

## COURSE SYLLABUS

<u>WEEK</u>	<u>TOPIC</u>
1	<b>God in Christ Reconciling the World</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Existence &amp; Attributes of God</li><li>• Man's Tarnished Image</li><li>• God in Christ</li></ul>
2	<b>Christ the Pre-Existent One</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Logos of God</li><li>• The Dogma of the Church</li></ul>
3	<b>The Covenant of Redemption</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Mind of God &amp; The Word of God</li><li>• The Elect</li></ul>
4	<b>The Light of Men</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Light &amp; Knowledge</li><li>• The Light that Lightest every Man</li></ul>
5	<b>Light in the Darkness</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Moral Light in the World</li><li>• He Came unto His Own...</li></ul>
6	<b>The Promised One</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Expectation of a Deliverer</li><li>• Why Israel?</li></ul>
7	<b>Christ in the Old Testament: Hermeneutical Questions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Jesus on Every Page?</li><li>• Direction of Interpretation</li></ul>
8	<b>Christ in the Old Testament: Typology</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Types of Messianic Prophecies</li><li>• Three Men and Christ</li></ul>
9	<b>Christ in the Old Testament: The Anointed (Two)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Messiah</li><li>• The Anointed Ones in Israel</li></ul>
10	<b>Cur Deus Homo</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• God With Us – the Stumbling Block</li><li>• The Unavoidable Dilemma</li></ul>
11	<b>The Word Became Flesh</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Mystery of Godliness</li><li>• The Virgin Birth - Fundamentals</li></ul>
12	<b>Kenotic Christology – The Emptying of the Son of God</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Crux of the Christological Problem</li><li>• Philippians 2:7</li></ul>
13	<b>The Self-Consciousness of Christ</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Birth to Baptism</li><li>• The Son of Man</li><li>• The Servant of God</li></ul>
14	<b>The Self-Consciousness of Christ</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Gospel of John</li><li>• The Self-Awareness of God's Son</li></ul>
15	<b>Tempted in All Manner...</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Temptation &amp; Sin</li><li>• The Temptation of Christ</li></ul>

## Chapter 1 - God in Christ Reconciling the World

**Key Text(s):** II Corinthians 5:18-20; Romans 8:19-23

*“It is in Him that God is going to reconcile everything,  
and there is no other way of reconciliation.  
We cannot emphasize this too often or too strongly.”  
(David Martyn Lloyd-Jones)*

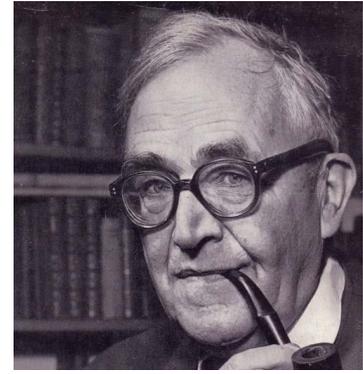
Traditionally, the third installment of a theological curriculum focuses on the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. Also traditionally, this segment of the theological curricula is called *Christ & Salvation*, as it emphasizes not only the Person and Work of Jesus Christ, but the impact of both upon the salvation of Man. As some systematizing is unavoidable due to the nature of human thought, the order of study is extremely logical, especially from a Reformed theological point of view. We begin with the study of God proper – *The Existence & Attributes of God* – wherein we establish the biblical (and creation-confirmed) self-disclosure of the One God. This is followed by *Man & Sin* – biblical Anthropology, in which study we find the majesty of Man as created in the image of God, and the consequent travesty of sin, the self-inflicted terminal wound which has reduced Man to a condition hovering just above the brute beast. As a result of these first and second installments of theology, an infinite chasm is discovered between God and Man, an impassible gulf between the Creator and His supreme creation, caused by the latter’s sin.

This is a metaphysical state of hopelessness. There is no rationale, no logic, and no experience by which Man can overcome and traverse this gulf between himself and his God. Man’s fallen condition is *“without hope and without God in the world”*; a statement that applies to the individual Jew as well as to the Gentile, for both are *“all under sin...that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God.”* The magnitude of Man’s hopelessness only becomes clear when one begins to fully appreciate and acknowledge both the holiness of God on the one hand, and the total and inescapable depravity of Man on the other. As these truths are laid before us from the Bible – first from Theology, and then from Anthropology – we are forced to the conclusion that *“the only necessary consequence of sin is that man should be damned and lost.”*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Barth, Karl *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation IV.1* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark; 1980); 3.

This situation is the reason Karl Barth did not title the volumes of his *Church Dogmatics* dealing with Jesus Christ, ‘Christ & Salvation,’ or even simply, ‘Christology.’ Rather several of the largest volumes within the entire series are devoted to *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, in which Barth thoroughly and theologically discusses the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. Barth maintains throughout this section of his *magnum opus*, that any attempt to investigate the Person



**Karl Barth (1886-1968)**

and work of Jesus Christ apart from the divine plan and purpose of *reconciliation* must lead to error on many fronts. The result will be either a separation of Christ from God, or from Christ and the Church, or from God and the Church, or, more frequently, an incoherent combination of these errors. “A mistaken or defective perception here would mean error or deficiency everywhere...From this point either everything is clear and true and helpful, or it is not so anywhere.”<sup>2</sup>

Barth’s perspective is a powerful one, for as the apostle Paul reminds us, “*God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.*”

*Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.* (II Corinthians 5:18-20)

Yet as important at the Doctrine of Reconciliation is, it is not where Barth begins his *Church Dogmatics*. Indeed, reconciliation only appears in Volume IV, though it then fills four individual volumes within Barth’s ‘Volume IV.’ The logic of reconciliation begins in theology as it does in the Bible, with God and not with Man, nor even with Jesus Christ. “*In the beginning, God...*” establishes the baseline worldview of moral accountability within the human race. The essential question of moral accountability is not ‘what?,’ nor ‘why?,’ but ‘to whom?’ This fact has largely been lost sight of in our post-modern world, though even the prevalent attitude of moral relativism (or, worse, amoralism) answers this

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<sup>2</sup> Barth; 3.

fundamental question, albeit with the answer, 'No one!' The Christian worldview, however, has and must maintain that the only rational and stable basis for morality and ethics places mankind in a recognizable and codifiable accountability to a higher being. All other frameworks for morality are nothing more than shifting sand.

Thus all right thinking about Man as a responsible moral creature, must begin with right thinking about God. The Christian (and the Jew with him) maintains that the only reasonable way in which a man might come to know anything about God is through the self-disclosure of God. In other words, unless God makes Himself known, man cannot know Him. Given the accepted definitions of 'god' and 'man,' this premise is eminently rational. Just as it is not rational for man to deny the existence of God – for it is, by definition, a subject matter the existence of which is beyond the ability of man to reason for or against - so by the same logic it is irrational for man to conclude that he might know anything about God apart from the latter's own self disclosure, His own self revelation. Thus, as we established in the first section of systematic, *The Existence & Attributes of God*, the Jew before, and the Christian now, seeks to know God through His revelation to mankind of His nature and His purpose: the Bible. To be sure, the Bible itself informs us that the man who refuses to seek God in this way cannot claim ignorance as an excuse, for the world in which he lives testifies of the reality of the God he denies.

*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.* (Romans 1:18-20)

For this reason the biblical record itself begins with God as Creator, establishing His sovereign ownership of all that is, and His divine superintendence of all that happens within His immense creation. The logic of Creation may be refused, but it cannot be denied. Not, at least, until man discovers a way to create something from nothing, or a natural law that writes itself into being. The foundation of modern Science rests upon the reality of causal events; it is certainly not rational to suppose that the myriad cause & effect relationships so integral to the Scientific Method are themselves the effect of no cause.

The Bible does not attempt to reason with us concerning the rationality of Creation; it simply states as fact that, “*in the beginning God created...*” The revelation of Creation is remarkably brief (which sadly has permitted countless fruitless debates as to the specifics in Time and Space). Very quickly the inspired record moves on to the matter of central importance to the entire Creation narrative: “*Let Us make Man in Our image...*” It is one of the fundamental tenets of the Judeo-Christian worldview that Man is the centerpiece of the divine cosmos. This notion has certainly come under attack in modern times, as being anthropocentric and ignorant of the ‘grander scheme’ of the universe. Of course, it is worth noting that this critique comes *from man*, who is the only being thus far manifest in the universe who *could* raise such a complaint! In all philosophical systems, it is man who philosophizes, man who ‘thinks’ about the cosmos and his own place within it. This is but a continual manifestation and proof that Man is at the center; the biblical account simply explains why this is so: Man is the *Imago Dei*; he is the created representation of the Creator Himself.

Much is made – too much, really – in modern theology and Church dogmatics, about ‘relationships.’ But it remains undeniable that the early placement of the account of Man’s creation *in the image of God*, does indeed establish the most profound relationship between the Creator and one of His creatures. To be sure, all creation is in relationship with the Creator. But not all creation is in relationship in the same manner and to the same degree. Being the one who uniquely bears the image of God, Man also bears a unique relationship vis-à-vis his Creator. This relationship is quickly placed in stark relief by the rebellion of Man against God: the *Fall* of Man recorded in Genesis 3. We have had occasion to discuss *theodicy*, the doctrine of why evil has come (been permitted) in the world, and we will have occasion in this session to discuss further the purpose of God in allowing/ordaining that Man should fall. At this particular juncture, what is important to see in the event is that the stage is thus set for the most vivid display and definition of what the relationship between God and Man *should be*, as contrasted to what is *has become*.

From the point of departure of the Fall, the biblical record moves in two diverging directions. On the one hand, there is a progressive revelation of God as *holy*; on the other, of Man as *corrupt*. The paths of these two divergent teachings provide the subject matter

for first, *The Existence & Attributes of God*, and, second, *Man & Sin* – the first and second installments of most theological curricula. In the current context, with regard to the first of these, what is important to rehearse is the biblical teaching of God as *holy*. This principle most powerfully establishes the moral accountability of Man to God. This is the principle



**Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)**

that Immanuel Kant referred to as the ‘categorical imperative,’ though the famous German philosopher attempted in vain to tie this imperative strictly to human reason. Kant’s divorce of moral motivation from divine holiness and the innate character of Man as the *Imago Dei*, and his elevation of Human Reason as the moral and ethical arbiter, led directly to modern moral relativism, and to the

‘post modernism’ of today. The Bible, however, grounds the moral sense, and the moral accountability, of Man on these two facts outlined in the first book, Genesis: that Man is made in the image of God and that God is holy. The first of these sets the *fact* of accountability; the second sets the *standard*. Both are crucial to a proper biblical understanding of morality and ethics.

Theologians speak of the *attributes* of God – concepts such as omnipotence and omniscience, aseity or self-existence, infinitude and immutability. On a more pedestrian (but no less biblical or important) level, we speak of God as Just, as Merciful, as Loving (as Love itself). We might well say that the latter group represent the outworkings of the former. Or we might equally say that the former represent those things that God is *in Himself*, whereas the latter describe Him in His relations to Man. But what we cannot say is that *holiness* belongs to either set. Holiness is not an attribute, nor is it a characteristic manner by which God manifests Himself to Man. Holiness transcends, though by no means negating, the attributes and characteristics of God. It is also the one descriptive term regarding the Divine Being that cannot be extrapolated from a characteristic of man himself. Man has being...God is the One who has being in Himself; Man has knowledge...God is the One who is All-Knowing; Man has power...God is All-Powerful; etc. But holiness is not truly the extrapolation of human goodness; it is not merely higher than that by an infinite degree, it is different in kind.

It has been said that holiness is ‘the sum of the divine perfections.’ The holiness of God is what is referred to when we read that He *“dwells in unapproachable light”* or that He is *“a consuming fire.”* Holiness is the glory of God; or perhaps it is better said, the glory of God consists in His holiness. In any event, and since the very concept of holiness is one beyond the full comprehension (and certainly beyond the experience) of any man, we may summarize the topic by saying that it is *holiness* that sets God apart from Man as, in Barth’s phrase, ‘wholly other.’ And though this standard of moral perfection is *“too high for me, I cannot attain it”* (Psa. 139:6), it is quickly established in the Bible as *the* standard by which Man is to be measured. *“By those who come before Me, I shall be holy,”* says the LORD God on the occasion of the ‘strange fire’ offered up by Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu. In the ‘Holiness Code’ of Leviticus, we read the standard of moral accountability before God,

*Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy’* (Leviticus 19:1-2)

Anselm, the 11<sup>th</sup> Century Archbishop of Canterbury, noted in his ontological ‘proof’ of the existence of God, that Man can conceive of a Being “greater than which there is none.” And in spite of warranted critique, and some undeserved abuse, that Anselm’s theory has endured over the ages, it remains a valid consideration that Man does have the ability to extrapolate his thoughts to reach a degree beyond his experience. Nowhere is this more necessary than with the concept of divine holiness. It is critical to a right understanding of the nature of the God with whom we have to do, that every worthy thought – goodness, integrity, justice, faithfulness, purity, etc. – be raised to its highest pitch in our minds as we contemplate the divine holiness. And yet, even then, we must also acknowledge that our minds may only approach the comprehension of holiness asymptotically – we can get closer, but we can never arrive at a full understanding of holiness.

In this, what must be avoided at all cost is the lowering of God even one degree in approach to Man. *“You thought I was altogether such a one as yourself,”* is a rebuke from the Lord for just such an error. Here the classic definition of idolatry furnished by A. W. Tozer applies: “The essence of idolatry is thinking thoughts about God that are unworthy

of Him.” Rather, let us consider God as He has revealed Himself in Scripture and Creation, as One who is in some ways *like* our best thoughts, but in the most fundamental



**A. W. Tozer (1897-1963)**

way *wholly other* than our best thoughts. He is “*high and lifted up,*” and it will do no good for us to lower Him in an attempt to close the gap between God and Man. If we err on this score, we will most certainly come up with a religion, a plan of redemption, that accords better with man’s opinion of himself. But because it will not accord with God’s revelation of Himself, the result will be both a false religion and a false hope. “But where God is not bound and man has no claim, even more com-

PELLING is the will and plan and promise of God.”<sup>3</sup>

In the opposite direction we find the nature of Man as fallen from God – the corrupted *imago Dei* in whom the essentially dignity of being ‘human’ has been all but forfeited. And just as it serves no good purpose to lower God in the direction of Man, so it is deceptive and dangerous to raise Man above his true condition in sin. Of course, it has been popular among philosophers and moralists throughout the ages to deny either that man is as bad as all that, or to deny the notion and existence of sin altogether. It is not within the scope of the current study – at least not this current lesson – to establish the truth and reality of moral depravity of Man. One would think that the most cursory study of human history and/or human nature would suffice to accomplish that proof. It must be sufficient for our purposes to establish that the depravity of Man is something *the Bible* teaches, so that we might come to a greater understanding and appreciation of the work of reconciliation we find embodied (literally) in Jesus Christ.

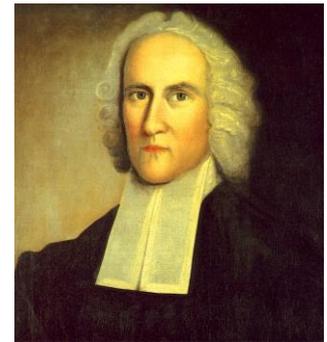
The trajectory of Man away from God begins as early as it might have in the biblical record – Genesis 3 records the ‘Fall’ of Adam a mere chapter after the recapitulatory account of his creation. Adam violated the (amazingly) simple prohibition against eating of one particular tree within the garden where God had established him and his wife. The prohibition itself offers an immediate purview of what lay ahead for mankind, “*In the day that you eat thereof, dying you shall die.*” Thus we learn that Death – famously called ‘the

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<sup>3</sup> Barth; 9.

Great Equalizer’ – was the result of a willful decision on the part of the first Man, a decision that impacted the entire race springing from him. The apostle Paul powerfully sums up this biblical teaching in his epistle to the Romans, “*Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned...*”<sup>4</sup> The universality of death echoes the universality of sin, though it does not teach that all men sin alike or to the same degree.

It is this latter fact that has confused people when it comes to their *hamartology*, their ‘doctrine of sin.’ Since all men are not equally bad, it is concluded that some men possess intrinsic good. Let it first be said that this conclusion can only be arrived at by those who have either discounted or denigrated the holiness of God, by whom the moral standard is set. The biblical doctrine of sin, therefore, is not established by a relative measurement of one man to another, but by the absolute comparison of each and every man to the holy God.



**Jonathan Edwards (1703-58)**

Jonathan Edwards commented that the true difference between the best of men and the worst of men was less than the distance between the top and the bottom of a pencil line. While we may acknowledge – as the Bible does – a relative scale of moral character among men, we cannot equate this with a solid moral standing before God.

Reformed theology refers to fallen man as ‘totally depraved.’ This is a much-maligned doctrine both by those who misunderstand it and by those who wish to find some vestige of true goodness within man, in spite of the testimony both of Scripture and of history. But as we have seen in the previous session of systematic, this doctrine does not teach that every man is as bad as he might be, nor that every man is as bad as every other man. Scripture, history, and experience would all have to be abandoned for such a view to be maintained. It is evident that in the matter of faithfulness and loyalty, David was ‘more righteous’ than King Saul, whereas in the matter of Bathsheba, David’s righteousness paled in comparison to Uriah’s. While in no way exonerating any of the men, it is still a fact of history that Stalin executed more people than did Hitler, and that

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<sup>4</sup> Romans 5:12

Pol Pot killed a greater percentage of his people than either the Communist or the Nazi. And from our Lord's own mouth came a stunning condemnation upon Chorazin and Bethsaida, two towns that will fall deeper into the pit of hell in the judgment than Sodom or Gomorrah. *Relative* morality is a given, and is in no way diminished by the doctrine of Total Depravity. But relative morality provides no abiding hope for man.

Perhaps it is unfortunate that the 'Five Points of Calvinism' were conveniently reduced to the acronym TULIP, the 'T' of which stands for Total Depravity. Yet even if we keep the 'T' we would do well to modify the meaning to 'Total Inability,' for that is indeed what the doctrine teaches. Yes, Total Depravity does maintain, as the Bible also does, that the corruption of sin has touched and infected every facet of man's being – physically, spiritually, emotionally, relationally, etc. The testimony of Scripture on this account is clear and consistent.

*Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great upon the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.* (Genesis 6:5)

*...for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth...* (Genesis 8:21)

*The heart is more deceitful than all else, and is desperately wicked; who can understand it?* (Jeremiah 17:9)

*There is none righteous, not even one.* (Romans 3:10)

But while the Bible clearly establishes the corruption of man in every part, it also establishes a more profound and sobering truth: that man is *totally unable*, indeed, *unwilling*, to do that which is required of him as the image bearer of a holy God. The classic biblical anthropology is found in the concatenation of Old Testament verses assembled by the apostle in Romans 3:10-18,

*There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands;  
There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one.  
Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit;  
The poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.  
Their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways;  
And the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.*

It is common for moderns to accuse Paul of misanthropy (along with the ‘fact’ that he was a misogynist, we are told); he was just a hard-nose people-hater. This assessment contradicts the even-handedness, the compassion, and the love that his writings reveal toward both the believing members of his churches and his unbelieving ‘brethren according to the flesh’ within Israel. Furthermore, as noted above, Paul’s scathing indictment of man does not consist of his own words, but rather is drawn from a compendium of anthropological passages in the Old Testament, showing that the utter depth of human depravity due to sin is not a Pauline (or Calvinist) construct; it is the teaching of Scripture.

What these two teachings – the Holiness of God and the Depravity of Man – present to the study of Scripture and of human nature, is an immense chasm between the Creator and the epitome of His creation, Man. The sin that lay between God and Man is not a mere barrier or obstacle that may be overcome with effort and good intention, it is an unbridgeable gulf fixed by the disparate natures of the two beings set opposite. On the one side there is a God whose *“eyes are too pure even to look upon evil,”* and on the other side there is Man, of whom Paul says, *“there is no fear of God before their eyes.”* The happiness of Man and, amazingly, the glory of God, depends upon this chasm being crossed. But to say that any measure of its crossing can be made by Man is to deny the biblical teaching concerning the effects of sin upon human nature. It is also wishful thinking, and dangerous deception, for it finds hope where none exists. If the divide is to be crossed, it must be by God alone. *“It is not merely a frontier, but a yawning abyss. Yet this abyss is crossed, not by man, not by both God and man, but only by God.”*<sup>5</sup> This is the glory of Christology, the study of the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.

The crossing of the abyss is the work of God in Jesus Christ, as Paul so clearly states it in II Corinthians 5,

*Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.*

(II Corinthians 5:19-20)

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<sup>5</sup> Barth; 82.

