nisan 15<sup>th</sup> [the Friday on which Jesus died]” (p. 79).

The Lord’s supper was instituted by Jesus, with the emblems of wine and bread, on the exact occasion of the Passover meal given as a type in Exodus 12. The Lord’s supper is the New Covenant memorial of the death of the Savior and a “rehearsal” of the future Messianic banquet to be celebrated when Jesus returns. Bread represents the body of Jesus broken for us all, and wine the intoxicating joy of the spirit and of the Messianic Kingdom to come, “wine to rejoice the heart of man” (Ps. 104:15). The New Testament church followed Jesus’ instructions to continue the fellowship meal which he instituted, breaking the bread in memory of him and drinking a little wine to recall his shed blood and the coming banquet at his return to establish the Kingdom on a renewed earth (see 1 Cor. 11:17-34). Paul had to correct the unruly celebration which occurred when the Corinthian church met together. They were not eating “the Lord’s supper” as they should have done, following Jesus’ command.

The details we have given from John’s Gospel and its harmonizing with the clear statement of Matthew, Mark and Luke, that Jesus celebrated the Passover at the same time as the Jewish nation may be further examined in A.T. Robertson’s *Harmony of the Gospels*, pp. 279-284. This view was held also by Andrews, Bochart, Davidson, Fairburn, Gardiner, Hengstenberg, Lange, Lewin, Lightfoot, Milligan, Norton, Olshausen, Robinson, Schoettgen, Tholuck and Wiesler. An easily accessible explanation along the lines above is found in D.A. Carson on Matthew in the *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*. ✧

Anthony is heard on **thebyteshow.com** interviewed weekly by GeorgeAnn Hughes. At the site, click on **Library** in the left column to access the archived interviews. He is also seen at **youtube.com**

## “Love My Enemies? Oh, C’mon Lord!”

Jesus can enable us to do just that. Do we even want him to do so? Love our enemies? That’s hard!

During the Protestant Reformation, it was costly to obey this command of Jesus. Facing arrest as an Anabaptist, Dirck Willems fled for his life across a frozen lake. When his pursuer broke through the ice, Willems thought that he soon would have drowned. Willems gave up his chance to escape by turning back to save his persecutor. Shortly, he was captured, imprisoned and burned at the stake in 1569.

More recently, in Cambodia back in 1975, Ta Hum was a practicing Christian there. In the village where he lived, his neighbors bribed a dishonest surveyor to change a long-established property boundary line. As a result, Ta Hum lost an acre of land.

His first reaction was, “They may get my land unfairly, but they won’t get my banana and coconut trees on the land.” So he began to cut down the trees with his machete. After cutting down several of them, he thought, “This is not what I learned in Bible class. Jesus said to turn the other cheek.” He prayed for God’s forgiveness, and returned to his home.

The next morning he went to the neighbors who were building a wall to mark the new boundary. Ta Hum told them, “You have taken my land; I’ll give you my house, too. What do I need with a house and land? I’ll move away and tell others about Jesus.”

News of what he said spread and reached the village chief, who investigated. He declared to the swindlers, “Everyone knows this land is Ta Hum’s. He planted these trees twenty years ago. I have the deed in my file. If you don’t get your wall out of here by evening I will throw you all in jail!”

But Ta Hum interceded, “It’s much too much work — give them until tomorrow evening.” The neighbors lost not only the land but also the bribe money, for the surveyor had spent it.

When Christians are persecuted, the outcome is not always so favorable to them. But Ta Hum’s attitude, even before he knew how the situation would end, showed his great faith in God and his willingness to obey Him. — edited by SP, via *Alliance Witness*

## Comments

### A Debate on the Trinity in Indonesia

*(We leave the English as we received it, to allow for its full and moving message to be heard — ed.)*

“Thanks for your prayer for the dialogue. It was ended without conclusion, as we predicted. The strangest statement I’ve ever heard in the dialogue from the trinitarian side was their opening: ‘Anyone who was able

to explain God with an easy explanation, as one is one, is heretic. God is so mysterious that none will be able to explain Him.’ Then we answered to this statement: ‘It is true that we will be unable to reach God’s full wisdom, but to understand Jesus Christ is permitted. As Paul said in Ephesians 4:13 until we understand about Son of God. We also cannot understand your approach as you can’t explain God but you try to explain that God are three. How can you know that God are three? Why not 1000?’ They only stated their previous statement to comment our answer. God is a mystery, they repeated.

“It was really a dialogue without any possibilities of meeting point. Their approach on Bible verses are really different. When we said that historically, Christianity came from Judaism and their monotheism teaching, they said, no, Jews are the one who crucified our Lord. Another strange understanding about history, the Jews teaching and policy to Christianity are different matter.

“Each side presented their paper, so they presented that Jesus must be God to save the world, and we presented that Jesus’ teaching was monotheism, and he honored his Father, YHWH, the God very much. We then discussed: 1. How could Jesus be full human and full God in the same time. 2. How about John 1:1 (trinitarian question). 3. How about Mark 12:29 and Deuteronomy 6:4 (our question). 4. How about Isaiah 9:5 (trinitarian question). 5. How about John 17:3 (our question). We could not go further and could not handle the Holy Spirit matter for the time was too narrow.

