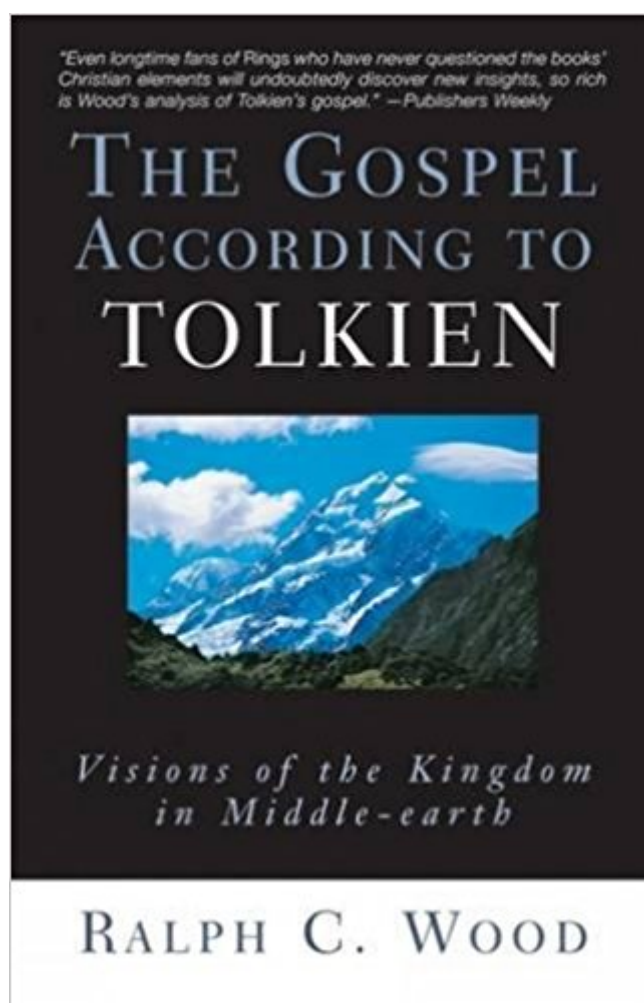




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# The Gospel According To Tolkien: Visions Of The Kingdom In Middle-earth



## Synopsis

Readers have repeatedly called *The Lord of the Rings* the most important book of our age--absorbing all 1,500 of its pages with an almost fanatical interest and seeing the Peter Jackson movies in unprecedented numbers. Readers from ages 8 to 80 keep turning to Tolkien because here, in this magical kingdom, they are immersed in depth after depth of significance and meaning--perceiving the Hope that can be found amidst despair, the Charity that overcomes vengeance, and the Faith that springs from the strange power of weakness. *The Gospel According to Tolkien* examines biblical and Christian themes that are found in the works of J. R. R. Tolkien. Follow Ralph Wood as he takes us through the theological depths of Tolkien's literary legacy.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Readers and fans of J.R.R. Tolkien have long been aware of the Christian underpinnings of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Still, Tolkien has not been without his religious critics, including those who have read a fascination with paganism into the pre-Christian world of Tolkien's creation. Wood, a professor of theology and literature at Baylor University, responds to those critics with an academically sound retort of "Nonsense!" Acknowledging straight off that *Rings* is devoid of any traces of "formal religion," Wood offers countless pieces of evidence that support his analysis of the full-fledged, deeply Christian theology of the mythological culture of Middle-earth. And he does so convincingly. Even longtime fans of *Rings* who have never questioned the books' Christian elements will undoubtedly discover new insights, so rich is Wood's analysis of Tolkien's gospel. But

be forewarned: This is not a book for the casual reader. Rather, it is a somewhat scholarly endeavor for those who want a more thorough understanding of the underlying themes that have made The Lord of the Rings novels, as well as Tolkien's other writings, such enduring treasures. Wood teases out those themes-life and death, good and evil, courage and cowardice, mercy and justice and of course, faith, hope, and love-to reveal the faith-filled nature of Tolkien's theocentric and sacramental, albeit fictional, world. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Ralph Wood's *The Gospel According to Tolkien* will send readers back to Tolkien's work to see what they had missed, as well as to enjoy what they had seen before. --Mark A Noll, author of *America's God; From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*