This is perhaps the most concise passage in the whole of Scripture concerning the *meaning* of the Person – both His eternal divinity and His Incarnation – and the Work – in both active obedience to the will of the Father and passive submission to the death of the cross – of Jesus Christ. In a word: *Reconciliation*. There are so many other words to be used in this study, all of which are either biblical or derived from clear biblical principles: justification, salvation, redemption, and so forth. But none is so comprehensive, or so beautifully simple, as *reconciliation*. The bringing together of God and the world in Christ Jesus; this is the heart of Christology and the essence of Christianity. “It has been the belief and the teaching of the Christian Church of all ages and of all Confessions, that Jesus, the Son of God, in His sacrificial death on the cross wrought the reconciliation of man with God.”<sup>6</sup>

Thus it will be the central premise of this study – a study on Jesus Christ – that the underlying theme of all sections is this word and act: *Reconciliation*. This concept answers both to Man’s need and to God’s glory, as the divine grace in reconciliation is the sole bridge that can overcome the abyss between the Holy God and fallen Man. But even the divine omnipotence cannot merely will the chasm to be closed; the divine justice demands satisfaction before the divine mercy can be poured out. So magnificent is the work of reconciliation, that the divine wisdom sets it before mankind only over the course of millennia and through the living history of one peculiar race among the whole. This path actually begins “*from before the foundation of the earth,*” and it is this redemptive path we hope to follow in this study. We who are on the finished side of the Cross have the benefit and privilege (and consequent responsibility) to be able to see the whole work as one of Reconciliation, the deepest need of fallen Man.

What takes place in this work of inconceivable mercy is, therefore, the free over-ruling of God, but it is not an arbitrary overlooking and ignoring, not an artificial bridge, covering-over or hiding, but a real closing of the breach, gulf, and abyss between God and us for which we are responsible.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Feine, quote by B. B. Warfield in *The Person and Work of Christ* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed; 1950); 528.

<sup>7</sup> Barth; 12.

It is only as the Church understands the fundamental role of *reconciliation* in the overall redemptive plan and revelation of God, through the Scriptures, can she avoid the errors that have so often plagued her concerning the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. This truth of reconciliation has a remarkable two-sidedness to it that will cause a certain measure of discomfort to many, it is so truly hard to conceive. The one side is easy: Man has separated himself from God through sin, and that gulf is insuperable from the vantage point of man himself. He can neither effect a crossing back, nor does he desire one, though he knows it to be his deepest need. But it is the other side of the story that is astounding: that God has chosen to stake His glory (and, in an incomprehensible yet biblical manner of speaking, His *own life*) on the restoration of the relationship He originally intended between Himself and Man. By uniquely placing the divine image within the human nature, God has vested Himself in the destiny of mankind in a manner that does not apply to any other being, including the angels. As Barth so often puts it, God has willed to be God-for-Man, and not otherwise.

...what unites God and us men is that He does not will to be God without us, that He creates us rather to share with us and therefore with our being and life and act His own incomparable being and life and act.<sup>8</sup>

This statement and concept should not be misunderstood to mean that there is something inherent within man that makes him appealing to God as a covenant partner and friend. Fallen man is an abomination to God, and for the same reason that God is so inextricably tied – by His own will and purpose – to Man: the *Imago Dei*. Barth, the chief promoter of this concept of God-for-Man, does not do so on the flimsy basis of a muddle-headed ‘loving’ God who winks at human sin, nor on the inexplicable foundation of a ‘lonely’ God who needs the companionship of man to fulfill His being. Rather, he wholeheartedly advocates the biblical doctrine of the Fall and of its detrimental impact on Man, reducing the supreme object of God’s creative power to a level slightly above the beast, if not for the abiding *imago Dei*. Barth writes,

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<sup>8</sup> Barth; 7.

The subject-matter, origin and content of the message received and proclaimed by the Christian community is at its heart the free act of the faithfulness of God in which He takes the lost cause of man, who has denied Him as Creator and in so doing ruined himself as creature, and makes it His own in Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup>

There is one further aspect of this glorious plan and work of reconciliation that flows from Paul's comments in II Corinthians 5. In spite of the persistent neglect within Christian preaching and Christian living, it remains a fundamental part of the divine plan of reconciliation to reconcile *the world* back to God. This is often overlooked for the simple reason that the cosmos did not commit the sin that plunged it into corruption and alienation from God; Man did. Therefore, and as we will see, necessarily, did the Second Person of the Godhead take on the form of a Man, and not of an angel or of an irrational beast of the field or bird of the air. But by virtue of the position given to Man as the image-bearer, and thus co-gerent of God, the entire world was conditioned upon the failed probation of the first Man. The fullness of the divine glory will not be manifested until the entirety of the cosmos is set to rights again. The creation knows this, as Paul teaches in Romans,

*For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.* (Romans 8:20-22)

Thus when we take up the topic of Christ, we take up an infinitely expansive theme. There will be so many facets of His glory manifested in the revelation of His eternal Person, of His Incarnation, of His Work and of His exalted session at the right hand of Majesty. There is always in such a study a driving need to find the 'kernel' or seed of ultimate meaning in the life of the person thus studied. Certainly with the life of the eternal God, manifested in the flesh, etc., there will be no successful singling out of one 'theme.' But we could do a lot worse than to take *reconciliation* as a guiding principle throughout, as "*God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.*"

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<sup>9</sup> Barth; 3.

## Chapter 2 – Christ the Pre-existent One

**Key Text(s):** John 1:1-2; 29-30; Colossians 1:15-18

*“He is the pre-existent **Deus pro nobis**...  
He is the Word of God to us  
and the work of God for us.”  
(Karl Barth)*

Religion in general posits a universe of two realms – the physical and the spiritual – and then establishes a system of communication between the two. Thus religion is a form of philosophy at its most basic level, a *weltanschauung* or world-view. Not all philosophies are religions, however, though they may contain the same dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual. Confucius did not produce a religion, but a philosophy whose ‘spiritual’ element never moved past human morality and duty. Plato’s philosophy left far more room for the spirit realm than did Aristotle’s, though neither philosopher was the progenitor of a religion. What separates religion as a distinct sub-class of philosophy is the *communication* between the physical and the spiritual; there must be some sort of a ‘bridge’ between the two realms. One of the oldest of these bridges, traced through the history of human philosophy, is that of the *Logos*. This philosophical construct from the ancient Greeks is an example of both the residual knowledge of God left within man’s cosmic understanding and the progressive corruption of the truth caused by sin.

The term *Logos* was widely used in the Greco-Roman culture and in Judaism. Through most schools of Greek philosophy, this term was used to designate a rational, intelligent and thus vivifying principle of the universe. This principle was deduced from an understanding of the universe as a living reality and by comparing it to a living creature.<sup>10</sup>

Plato is perhaps the most famous of the ancient Greek philosophers, and can be said to have been a progenitor of the *Logos* philosophy, though not the original formulator of it. Plato adhered to the view that there existed one Divine Being who was unknown and unknowable. Man’s knowledge of this unknowable Being is an extrapolation of divine *emanations* that proceed from this One like rays of light from the Sun. The chief among these emanations was the *Logos*, which is considered to be the organizing force of the

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<sup>10</sup> “Philo of Alexandria,” Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy; <http://www.iep.utm.edu/philo/#H11>; accessed 5/22/17.

Divine Being in the universe. “During the Hellenistic age [Logos] was the regular term by which the philosophical schools expressed the impersonal world-force which governed all things.”<sup>11</sup> The word *Logos* is the Greek word for ‘word,’ and as the Greek philosophers believed that both the spoken and written word are vital to organized thought, it was logical (no pun intended) that the *Logos* would become the concept by which the Divine Thought would gain organization and order: the *universe*. The philosophy of the *Logos* would become most influential through the Stoics, epitomized by the teachings of Zeno and the ‘meditations’ of the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius.

These developments in philosophy took place during the ‘inter-testamental’ years of redemptive history: from the early post-exilic years to the time of Christ’s first advent. With Judea straddling the main avenue of commerce in the Ancient Near East – and of the



**Philo (20 BC- D 50)**

journeys of conquest of Alexander the Great – it was inevitable that the *Logos* philosophy would seep into Hebrew thought, which it did. The most famous synthesizer of Hebrew and Greek thought was Philo Judeaus, who incorporated the *Logos* philosophy into his Alexandrian version of Hebrew theology. Greek philosophy motivated Philo to distance God more and more from His Creation, whereas his Hebrew heritage caused him to cling to the identity of Israel as God’s chosen people. He thus incorporated the *Logos* as the mediator between the infinitely distant God and the immanent people of God. In doing this, Philo made the *Logos* philosophy particularly attractive to Hellenistic Jews, as he personalized the *Logos* in a manner that no other philosopher had done, essentially equating the *Logos* with the ‘Word of God.’

The Greek, metaphysical concept of the *Logos* is in sharp contrast to the concept of a personal God described in anthropomorphic terms typical of Hebrew thought. Philo made a synthesis of the two systems and attempted to explain Hebrew thought in terms of Greek philosophy by introducing the Stoic concept of the *Logos* into Judaism. In the process the *Logos* became transformed from a metaphysical entity into an extension of a divine and transcendental anthropomorphic being and mediator between God and men. Philo offered various descriptions of the *Logos*.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Bentwich, Norman *Philo-Judæus of Alexandria* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society; 1910); 144-45.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.iep.utm.edu/philo/#H11>;

Philo came closest among the philosophers to a view of the Logos as eternal, though in the end he adhered to the Greek notion of the Logos as an emanation from the Divine Being.

The Logos has an origin, but as God's thought it also has eternal generation. It exists as such before everything else all of which are secondary products of God's thought and therefore it is called the "first-born." The Logos is thus more than a quality, power, or characteristic of God; it is an entity eternally generated as an extension, to which Philo ascribes many names and functions. The Logos is the first-begotten Son of the Uncreated Father: "For the Father of the universe has caused him to spring up as the eldest son, whom, in another passage, he [Moses] calls the first-born; and he who is thus born, imitating the ways of his father, has formed such and such species, looking to his archetypal patterns" (*Conf.* 63).<sup>13</sup>

Because of musings such as this – and Philo's doctrine of the Logos was by no means consistent throughout his writings – modern scholars see in Philo the foundation of Christianity, particularly that of Paul and of John. But this is to confuse significantly different interpretations of a current cultural thought; that of the Logos. Philo possessed no comprehension for a Trinitarian view of the Godhead, and his Logos was at all times subservient to God Almighty; never of the same essence as God. Thus, in the end, Philo's Logos was but an exalted emanation, the closest and most original of the divine emanations, but nevertheless and fully something *less* than divine. Still, Philo's thoughts on the Logos – as with the thoughts of Heraclitus, Plato, and Zeno before him – set the philosophical and epistemological stage onto which Christianity opened its drama. To a large extent in the first century, the language of philosophical religion was the language of the Logos. Unless the propagation of the Good News was to be limited to the Hebrew nation (which, by the way, never quite warmed to the philosophy of her Hellenistic son, Philo) the advent of the true and promised Mediator between God and Man could not be explained without some reference to this concept.

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<sup>13</sup> *Idem.*

Enter John’s remarkable Prologue, one of the most beautiful and profound passages in human literature. It is flawless Greek, and deep philosophy, as well as true religion; and all of this in two short verses.<sup>14</sup>

*In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God.*

(John 1:1-2)

Jehovah’s Witnesses famously maintain that the lack of a definite article in the third clause of this Prologue is ‘proof’ that Jesus, the Logos, was ‘a’ god and not ‘the’ God. Their error may be addressed quickly and laid aside once the poetic structure of these verses is set forth. The Prologue of the Gospel of John is indeed poetry, and the text of the Greek transferred directly into English illustrates the connection between the three clauses of this powerful passage:

*In the beginning was the **Logos***

*And the **Logos** was with **Theos***

*And **Theos** was the **Logos**...*<sup>15</sup>

Our English versions have smoothed the translation on the basis of sound Christology, but the Greek arrangement explains the lack of the article before the final *Theos* (God) in the third clause – it is the Subject of the clause and therefore does not require the article. This is excellent Greek, and excellent theology as well. The three clauses of John 1:1-2 reach a crescendo of ontological identification between Logos and Theos; something to which Philo never attained. The first two verses of John’s Gospel would have hit the immediate world in which it was first read as an explosion in the midst of the rabbinic as well as the philosophical schools. The Jewish reader would hear the opening clause, *in the beginning*, and would return at once to the opening clause of Genesis 1, which in the Greek translation is identical to John’s opening comment: *en archai* (ἐν ἀρχαῖς). The Hellenistic Jew and the Greek would quickly latch on to John’s use of this fundamental word within the prevailing philosophical schools of the day: *Logos*. We in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century just cannot fully appreciate what powerful impact *en*

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<sup>14</sup> The Prologue of the Gospel of John comprises the first fourteen verses of John chapter 1, but the first two verses are the most powerful, the ‘prologue’ of the Prologue.

*archai hain ho logos* (ἄρχαι ἔσαν ὁ λόγος) - In the beginning was the Word - had on its first readers, but the profundity of the meaning remains even though the religious and philosophical context has changed.

It is popular among modern scholars and theologians to deny that John had any reference to the Greek concept of the *Logos* when he wrote the prologue to his gospel. While it may be true that the apostle did not intend to fully engage a prevailing philosophical school - or contrast this new religion of Christianity with Stoicism or with Philonic Judaism - it is hard to believe that he did not appreciate the weight that the term *Logos* carried in the intellectual, philosophical, and religious world of his day. Indeed, if John intended to address his readers without a single reference to the prevailing *Logos* philosophy - or to the Stoics, or to the followers of Philo, or to early Christians who were attempting a Philonic synthesis of their own - then he chose a word perfectly suited to confuse his readers from the start. It does no good for an author to use a term already pregnant with meaning and to protest later that he never intended the common meaning to come into view. No, it is far more reasonable to think that the Holy Spirit, inspiring the apostle and leading both him and his readers into the truth, reclaims the term *Logos*, extracting the precious from the vile in ancient philosophy by accepting the residual truth in the concept while at the same time purging out the error.

This is evident quickly in John’s Prologue, as the *Logos* is immediately seen as *personal* and not just a cosmic organizational force. This comes out in the second clause: *and the Logos was with God* (& ἔθετο ὁ λόγος ἔσθαι ἰσὺς θεοῦ ἁπλοῦς). The preposition translated ‘with’ in our English versions is more personal even than mere association; it carries with it the connotation of being ‘in the presence of as an associate.’ “It designates not merely the intimacy of fellowship, but the internal union, the living intercourse of fellowship. He who entered into communion with us stood before time in living communion with God.”<sup>16</sup> To be *pros Theon* (πρὸς θεόν) is a personal concept of being present before a great king. It is the Greek equivalent to *coram Deo* in the Latin

<sup>15</sup> ἄρχαι ἔσαν ὁ λόγος

<sup>16</sup> Luthardt, Chritoph Ernst *St. John’s Gospel; Volume I* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark; 1876); 264.

and is reminiscent of the personification of Wisdom in Proverbs 8, a passage that John undoubtedly intended to call to mind.

*The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way,  
Before His works of old. I have been established from everlasting,  
From the beginning, before there was ever an earth.  
When there were no depths I was brought forth,  
When there were no fountains abounding with water.  
Before the mountains were settled, before the hills, I was brought forth;  
While as yet He had not made the earth or the fields,  
Or the primal dust of the world.  
When He prepared the heavens, I was there,  
When He drew a circle on the face of the deep, when He established the clouds above,  
When He strengthened the fountains of the deep when He assigned to the sea its limit,  
So that the waters would not transgress His command,  
When He marked out the foundations of the earth,  
Then I was beside Him as a master craftsman; and I was daily His delight,  
Rejoicing always before Him* (Proverbs 8:22-30)

Thus in the first verse of his gospel, the apostle establishes two powerful – and uniquely Christian – parameters with regard to the *Logos*. First, the *Logos* predates Creation, for *in the beginning* can mean nothing other than the same *in the beginning* of Genesis 1:1 – the creation of the heavens and earth by God. The verb tense is past, *was*, and is the ontological verb ‘to be’ rather than the creative verb ‘became.’ This latter concept John will use later in the same chapter, when he speaks of the *Logos* becoming flesh (1:14). But here in verse 1 the *Logos* is coëval with God. “The terms cannot possibly teach anything less than the great truth that Jesus Christ existed in eternity, an enduring, timeless existence before the foundation of the world.”<sup>17</sup> The second profound thought given here by John is the *personality* of the *Logos*, as one who is not only of the same time element (eternal) as God, but who exists as a personal being in association with God. Both of these concepts set John far apart from the Greek conception of the *Logos* and prove immediately that he is writing of a Being far greater than the *Logos* of Heraclitus, Plato, Zeno, or Philo. He speaks of the *Logos* of God, who is none other than Jesus Christ.

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<sup>17</sup> Jacobus, *Melancthon Notes on the Gospels: John* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers; 1857); *en loc.*

But John has one more astounding thing to say concerning the *Logos*: verse 1c, and the *Logos was God* (Ἐν ἄρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος θεὸς). We have already seen that the syntax of this third clause is due to the poetry of the opening verse, so that ‘God’ lines up as the last noun in the second clause and the first noun of the third clause (see above, page 18). It is the linking verb that matters most in this third clause, the past tense of the verb ‘to be,’ which states in sublime power the ontological identity of the *Logos* with *Theos*, the unity of essence between the Word and God. There is a perfectly good Greek word to use if John

had intended to label the *Logos* as ‘divine,’ in which he would have been in step with many of the Greek philosophers and with Philo. But he chooses the simple noun *Theos* to show that he intends to equate the *Logos* ontologically with God, and not merely state that the *Logos* possessed some measure of divinity as an emanation from the Divine Being. But John is not a philosopher, and does not provide a treatise on what he has so simply stated in one short verse. He is certainly not trying to establish his own philosophical school to compete with Zeno or Philo. “He does not intend to give a philosophy of religion. He wishes to say of Christ, of the Word which has appeared in time, that he was with God before time, and even was God by nature.”<sup>18</sup>

An answer to the contention by Jehovah’s Witnesses that the lack of an article before *Theos* in the third clause of John 1:1, allegedly meaning that the *Logos* was merely ‘a god’ and not ‘the God,’ can be made on several grounds. First, the arrangement of the clause is clearly done on the basis of poetic parallelism with the clause preceding, so that *Theos* lines up between the second and third clauses of the verse. Thus John was required by his Greek to stipulate which of the nouns in the third clause was to be the subject and which was to be the predicate; this he does by providing the article in front of *Logos*, making it the subject though it appears second in the clause, and omitting the article in front of *Theos*, making it the predicate in spite of the fact that it comes first. This principle of Greek grammar also prevents us from translating the clause, ‘And God was the *Logos*.’ A second reason for the lack of an article may be to distinguish between *Theos* as ‘the Father,’ and *Theos* as ‘God,’ the second of which John intends here and not the first.

The preëxistence of Christ is also taught further on in John chapter 1, through the testimony of the Baptist,

<sup>18</sup> Luthardt; 265.

*The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.'* (John 1:29-30)

The evidence of the preexistence of Christ is powerful in the Gospel of John. Though not as prevalent a theme in the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, there is nonetheless plenty of supporting documentation there regarding the ontological equality of Christ with God, which necessitates preexistence. But the Gospels were written later in the history of the New Testament canon, and the Gospel of John is perhaps the latest of the four. Thus modern scholarship has emphasized this fact, and has largely concluded that the preexistence and deity of Christ were not original to the teachings of



**N. T. Wright (b. 1948)**

Jesus of Nazareth, but were developed by the early church as it struggled for identity against the hostile Judaism from which it sprang. The theological world of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century accepts as given that Jesus did not claim for himself the ontological nature of deity, but rather that this was foisted back onto his memory by the early church. As the entirety of the New Testament was written during the period of the early church, it is incumbent upon the modern student of the Scripture to address the issue of the preexistence/deity of Christ vis-à-vis the early church, and

to reestablish this article of faith in each generation. N. T. Wright accurately states, "All pictures of Jesus, then, depend to a lesser or greater extent on a complementary picture of the early church."<sup>19</sup>

Wright's critique of the various 'Life of Jesus' and 'Quest for the Historical Jesus' movements over the past several centuries takes a unique and intriguing form: he seeks to understand from the record that we do have of Jesus – both from the Gospels and from the later narratives and epistles of the New Testament – what it was about the Galilean rabbi that made Him both *comprehensible* and *crucifiable*.<sup>20</sup> Wright's point is very cogent: for Jesus to have made the impact that He undeniably did in his own day, He must have

<sup>19</sup> Wright, N. T. *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press; 1996); 112.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*; 98.

spoken in terms that were *comprehensible* to His original audience. In other words, He must have spoken in terms and on topics which resonated with Second Temple Judaism; otherwise Jesus would have merely been an odd bird, and hardly worth the effort of crucifying. But this latter fact – that Jesus was crucified – necessitates that His message was both comprehensible and powerfully subversive. The subversive aspect of Jesus' teaching, furthermore, cannot be found in some revolutionary or rebellious activity against Rome – for neither the Gospels nor the early church contain any such insurrectionist dogma. No, that which made Jesus both *comprehensible* and *crucifiable*, had to be His adherence to the traditional prophetic word of the Old Testament – though reformulated with subversive elements to the current understanding of Second Temple Judaism – and to His active and passive claim to being essentially equal to God.

To establish the doctrine of the preexistence of Christ as it is found in the early church – at least in terms of the current debate within New Testament scholarship – one can no longer rest entirely upon the testimony of the New Testament alone, for it was written by the early church. Let it be clearly stated at this point that we are not talking about the settled faith of the believer that the New Testament is as God-breathed as is the Old Testament. This particular debate is not about biblical inspiration (though the relative views on this subject are as polar as those on the preexistence of Christ); it is about the historical validity of the early church's claim that her Lord Jesus Christ was and is eternal God, the Second Person of the Triune Godhead. This is an important task, as the deity and preexistence of Christ has been a non-negotiable tenet of Christianity since the very beginning. In his book, Wright develops what he calls a 'pincer movement,' whereby he comes at the problem from two sides: first, the Jewishness of Jesus and His teachings, and second, the testimony of the early church. From the first we can establish the *a priori* expectation of the coming of God to mankind, and to Israel in particular. From the second we can establish that the early church *inherited* this expectation, manifestly fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ, and did not create it.