“Most attendances in the dialogue were trinitarian, and most of them are pastor or evangelist. So, we got enough mental terror. They applauded everytime the trinitarian side gave explanation, but none for us. And they started to go further after 12 o’clock (the dialogue started at 10.00). They protested to our background, that none of us are from theological school. They shouted: ‘Go home boy, you are no match for this theology expert’ or ‘Repent now’ or ‘How can we hear something from this non-theological young boy, since we are all from theology school.’ On this protest, we said that Jesus gave us opportunity to study the word of God. Matthew 11:25 gave the guarantee that this gospel can be understood by ‘small people.’ But they said Bible can only be understood by Greek and Hebrew expert. What? It is another absurd idea, I think. Two third of the audience did not continue to join the dialogue. They left the room with saying: ‘They are uneducated boys, why should we hear them.’ Hahaha. Funny.

“Finally the dialogue ended at 3 pm. The trinitarian side on the end of the event asked apologize for the reaction of the trinitarian audience. We said, that we thought nothing about that. They asked contact and further dialogue and promised a better situation. Some pastor came to us and also apologize for the audience.

They said ‘thank you for your fairness and emotion control.’ Hahaha. We really feel nothing for their action. Some Moslem friends who also attended the dialogue said, ‘you showed a great appreciation for the Bible compared with the trinitarian and good that you did not react negatively to such impolite action.’ It was ended with no conclusion but also without any bad side-effect.”

— *Indonesia*

“Thank you for *Focus on the Kingdom*. I always find it helpful and informative.” — *New Jersey*

“My wife and I have just begun *The Amazing Aims and Claims of Jesus* book. Great reading — especially when it talks about the dead being dead, and who Jesus Christ is. I love the laymen’s style for the churchgoer.”

— *Ohio*

“I have been listening to your teachings on The Byte Show ([thebyteshow.com](http://thebyteshow.com)) and have subsequently purchased several books. I feel as if I’ve been coming out of a fog. I am so grateful to you and others who are teaching us — me — more grateful than I can adequately convey in this short message. I feel very, very fortunate — I hardly dare to say that I feel blessed — but I am...I see this. I’m a new reader of the Bible although I’ve had experience with church and was married to a Jewish man for several years.” — *Massachusetts*

## 2007 Theological Conference Report

At the beginning of the 2007 Theological Conference, Anthony Buzzard reminded us of the theme that emerged during last year’s conference: “Publish!” And we have. These are a few of the encouraging efforts undertaken in the last year to publish God’s truth to the world:

- *Maggie Seeks the Kingdom of God*, a book for children (and parents) by Angela Moore ([angelahaysmoore.com](http://angelahaysmoore.com))
- *Divine Truth or Human Tradition?*, a study of the Trinity by Patrick Navas (available at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) or [authorhouse.com](http://authorhouse.com))
- “The Human Jesus,” a documentary by Mark Dockery which was viewed for the first time at the conference (see [thehumanjesus.com](http://thehumanjesus.com))
- *The Travesty of the Trinity*, a forthcoming book by Priscilla Jervey who told her “faith story” at the conference

Dan Gill of Tennessee opened the sessions on Friday with his intriguing title: “The Next Thing Buddha Will Hear.” He encouraged us to reject the popular idea that all paths lead to God. The next thing Buddha will hear is the voice of Jesus calling him to judgment. Chuck Jones of California challenged us with insights related to the book *The Myth of a Christian Nation* by Gregory Boyd. Christian discipleship means non-involvement in the politics of the present evil systems. Al Spangler of Texas

recounted his refreshing “Pilgrim’s Journey from Legalism to Freedom” in the New Covenant.

Dr. Joe Martin, a professor at Atlanta Bible College, rousingly reminded us that the Gospel of the Kingdom is God’s GOOD news, to restore the earth to its state when God said it was “good, good, good...very good.” Later Sean Finnegan of New York presented the other side — the Bible’s warnings of the coming judgment as motivation to repent in view of God’s coming decisive intervention. Dustin Smith of Louisiana spoke about “Apocalyptic Dualism” — the Bible’s worldview of this present evil age and the age to come — and its implications for Christian ethics today.

James Engelbert of New York spoke on “Lessons from the House of Hezekiah: Extreme Makeover — The Spiritual Edition.” We are to take our cue from the heroic restorationists of the past. Robert Hach of Florida presented a paper on “The Faith of Jesus” in which he made the excellent and neglected point that to believe in Jesus is to believe *what Jesus believed*: the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. Alex Hall from England, having undertaken an in-depth study of Adolf von Harnack’s 19<sup>th</sup>-century *The History of Dogma*, summarized for us Harnack’s explanation of how Christianity has undergone a “Radical Deformation.” Greek philosophy invaded the Church of the second century and radically changed the New Testament portrait of Jesus as the human Messiah.

In “No Contented Cripples in the Kingdom,” Robin Todd of Washington spoke movingly about the healing, restoring power of the message about the age to come. Robin also sang for us during the weekend, including the song he wrote called “His Kingdom Is Coming.” Anthony Buzzard presented an examination of the 70 “sevens” prophecy of Daniel 9. On Sunday morning Sean Finnegan exhorted us to remain tender when dealing with opponents, and to boldly “use our words” to speak the Gospel of the Kingdom. There can be no evangelism without speech and teaching.

We all enjoyed the new location for the conference — Simpsonwood retreat center in a beautiful wooded setting on the banks of the Chattahoochee River. Staying there all together gave us even more opportunities for the fellowship that is always one of the highlights of the conference. We were blessed to have guests all the way from New Zealand, England and many states in the US.

We are setting up a scholarship fund to assist people who cannot afford to come to the conference. If you would like to contribute please contact us at [anthonybuzzard@mindspring.com](mailto:anthonybuzzard@mindspring.com). DVDs and papers are available from Atlanta Bible College (see last page). The papers are also on the web at [www.kingdomready.org/blog](http://www.kingdomready.org/blog)

We hope to see you next year in Georgia!