This book summarizes part of *The Lord of the Rings* (and other Tolkien work) and draws comparisons with Christian thought and mythology. It tries to draw direct connections between the characters and situations in TOLR and classic Christian stories from the bible and church history. It examines portions of the stories and compares them to classic Christian thought and literature. While I do not agree with some of the author's allusions, I find his drawing of the connections to at least be interesting and, at times, thought provoking. The book gives a different way of looking at parts of the story that one may not have considered before. Most Tolkien fans will tell you that there is not supposed to be any one-to-one relations of things in TOLR and things elsewhere. I would grudgingly concede that there may be connections that Tolkien did not intend to be there, but are there if you are looking at them with a certain lense as this author is. I would recommend this book to anyone who is a TOLR fan as well of other Tolkien works. It gives you things to think about the next time you are reading the trilogy or *The Hobbit* or *The Silmarillion*. I would caution the reader to not take this book as gospel and to leave some room for doubt and for making your own conclusions. It is an enjoyable read and is well worth the time spent reading it.

I like this book. It isn't perfect, but few books are. Let me get the quibbles out of the way first. The first issue I have is on page 5; the author implies that Tolkien suggested the Ring of Sauron as potentially suggestive of the atomic bomb. Tolkien didn't suggest this, and Tolkien began writing the background for book well before the atomic bomb existed. The second issue of contention - the author dramatically understates the impact of pagan and polytheist religion in the book. Richard Purtill's book "*J.R.R. Tolkien: Myth, Morality and Religion*"<sup>^</sup> *The J.R.R. Tolkien: Myth, Morality, and Religion*<sup>^</sup> should be read as a corrective here. Ok - negative part said. Apart from that, I think the

author is a very concise and eloquent writer, who has explained the moral and religious themes of The Lord of the Rings quite well. The Christian themes are very apparent, the Tolkien fan will be well-rewarded. It does help to have some knowledge of Tolkien (including the Silmarillion) to understand this book thoroughly. That said, I think the language is clear and concise enough, much may be grasped even without that. This is a good book on the religion of Tolkien, I just recommend reading the Purtill book as well to enhance and fill out your view of Tolkien.

This is a most excellent, well researched and well written book; well worth buying and reading carefully. My only criticism is that Prof. Wood does not delve deeply enough into the specifics of the Roman Catholic mysticism which permeate all of Tolkien's truly brilliant works. Nevertheless, Professor Wood very eloquently and specifically demonstrates how Tolkien's works are indeed filled with Truth: Christian ideas and virtues. Furthermore, Prof. Wood looks into several key examples of lives in Tolkien who triumph through virtue and grace, to rise above the sin and death of Middle-earth (and thus of our world), as well as highlight those poor creatures, great and small, who succumb to the allure of pride, dominion, lust for power and greed. He likewise explores those characters who fall prey to great evil; who foolishly give up hope and sadly sink into despondency, with its resulting outcomes. It helps a great deal if Wood's readers are already quite familiar with all the great works of Tolkien, not merely the Hobbit and Lord of the Rings. Yet, it could be said that this book might for some new readers, act as a springboard into the brilliance and extreme depth of Tolkien; those perhaps only familiar with the films and want to explore the vastly richer world of Tolkien's actual writings. Likewise, Prof. Wood's book can arm the new reader of Tolkien, or even experienced ones, with insights which will make reading (or deeply re-reading) Tolkien's great works a much more interesting, insightful and valuable experience. Professor Wood gave an excellent lecture at Gordon College on Lord of the Rings specifically, and on Tolkien and his Roman Catholicism generally (it's only about an hour long). Below is the link to view this must-see lecture, on You Tube [...]"Ralph Wood - On Tolkien--The Lord of the Rings--A Book for our Time" [...]

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