There is no controversy over the fact that Israel anticipated a Messiah, nor that messianic expectations were heightened in the Second Temple Period. The prophecies of Daniel as well as the political situation of Roman dominion, conspired to intensify

messianic fervor throughout Judea and Galilee, a fervor that eventually led to two revolts against the Roman overlord, the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, and the eventual scattering of Jews into a two thousand year Diaspora. Jesus of Nazareth was by no means the only claimant to the messianic mantle, as we are reminded in the Book of Acts. In advice recognized by the Jewish Sederim as wise, Gamaliel cautioned against overt action toward the disciples of Christ. But he did not do so on the basis of no expectation that something like what the disciples claimed might indeed happen in Israel at that time, rather that *so many* would-be Messiahs had arisen that it was impossible to tell which one was true until time sorted them out.

*Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while. And he said to them: "Men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what you intend to do regarding these men. For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody. A number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing. After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away many people after him. He also perished, and all who obeyed him were dispersed. And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it – lest you even be found to fight against God." (acts 5:34-39)*

There is no controversy, then, regarding the early church's claim that Jesus of Nazareth was Israel's Messiah. That He was divine – of the very essence of God – is a much more contested point, even within professing Christendom. Can we establish from the Old Testament Scripture not only the expectation of the Messiah, but also of a *Divine* Messiah? This is not to ask whether we can fully establish the Doctrine of the Virgin Birth, or fully delineate the divine and human natures in the Messiah, strictly from Old Testament passages. It is to ask whether a devout Jew in the Second Temple Period might *expect* the Promised One to be God Himself. And the answer is, 'Yes, indeed.'

We may begin obliquely with some passages from the Old Testament that indicate that this One in Whom Israel hoped was worthy of trust, obedience, and even adoration due only to Jehovah. One of the first indications of a Jewish 'Messiah,' though he is not here designated as such, is found in Deuteronomy 18, the promise of a greater prophet than even Moses.

*The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear...I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him.*

(Deuteronomy 18:16; 18-19)

This prophecy undoubtedly applies partially to the entire prophetic office as it was experienced within Israel, and each generation was granted *seers* and *prophets* to bring the word of the LORD, though these prophets did not come from a stipulated tribe as did the priests (Levi) and kings (Judah). But the Jewish nation soon, as it were, capitalized the “Prophet” promised here by Jehovah through Moses, and the highest conceivable authority was vested in this expected messenger from the Lord. This tremendous authority appears again in another crucial messianic passage, found in Daniel.

*I was watching in the night visions,  
And behold, One like the Son of Man,  
Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days,  
And they brought Him near before Him.  
Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,  
That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.  
His dominion is an everlasting dominion,  
Which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.*

(Daniel 7:13-14)

At the very least, visions such as this one begin to color the expected Messiah as one who is something other than a mere man, or even a mere king. As Barth writes, “He is not simply a better man, a more gifted, a more wise or noble or pious, in short a greater man. But as against all other men and their differences we have in the person of this man One who is their Lord and Lawgiver and Judge.”<sup>21</sup> Authority and power and everlasting dominion in undiminished measure; these are things that belong to God alone. Yet even these allusions are oblique, and may be denied as indicating clearly that the promised Messiah was Himself divine. What is needed next is *worship*. God Almighty may

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<sup>21</sup> Barth; 160.

conceivably establish an earthly king – a King David, say – to whom obedience is to be fully rendered as if to God Himself. But to accord *worship* to such a one is impossible, for God has revealed Himself as a jealous God, who will not share His glory with another. And worship is the ultimate assignment of glory, even more than obedience.

We turn then to an enigmatic phrase in the second Psalm, a psalm that clearly refers to God in heaven in His role as supreme governor not only of Israel but of the whole world. It also speaks of this ‘King’ alluded to in Daniel 7.

*He who sits in the heavens shall laugh;  
The Lord shall hold them in derision.  
Then He shall speak to them in His wrath,  
And distress them in His deep displeasure:  
“Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion.”* (Psalm 2:4-6)

We soon learn that this exalted King is none other than God’s Son, “*Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee,*” and to this Son the Lord through the psalmist ascribes worthiness of worship,

*Kiss the Son, lest He be angry,  
And you perish in the way,  
When His wrath is kindled but a little.  
Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.* (Psalm 2:12)

These passages, and many others like them, have the cumulative effect of producing the expectation that a human Messiah would be given by God, who would be the closest of associates to the Almighty, would be granted unlimited power and duration of rule, and would be accorded worship and trust due alone to God. Unless Israel was to abandon her monotheism – something she could not do and maintain her integrity relative to the Scripture – the conclusion is forming that the Promised One would be none other than God Himself. Other passages confirm just this conclusion in more explicit terms.

*Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.* (Isaiah 7:14)

*For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given;  
And the government will be upon His shoulder.*

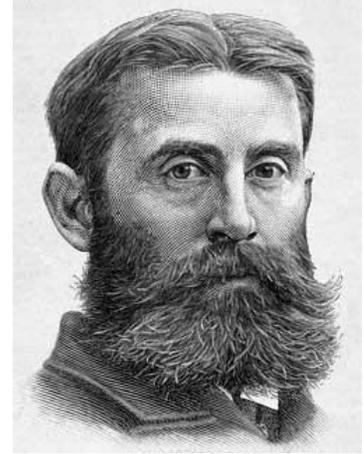
*And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
Of the increase of His government and peace  
There will be no end,  
Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,  
To order it and establish it with judgment and justice  
From that time forward, even forever.* (Isaiah 9:6-7)

Here is the everlasting, never-ending kingdom, set upon the shoulders of one who will be called *Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace*. It is hard for us who live on this side of the cross to understand how the majority of the Jewish nation failed to comprehend the meaning of these words – that the Promised One who would ultimately deliver Israel from the ‘exile’ under which they still lived, was none other than God Himself. The humanity of the Messiah was well attested and universally accepted; but the deity of the Messiah, though also well attested, was largely missed.

Still, the stage was set for the Advent of the Messiah, Immanuel, God with us. When the Son of Man (of Daniel 7) finally came, those with eyes to see and ears to hear recognized Him also as the Son of God (Psalm 2). Though Jesus’ deity was veiled behind the cloak of His humanity, the notion that the Promised One was God Himself was secure enough in Old Testament prophecy to stir people in Jesus’ day to worship Him. His own self-awareness was such that He did not forbid them to do this act that belonged by rights only to God. No doubt the Old Testament Scripture fails (on purpose) to give us a full and clear picture of the union of the human and the divine in the Messiah, but once the Son of Man is revealed to be the Son of God, these Old Testament passages are illuminated so that one may securely say that it was all “*according to the Scripture.*”

We will have further occasion in this study to investigate the Christology of the Old Testament, and to revisit these passages and more that show the Promised Messiah to be exalted far above mere man. The weight of Old Testament evidence is such that John’s statement in his Prologue, that “*The Logos became flesh and tabernacled among us*” should cause no alarm whatsoever. In spite of the fact that the Gospels were written by the Church, the conclusion cannot be reasonably accepted that therefore the doctrine of the deity of Christ was a construct of the Church. There is too much evidence leading up to the advent of the Messiah that the Promised One would be Himself divine, and therefore it

is most reasonable to see all references to the deity of Jesus Christ in the Gospels as the realization of a subliminal expectation, rather than the retrospective creation of a later religion. “The assured conviction of the deity of Christ is coeval with Christianity itself. There never was a Christianity, neither in the times of the apostles nor since, of which this was not a prime tenet.”<sup>22</sup> From the earliest record we have of the Church – the book of Acts, the apostolic epistles, and even extra biblical testimony from Pliny the Younger – we are faced with the reality of Jesus Christ being accorded adoration, trust, and worship as God, without the slightest deviation from the monotheism inherited by the early Christians from their Jewish forefathers. It would take several generations for the Doctrine of the Trinity to be fully and firmly established as dogma; but Trinitarian faith



**B. B. Warfield (1851-1921)**

was already firmly established in the life of the Church from the very beginning at Pentecost. Warfield justifiably asserts that “the deity of Christ is the presupposition of every word of the New Testament.” There is no discernible time between the life of Jesus of Nazareth and the earliest writings of the Christian Church, when it may be reasonably asserted that the doctrine of the deity of Christ was ‘developed’ by the Church. It was there at the beginning, and most assuredly was there because it was the self-assertion of Jesus during His earthly ministry and was directly passed along to His Church through His disciples.

From a purely practical viewpoint, the development of the doctrine of the deity of Jesus Christ could in no way have ‘promoted’ the fledgling Christian Church, but rather would have (and did) array the entirety of Judaism against it. Not only is there no discernible time period in which this dogma might have developed, there is no logical reason why it should have developed unless it was indeed original. The doctrine of the deity of Jesus Christ not only served to make the new religion irreconcilable with the traditional monotheism of Judaism, it aligned more closely with the Roman practice of deifying the Emperor. That the doctrine would prove a stumbling block even within

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<sup>22</sup> Warfield, Benjamin B. “The Deity of Christ,” *Selected Shorter Writings*; 153.

professing Christendom would become clear by the second century. Thus from a purely practical perspective, there can be found no good reason for the early church to develop a doctrine like this; it served no good purpose unless it was that which was handed down to the church by her Lord, Jesus Christ.

As if to mark this transfer with an exclamation point, Matthew records some of the last words spoken by Jesus while on earth, in a clear reference to the vision of Daniel 7,

*And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.*

(Matthew 28:18-20)

The truth of the matter, from the beginning of Jesus' ministry to the 'birth' of the Christian Church, is the manifestation of Jesus of Nazareth as the Promised Messiah, fully man as the Son of David, and fully God as Immanuel. "His friends and enemies, and those to whom He means nothing, and all men of all times and countries have to do in Him with God."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Barth; 176.

### Chapter 3 – The Covenant of Redemption

**Key Text(s):** John 1:3; Colossians 1:15-18; Psalm 40:6-8

*“It belongs to the perfections of God that he have a plan,  
and the best possible plan.  
Here is no necessity, but only the certainty that infinite wisdom will act wisely.”  
(Augustus Strong)*

The origins of the Logos philosophy within pagan Greece, and the Platonic influence of Philo in the early church leading to a great deal of difficulty with the Gnostic heresy, seem to have pushed the concept of the Logos to the periphery of Christian thought fairly early on. It is almost non-existent in modern theologies, as authors for the past several centuries have moved from the assertion of the deity of Christ directly to the Incarnation, without so much as a mention of the Prologue of the Gospel of John. But because of this neglect of the Logos doctrine many other ‘truths’ of Christology are left hanging in thin air, with no solid theological or biblical support beneath them. Not the least of these is the Incarnation itself, along with the Atonement and the Session of Jesus Christ as the exalted God-Man at the right hand of the Father. These are all precious doctrines within the overarching Christology of the church, and they all emanate (yes, fully intended) from the Logos doctrine of the apostle John. We ought to spend some time with this mystery, and contemplate the light shed upon it by the revelation of God’s Word – both written and living. Ultimately the entire Doctrine of Reconciliation is grounded in the identity of the Second Person of the Trinity, the Christ of God, as the *Logos*.

What existed before Creation? This question is both simple and profound. It is simple because the answer is, simply, God. Yet it is profound because it is impossible for a finite being such as Man to conceive of an existence apart from Time and Space, two dimensions that owe their origination to Creation itself. It is important nevertheless, for the believer to spend at least a little mental energy on this concept of ‘before the foundation of the world,’ as it is a concept presented to him not infrequently in the Bible. *In the beginning was the Logos...He has chosen you in Him from before the foundation of the world...Thy word is from everlasting to everlasting...* The concept of ‘what was’ before Creation is presented to us in the Scripture as though it were something that we should be

able to comprehend, even if not fully. And it is the *Logos* – whom John tells us is the “*Light that has come into the world*” – who allows our finite minds to begin to grasp the infinite, and even to approach a more thorough answer to the question, “What existed before Creation?”

When theologians thus speak of the eternity of God before Creation (and even the use of prepositions here manifests our inability to speak of timelessness in any other than



**A. H. Strong (1836-1921)**

temporal terms), they are really moving back into the first session of systematic: the *Existence and Attributes of God*. The emphasis here, however, is on the nature of God’s eternal existence apart from His created works – in other words, God ‘before’ He does anything beyond Himself. We say that the Divine Being is *self-existent* because we cannot conceive of a being coming from nothing. But what do we say *about* that self-existence? What was it like? Generally theologians and philosophers alike speak of the eternal existence of God in terms of pure *Thought*. Augustus Strong speaks of Creation thus, “It could have had its ground in nothing outside the diving mind, for in eternity nothing existed besides the divine mind.”<sup>24</sup>

But the very existence of the created universe indicates that the eternal nature of God must be more than simply Thought in the abstract, it must also comprise *Will* or *Intent*. Man’s possession of rational thought – and, even more importantly, his awareness of *irrationality* – bears witness to a Creator whose thought is both comprehensive and simple. In other words, the Divine Mind comprehends all that is possible as well as all that is, but it does so without sequence; God does not ‘think about’ things the way man thinks – with premises and conclusions. The Infinite Mind holds all knowledge perfectly and simply. “The eternal object of His cognition...is nothing less than the whole of the possible.”<sup>25</sup> But Creation incontrovertibly teaches Man that form he possible came the

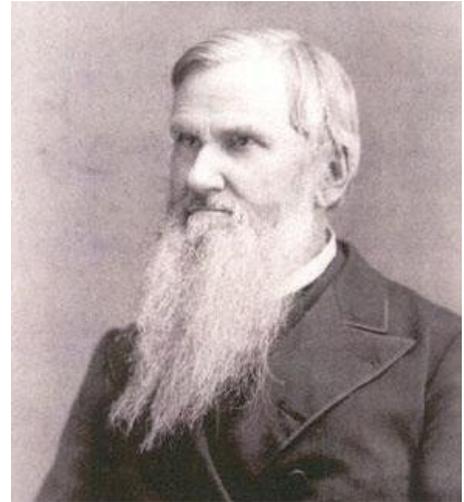
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<sup>24</sup> Strong, Augustus Hopkins *Systematic Theology* (Valley Forge, PA: The Judson Press; 1969); 356.

<sup>25</sup> Dabney, Robert Louis *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust; 1996); 211.

actual, and this fact adds *Intent* to Thought; the eternal God comprised perfect Will as well as perfect Mind.

In human thinking, when *will* or *intent* is added to *thought*, we speak of the result as a *Plan*. These are human terms, and our understanding is limited to the manner of sequential (and often erroneous) thoughts that form a human plan. But the same concepts are true of God, from whose infinite Mind Man derives his pattern of finite thought. As impossible as it is for us to conceive (though men have tried) of a being originating from nothing, so it is impossible for us to conceive of an ordered universe coming into being apart from a prior organized thought or plan, coupled with the will (and power) to bring it into effect. Robert Louis Dabney writes,



R. L. Dabney (1820-98)

...the only way in which any object can by any possibility have passed from God's vision of the possible into His foreknowledge of the actual, is by His purposing to effectuate it Himself...Now it is impossible for us to conceive how an intelligent Being can set about producing anything, save as He has the conception of the thing to be produced in His mind, and the intention to produce it in His will.<sup>26</sup>

But how does Will mediate Thought into Action? *Through Word*. We can conceive of the Eternal Being of God as Pure Thought, and the necessity of Will is manifest by the reality of a created order, as Dabney asserts. But in order for Thought to become Event, for Will to effectuate Thought into Existence, there must be Word. "*And God said, 'Let there be light.'*" and "*By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by **the word** of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.*"<sup>27</sup> This is the *Logos*, the Word of God who was with God in the beginning, and who was God from all eternity. The eternity of the *Logos* can be shown to our understanding simply by the reflection that no ordered thought exists apart from *words*. Not only is it true that no plan can move from the conceptual to the actual without the intervention of words, it is equally true that no

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<sup>26</sup> Dabney; 212.

concept can be recognized as such apart from its formulation *in words*. If the Thought of God is eternal, so also must be the Word of God. This should be a self-evident rational verification of the testimony of Scripture to the eternity of the *Logos*.

The analogy of the human mind helps us further, as we should expect knowing that Man is created in the image of God. The transfer of a mental image or plan into an actual creative event – be it a sculpture, a painting, a book, or a structure – does not remove it from the realm of the conceptual. The ‘idea’ still exists in the mind of the creator, even after the ‘word’ has brought it into visible existence. So it is with Creation and God: all comes to pass by virtue of the *Logos*, while all still remains firmly within the Mind of God. The apostle Paul was not advocating pantheism when he quoted with approbation the pagan thought, “*In Him we live and move and have our being.*”<sup>28</sup> What he is saying in this passage is that even the pagan philosopher understood that the act of creation did not removed the created order from the Creator himself. What the *Logos* doctrine gives us is the truth that binds the Infinite Mind and Will with the Temporal Cosmos,

*All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.*

(John 1:3)

*For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.*

(Colossians 1:16)

*...through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power...*

(Hebrews 1:2-3)

The latter two passages are as much ‘*Logos*’ passages as is the first one from John’s Prologue. Both the Doctrine of Creation and the Doctrine of Reconciliation are bound together in the *Logos* with the Eternal Mind and Will of God, who “*works all things according to the counsel of His will.*”<sup>29</sup> As we understand the vast significance of the *Logos* doctrine to the entire revelation of the works of God in Creation and in Redemption, we will come to see that Reconciliation was as much part of the eternal Plan of God as was

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<sup>27</sup> Hebrews 11:3

<sup>28</sup> Acts 17:28

<sup>29</sup> Ephesians 1:11

Creation. To speak in human terms, once Creation was decided upon, Reconciliation was as well. The historical theological formulation of this truth is variously called the *Covenant of Redemption*, the *Council of Peace*, and the *Pactum Salutis*. Each phrase refers to the eternal



**Charles Hodge (1797-1878)**

naturally belongs to it.”<sup>30</sup>

‘discussion’ within the Godhead wherein it was ‘determined’ that Creation would occur, and with the same determination, that Reconciliation would also occur. Both events ‘originating’ in the Mind and Will of God, and effectuated by the *Logos* of God. We understand that all such terminology has no real application to the Mind of God, but also that we have no other terminology at hand. “This is a subject which, from its nature, is entirely beyond our comprehension. We must receive the teachings of Scripture in relation to it without presuming to penetrate the mystery which

### **The Covenant of Redemption**

Hodge’s comment is in regard to the ‘Covenant of Redemption,’ the theological construct of an eternal counsel between God the Father and God the Son, the purpose of which was to determine the ‘plan of redemption.’ The language is manifestly human, but necessary for us to comprehend in small measure the eternal intention of God to redeem for Himself a people, and to reconcile the world to Himself through the Person and Work of His Son, the *Logos*. What we seek to understand in this lesson is the centrality of the *Logos* teaching to the revealed purpose of God in both Creation and Redemption, comprehending in these two facets of the divine plan the meaning and the beauty of the Doctrine of Reconciliation.

The inference of a ‘counsel’ or a covenant between the Eternal Father and His Eternal Son is reasonable from the indirect Scriptural data available. Key passages such as Ephesians 1:3ff indicate both that the plan of redemption was formulated before *the*

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<sup>30</sup> Hodge, Charles *Systematic Theology: Volume II* (Grand Rapids: Hendricksen; 2001); 359.

*foundation of the earth*, and that it was in accordance with nothing other than the will of God.

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him **before the foundation of the world**, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which **He purposed in Himself**, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both<sup>a</sup> which are in heaven and which are on earth – in Him. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him **who works all things according to the counsel of His will...***

(Ephesians 1:3-11)

This passage also contains the significant concepts of election and predestination, which are also firmly grounded in the *Logos* doctrine and in the ‘Covenant of Redemption.’ In Ephesians 1 we see the eternal plan of God, *which He purposed in Himself* and *according to the counsel of His will*. This teaching merely confirms the overall biblical revelation of God as thinking and acting within Himself and not through or by input from without. Paul is merely quoting the Old Testament in his doxology of Romans 11, “*For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?*”<sup>31</sup> The independence of the divine thought from everything outside of it, created by it, is fully confirmed by such passages as well as by our most basic understanding of ‘God.’ But without the *Logos* doctrine as taught by the apostle John, the thought of God would have no means of expression. As argued above, it may be said that without self-expression, no thought even exists.

The *Logos* is that expression of the Divine Mind, both within its eternal Self (“*purposed in Himself*”) and as expressed ‘outside’ of Himself through that which He creates. Here we have a category of passages with reference to the Second Person of the Trinity, the eternal Christ, which is not always seen as a set. Already mentioned above are the relationship between the *Logos* and Creation in John 1:3, as well as the powerful and continual governance and sustenance of the Cosmos by God’s Son as taught in Hebrews

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<sup>31</sup> Romans 11:34 quoting from Isaiah 40:13; *cp* Jeremiah 23:18.

1:3. There can be little doubt that the apostle Paul is on the same page as John and the author of Hebrews when he exalts Christ in the first chapter of Colossians,

*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.* (Colossians 1:15-17)

These are *Logos* passages even though the word is not used in the same sense in Colossians and Hebrews as it is in John's Prologue. They speak not only of the same Being – here as the *Logos*, there as the *Son of God*, and again as *image of the invisible God*, but they speak of the same transference of the divine Thought into visible and temporal action through this exalted Being, the Christ. The *Logos* is both the original and the on-going expression of the Divine Mind, the Spirit being Him who *searches the deep things of God* and who also fills Jesus Christ *without measure*. But before the foundation of the world, when Time and Space were not yet, these three divine persons existed in supreme self-satisfaction as the one Godhead. That Creation would come to pass at all, therefore, can only ever be attributed to the will of this complacent God. And that will was a perfect expression of the divine thought, which was perfectly expressed within and without the Godhead by the *Logos*. All of this intertrinitarian thought, will, and expression – humanly speaking, that is – is what theologians call the 'Covenant of Redemption,' or alternatively, the 'Council of Peace.' It comprises the *plan* of God for both the Creation and the Reconciliation of the world, and both together rather than separately. And it comprises the working out of all of this divine plan through the person of the *Logos*.

Stemming from the ancient and medieval councils of the Roman and Holy Roman Empires and of the Catholic Church (and later, too, from the Protestant councils and synods), the 'decisions' of this eternal council are called the 'divine decrees.' Reformed theologians recognize that these terms are useful for human thought only, and do not touch upon the divine reality. But the decrees are spoken of in the plural – the decree to Create, the decree to permit Sin, the decree to Redeem, etc. – while also firmly held to be ultimately singular: *one* divine decree that encompasses all that comes to pass. This aspect of the 'decree' of God being simple and unified, presents the greatest challenge to

theologians and philosophers alike when faced with the reality of Sin and of Man's Fall. If God decreed 'whatsoever comes to pass,' is He then to be accredited as the author of sin? If the origin of sin be temporarily removed from the equation, do we establish God's decree to redeem as coming *before* the advent of sin, or after? Incorporating the biblical doctrine of Election into the mix, do we reason that those who are elect will believe, or that they are the elect because they believe? Quite the morass of theological opinion has grown up around questions like these, centered on man's attempt to penetrate the darkness of the Divine Mind *before the foundation of the world*.

It is not an intellectual search that can simply be avoided, for Scripture itself alludes too frequently to events from before the dawn of Time, which are themselves powerfully directive of events within Time. To be told that we who believe "*were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world,*" is to draw our minds to that timeless expanse before God said, *Let there be Light*. But before anyone ventures forth into the murky depths of the Divine Mind, he must be sure that his own pattern of thinking is firmly anchored in the one revealed Truth that holds all others together: the *Logos*. For we were chosen *in Him*, all things were created *through Him* and *in Him* all things hold together. Truly, when we come to a clearer understanding of the biblical teaching concerning the *Logos*, we realize that, in a sense, both Creation and Redemption were 'inevitable' results of the divine decree.

This is not to say that there is anything necessary, from a philosophical point of view, about the Creation of the Universe. There is no biblical or rational justification or support for a view that holds Creation as a *necessary* concomitant to the existence of God, as if God could not exist without Creation. But we can say that Creation is a *logical* consequence of the nature of God as a supremely rational Being, whose Thought is absolutely pure and deserving of the fullest expression, and whose expression is the *Logos* in whom Creation and Redemption reside. But for the expression of the Divine Mind to be full it must be comprehensive of the Divine Attributes; it must entirely express the Divine Nature; it must be *an exact representation of Him*. This the *Logos* is in Himself; now we will see how He is also this in His visible manifestation.

To say that Creation is the expression of the Divine Mind through the *Logos* is not very controversial. The reason this truth is not expressed any longer in terms of the *Logos* is probably because of the errors that crept into the church through a Philonic and Gnostic understanding of the *Logos* philosophy, sadly displacing the biblical doctrine of the *Logos* as we have it in John's Prologue. Even so, the earlier tying together of passages from John 1, Hebrews 1, and Colossians 1 under the rubric of the *Logos* would cause very little indigestion among modern theologians, of just about any stripe. There is something benign about the *Logos* with reference to Creation. But this is definitely not the case when the discussion turns to the advent of evil, and of the Fall of Man. Can this phenomenon also be tied to the *Logos* as the expression of the Divine Mind? The Reformed, and we believe biblical, answer is 'Yes.'

The logic is simple and irresistible: either the advent of evil into God's created order is comprised within His eternal plan, or it is not. If it is not, then the reality of evil manifests an event occurring apart from the *counsel of His will* and His good pleasure, which we are expressly told by Paul cannot be. Furthermore, if the advent of evil is beyond the scope of the eternal plan, then the Mind of God failed to comprehend all circumstances and eventualities, with the incurrance of an outside event beyond both His foreknowledge and His ability to prevent. These are wholly untenable thoughts with regard to God, and wholly unsupportable within His self-disclosure in the Scripture. Thus we must conclude that the advent of evil into the Cosmos was fully comprised and accounted for within the eternal plan of God. This means that evil, and the Fall of Man, was comprised within the divine decree, of which the *Logos* is the full expression.

Does this make God the author of Sin? The universal and consistent answer of the Church has been 'No!', but the expression of this negation has not always been universally clear or consistent. It is common among Reformed theologians to speak of God's *decretive* will and His *permissive* will, the former being that which He actively desires to bring to pass, and the latter being that which must come to pass for the former to be fully realized. There is some merit in this line of thinking, limited as it must be due to our finite understanding of things divine and inscrutable. But the incorporation of the term *permissive* is itself dangerous, as it implies forces beyond the direct control and purpose of

God, forces that He ‘permits’ to act though He could prevent them. But if God wills to permit what He could otherwise prevent, then this purpose is itself comprised in the Divine Thought, and thus fully part of the Divine Decree. Still, we refuse on the testimony of Scripture to attribute the origin of sin actively to God, helped to some extent by Augustine’s consideration that sin is not itself a *creation* but a *corruption*. Nevertheless, this study is not a *theodicy*, an attempt to explain the origin and nature of evil while preserving God’s integrity. Theodicies were discussed in the first installment of systematics; this session is devoted to the Person and the Work of Jesus Christ. Still, and clearly, Christ cannot be studied apart from the reality of evil, and as the *Logos* of God, He factors into any consideration of the advent of evil and the Fall of Man. From this perspective, and considering the eternal council of the Godhead – the divine decree – perhaps the most profound statement on the advent of evil was made



**Patrick Fairbairn (1805-74)**

by Patrick Fairbairn, quoted in Augustus Strong’s *Systematic Theology*: “Evil once intended may only be vanquished by being allowed.”<sup>32</sup> This, too, is centered in the *Logos*.

Fairbairn is following here the same logic that we derive from the biblical testimony concerning the all-encompassing purpose and counsel of God: if evil has occurred, then it must have been intended. But was evil intended as an end, or as a means to an end? The first option is little more than the corruption of dualism entering into biblical thought, but the second option seems also to echo a wrong principle condemned in the Bible: *let us do evil, that good may come*. Let us attempt to unravel this knot by considering the ‘order’ of events within the divine decree: the Decree to Create, the Decree to permit Sin, the Decree to Redeem, In what sequence do we most properly consider these decrees (recognizing at all times that sequential thought is not the way God thinks)? This thought process is where we encounter two of the most esoteric words to be found in Christian dogmatics: *supralapsarian* and *sublapsarian*. The first advocates the placing of the Decree to Redeem *prior to* the Decree to permit Sin; the latter has the Decree to permit Sin ahead of

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<sup>32</sup> Strong; 366.

the Decree to Redeem. The first is proactive to an end: the redemption of a people brought about through the conquest of Sin; the second is reactive: the redemption of a people who were permitted to sin. It must be stated clearly here that *both* views are considering the divine council *before* the foundation of the world. Within Reformed theology, the determination of all things was secured in eternity past, and at no time do we find God reacting to events taking place in time. It should also be stated up front that neither supralapsarianism nor sublapsarianism can be definitively proven from Scripture, and thus should be securely regulated to a much lower level of importance within theology.

Still, these two \$25 words force us to think about the ‘order’ of events in the eternal council with respect to the *Logos* doctrine we have been studying with respect to Jesus Christ. What we find revealed concerning the *Logos* – His identity and His work – will allow us to extrapolate backward to that sublime counsel in eternity past, in which the Father and the Son purposed to bring to pass that which the Son accomplished.

*I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.*  
(John 17:4-5)

The Son was sent into the world with *work You have given Me to do*, and He accomplished this work while on earth. So it is reasonable to consider the *plan* that was



**Herman Bavinck (1854-1921)**

developed – again, using human terms to describe an indescribable occurrence – within the glorious Godhead before the world was. “The covenant of grace revealed in time does not hang in the air but rests on an eternal, unchanging foundations. It is firmly grounded in the council and covenant of the triune God and is the application and execution of it that infallibly follows.”<sup>33</sup> It was evidently a plan that would most comprehensively manifest the attributes of God to His Creation, a goal that necessitated the

advent of evil in the universe in order to fully make known the glory of divine grace.

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<sup>33</sup> Bavinck, Herman *Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic; 2006); 215.

*...in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.* (Ephesians 2:7)

“It belongs to the perfections of God that he have a plan, and the best possible plan. Here is no necessity, but only the certainty that infinite wisdom will act wisely.”<sup>34</sup> Our understanding of the nature of God revealed in Scripture and in Creation assures us that this comment is true. Our growing understanding of the *Logos* as the expression of the Thought and Will of God begins to assure us that the fullness of the divine ‘plan’ or decree is comprised within the identity and the work of the *Logos*, Jesus Christ. As there can be no shadow of changing in God – no vacillating between opinions, no reacting to events unforeseen – so it must be that the eternal decree comprehended *all* that comes to pass in Time and Space, including the sufferings of Christ because of Sin. For this reason it is generally the case that Reformed theologians hold to the *supralapsarian* view, inasmuch as it most clearly presents the eternal plan of God as entirely *proactive*, and not the least *reactive*.

### **A Body Thou Hast Prepared for Me...**

Understanding the *Logos* passages such as John 1, Colossians 1, and Hebrews 1 permits us to see the centrality of Christ in all things that have come to pass in Time and Space. As the expression of the Thought and Will of the Godhead, the *Logos* must comprehend all that *is*; otherwise we slip back into that dualism or pantheism so characteristic of the world of Man unenlightened by the *Logos*. “*In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness comprehends is not.*”<sup>35</sup> This means that all true knowledge of any particular aspect of the history and redemptive history of the world, must somehow have the *Logos* as its fountain and source; the “*truth as it is in Jesus Christ*” is not simply one type of truth amidst many others, it is the *only* truth that can possibly be. One of the most profound of these truths, and consequently one of the most controversial, is the truth of *divine election*.

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<sup>34</sup> Strong; 353.

<sup>35</sup> John 1:4-5

If divine election is true – and there can be no doubt that the Bible does teach some form of divine election, though theologians will continue to debate just what form that is until the Second Coming – then it, too, must be comprehended within the eternal decree, which means it must also be an expression through the *Logos* of the Thought and Will of God. God decreed to *Create* and to *Redeem*, and within the second purpose, to *Elect*. But that election – that divine choice – does not begin within the Divine Mind with the choosing of certain individuals from among the fallen human race, and the passing over of others. Though this is typically the scope and extent of our discussions regarding ‘election,’ it is biblically incomplete, and therefore either misleading or confusing. Scripture teaches that the *first* choice that God made was the election of *His Son*, the *Logos*. “In Him God elected the believing, and in Him the plan of the world must attain its completion.



**J. J. van Oosterzee (1817-82)**

He Himself is, *par excellence*, the Elect and Beloved of the Father.”<sup>36</sup>

Thus the outflowing history of redemption begins, not at the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, nor earlier at the call of Abram from Ur of the Chaldees, nor even with the *protoevangelium* of Genesis 3:15. The origin of the stream of redemption and reconciliation flows from *before the foundation of the world*, from the eternal Godhead ‘in council,’ as it were, giving expression through the *Logos* to the ineffable Thought and Purpose of God. Perhaps the very first physical step in this progressive revelation of the Divine Mind – at least the first step in which the overall plan can be recognized in some clarity – is the creation of Man in the image of God. It is common for us to think that the Second Person of the Trinity took on the form of Man simply because this was the form that Man had. In other words, the nature of Man dictated the physical and temporal form of the Divine Messiah. It seems more reasonable to conclude, rather, that the form which was given to Man derived its definition and source from the nature of the *Logos* for whom it would serve as an instrument of reconciliation for both mankind and the whole of creation.

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<sup>36</sup> Van Oosterzee, Jan Jacob *Christian Dogmatics* (London: Hodder and Stoughton; 1891);447.

What we are talking about here – and it is admittedly a very difficult concept to wrap our finite minds around – is just what the author of the Hebrews has to say about Jesus Christ, in Hebrews chapter 10. Speaking particularly of the Incarnation, “*therefore, when He came into the world...*” the writer alludes to the ancient council in which all of this was first ‘planned.’

*Therefore, when He came into the world, He said:*

*Sacrifice and offering You did not desire,  
But **a body You have prepared for Me.***

*In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure.*

*Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come –*

*In the volume of the book it is written of Me – to do Your will, O God.*

(Hebrews 10:5-7)

The author utilizes the Septuagint translation of Psalm 40, substituting *a body You have prepared for Me*, for the Hebrew original, “*My ears Thou hast opened.*” The purpose of the author is apparent: to show that the incarnation of God in the Person of Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of the eternal plan of God, “*In the volume of the book*” from before the foundation of the world. But the body thus prepared was not merely the one formed in the womb of the virgin; it was the form and substance of the first Man, Adam, prepared from the dust of the ground to one day be taken up by the last Adam, Jesus Christ. The identity of the *Logos* both as the expression of the Divine Mind and as the One who is thus come into the world ties together the perfect plan of God for the full manifestation of His glorious grace, joining that which moves from God to Creation with that which moves from Creation back to God. The fullness of the divine purpose was always fully comprehended within the *Logos*, and therefore we conclude that each and every part originates *in Him* and flows *from Him*. Let us learn to see and apply the biblical doctrine of the *Logos* as the unifying principle behind the multifaceted revelation of the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.

*God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power...*

(Hebrews 1:1-3)

## Chapter 4 - The Light of Men<sup>37</sup>

**Key Text(s):** John 1:4-5

*“Marvelous then is the blindness of the intellect which does not consider that which is its primary object and without which it can know nothing.”*  
(Bonaventura)

Nicholas Wolterstorff begins his excellent treatise, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion* with the historical account of the infamous declaration of the Catholic Church that the Copernican Revolution was nothing less than heresy against the teachings of the Church. Wolterstorff notes that the *Holy Office* – the successor to the Inquisition within the Roman Catholic hierarchy – convened its experts on February 19, 1616 in order to respond to two propositions,<sup>38</sup>

1. The sun is the center of the world and hence immovable of local motion;
2. The earth is not the center of the world, nor immovable, but moves according to the whole of itself, also with a diurnal motion.

The assembled theologians determined after a four day conference that the first pro-



position was “foolish and absurd philosophically, and formally heretical, inasmuch as it expressly contradicts the doctrine of the Holy Scripture in many passages, both in their literal meaning and according to the general interpretation of the Fathers and Doctors.” The second proposition was declared “to receive the same censure in philosophy, and as regards theological truth to be at least erroneous in faith.” This

**Nicholas Wolterstorff (b. 1932)** determination that the Earth was the center of the universe, or at least of the planetary system, was to hold sway within Catholic orthodoxy for several centuries, and would only be officially repealed long after man had landed on the moon. It was not until 1992 that Pope John Paul II officially retracted the official Church

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<sup>37</sup> Correction from Lesson 3: the quote attributed to Patrick Fairbairn should have been attributed to Andrew M. Fairbairn; apparently no relation beyond a common last name.

<sup>38</sup> This section from Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans; 1984); 15ff.

condemnation of Galileo’s teachings, and this only after a thirteen year investigation into the Church’s action against the proponent of a heliocentric planetary system.<sup>39</sup>

The actions taken against Galileo have become emblematic of the position of Religion vis-à-vis Science, and have led to a common view within modern Western culture that religious people are ignorant and superstitious, unwilling to allow the discoveries of Science to stand on their own merit. Protestantism has not been immune from either the errors of Rome or the opprobrium meted out by the scientific community. From the ‘Age of the Earth’ to ‘Climate Change,’ Christians are labeled as intellectual obstructionists and superstitious bumpkins. Too often these labels fit, but in view of what John has to say about the *Logos* in the Prologue to his gospel, superstitious ignorance is a label that should never accurately describe anyone who has been regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus Christ. Indeed, when John’s words in verses 4 and 5 of the Prologue are properly understood, they would (or at least *should*) banish superstitious ignorance forever from the community of faith,

*In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.* (John 1:4-5)

The *Logos*, who was Himself Life, was “*the Light of men.*” Light has long been associated with Knowledge and Wisdom, with the rational faculty of Man, with perception and understanding. The ‘Dark Ages’ are so named because of the historical misperception that these centuries were characterized by gross ignorance and a retreat from scientific inquiry. And the era wherein Human Rationality was most supremely elevated as the arbiter of all things, is called the *Enlightenment*. Mankind – at least within Western society – had progressed so far in Science, and largely due to the intellectually liberating doctrines of the Protestant Reformation, that he was able to proclaim himself sovereign, his reason now capable of accomplishing, unaided, all things. “The answer that the Enlightenment gave to these anxious questions was Reason. We are to guided by Reason. Reason is something that each of us possesses intrinsically...It is to follow *one’s*

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<sup>39</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/1992/10/31/world/after-350-years-vatican-says-galileo-was-right-it-moves.html>

*own voice.*"<sup>40</sup> The *Enlightenment* was, it has proved, an exchange of one form of bondage for another. Men threw off the shackles of the 'Holy Office,' and proceeded to bind themselves with the manacles of self-assured rational independence. The *Enlightenment* was the logical conclusion of the 'humanistic' path of the Renaissance just as the *Reformation* was the necessary end of the 'spiritual' path. Man in the *Enlightenment* came to be viewed as a self-generating Light, no longer reflective as a moon, but generative as a sun. In a very powerful sense it was a movement in the right direction; in an equally powerful sense it was a movement gone horribly wrong.

*Light* remains, even when man tries to quench it as the Holy Office did in the case of Galileo. It is reputed that after 'recanting' his teachings, and enduring the harsh condemnation of the Church officials, Galileo is said to have mumbled, '*E pur si muove*' - 'and yet it moves.' No proclamation of the Church could prevent the Earth from continuing its orbit around the Sun, nor could any amount of pressure brought to bear upon Galileo undo the knowledge that he had gained that this was indeed the truth. Galileo might recant, and the religious establishment of a society might enforce rigid and ignorant obedience, but the Light of Knowledge still shines nonetheless. But recognizing the *Light* of Truth also means acknowledging its True Source, and that is not from within Man. The *Logos* is the Light which illuminates every man. This is a very important consideration in the study of the pre-existent Christ, the *Logos* of God. Again, the phrasing of John's Prologue is powerful in its simplicity and brevity.

The irony of the pronouncement of the Holy Office in 1616 is that there were still many voices within the Church who cried out for the liberty of thought and of Science. *Light* had long been recognized within the Roman Catholic Church as synonymous both with Truth and with Jesus Christ, and within the mendicant orders there were still those who supported a free inquiry into both Scripture and Nature; Galileo was not without support within the Catholic system. But then again, Jesus was not without support within the Sanhedrin. Just as it is a misconception to characterize post-Roman Europe as living in the 'Dark Ages,' so it is historically inaccurate to lump together the entire Church of this period as superstitious guardians of ignorance. Perhaps the most accurate depiction of the

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<sup>40</sup> Plantinga, Alvin and Nicholas Wolterstorff *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God* (Notre Dame: University

intellectual life of many within Christendom of the Middle Ages is that of Anselm, the 11<sup>th</sup> Century Archbishop of Canterbury, who famously said, “*I believe, that I may know.*” Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, and many others believed that God had both placed order and patterns into Creation, and had given Man the light of Knowledge into the mysteries of His Creation. *Light* still shined, though the Holy Office tried to snuff it out.

This *Light* was by no means limited to the study of the natural world. Theologians such as Anselm, Aquinas, and the latter’s counterpart at the University of Paris, Bonaventura, knew that the Light of Knowledge came from God and returned to Him. Bonaventura wrote a stimulating pamphlet entitled *The Mind’s Road to God*, in which he speaks of the proper path of human knowledge and recognizes that unless the source of all knowledge, all *Light*, be accepted and adored, there can be no true knowledge at all. “Our intellect cannot reach the point of fully understanding any of the created beings unless it be favored by the understanding of the purest, most actual, most complete, and absolute Being.”<sup>41</sup>

### **Light of Nature:**

Even the terminology used by ancient philosophers and rationalists of the Enlightenment hinges on the recognition of Light as synonymous with Knowledge. The ‘Light of Nature’ is frequently referred to in both classical and modern treatises on Knowledge, as the basic rational faculty of Man, the *essence* of humanity being Man’s ability to Reason.<sup>42</sup> Bonaventura spoke of “the light of nature and of acquired science” as being the common feature of all men, and being insufficient to enable any man to truly penetrate into Knowledge. “Therefore, however much anyone is illuminated by the light of nature and of acquired science, he cannot enter into himself that he may delight in the Lord in himself, unless Christ be his mediator.”<sup>43</sup> In this statement there is both the recognition that even fallen man possesses a remarkable ability to use his mind, as well as the acknowledgment that this ability is *derivative* and not *generative*. This is what delineates the simply ignorant from the truly blind.

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of Notre Dame Press; 1983); 5.

<sup>41</sup> Bonaventura, *The Mind’s Road to God* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill; 1953); 24.

<sup>42</sup> Wolterstorff, *op cit*; 5.

Perhaps the greatest majority of mankind over the millennia falls into the first class: *simply ignorant*. It is an ignorance born of the Fall and perpetuated by generations of sin and continued rebellion against God. It is the regressive path of every human society that moves, generation by generation, farther from Him *who is Light*, and in Whom *there is no shadow of turning*. Modern man is too often dissuaded from the doctrine of Total Depravity by the remarkable intelligence that still resides in Man, failing to comprehend the relative ignorance of the most enlightened of men, as well as the Stygian darkness of the most proud among them. For the man who is least aware of God is not as blind as the man who credits himself as the source of the ‘light of nature’ and of his own knowledge. “Marvelous then is the blindness of the intellect which does not consider that which is its primary object and without which it can know nothing.”<sup>44</sup>

Philosophers and theologians –pagan, Jewish, and Christian alike – recognized that the ‘light of nature’ was not generated within man himself, but was the reflected light of the gods, mediated through the human senses in contact with the natural world. When the Reformed theologian speaks of Man being totally depraved, he in no way denies this ‘native’ ability – an ability that at times seems to shine brightest in men who deny all knowledge of God. What the Reformed theologian does maintain, however, is that this reflective ‘light of nature,’ while impressive among men, is an affront and an abomination to the God from whence it came, without due recognition, thanksgiving, or honor. It is no wonder then that the apostle Paul uses the language of light and darkness in speaking of the ‘sin’ of human knowledge,

*...although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools...*

(Romans 1:21-22)

### **Beatific Vision:**

Thus the scholastic theologians of the Middle Ages did not glorify rank ignorance; nor did they deny the native ability of mankind to ‘know’ in the natural scientific sense of the term. This was ‘Light,’ though only the ‘light of nature.’ Within the Medieval Church

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<sup>43</sup> Bonaventura; 28.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*; 35.

itself, the common hermeneutic of the Bible equated this sort of knowledge with the 'literal' sense of the words of Scripture – fit for the uneducated and unspiritual. The deeper understanding came to those who perceived the allegorical meaning of the Scripture; to them true light was given. So both in the world and in the Church (though this distinction was blurred within Christendom of the Middle Ages), there was a hierarchy of 'Light' and Knowledge determined by one's relationship to God through Jesus Christ. This hierarchy or progression of knowledge is the meaning of the title of Bonaventura's treatise, *The Mind's Road to God*, for at the apex of the journey is what medieval theologians called the 'Beatific Vision' – the Beautiful Sight. Like Bonaventura, medieval theologians taught that the believer can ascend to this vision by steps, using the various levels of biblical interpretation, along with meditation and contemplation, to move from the light of nature toward, and finally to, the Beatific Vision.

It happens that we may contemplate God not only outside us [i.e., *Nature*] but also within us [i.e., the *Literal* sense of Scripture] and above us [i.e., the *allegorical* sense of Scripture]. Thus we contemplate him outside through his traces, inside through His image, and above us through His light which has signed upon our minds the light of eternal Truth, since the mind itself is immediately formed by Truth itself. Those who exercise themselves in the first manner have already entered into the atrium of the tabernacle; the second have entered into the sanctum; but the third have entered into the Holy of Holies with the High Priest.<sup>45</sup>

No matter what we make think in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century of Bonaventura's 13<sup>th</sup> Century mode of speaking (and of thinking), it cannot be denied that the Franciscan monk held a high regard for Knowledge, and recognized that God Himself was both the source and the goal thereof. He speaks powerfully of God as the sphere "whose center is everywhere and whose circumference nowhere."<sup>46</sup> It is important to recognize that, despite all protests of the scientific community today to the contrary, the history of the Christian Church has been appreciative of knowledge and not prohibitive of it. Sadly, like so many institutions, the leadership of the Church itself did not pursue the 'mind's road to God,' but rather pursued their own acquisition and maintenance of power – something to which Knowledge has always been a threat.

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<sup>45</sup> Bonaventura; 34.

## The Light that Enlightens Every Man...

The biblical apologist even of this post-Modern world, need not abandon the field of Knowledge to the scientist. No only does the 21<sup>st</sup> Century believer have a wealth of philosophical and theological intellectual history behind him, he has (or should have) a unique understanding of the very source of Knowledge: the *Logos* of God, who is the Light that gives light to every man coming into the world.<sup>47</sup> Thus in John's Prologue we progress from the role of the *Logos* in Creation and in the Governance of the Cosmos, to his role as the One in whom not only is Life, but also Light – not only being, but also knowing. This aspect of the *Logos'* relationship to Man is by no means limited to the regenerate, and sadly many of the regenerate act as if they have no comprehension of the *Logos* as *Light*. On the one hand, the believer can and should recognize the contributions made by the unregenerate in every field of study – knowing as only a believer can know that the brilliant minds of the world shine through a borrowed light, which they themselves refuse to



**Cornelius Van Til (1895-1987)**

t acknowledge or give due honor. The believer knows that the unregenerate man who seeks Knowledge apart from God is, as Cornelius Van Til famously put it, like a child who stands on his father's lap in order to slap him in the face.

Thus it is for the believer and the church to proclaim intellectually, philosophically, and theologically that the *Logos* of God, who as we will soon read in John's Prologue, "*became flesh and tabernacled among us,*" is the true light that gives light – and the only true light – to every man, whether believer or unbeliever. This is just to say that the church cannot yield the rational battlefield to the world, as though not only does the *Logos* fail to enlighten even those who deny Him, but that He fails to enlighten His own body. On issue after issue the majority of professing Christians have assumed positions of ignorant intransigence – not unlike that of the Holy Office in 1616 – without employing the light

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*; 38.

<sup>47</sup> John 1:9

available to their unbelieving opponent, to say nothing of the additional light of regeneration.

To be sure, this is not to say that believers can somehow attain to infallibility in matters either of Nature or of God. Nor is it to say that each and every believer will be smarter than each and every unbeliever. The characteristics of each man have been meted out to him by the sovereign providence of God, which is a truth taught to the believer by the indwelling Spirit of the *Logos* as well as by the ‘light of nature’ through the study of genetics. Nevertheless, the church should never lose sight of the historical fact that much of modern science arose within its profession, as men of faith took to heart both the mediating power of the *Logos* and the script of Knowledge presented to them by Nature.

*The heavens declare the glory of God;  
And the firmament shows His handiwork.  
Day unto day utters speech,  
And night unto night reveals knowledge.  
There is no speech nor language  
Where their voice is not heard.  
Their line has gone out through all the earth,  
And their words to the end of the world.* (Psalm 19:1-4)

### **Faith & Reason:**

The doctrine of the *Logos* has perhaps its most profound application to the endless debate both within and without the church, regarding the relationship between Faith and Reason. Anselm’s *credo ut intelligam* – “I believe in order that I may know” – has not always been the view of the relationship between Faith and Reason within the church, and has almost universally *not* been the view of the world outside the church. But a consideration of the anatomy of Reason, made in light of the *Logos* doctrine here in John’s Prologue, renders Anselm’s dictum all but irrefutable both for the believer and the unbeliever.

Human epistemology – the study of how man *thinks* – tends to move between two extreme views. On the one side is the view of Aristotle, developed in the modern era by Immanuel Kant. This view teaches that man enters the world as a *tabula rasa*, a ‘blank slate.’ All the human infant possesses is his or her senses, and the data that comes into the

brain through these senses ‘writes’ on the otherwise vacant slate, the content-less mind. Kant expanded this view to define reality for each person as being a totally private affair; reality is literally whatever one makes it through their own sense perceptions.

The analogy of the blank slate itself serves to show how untenable the Aristotelian/Kantian view is with regard to human acquisition of knowledge. For a blank slate to serve any purpose at all, it must be written on by an intelligent being; the student using the slate will etch out his numbers, or his verb declensions, or his geometry proofs and then turn the slate in to the teacher. There is *intelligence* involved in the writing on the slate; it is far from arbitrary input from sight and hearing and taste. In the case of the human mind, there must exist a prior capability of *processing* the incoming sensory data for there to be any growth in learning and understanding. A truly blank slate, with no innate capacity whatsoever, would receive sensory input as if it were a pre-school child scribbling on the board: it would be nonsensical. The ability to compare and contrast, to sequence, and to remember – just to name a very few of the ‘processes’ that are *a priori* to learning – must be present in the mind if sensory input is ever to amount to anything remotely like Knowledge. If we accept the analogy of the slate, then when the sensory data hits the surface, something already present and animate goes to work organizing that data according to a host of criteria, turning the raw data of sight and smell and sound into the building blocks of understanding. This reality is a far cry from Aristotle’s conception of the human mind at birth.

But the other extreme also faces insurmountable problems. This is the view in which the human mind is endowed at birth with the ‘light of nature,’ as Isaac Newton believed, or higher still, the ‘divine spark’ that Goethe believed every man to possess. “Were no sunshine in thine eye, how could it perceive the sun? Were God’s own power not inherent in ourselves, how could Divinity enchant us?”<sup>48</sup> This became the common view of human



Goethe (1749-1832)

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<sup>48</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe; quoted in *The Age of Enlightenment, Volume 1*; Simon Eliot, ed. (New York: Barnes & Noble; 1979); 1.

epistemology among the Romantics of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and has characterized the anthropology of liberalism within professing Christianity well into the current day.

This view has more to suggest it than the 'blank slate' position of Aristotle, for it acknowledges an ability innate within man which renders him capable of processing the sensory input from Nature and of turning it into Knowledge. The fact that it usually throws a sop to 'God' as the Creator of Man renders the epistemology attractive to theologians for whom the revelation of Scripture is no longer a guiding force. But what it does at its very heart is to deify man, making him the very source of his own light. Ultimately, therefore, it is blasphemous; and certainly it is unsupportable by the *Logos* doctrine of John's Prologue. The Golden Mean is not midway between the two views: it is definitely closer to Goethe's position than to Kant's. Yet it fails to explain just how this attribute of deity comes to be found within the creature who is, in all other regards, decidedly un-godlike. Romanticism is simply a softer form of the Rationalism of the Enlightenment, and the 'godlike spark' inherent in Man is nothing but the arbitrary deification of the Enlightenment's Reason.

### **The *Logos* as Life and Light:**

John's Prologue ought to be read slowly, and the deep truths contained in it ought not to be rushed. Too many commentators place the entire section within the atmosphere of 'salvation,' and thus fail to see the comprehensiveness of the *Logos* to all of Creation, and not just to the redemption of Man. John begins where Genesis begins, and takes us to the pre-existence and divinity of the *Logos*. We should not that the apostle does not 'enflesh' the *Logos* until verse 14. We must remain with John in the vast eternity before Creation, moving slowly into Creation itself as having happened in and through the *Logos*, and arriving at the Incarnation only at the very end of the Prologue. This section is profoundly about the *Logos*, who took on flesh and became our Lord Jesus Christ. First we hear of His pre-existent oneness with God, then of His creative and providential relationship with the created universe, and only afterward of His coming into the world *as man*. In verses 4 and 5 we are beyond Creation, but not yet at the Incarnation.

Thus what we read of the *Logos* being the Life and Light pertains to all mankind just as much as His being the mediator of Creation pertains to all the cosmos. We cannot yet make the division within mankind vis-à-vis Jesus Christ that will soon be made: the division between those who received Him and those who did not. What we read now concerning the *Logos* is that He is in Himself *Life*; that all life derives from Him and is sustained by Him, which is what we learned in the last lesson. He holds all things together – and most supremely life itself – by the word of His power. But we also learn that He is the *Light* that enlightens every man. He, and not sensory perception or the ‘divine spark,’ is the source of all human knowledge and understanding, even for those who steadfastly refuse to acknowledge Him.

This aspect of the ministry, if we may so call it, of the *Logos* manifests itself in the world both through Creation and through Revelation. We read of the testimony of Creation – which is none other than the light of the *Logos*, in Romans 1.

*For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse...*

(Romans 1:20)

And the manifestation of the *Light* in redemptive revelation is presented to us in II Corinthians 4.

*For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

(II Corinthians 4:6)

Once again we are able to recognize these passages from Paul as ‘Logos’ passages, even though the word itself is not used. In Romans 1 Creation *illuminates* the character of God, rendering Man without excuse – *every* man. In II Corinthians the light *shines out of darkness* bringing the saving knowledge of God in Jesus Christ. This is all the very same work of the *Logos* as the *Light* that both creates the world and comes into the world.

*Life* and *Light* are both originals, against which *death* and *darkness* are corruptions. Light is primary over Darkness in our understanding (there can be no meaning to ‘darkness’ apart from a prior understanding of ‘light’) and Life is primary over Death (for

the same reason). But in John's Prologue we immediately encounter the conflict that will be the backdrop for the entire gospel account: "*And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.*" This is by no means the dualism of Light versus Darkness, in which the two phenomena meet as equal and opposite forces. No, *Light* is on the level of *Life*, and both are ontologically the *Logos* – or the *Logos* is ontologically both *Life* and *Light*. And this is the *Logos* who was with God in the beginning, and was God. "John opens his gospel with the highest Christology possible, the absolute divinity and equality with God of the sent one."<sup>49</sup> The apostle continues this elevated Christology all the way through the Prologue, and all the way through his gospel.

The eternal *Light* that is the *Logos* confronts the darkness that has befallen Creation because of human sin. But this confrontation begins not at the Incarnation, nor yet at the commencement of Jesus' ministry. Rather it coexists with fallen Man from the time of the banishment from Eden until the very end of time itself. The *Logos* as *Light* confronts all men through their Reason, in the ways we have already discussed in this lesson. Fundamentally, the *Logos* as *Light* confront the darkness to find out if the darkness will admit itself, and will acknowledge the Light. This is the *Logos* doctrine informing Jesus' comment to the religious leaders concerning their inveterate blindness,

*Then some of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, "Are we blind also?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, 'We see.' Therefore your sin remains.* (John 9:40-41)

The *Light* of the *Logos* is brighter than a thousand suns, and its presence in the world – and the world's rejection of it – is a powerful testimony to the depth of spiritual and intellectual blindness in fallen Man. The unregenerate man cannot see the light as it truly is, in spite of its immense and eternal brightness. The vestiges of the *imago Dei* in man, even fallen, allow him that 'light of nature' that so many philosophers have mistaken for divinity in itself. But such light is, in the end, really darkness, because it does not lead

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<sup>49</sup> Bock, Darrell L. *Jesus According to Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic; 2002); 413.

to the *truth as it is in Jesus Christ*. It is the derived light of the Moon, often beautiful and beguiling, but derivative and not generative. And in such light the shadows dominate.

The first thing the regenerate man sees upon his spiritual rebirth is the Light of the *Logos*, Jesus Christ. And as the believer grows in knowledge both of Nature as God's Creation, and Redemption as God's glorious grace, he or she is progressively illuminated by the very same *Light*, the *Logos*. What C. S. Lewis said about Christianity could perhaps more accurately be said about the *Logos* Jesus Christ, the *Light* of the world, if the rephrasing of Lewis' words might be permitted, "I believe in the *Logos*, Jesus Christ, as I believe that the sun has risen; not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else."

## Chapter 5 - Light in the Darkness

**Key Text(s):** John 1:10-13

*“Every conscience for 4,000 years before Christ clearly and strongly testified for God, against the sinner, as it does now.”*  
(William van Doren)

If the light of the *Logos* was in the world before the Incarnation, though the world was in darkness, was it possible for anyone to see the Light? The biblical record clearly answers in the affirmative, as we find a lineage of faith stretching from Abel to Abraham before we even begin to see the shadowy outlines of the promised ‘messenger of the covenant.’ The likes of Enoch, Noah, Melchizedek, and Job assure us that the Light of the *Logos* was far more than just an intellectual light; it was moral, and salvific. It is problematic for evangelicals to speak of salvation prior to the advent of Christ as the Son of Man; we generally do not go much further than to say that it was ‘by faith’ as it is since the Lord’s coming. The conversation grows even more difficult when the sphere of salvation is taken beyond the limitations of Israel, God’s Old Testament people and recipient of immeasurable blessings through the covenants. But the Scripture gives warrant to consider the redemptive work of God (*in the pre-incarnate Christ*) beyond the realm of Abraham’s seed. Certainly Melchizedek was not of the Abrahamic line, and few consider that Job was related in any way to the patriarch, either. It would be anachronistic to attribute the faith of Abel, of Seth and Enoch, and of Noah to the covenant of Abraham. And if we can name a few, might there not have been more?

Mankind has from the beginning pursued *Knowledge* and, as we have seen, such Knowledge as was truly found – or was found to be true – was nothing less than the *Logos* enlightening man’s mind, as He continues to do today and forever. But though Man is a rational creature, he is much, much more than just rational; he is spiritual, and his search has always contained a metaphysical component unanswerable by mere reason and logic. The apostle speaks to the general condition of all mankind when he tells the assembled self-proclaimed philosophers on Mars Hill, “...that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us.” (Acts 17:27). Earlier, as

Paul is trying desperately to restrain the Lycaonians from worshipping Barnabas and himself, he proclaimed,

*And in the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; and yet He did not leave Himself without a witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.<sup>50</sup>*

But what was it within man that was capable of receiving and interpreting this witness? And, in itself, in what did this witness consist. The answer to the first questions is *Conscience*; and the answer to the second, *Logos*. It is of this moral influence that the apostle John speaks in verses 10-13 of the Prologue to his gospel, and it is of the salvific power of the *Logos* during the millennia when He continued as the light of Men, but before He Himself took on the form of Man.

*He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:10-13)*

This passage is subtly different from the one reviewed in the last lesson. John is still talking about the *Logos*, though He is not mentioned by that name again until verse 14. The transition from the earlier reference to the *Logos* as Light and as the Creator of all things is made in the first two clauses: *He was in the world* – as the Light which was the Light of Men – *and the world was made through Him* – and nothing was made that was not made through Him. So we have here a continuation of John’s profound introduction of the *Logos*, though our context and bearings are still *in the world* and still before *the Logos became flesh and tabernacle among us...* But the subtle difference between this section of the Prologue and verses 4-4 and 9, is the phrase *and the world did not know Him*. Verse 5 is of a similar thought, *“and the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overpower it”* in that there is antipathy between the *Logos* and the world to which He comes. But verse 10 goes even deeper, utilizing a word that contains strong elements of *believing* and of the intimate relationship with God that we call ‘salvation.’ It is more than that the world *did*

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<sup>50</sup> Acts 14:16-17

*not comprehend* or *overpower* the Light; here we read that the world *did not know* the Light, the *Logos*. That John is now speaking of more than just rational knowledge is evident in three verbs that he uses in this section, verbs that consistently reflect saving faith and not just intellectual knowledge.

*He was in the world...and the world did not **know** Him...*

*He came unto His own...and His own did not **receive** Him...*

*But as many as **received** Him He gave the right...*

*Even to those who **believed** in His name...*

Another point to be made from this section of verses is the division John makes between verses 10 and 11. In verse 10 the *Logos* is ‘*in the world,*’ while in verse 11 He ‘*comes to His own.*’ While many commentators take both phrases to be in reference to Israel, it seems exegetically more accurate to see the first as a reference to the broader sphere of the world, the *cosmos* (verse 10 is the first use of this word in John’s gospel), and the second as a narrowing down of the focus to a particular nation or people referred to as ‘His own.’ In both cases – *the world/cosmos* and *His own* – the reception was the same: unbelief and rejection. Not *universally* however, as verses 12 and 13 will teach us.

This language the apostle uses would have been of a familiar tone to his audience, both Jew and Greek. Not only was he employing the well-known term *Logos* in his Prologue, he was speaking of the *Logos* in terms that would have connected the concept with others – such as *Wisdom* for both the Jew and the Greek, and *Torah* for the Jew. For instance, in the wisdom book of Enoch we read,

*Wisdom went out, in order to dwell among the sons of men, but did not find a dwelling; wisdom returned to her place, and took her seat in the midst of the Angels.* (Enoch 42:2)

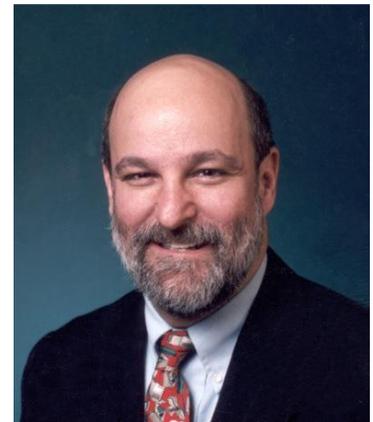
The *Logos* was widely recognized as the same as *Wisdom* in both Jewish and Greek writings of the centuries before John’s Prologue. But the light that was given by the *Logos* was more than just living ‘smart,’ it meant living ‘right’ in a moral and ethical frame of reference that transcended mere reason. To the pagan as to the Jew, following the precepts of the ‘word’ or the Torah, or the *Logos*, or ‘Wisdom’ – however the concept might be

phrased – meant living in accordance with the way things ought to be, living as the gods would have man to live.

For Heraclitus the Logos is ‘the omnipresent wisdom by which all things are steered’...For the Stoics, the Logos is the common law of nature, immanent in the universe and maintaining its unity, the divine fire, the soul of the universe...Philo of Alexandria...saw the Logos as *the agent of creation*...The Logos is the *medium of divine government of the world*; it is ‘the captain and pilot of the universe...the Logos is viewed as the High Priest through whom men come to God...For the Gnostic the Logos is the Redeemer who descended into the lower world in human form, deceiving the demonic powers, and made it possible for man to follow him into the higher world of God.<sup>51</sup>

These references summarized by Beasley-Murray prove the point that the *Logos* was more to the philosopher than just intellectual enlightenment, just as knowledge in the ancient world was far more than mere ‘science.’ Wisdom and Knowledge and *Logos* were merely different terms representing – to borrow Bonaventura’s phrase and put it in the mouths of the Platonist, the Stoic, and the Gnostic – *the mind’s road to God*. This the *Logos* also was to the Jew, and supremely so.

Darrell Bock, in his *Jesus According to Scripture*, offers an interesting summary of what the use of *Logos* in John’s Prologue would have meant to the Jew first reading it. The attributes of the *Logos* assigned by the apostle would have resonated with the knowledgeable Jew, as that which John has to say concerning the *Logos* would have been familiarly associated in the Jewish rabbinic world with such concepts as the *Word of God*, *Wisdom*, *Torah*, and the *memra* of the Jewish targums.<sup>52</sup> There is little doubt that John intended these connections to be made by his readers, as he certainly intended for the Jews as well as the Greeks to realize that the *Logos* was the fullness and the fulfillment of all of their philosophical and theological meanderings.



**Darrell Bock (b. 1953)**

Bock’s analysis of these four terms is a summary of how the orthodox Jew sought salvation through the closer knowledge of God and His Law. We have already seen the

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<sup>51</sup> Beasley-Murray, George R. *Word Biblical Commentary: John* (Waco, TX: Word Books; 1987); 6.

concept of *Wisdom* as personified in the Book of Proverbs and other Wisdom literature, being the voice calling men to come to her and find peace and salvation. The apocryphal book of Ben Sirach speaks in the same terminology as John uses in his Prologue, speaking of *Wisdom* as 'tabernacling' with the people of God.

Wisdom praises herself, and tells of her glory in the midst of her people.

In the assembly of the Most High she opens her mouth, and in the presence of his hosts she tells of her glory:

"I came forth from the mouth of the Most High, and covered the earth like a mist.

I dwelt in the highest heavens, and my throne was in a pillar of cloud.

Alone I compassed the vault of heaven and traversed the depths of the abyss.

Over waves of the sea, over all the earth, and over every people and nation I have held sway. Among all these I sought a resting place; in whose territory should I abide?

"Then the Creator of all things gave me a command, and **my Creator chose the place for my tent**. He said, "Make your dwelling in Jacob, and in Israel receive your inheritance."

(Ben Sirach 24;1-8)

Thus *Wisdom* held a central place in the religious thought of Second Temple Judaism, and it is clear that the apostle, by utilizing very similar terminology with reference to the *Logos* as the standard *Wisdom* literature also used, intended to teach his Jewish readers that the *Logos* answered all the *Wisdom* promised. But as important as *Wisdom* was in the religious life of the orthodox Second Temple Jew, nothing was higher in his estimation than *Torah* – the Law of God. This particular reference was not to the entirety of Scripture as much as to the Books of Moses, and predominantly to the legal and ritual ordinances and statutes and commandments contained therein. This is not to denigrate the Psalms and the Prophets by any means, for the faithful Jew would recognize that both of these divisions of the Scripture bear witness to the Law. Psalm 119 is, of course, filled with the praise of the Law and of its salvific role in the life of the faithful, and the prophets Isaiah and Malachi both hinge all true prophecy upon the Law of Moses,

*To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn.* (Isaiah 8:20)

*Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel.* (Malachi 4:4)

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<sup>52</sup> Bock; 410.

The Jew believed that eternal life and light were bound up in *Torah*, and the Pharisee believed that no higher life could be lived than that which was spent in constant study of *Torah*. Later Jewish writings expanded the role of *Torah* to that very similar to *Wisdom*, with sources such as the Babylonian Talmud placing *Torah* in the beginning of Creation, just as John here places the *Logos*. *Pesachim 54* in the Babylonian Talmud states that “Seven things were created before the world was created, and these are they: The Torah, repentance, the Garden of Eden, Gehenna, the Throne of Glory, the Temple, and the name of the Messiah.”<sup>53</sup> Another Talmudic saying makes the connection between Torah and eternal life quite explicit, “The more Torah the more life...He who has acquired for himself words of Torah has acquired for himself life in the World to Come.”<sup>54</sup> And all of this is no more than Jesus Himself said to the religious leaders who refused to believe in Him,

*You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.*

(John 5:39-40)

Once again the apostle (who it was who recorded Jesus’ statement above) shows that the *Logos* answers to all that Torah was in the life and hope of the Jew. The *Logos* did not supersede *Torah* anymore than He did *Wisdom*, but rather it was the central thesis of John’s Prologue (and gospel) that Jesus Christ as the *Logos* was the embodiment and fulfillment of all that the Jew sought from *Wisdom* and from *Torah*.

In Second Temple Judaism the targums became extremely influential in orthodox and rabbinic life. A ‘targum’ was a paraphrastic interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures, prepared and presented by rabbis to their students, in their common language, most frequently Aramaic. In a manner of speaking, these were the commentaries on Scripture used by rabbis and rabbinic students in the Second Temple Period and, even more so, after the destruction of the Temple in AD 70. Within the targums a concept developed under the Aramaic word *memra* which stood for the presence of God among and amidst His

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<sup>53</sup> <http://juchre.org/talmud/pesachim/pesachim3.htm#54a>

<sup>54</sup> Cohen, A. *Everyman’s Talmud* (New York: Schocken Books: 1975); 126.

people. “The *memra* is the presence of God among his people, giving them support.”<sup>55</sup> The 1906 Jewish Encyclopedia offers as a translation of *memra*, the same *logos* that John uses in his Prologue. We read there the following definition of *memra* as it was utilized in the targums.

"The Word," in the sense of the creative or directive word or speech of God manifesting His power in the world of matter or mind; a term used especially in the Targum as a substitute for "the Lord" when an anthropomorphic expression is to be avoided.<sup>56</sup>

Thus the creative *Word of God*, along with *Wisdom* who was with God at Creation, and *Torah*, one of the seven things made before the creation of the world, and *memra*, the supportive presence of God amidst His people, all functioned as ‘the mind’s road to God’ to the Jew of the Second Temple Period. To them, unless the hardness of unbelief rendered them blind and deaf, the words of John’s Prologue would have resonated with multifaceted meaning, as the apostle pulls together four Hebrew words/concepts into one Greek word, *Logos*, and identifies in that One all that the Jew sought in the other four. John’s Prologue is indeed “the highest Christology possible”<sup>57</sup> and the claim being made by the apostle on behalf of Jesus Christ could not have been mistaken either by his Greek or his Jewish audience.

Even before His incarnation, this *Logos* was “in the world” though the world did not know Him, and He “came to His own,” though His own did not receive Him. We submit that the presence of the *Logos* in the world and unto His own during this time was more than the intellectual enlightenment that was investigated in the last lesson. Here was the One for whom the pagan ‘groped in the dark, though He is not far from any one of us.’ Here was the One sought by the Jew through the Word, the Wisdom, the Torah, and the *memra*. He was there all along; did no one find Him?

### **Groping in the Darkness:**

John makes a division in verses 10 and 11 between the *Logos* being ‘in the world’ and coming ‘to His own.’ The reception of the *Logos* by the two groups – the wider and

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<sup>55</sup> Bock; 412.

<sup>56</sup> <http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/10618-memra>

the narrower – is essentially the same: the world *did not know Him* and His own *did not receive Him*. These two words both represent rejection of the *Logos* by the group designated, and the slight nuance of difference between ‘know’ and ‘receive’ is explained by the relative association of each group to the *Logos*. To the first – that world which the *Logos* made and in which He dwelled – the overwhelming response was ignorance – *agnosticism*, lack of knowing. But of that special subset of the world called ‘His own,’ we read that He was not ‘received.’ In a sense this is a deeper form of rejection than the ‘not knowing’ of the world, for the designation ‘His own’ signifies a much closer relationship, one in which both knowledge and positive reception should have been expected.

But verse 13 makes us aware immediately that the rejection was not universal, “*But as many as received Him...*” The repetition of the word from verse 12 may indicate that John is here speaking only of those among ‘His own’ who received the *Logos*, or it may be a poetic hinge upon which the entire passage moves from rejection to reception. If the former, the world is indeed left entirely out in the cold; if the latter, then the reception of verse 13 applies as well to the world as it does to ‘His own.’ Let us consider the second possibility first, as it does have some historical precedent within Scripture. Clearly separate from the redemptive lineage beginning in Abraham and moving through the twelve tribes of Israel, we have a few among the antediluvians who were noteworthy in their faith: Seth, Enoch, and Noah, for instance. At the same time as Abraham we have Melchizedek, the priest of God Most High, and possibly Job, whose righteousness was remarkable enough for God to mention it to Satan. Even in the days of Moses we encounter his Midianite father-in-law, Jethro, who is mentioned as a priest of Midian<sup>58</sup> and who later offers up sacrifices to God.<sup>59</sup>

Such men represent a class of human beings in whom divine and saving grace is found apart from any association with or lineage from, the ‘chosen people’ Israel. These were men, especially those from Abraham’s day onward, who were of the world, but not of ‘His own.’ Yet the fact that they found mercy and grace from God must teach us that such grace was by no means entirely and universally denied to the pagan nations. *He was*

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<sup>57</sup> Bock; 413.

<sup>58</sup> Exodus 3:1

<sup>59</sup> Exodus 18:12

*in the world, and the world did not know Him...but some from the world did know Him.* Is it too much to say that men such as those mentioned above were such as God gave “*the right to become children of God*”? From the perspective of a traceable lineage from Abraham through Isaac and Jacob, one can assuredly say that men like Jethro were born “*not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*” Indeed, the author of Hebrews tells us that Melchizedek was “*without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life...*” In terms of John’s Prologue, these men belong in verse 10, and not in verse 11. Yet they did attain to verses 12 and 13.

Reasonably assuming, then, that men like Melchizedek and Jethro were redeemed, we may with equal reason assume that they were not the only men thus delivered from the world beyond the covenant people. And if the analysis above is correct, then we may safely conclude that the salvation of Melchizedek and of Jethro, and of however many others among whom God had not left Himself without witness, were ‘saved’ through *receiving and believing on the name of the Logos of God* (vs 12). Their knowledge of the *Logos* need not have been mediated through the Abrahamic covenant. Indeed, clearly the faith of Melchizedek predates that of Abraham, and there is no known association of Job with the patriarch that would justify a connection between the covenant and Job’s relationship with God.

The point of contact according to the apostle is the *Logos*. The one in whom all things were created, and apart from whom nothing was created that was created. The *Logos* who is the *Light* of men, the *Light* that comes into the world, enlightening every man. If we allow that God does not hold man responsible to a revelation not yet given, we need not posit anything like a clear understanding of the Promised One as involved in the faith of Melchizedek, Job, and Jethro. And if the vast majority of the world did not *know* Him in the world, and chose the darkness rather than the Light because their deeds were evil, this does not necessarily mean that *no one* knew Him. If three men knew Him, why not more? Probably not many; that is not the point. The point is that the *Logos* was not only in the world giving *Light*, but also Salvation, to those who received Him and believed on Him.

There are some well-known sticky points with this view, that men outside the covenant community were saved through a knowledge of the *Logos*. It has the undeniably

strength of precedent in the examples of the men already noted, but it also bears the danger of association true religion with any and all ‘Logos’ philosophies that moved in and out amidst the ancient world. Heraclitus and Plato and Zeno and Philo all waxed eloquent concerning the *Logos*; are these men to be counted alongside Melchizedek and Job and Jethro? We have the benefit of other writings from such men to prevent us from, for instance, ‘saving’ Plato simply on the basis of his Logos philosophy.<sup>60</sup> All that may be concluded from John’s Prologue is that the *Logos* was in the world (and amidst His own) as a powerful saving influence that some men were permitted to feel and respond in faith.

Another danger of this view is what it may appear to say concerning men in the world today, living in regions and cultures to which the name of Jesus Christ has never gone. The Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner introduced the concept of the ‘Anonymous Christian,’ someone who has never heard of Jesus Christ but, by virtue of their disposition



**Karl Rahner (1904-84)**

and behavior, prove themselves to be Christian nevertheless. Rahner emphasized the role of the conscience in such men, referencing Paul’s statement in Romans 2 concerning the judgment of conscience, “...for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, <sup>15</sup>who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else

*excusing them*.” Rahner’s inclusive doctrine became very popular in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and is all but dogma within the worldwide ecumenical movement. He writes,

Anonymous Christianity means that a person lives in the grace of God and attains salvation outside of explicitly constituted Christianity — Let us say, a Buddhist monk — who, because he follows his conscience, attains salvation and lives in the grace of God; of him I must say that he is an anonymous Christian; if not, I would have to presuppose that there is a genuine path to salvation that really attains that goal, but that simply has nothing to do

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<sup>60</sup> It was somewhat common for Hellenistic Christian theologians and apologists in the early Church to consider the great philosophers to be ‘Christian’ on the basis of their teachings’ similarity to such concepts as Torah and Logos. Modern liberal Christianity does much the same thing by sanctifying people of other world religions, romantic and/or progressive novelists, or ‘well-meaning’ atheists. We have no warrant from Scripture for any of these views.

with Jesus Christ. But I cannot do that. And so, if I hold if everyone depends upon Jesus Christ for salvation, and if at the same time I hold that many live in the world who have not expressly recognized Jesus Christ, then there remains in my opinion nothing else but to take up this postulate of an anonymous Christianity.<sup>61</sup>

This view has been largely accepted by the Roman Catholic Church from Vatican II forward, and the following modified version of Rahner's doctrine was written by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Head of the Holy Office of the Roman Curia before becoming Pope Benedict XVI,

Nevertheless, God, who desires to call all peoples to himself in Christ and to communicate to them the fullness of his revelation and love, "does not fail to make himself present in many ways, not only to individuals, but also to entire peoples through their spiritual riches, of which their religions are the main and essential expression even when they contain 'gaps, insufficiencies and errors'". Therefore, the sacred books of other religions, which in actual fact direct and nourish the existence of their followers, receive from the mystery of Christ the elements of goodness and grace which they contain.<sup>62</sup>

There are undeniable similarities between the view outlined above concerning the saving work of the *Logos* prior to the Incarnation, and the various forms of the 'anonymous Christian' teaching prevalent in the world today. But the differences are also clear and strong. The first is, of course, that John's teaching concerning the *Logos* being in the world is found *before* the *Logos* becoming flesh and dwelling among us. It is one thing to posit a faith in the *Logos* for those who lived before the First Advent of Christ, and outside the commonwealth of Israel, as a means of their salvation – a valid supposition given the clear historical examples of Melchizedek, Job, and Jethro already noted. It is quite another thing to posit the same salvation to animistic natives, Hindu priests, and 'spiritual' atheists on the basis of their never having heard of Jesus Christ, yet having lived 'Christian' lives nonetheless. There is the fact that very few people in the world today have truly never heard of Jesus Christ, along with the reality that any such determination of what a 'Christian' life consists is pure subjectivity, and is widened beyond all recognition of biblical Christianity by the modern ecumenical movement.

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<sup>61</sup> Robbins, Jerry. *A Reader's Guide to Interreligious Dialogue* (Morgantown, WV: Lutheran Campus Center; 1989); 135.

<sup>62</sup> Ratzinger, Joseph Cardinal, *Dominus Iesus* I.8.

Beyond these obvious problems with the ‘anonymous Christian’ perspective, we have the biblical concept of progressive revelation. Perhaps it was sufficient for salvation for someone like Melchizedek or Job to believe in the name of the *Logos* as the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer of the cosmos. But God’s self-disclosure moves through redemptive history by the path of ever more developed ‘names’ of God. The patriarchs knew God as *El Shaddai*, Moses and the children of Israel as *YHWH*. But today He has fully and finally revealed Himself in His Son, Jesus Christ, who is the Name above all names and “*the only name given in heaven and earth by which we must be saved.*” Jesus Christ is now and forever the *Logos*, but by that name He is no longer working the redemption of lost souls.

### **He Came to His Own:**

The case is much easier with regard to ‘His own.’ Though the vast majority of that people who were constituted a nation through the Abrahamic Covenant ‘*did not receive Him,*’ we have ample evidence from Scripture that there were still many who ‘*believed on His name.*’ But John makes it clear that the path to salvation was not by way of birth or heritage, but only through believing in the One who is the *Logos*. We can infer from our earlier discussion that it was to those who recognized the *Logos* in the Word of God, Wisdom, Torah, and *memra* that saving grace had been poured out and faith given unto salvation. These concepts and commandments were instruments or symbols of the underlying truth of the *Logos*, and in and of themselves were powerless to save. Indeed, apart from the knowledge of the *Logos* – and the *reception* of Him in faith – such instruments were only means of increasing the darkness. They reflected the Light of the *Logos*, but they were not that Light. If viewed as though they were the source of Light itself, such wonderful things as the Word of God, Wisdom, Torah, and *memra* became snares that entrapped their devotees, extinguishing whatever light remained, and causing the deepest darkness imaginable. The evil deeds that have long caused men to love the darkness rather than the light, have also frequently been *religious* deeds. When the Jew sought to find light in Wisdom or Torah, apart from the *Logos*, he groped in the darkness no less than the Gentile.

## Chapter 6 – The Promised One

**Key Text(s):** Genesis 3:15; 5:29; Malachi 3:1-3

*“All of creation seemed to whisper,  
perhaps ambiguously,  
a reason for hope in an ultimate victory over death and dissolution.”  
(Leon McKenzie)*

When Noah was born his father Lamech prophesied over him, saying, *“This one shall give us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands arising from the ground which LORD has cursed.”*<sup>63</sup> There are several points of interest in this verse to our current study. The first is that Lamech, while of the lineage of Seth, was (of course) not comprehended within the Abrahamic Covenant; Noah’s father was not of the covenant people of Israel. In a manner of speaking he was still ‘of the world,’ as we would find Job and Melchizedek later on. The second point of interest is the tone of *expectation* in Lamech’s voice as he prophesied over his son. There was the anticipation of *rest* and *release* from the impact of the curse incumbent upon man’s first sin. That expectation would be channeled into a particular nation – Israel – through the giving of the Law and the testimony of the Prophets. But did it therefore disappear from the world? We have seen from the Prologue to the Gospel of John, that the *Logos* was in the world, enlightening the world which He alone made, even when the world chose to embrace the darkness rather than the Light. Let us here look at things from the perspective of the world: *Was there an expectation in the world of a Great Redeemer? A Deliverer who would set all things to right?*

Paul in Lystra told the unsettled crowd that *“in the generations gone by God permitted all the nations to go their own ways; and yet He did not leave Himself without witness...”*<sup>64</sup> The particular ‘witness’ of which Paul spoke at that time was the *“rains from heaven and fruitful seasons,”* but what was it about these natural events that witnessed not only of God the Creator, but also of God the Redeemer? Was there anything in the human psyche, outside the clear promulgation of the Covenant, that bore witness to the mind and heart of Man that there would be an ultimate victory over sin, death, and dissolution? And if so, why was this testimony not sufficient to lead men to the Redeemer when He did come? Why

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<sup>63</sup> Genesis 5:29

<sup>64</sup> Acts 14:16-17

was it necessary that a single nation, and then a single tribe and family within that nation, should be chosen through which alone the Promised One should come?

It is commonplace in modern theological and biblical studies for scholars to attribute the miracles of the Bible – and especially those surrounding the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ – to a mythology that simply co-opted the common legends and mythical stories that abounded in the ancient world. It cannot be denied that such pagan myths existed, and that the motif of a hero suffering, dying, and being resurrected and/or deified is a common thread among this ancient genre of mythological literature. Frequently, also, this hero is himself a product of the union of the divine and the human, another similarity (though tenuous) between the pagan myths and the Christian doctrine of Christ Jesus. One of the most influential and tenacious of these myths in the early years of Christianity was the cult of Mithras. “Mithraism was the worship of Mithras, the Indo-Iranian god of Light. Mithras was the chief ally of the Ahura Mazda, the principal force of good in the ancient Zoroastrian religion.”<sup>65</sup> The religion of Mithras evolved over the millennia before Christ, and it is probable that similarities now listed between Mithraism and Christianity – between Mithras and Jesus Christ – became more developed during the Christian era.<sup>66</sup> But such similarities as can be traced further back into the centuries before the birth of Christ are still noteworthy. Mithras was apparently born of a virgin, was often referred to as the mediator between heaven and earth, offered himself in a sacrificial death for the peace of the world, and consequently ascended to heaven in a deified state.

Mithras was but one of many heroes of the ancient world whose lives included trials, suffering, death, and often resurrection and deification. Liberal scholars of the past two centuries have concluded from these ancient myths that the Christian narrative of the birth, life, passion & death, and resurrection & ascension of Jesus Christ are nothing more than an adaptation by the religion of Christianity of ancient myths, applied to Jesus of Nazareth, the ‘hero’ of this particular religion. The inference is plausible, but not

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<sup>65</sup> McKenzie, Leon *Pagan Resurrection Myths and the Resurrection of Jesus* (Charlottesville, VA: Bookwrights Press; 2012); 44.

<sup>66</sup> For instance, one source notes that Mithras was born on December 25<sup>th</sup>, a significant ‘similarity’ with Christ. But the ‘birth’ of Jesus on December 25<sup>th</sup> was a rather late development within Christianity, not sustained by the Scripture and itself an infusion of paganism into the Christian religion.

necessary. It assumes a linear relationship between human society's metanarrative and myth – that the older mythological story must be the progenitor of any that arrive on the scene later in time. This is the old Darwinism applied to ancient mythological literature: the direct linkage between literary 'species' within the ancient world. Thus, since Christianity is younger by far than Mithraism, the former must have inherited its mythical framework from the latter.

There is ample evidence to show that the Christian narrative of Jesus Christ, from birth to resurrection, cannot be properly classified as a myth, and certainly not as an adaptation from one or many pagan myths. But that is matter for another study, specifically addressing the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In this lesson we seek to understand the expectation of the world, particularly outside the covenant people Israel, for a divine/human deliverer. In other words, mankind's generational anticipation of an aspect of the *Logos* that was not necessarily explicit in the world around Man: that He was going to come into the world as Redeemer.

The first avenue of approach in dealing with the similarities between ancient myths and the Christian dogma of Christ's Life and Resurrection, is to establish the equally plausible fact that multiple similar stories have a common ancestor, not traceable directly from one such story through the others in a chronological line from youngest to oldest. In other words, the myths of the ancient world were *cousins*, not direct descendants from an original 'story.' Considering the rapid migration of mankind across the earth – especially in the Ancient Near East, Eastern & Southern Europe, and Indo-China – it is more plausible that the various myths be related to one another horizontally rather than vertically. Deriving from a common fountain, they retained similar features while also adopting significant differences each in its own separate evolutionary progression. The closeness of storyline between multiple myths – be they creation or redemption myths – then would have more to do with geography than chronology. If this theory is correct – and it cannot be denied that it is plausible – then we would expect to find in the social traditions of the nations of the ancient world, a similar expectation of Hero/Deliverer manifested in their religion and mythology.

Part of Christianity's claim to have the 'original' story is the fact that the Bible is the only 'holy book' that elucidates the expectation in its very earliest chapters. The anticipation that would eventually manifest itself in both the myth and the reality of the virgin birth, begins with the *protoevangelium* of Genesis 3:15,

*And I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
And between her seed and your seed;  
He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.*

Furthermore, and of equal importance, it is the Bible that provides us with the separation of a particular people, not simply as more 'special' than the rest of mankind, but rather as the incubator of the Promised One. Unlike the mystery religions of the ancient world, in which the motif of Hero/Deliverer is consistently found, the biblical religion provides a steady and progressive development of the universal human expectation. Later in this lesson we will investigate the question, 'Why Israel,' but suffice to state at this juncture that Israel was not a nation born from God, as so many ancient peoples claimed for themselves, but a nation chosen by God through which He would be born. This is a unique and powerful difference between the specific literary heritage of Christianity and all other ancient mystery religions and myths.

But to return to the wider world outside of Israel. The prophecy of Lamech with regard to his son Noah is evidence of the very same anticipation contained in so many ancient hero myths. The sheer volume of such mythological literature is an *a priori* statement of the universality of this anticipation: that a Deliverer would come who would

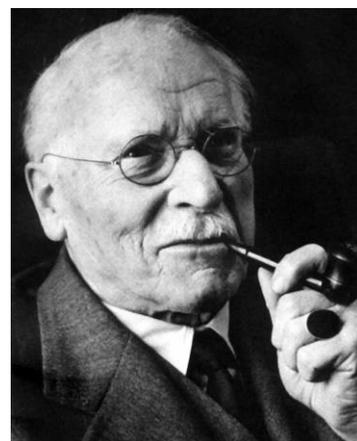


**Leon McKenzie (1932)**

be either Man from God, or Man becoming God, and would somehow rescue his people from the wrath of the gods – only this last part never seems to happen, and the people are just a miserable and subject to death and decay – both personally and nationally – even after the hero has ascended. Leon McKenzie, former professor at Talbot School of Theology, addresses the issue of a basic and universal human expectation of the Deliverer, in his book *Pagan Resurrection Myths and the*

*Resurrection of Jesus Christ*. M<sup>c</sup>Kenzie argues cogently that the similarities between ancient hero/resurrection narratives need not be interpreted as a borrowing of one from another. Indeed, the difficulty in communication in the ancient world, and the limited travel available to the average person, would almost preclude much cross-pollination of such ideas. Rather it is more likely that each of the individual metanarratives flowed from a common ancestor, the question then becoming: which one stands nearest the fount?

M<sup>c</sup>Kenzie consciously borrows from the teachings of the famous Swiss psychologist, Carl Gustav Jung, and his notion of *archetypes* as the foundational components of the human psyche, especially the human social framework. M<sup>c</sup>Kenzie, of course, repudiates Jung's avowed agnosticism, but sees value in the Jungian system of archetypes. "Archetypes, in my way of thinking, are universal meaning structures of the human psyche. These meaning structures comprise the psychic infrastructure which supports the genesis of certain widespread ideas, symbols, and myths."<sup>67</sup> Jung referred to these archetypes as 'primordial images,' though he never managed to explain just how these images entered into mankind's primordial state. This is a question the biblical scholar can answer, however, and this is what M<sup>c</sup>Kenzie seeks to do in his book.



Carl Jung (1875-1961)

M<sup>c</sup>Kenzie mentions a number of life events that continue to speak to the human mind and psyche in terms of deliverance and renewal. The seasons – especially the Winter Solstice – have always testified to mankind of the cycles of life and death and life again. The cycle of vegetation, an example used by the Lord in His own teaching, wherein a seed "*falling to the earth and dying*" results in new and abundant life. The daily cycles of sunrise and sunset and waking and sleeping, speak again of the transition from life into death and back to life again. Finally, the life cycle of death and birth, ever present in the social life of every people, was consistently interpreted as 'renewal' within the tribe.<sup>68</sup> In short, rather than develop a strictly linear chronology whereby the universe moves inexorably from a

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<sup>67</sup> M<sup>c</sup>Kenzie; 59.

beginning to an end, mankind has tended toward a cyclic chronology in which the normal events of life – linear in themselves – are viewed as beginning and ending and beginning again.

Yet the mythology of mankind never became completely cyclical, in the sense of an unending loop of life that would itself be meaningless. The twin notions of progress and escape were also prevalent in the hero myths: that the advance of the social unit was possible even along the cyclic patterns of year to year, harvest to harvest, and defeat to victory. This was progress. But death itself was not viewed as an end in itself; it was rather a breaking out of the cycle into a fuller existence – in Elysium, or Valhalla, or Paradise. “All of creation seemed to whisper, perhaps ambiguously, a reason for hope in an ultimate victory over death and dissolution.”<sup>69</sup> This is, of course, no more than the apostle Paul says in his letter to the Romans,

*For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.*  
(Romans 8:19-22)

Where did these archetypes come from? How did they become so universally implanted within the human psyche, in such a manner that the tribal stories of all peoples throughout time and space developed such a remarkable similarity? The most sensible answer is that of a common beginning, and a common original ‘story.’ This is the testimony of Scripture which, while predominantly a *Jewish* holy book, nonetheless attributes the origins of the entire human race to but one, single man. This in itself is unique among the world’s religions and cosmogonies. That the human race would propagate such familiar narratives over the millennia, in spite of vast distances of migration, indicates logically that more than just a common origin and a common original story must be at work. Even a common nature – human nature – cannot explain the universality of hopes and expectations among the families of Man across the ages.

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<sup>68</sup> This concept may shed some light on the enigmatic statement by the apostle Paul in I Timothy 2:15.

<sup>69</sup> M<sup>c</sup>Kenzie; 63.

This is where the archetype comes into play in McKenzie's theory. The 'universal meaning structure' of life and death and life was innate in the first man, who was created to live, brought to himself and to the world death through his sin, and first heard the promise of deliverance through the Seed of Woman. This man, created in the image of God, was therefore also the image of the *Logos* of God as well as the pattern of the 'flesh' that the *Logos* would one day take upon Himself. Because of this inner structure – mental, spiritual, or psychic, it does not matter – the archetypes that were instilled by God into His chief creation were passed down whole from generation to generation. "The fact of this inheritance explains the truly amazing phenomenon that certain motifs from myths and legends repeat themselves the world over in identical forms."<sup>70</sup> Left to itself, mankind in sin could not help but corrupt and pervert the development of the archetypal 'stories' that lie deep within the human psyche. This is the spiritual side of the thermodynamic law of Entropy – the tendency of all systems to greater disorder. A greater force had to be applied to bring the system back into alignment with the truth, and that greater force would be the self-disclosure of God, of His nature, and of His Promised One through special revelation delivered to a specific people, Israel.

Thus when we read that God did not leave Himself without a witness, in that the seasons and the cycles of nature and of life continued to bear testimony, we can understand what it was that these witnesses said to the pagan world. Paul uses this line of reasoning in support of his Gospel message, in which the resurrection of Jesus Christ was at all times front and center. We would not have expected Paul to organize his thoughts in terms of Jungian archetypes, but that does not mean that the apostle would in any way disagree with the concept of a universal structure of meaning abiding in each and every man, by virtue of his being created in the image of God. Jesus employed the metaphor of the seed falling into the earth and dying; Paul speaks of the woman as being saved through child-bearing, and alludes to the regularity of the seasons and the rain – cycles of life and death and life – in support of his Gospel preaching. The pagan mind was not a vacuum; it was not a soulless abyss. "The God who raised Jesus from the dead is the same

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<sup>70</sup> McKenzie; 59.

God who created a world in which resurrection motifs abound and register in human experience.”<sup>71</sup>

For the majority of humanity, then, the notion of a resurrected hero did not strike as odd, but rather fit in with the basic paradigm of life-death-life intrinsic in the metanarratives of all peoples. Exactly *what* the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ meant was more than the archetype could produce; hence special revelation and the history of Israel. But when the truth finally came to the pagan world, it was not completely out of step with the meaning structures that had guided ancient societies for millennia. Remarkable in this is the commonality of the god/man motif within the hero narratives of ancient mythology. A man born of the gods who becomes the deliverer of men, or a human hero deified after death, or in conquest of death – these were common themes throughout the ancient world, and it is again reasonable to see in this the archetype of creation forming the ‘universal meaning structures’ that underlay the human story. The awareness of a higher, spiritual realm has always been with man, as has the realization that ‘help’ must come from man himself; it never seems to come from the gods in any lasting way. Thus the hero of the story is always a man, or at least part human. Yet the hero’s strength is from the gods, and his destiny is to the gods. But all of these stories were little more than the groping in the dark of men seeking after God but forever unable to find Him.

The presence of these archetypes were never sufficient to save mankind, or even the men in whom the archetypal knowledge developed closest to the truth. It is as if the presence of archetypes kept mankind within the realm of humanity, and prevented the utter loss of that primal knowledge that oriented Man toward God and preserved mankind from becoming no better than “*the beast that perishes.*” But alongside the remarkable similarities of the stories lies the remarkable differences, and the fantastical and ridiculous components of each and every one. The non-historical character of these myths actually removes them from human life and renders them impotent to guide man in the path of truth, much less to save him. Furthermore, despite the intrinsic similarities of the myths, they were universally parochial and bigoted, pertaining to one and only one

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<sup>71</sup> M<sup>c</sup>Kenzie; is.

people, the rest of the world be damned. There was no true hero for the world, only demigods who scored temporary victories for a single people or tribe.

Ironically, or rather providentially, God chose a single nation and tribe through which to answer all of the archetypes within the human psyche, through the promised Seed of Woman. This One would not merely deliver His own people as the traditional mythological hero, but would bring deliverance to the whole world, and a reversal of the curse that had engulfed Creation on account of man's sin. The worldwide scope of His deliverance was not in response to His poor reception among His own people, but was the original intent of His coming. *"It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth."*<sup>72</sup> And, *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life."*<sup>73</sup>

The presence of archetypes within the human psyche – structures of meaning that orient human society toward such themes as deliverance and resurrection – shows us from an anthropological perspective what the Scriptures plainly teach: Salvation was at all times intended for all the nations of the world, not just Israel. This is not universalism, nor is it Arminianism. It is rather the universal *scope* of the salvation brought to mankind by the



**Oscar Cullmann (1902-99)**

Son of God, the *Logos*, whose favorite title for Himself during His earthly ministry further confirms this universality: the Son of Man. Thus there are two important lines of human development, mirrored in the two genealogies of Christ found in the gospels of Matthew and of Luke: the Adam-Christ line and the Abraham-Christ line. Christian theology has lost sight of the first line in deference to the second. Oscar Cullman writes in his *Christ & Time*,

*"Since the time of Abraham there has been occurring a course of events which, to be sure, develops outside of the real redemptive history, but which nevertheless has proceeded from it and will again enter into it; indeed, since Christ's death and resurrection it already*

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<sup>72</sup> Isaiah 49:6

has begun to enter into it again.”<sup>74</sup> The Adam-Christ line that developed outside the more explicit redemptive historical Abraham-Christ line was never outside the redemptive plan and purpose of God, and the vestiges of the *imago Dei* within all men bore witness to this connection through the legends and myths of unenlightened human society.

### **Savior of the World/Israel’s Messiah:**

But God did not bring the Messiah into the world through any of these unguided paths of human development. The Promised One did not simply appear on the scene, “*without father, without mother, without genealogy.*” Theologians have pondered for millennia the ‘purpose’ of Israel, but it seems that one of the primary reasons for the election of Israel from the nations was for the preparation and preservation of the Messiah. Sadly, in the modern church, the teaching of Dispensationalism has so thoroughly divorced Christianity from Judaism that many conservative theologians give little or no serious consideration to the fact that Jesus Christ came as the *Jewish* Messiah. N. T. Wright comments,

It would not...be much of a caricature to say that orthodoxy, as represented by much popular preaching and writing, has had no clear idea of the purpose of Jesus’ ministry. For many conservative theologians it would have been sufficient if Jesus had been born of a virgin (at any time in human history, and perhaps from any race), lived a sinless life, died a sacrificial death, and been raised again three days later.<sup>75</sup>

Recognizing that the Adam-Christ line was always an important and integral part of God’s redemptive plan does not diminish the critical importance of the Abraham-Christ line. Early in the history of the chosen people they are reminded that the election of Israel had no meritorious cause from within the people themselves.

*For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He*

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<sup>73</sup> Do you really need the citation for this one??

<sup>74</sup> Cullmann, Oscar *Christ & Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press; 1950); 180.

<sup>75</sup> Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*; 14.

*swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.*

(Deuteronomy 7:6-8)

The God who chooses the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to overthrow the strong, chose Israel to be the vessel of deliverance, the nation and tribe established through which the Son of God would become the Son of Man. So the most basic understanding of ‘why Israel’ is just this, that the appearance of the Redeemer might not be just an arbitrary arrival of a ‘hero’ as is found in all of the other human deliverance myths. There would be a specific lineage – first through Abraham, Isaac, and Israel; then through Judah and David – bringing mankind down through the generations to the “*fullness of time*” when Christ the *Logos* “*became flesh and tabernacle among us.*” Here we may say that God could have chosen a different race than Israel, as he could have chosen a different patriarch than Abraham. As there was no merit within the man or the race to justify the divine choice, we must conclude “*even so, Father, for it seemed good in Your sight.*”

But having made the choice – the *election* of Israel from among the nations – the role of that nation became much, much more than mere genealogy. Israel was not merely a biological incubator for the Messiah. That would be to provide and preserve a *genetic* line and a *national/ethnic* context for the Promised One, but would leave His appearance devoid of any *moral* or *spiritual* context. It is not enough to know of what race the Messiah was to come, we need to know *what kind* of Messiah He will be. We need to know exactly what He is delivering mankind *from*, and what He is delivering them *to*. This the history of God’s dealings with His people Israel does in a clear and glorious manner. This is the true meaning of what Paul has to say with regard to the ‘benefits’ of being the covenant people,

*...who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.*

(Romans 9:4-5)

Notice that the biological lineage of the Christ is mentioned last in Paul’s enumerations of the blessings that came to Israel. But this list is not just an arbitrary

concatenation of blessings; those listed earlier *culminate* in that one listed at the end. And these others – the *adoption*, the *glory*, the *covenants*, the *giving of the law*, the *service of God*, and the *promises* – all describe for the world just what sort of Messiah the Christ would be. In Israel God was not simply setting aside one ethnicity out of many in order that the Messiah might have a particular race, He was preparing a people for the Messiah, a people who would also prepare the world for the same Messiah.

So much can be said in this regard – in fact, an entire biblical theology of the Old Testament could be written on the theme of the preparation of the world for the Messiah through Israel. Some of this will be addressed in the next lesson, Christ in the Old Covenant. For now it will suffice to establish the general principle of the ‘meaning’ of Israel to look at two central features of the national life of God’s chosen people, in light of the previous statement that God was showing man just what the Messiah would deliver mankind *from*, and also what the Messiah would deliver mankind *to*.

#### **Delivered from Estrangement:**

The first of these central components of Israelite life is the *tabernacle*, later the *temple*. The profundity of the tabernacle – its purpose, its design, its furnishings – is truly inexhaustible, but there are two essential features of the tabernacle/temple concept that pertain to our discussion regarding the shadow of the Messiah in the earthly tent of meeting. The first is that this is where “*God caused His Name to dwell.*” The tabernacle in the wilderness and the temple in Jerusalem both proclaimed that God was dwelling among His people. This reality is graphically manifested, in a positive and in a negative way, by two events recorded in Scripture. The first was the *shekinah*, the cloud of glory which descended on the tabernacle in the wilderness and then centuries later on the temple dedicated by King Solomon. This was, as each account describes, the *glory of the Lord* in His house, a glory so magnificent that the priests and even Moses were rendered incapable of continuing their ministerial duties. This was the positive manifestation of God causing His Name to dwell in the midst of His people. The negative comes from the vision granted to the prophet Ezekiel, in which the glory arises from the altar and departs from the temple – the *glory of the Lord has departed* and His Name no longer dwells with His

people. This remains perhaps the most disturbing and hopeless of all prophetic visions recorded in the Old Testament, for it meant that the God of Israel had abandoned His people. We know from the sequel that the abandonment was not permanent; still, an empty temple was to the faithful Jew, a hollow hope.

The tabernacle/temple complex within Judaism portrayed God dwelling graciously with His people and with His creation, for the components and the decorations of the tabernacle and temple illustrated both Creation and Man, particularly Man in his relationship to God his Creator. Thus the tabernacle/temple instructed the Jew first of all, that true blessing comes in the presence of God, when God dwells with His people. Secondly, it teaches that the dwelling place is most truly within man himself – in the *mind* (the illumination of the mind by the Spirit typified by the menorah), and in the *heart* (the incense being the ‘prayers of the saints’ arising as a sweet aroma to God), and constitutes the true sustenance of man (the table of showbread that stood before the menorah). Looking back on these things from the perspective of Christ having come, and Christ having alluded to His own body as the true temple, we can now see that the tabernacle/temple complex foreshadowed God dwelling in the midst of His people *as Man*.

But the tabernacle/temple did contain one furnishing that was forbidding and discouraging: the veil. In the very place where God had caused His Name to dwell, there was a separation that was visible and insuperable except for one man, one time every year. “*Your sin has made a separation between you and your God*” the veil perpetually called out to Israel. Separation was magnified by the selection of only one tribe among the nation, Levi, to minister inside the tabernacle/temple, and then there was further separation by the selection of but one family within that tribe, the family of Aaron, to serve as priests in the Most Holy Place. The average Israelite would *know* from his Scripture what was inside the tabernacle/temple, but he would never personally *see* any of it. Thus we learn that the Promised One would deliver Man from the sin which had caused this separation between Man and God, and He would do so *as Man*. The symbolism of the tabernacle/temple speaks of God’s relationship with the world as well as with Israel, and each aspect is summed up in the One who would be the true tabernacle, the true temple.

The second component of ancient Judaism that taught the Jew, and now teaches the Gentile, of the meaning of Israel and the Coming Messiah, is the Law – Torah. Again, theologians have written and argued – and will continue to write and argue – for generations just what the Law meant, and what it means. The answer is not singular, but one major facet of the meaning of Torah must be the picture it paints of the holiness of God and of the sinfulness of man. In this the lesson of the Law is similar to that of the tabernacle/temple, but the Law is more concrete. The says “*Do this and live*” whereas the tabernacle speaks in symbols and images. This does not make the teaching of the tabernacle less powerful – images have always had a powerful didactic influence on the human mind, more powerful than we often realize. But God provides us with both an abstract and a concrete image of the Promised Messiah.

If the tabernacle teaches man that God dwells in unapproachable Light, yet condescends also to dwell with man, the Law teaches that God requires *righteousness in the inward parts*. The tabernacle proclaims God as holy; the Law demands that Man be righteous. The tabernacle becomes the picture of the Promised One dwelling in the midst of His people as a man; the Law speaks of the righteousness that will be His mantel.

*Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins,  
And faithfulness the belt of His waist.* (Isaiah 11:5)

Christ in the Old Covenant is revealed in so many ways, both symbolic and concrete, so that Israel – and through Israel, the world – might know what kind of Messiah to expect, what kind of Deliverer was promised. The pagan was not without the testimony of Nature that such a Deliverer would come, but this was truly insufficient evidence to formulate any reasonable expectation. The revelation of God to and through Israel, and the tabernacle and the Torah, as it were, sharpened the vague impression of Nature into a clearer picture of the Promised One. This revelation came through the Abraham line, but the Adam line most certainly has benefited. “These two lines, the Adam-Christ line and the Abraham-Christ line, show that the Old Testament belongs to the Christian revelation.”<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Cullmann; 137-138.

## Chapter 7 – Jesus in the Old Testament: Hermeneutical Questions

**Key Text(s):** Matthew 2:15-18; I Corinthians 10:1-4

*“Texts are not inert;  
They burn and throw fragments of flame.”  
(Richard Hays)*

A common, though regrettable, literary device often used by novelists is called the *Deus ex machina*. Literally translated, this phrase means ‘God from the machine,’ but from a literary viewpoint, it means the author has just ‘miraculously’ introduced a solution to an insoluble problem that has been developing within the plot for chapters. It is the novelist’s equivalent to Alexander cutting the Gordian Knot with his sword. Except when done purposefully as a comedic interposition within the story, the *Deus ex machina* device is basically an admission by the author of an intractable problem within the plot. In other words, it is not good writing. Certainly it was not the device employed by God – who as *Deus* would be the only truly qualified author to employ it – in the story of redemption. One might view the multitude of hero/messiah legends and myths that had developed throughout ancient human history to be just the sort of intractable plot line that would require the *Deus ex machina* to solve. God appears in the man Jesus of Nazareth to wrest control of the world from the devil, dies in the attempt, but overcomes the grave in ultimate victory. Sounds like the divine sword slicing through the knot of human salvation.

Dispensationalism relies heavily, though not admittedly, upon the *Deus ex machina* in its account of redemptive history. The refusal of Israel to accept her Messiah presented an insuperable barrier, an insoluble plot development, to God in His attempt to bring redemption to His people. This ‘plot knot’ had indeed been developing for many, many chapters of Scripture, as Israel grew more stubborn in its refusal to acknowledge and accept the prophets that God sent to her, culminating in the nation’s failure to listen to the ‘voice in the wilderness,’ John the Baptist, and to recognize Jesus as the Promised Messiah. The Dispensational storyline introduces the Church as a *Deus ex machina*, providing Jesus with at least a measure of victory in the face of the failure of Israel to bow the knee to her promised Savior.

Liberal theology views the advent of Christ in the Christian redemption story as a complete *Deus ex machina*. Rejecting prophecy in general, and miracles in particular, liberalism is left with nothing but a radical change in the plot made by the leaders of the early Church: the introduction of a risen Hero who was now the ‘Head of the Church,’ and the ‘Savior of the World.’ The plethora of myths with similar storylines ‘confirms’ the liberal theologian in his conclusion that the Christian ‘myth’ is no better, though within liberal Christianity the ‘teachings’ and ‘example’ of Christ are still retained. It should not come as a surprise that professing believers can almost entirely reject the redemptive history of Scripture as *Deus ex machina* while still seeking to maintain the happy ending. We have all read and enjoyed novels in which this literary device is employed – sometimes blatantly.

But God is the consummate Author both of Creation and of Redemption, and employs no weak literary mechanisms to ‘fix’ a storyline that has spiraled out of His control. We have seen how the *imago Dei* causes Man to retain the basic storyline within his own societal evolution in legend and myth, preparing him to eventually receive – by grace through faith – the truth as it is in Jesus Christ. This residual knowledge is of critical



**E. W. Hengstenberg (1802-69)**

importance not only in the salvation of the pagan nations, but as well within the overall redemptive story. It constitutes a, if not the, back-story that will come to the fore at the time when the Seed of Woman and of Abraham appears, but for most of the story it remains a dark and foreboding periphery. “Though man retained, after the fall, some feeble remains of the Divine Image, consisting in an obscure consciousness of his original happy condition, and an earnest desire to regain

it; yet this was insufficient of itself to effect the great end of his being, a reunion with his Maker. It was of value only as it made him capable of receiving aid from above; it rendered his return to god possible, but could not be its efficient cause.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Hengstenberg, E. W. *Christology of the Old Testament*; 17.

Christians, at least in the early Church and since the Reformation, see the development of the promise through the Old Testament Scriptures. Martin Luther famously found Jesus on ‘every page of Scripture,’ though room should be given for hyperbole here. Melito of Sardis (c. AD 180) recognized the typological character of the Old Testament and of the famous men encountered there, “It is he [Jesus] that was in Abel murdered, and in Isaac bound and in Joseph sold, and in Moses exposed, and in the lamb slain, and in David persecuted, and in the prophets dishonored.”<sup>78</sup> However, an honest assessment of the Old Testament will produce many passages and chapters that seem to have no reference to Christ at all, let alone any prophetic indication of the nature of the man Jesus. In addition, we find that some of the New Testament references and allusions to Old Testament passages seem questionable when we turn back to the ancient word and read both the passage and its context. It has been the contention of Judaism for two millennia that Christians bend and twist the Old Testament, the Jewish Bible, to suit the demands of Messianic prophecy and history; a process, it is claimed, that began with the apostles themselves.

On the one hand, it cannot be denied that the writers of the New Testament firmly believed that their account of Jesus Christ - His life, His teaching, as well as His death, resurrection, and ascension - were all rooted in the prophetic word of the Scripture to which they turned for explanation. Jesus Himself claimed the validation of ancient Scripture for His Person and His ministry, and the apostles followed this pattern directly. “We only remark here, that with its truth or falsehood the authority of Christ and his Apostles must stand or fall. That *they* believed the Scripture to contain genuine predictions, is evident from the passages in their writings.”<sup>79</sup>

But on the other hand, it must also be admitted that the connections sometimes made by the authors of New Testament gospels and epistles are not always so clear as the evangelical would wish them to be. The line of sight from the prophetic word of the Old Testament to the person of Jesus Christ is not all that clear when viewed solely from the vantage point of the Old Testament itself. In keeping with the Reformation tradition,

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<sup>78</sup> Quoted by Holmgren, Fredrick C. *The Old Testament: The Significance of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1999); 39.

<sup>79</sup> Hengstenberg; 26.

Hengstenberg overstates the case when he writes, “But the chief object of prophecy was so to prepare the way for Christ, that, when He should come, He might be identified by a comparison of the prediction with its fulfillment.”<sup>80</sup> In light of this comment, we must ask if men in Jesus’ day recognized Him as who He was, by the process of comparing the prediction with the fulfillment. Was old Simeon coming from a Bible Study in Isaiah 49 when he beheld the Christ child in the Temple? Did John the Baptist thus recognize Jesus as the One who would baptize in the Holy Spirit? Did Peter confess Jesus as the Son of God after a thorough study of Old Testament Messianic prophecy? In short, do we have record of *anyone* coming to a knowledge of the Messiah through the process described by Hengstenberg? Were the Old Testament prophecies that clear and linear? Many who have struggled to make the same connections that others, including the apostles, have made would answer in the negative. It may not be as easy as we have been led to believe, to create a direct line of prophecies clearly leading to the Messiah. Or, perhaps better put, it may be that this line is far more evident in retrospect than in prospect; far easier to see from the vantage point of the Advent of Christ than in the prospect of prophecy.

Two examples from the New Testament illustrate the hermeneutical challenge facing the believer as he or she moves from the ‘fulfillment’ passages to the ‘prophetic’ passages of Scripture. The account of Joseph & Mary’s flight into Egypt with the baby Jesus, recorded in Matthew 2, and Paul’s discussion of the water in the wilderness in I Corinthians 10 are just two of many passages in the New Testament wherein the connection between the apostolic word of fulfillment and the ancient passage of the Old Testament to which they refer, is less than clear.

*Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, “Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him.” When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, “Out of Egypt I called My Son.” Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying:*

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<sup>80</sup> Hengstenberg; 26.

*A voice was heard in Ramah,  
Lamentation, weeping, and great mourning,  
Rachel weeping for her children,  
Refusing to be comforted,  
Because they are no more.*

(Matthew 2:13-18)

Twice in this passage Matthew uses the formula *'it was fulfilled'* with regard to two different Old Testament passages: one from Hosea and one from Jeremiah. In neither case is it evident from the Old Testament passage that the events of Jesus' childhood were the subject of the prophetic word. The first reference, to Hosea 11:1, is clearly in the context of a prophetic *retrospective* as opposed to a *prediction*. *"When Israel was a youth I loved him, and out of Egypt I call My son."* The minds of the original hearers of this passage would not have been drawn forward to an expectation of the coming Messiah, but rather backward to the Exodus, God's ancient deliverance of Israel from Egypt. There is the connection of 'youth' between the fledgling nation of Israel at the Exodus, and the child Jesus returning from Egypt with his parents after Herod's death; but it is a stretch to call Hosea 11:1 a 'messianic' prophecy. Yet in it Matthew saw Jesus.

The second passage refers to the execution of all male children under the age of two in the environs of Bethlehem, where Jesus was reported to have been born.<sup>81</sup> Matthew is unequivocal regarding the nature of Herod's wicked order as being 'fulfillment' of prophecy, *"Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled,"* followed by an excerpt from Jeremiah 31. This particular chapter of Jeremiah is, of course, famous for containing the promise of the New Covenant, but that is much later in the chapter from the reference made by Matthew. Whereas the Hosea reference was contextually a matter of the Exodus, this one from Jeremiah 31 has direct reference to the Babylonian Exile, though the hope of a return and restoration is contained immediately following the verse quoted by Matthew.

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<sup>81</sup> As a side note: this passage would indicate that the magi did not arrive at the scene of Christ's birth, but may have come to the home of Joseph & Mary up to two years later. It is possible that Herod, a very wicked man by all accounts, was just hedging his bets by killing all boys under the age of two; but it is equally possible that the information gleaned from the magi was indeterminate for a period of two years. It may be that the magi did not start their journey until the star appeared in the sky.

*A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping,  
Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted for her children,  
Because they are no more.*

*Refrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears;*

*For your work shall be rewarded, says the LORD,*

*And they shall come back from the land of the enemy.*

*There is hope in your future, says the LORD,*

*That your children shall come back to their own border.*

(Jeremiah 31:15-17)

It is a challenge to understand how Matthew saw in these two Old Testament passages Messianic implications fulfilled in the childhood events of Jesus, but we trust that he did so by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The question, however, remains: How are we to make the same connections? Or, taking them at face value, how are we to explain such tenuous connections to others, especially unbelievers? Another example of New Testament usage of Old Testament history in a less than clear manner, is that of I Corinthians 10.

*Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.* (I Corinthians 10:1-4)

This passage contains hermeneutical interest on several levels. First, we have another example of an inspired author of Scripture utilizing a legend and, by doing so, sanctioning that legend. In this case the ‘rock that followed’ Israel is an allusion to a very old Jewish tradition that the rock which produced water for the Israelites in the wilderness did, indeed, follow the people on their wanderings for forty years.

And so the well which was with the Israelites in the wilderness was a rock, the size of a large round vessel, surging and gurgling upward, as from the mouth of this little flask, rising with them up onto the mountains, and going down with them into the valleys. Wherever the Israelites would camp, it made camp with them, on a high place, opposite the entry to the Tent of Meeting.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Neusner, Jacob *The Tosefta*; quoted by Holmgren; 32.

The second challenge presented by Paul's usage of this legend is his identification of the rock with Christ, "*And that rock was Christ.*" This is somewhat like Luther's finding Jesus on every page of Scripture, for it is hard to believe that the Israelites in the wilderness – or even their posterity living in the land – would have interpreted the water-from-the-rock miracle as a Messianic prophecy. Certainly, at the most basic level, there is the testimony of this miraculous provision to the care of God for His people, and that concept most assuredly culminates in the divine provision of the Messiah and salvation. But the mental path from the rock in the wilderness to Jesus Christ is not a clear and obvious line of thought. The modern reader is challenged in such cases to follow the logic of the biblical writer.

One thing is made evident by these examples – and confirmed by many other passages in the New Testament. The Advent of Christ, and faith in Him, opened up the Old Testament Scripture to a Christocentric perspective much more pronounced than one would sense from the ancient texts alone. But the reaction of those who first met Jesus, and the apparent basis for their decision to follow Him, would indicate that the pathway to understanding did not follow the route laid out by Hengstenberg as quoted earlier – from clear prophetic testimony to the reality of the fulfillment. Rather it would appear that the trajectory was from Jesus to the Old Testament and then back to Jesus again. "Clearly the New Testament writers did not first consult the Old Testament and then form their opinion about Jesus. On the contrary, they moved from Jesus to the Old Testament Scripture."<sup>83</sup> In other words, Old Testament passages that *might* have been Messianic, as well as Old Testament passages that *were certainly not* Messianic, become so through the reorientation of the mind and the heart that comes through regeneration.

Now it must be stated at this point that this is not the same as saying that the Bible 'becomes' the Word of God through some existential moment of faith in the individual, wherein the otherwise neutral Scripture is transformed into divine revelation. Old Testament Scripture remained the objective Word of God throughout the ages leading up to the advent of Christ, and remain so in the millennia since. What we are dealing with here is the mechanism, the *hermeneutic*, by which New Testament believers immediately

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<sup>83</sup> Holmgren; 54.

saw the Old Testament Scripture as a prophetic word entirely fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus. It is also an attempt to show how believers today can reasonably and rightly interpret the Old Testament as centered upon Jesus, even in passages – like Matthew 2 and I Corinthians 10 – that seem in their original context to be devoid of any messianic content.

### **From Jesus to the Old Testament and Back Again:**

To anyone who has experienced faith in Jesus Christ and then has spent time in the Old Testament, it seems unbelievable (no pun intended) that Jews ever denied, and continue to deny, that Jesus is their promised Messiah. What about Isaiah 53? What about the “*virgin shall be with child...He shall called Emmanuel*”? What about the Messianic Psalms, like the one quoted by Peter during his first sermon, “*Thou wilt not allow Thy Holy One to see decay*”? These passages seem so crystal clear, and so clearly fulfilled in Jesus, that Christians throughout the ages have been astounded by continuing Jewish unbelief. When we add to this the lineage of the Seed of Woman through the Seed of Abraham to the Root of Jesse and the Son of David, it all stands so incomparably apparent to the Christian that Jesus alone must be the Jewish Messiah, how is it that the Jewish nation cannot see that?

But when we turn to the New Testament and read the accounts of those who encountered Jesus and followed Him, we realize that a prior knowledge of Scripture really did not ‘prepare’ them for Jesus, except for a vague expectation that *something* was due to happen in Israel. Fredrick Holmgren writes, “...early Christians did not discover Jesus as the result of an initial study of the Old Testament. Rather the movement was in the opposite direction; that is, from their ‘meeting’ with Jesus Christians looked back to the Old Testament, their scripture, in order to gain understanding of what took place.”<sup>84</sup> This is a very important statement in terms of biblical hermeneutics; one that differentiates between the exegesis of a believer and that of a non-believer. For as obvious as a passage, or group of passages, must seem to the believer with regard to their prophetic fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ, to the unbeliever they remain vacant texts. The believe will see Jesus in the Old Testament where the unbeliever sees only Moses, or Israel, or David.

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<sup>84</sup> Holmgren; 13.

Another important aspect of this hermeneutical trajectory of movement from Jesus to the Old Testament and then back to Jesus, is the example it provides of how to ‘use’ the Scripture in the life of faith. The believer does not built a casebook of proof texts in order to arrive at a conclusion, but rather mediates the reality of the event through the revelation of God provided in Scripture. This is what the first disciples did, “...when the New Testament authors make use of the Old Testament, they do not move from the Old Testament to the reality of Jesus; rather they move from the reality to the text of the Old Testament.”<sup>85</sup> This explains Matthew seeing Jesus in Hosea 11, and Paul seeing Jesus in the ‘rock’ that followed Israel through the wilderness.

All of this may sound highly subjective and therefore highly dangerous. It is not subjective, but it can be dangerous. Holmgren writes, “To be sure, this kind of approach opens itself to arbitrary, acrobatic interpretations that strive after newness and difference. But then, no approach to scripture comes with an absolute guarantee against misuse.”<sup>86</sup> Thus there has always been the danger of error within the Church as it seeks to find Jesus in the Old Testament, and to apply the lessons learned there to the life of the New Testament congregation. The ‘Jesus to Old Testament to Jesus’ hermeneutic is not subjective, however, in that the common denominator is the faith experience of the interpreter, and the consequent indwelling of the Holy Spirit, sent to “*guide you into all truth.*” Biblical interpretation in the Church has, in fact, never been more in error and danger than when rigid hermeneutical structures are established beyond which no exegete is allowed to wander. Hermeneutical straight-jackets forced on biblical interpretation are a far greater threat to the life of the Church than a seeming subjective hermeneutic that openly seeks to understand the Christ event – in the life of the Church as well as the individual – through the Scripture given to provide just this explanation. “When some Jews were confronted by the extraordinary figure of Jesus – and in fact became His followers – they attempted to understand him in the context of the faith of Israel preserved in the Hebrew Bible.”<sup>87</sup> This is the proper method for believers today; not ‘proof-texts,’

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<sup>85</sup> Holmgren; 20.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*; 36.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*; 29.

but the cumulative voice of Scripture heard through ears opened by grace through regeneration.

In a sense, this is what is meant by the writer of Hebrews when he describes the Word of God as ‘living.’

*For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.* (Hebrews 4:12)

The revelation of God was mediated through the lives of people and of a nation. It is a *living* revelation and not a dead letter. It is apparent from the nature of the Christ event that, if true, the advent of Christ and His work on earth must be the culmination of the ‘story’; there cannot be a sequel to God sending His only Son (*cp.* Hebrews 1:1-2). Therefore, just as the first disciples sought to make sense out of their experience with Jesus through consulting the divine revelation entrusted to their nation, what we now call the Old Testament, so believers of every age continue to make sense of their encounter with Jesus through the completed revelation of God in both the Old and New Testaments. We, too, work from the reality of Jesus back to the Scripture and then forward again to the reality of Jesus. And because the centerpiece of this entire grand mosaic is none other than the Son of God become Son of Man, Jesus Christ, we will also find him in Abel’s murder and Isaac’s binding, and in Israel being called out of Egypt, and in the rock that followed Israel through the wilderness, and in countless other narratives and characters depicted in their own contexts within Scripture, but foreshadowing the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.

Theologians have come to call this hermeneutic ‘insider’ or ‘believer’ exegesis. It is really no more than what Jesus said about His Father “*hiding these things from the wise and prudent, and revealing them to babes; for it seemed good in Your sight.*”<sup>88</sup> “The New Testament’s interpretation of the Old Testament is ‘insider’ or ‘believer’ exegesis; it understands the older scripture in the light of faith in Jesus.”<sup>89</sup> To the unbeliever this all comes across as special pleading: the Scripture only makes sense to those who believe in

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<sup>88</sup> Matthew 11:25-26

<sup>89</sup> Holmgren; 38.

Jesus Christ. If such a complaint comes from a Jew, we can point to numerous passages in their Bible that indicate the incapacity of the natural man to hear with understanding,

*Yet the LORD has not given you a heart to perceive and eyes to see and ears to hear, to this very day.*  
(Deuteronomy 29:4)

*Keep on hearing, but do not understand;  
Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.* (Isaiah 6:9)

*Who has believed our report?  
And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?* (Isaiah 53:1)

To the pagan unbeliever we can merely shrug our shoulders, realizing the truth of this principle, that “The eye of the reader can only follow the scripture if vision is sanctified.”<sup>90</sup> The New Testament writers were not guilty of twisting the Old Testament to their purposes; the steadfastness of their witness (often to death) and the consistency of their message argues strongly against such biblical subterfuge. Rather it is the case with the entire body of disciples, Paul included, that which happened to the two on the road to Emmaus,

*Then He said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?” And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself...And they said to one another, “Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?”*  
(Luke 24:25-27; 32)

Thus the interpretation of Scripture becomes more than just the lining up of proof-texts to bolster the Christian argument for this or that principle of Scripture. Instead it becomes a dialogue between the Scripture – both Old and New Testaments – and experience in Christ – both personal and corporate within the Church. Each journey from the reality of Jesus Christ to the Scripture reveals new truths, which return to further clarify and glorify the reality of Jesus Christ. We struggle when we try to move from the Old Testament texts to Jesus; some of them just refuse to cooperate. But the pathway back

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<sup>90</sup> O’Keefe, John J. & R. R. Reno *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press; 2005); 23.

from Jesus to the Old Testament is much clearer to the one whose vision has been made whole by grace through faith in the object of our adoration, Jesus Christ. One modern author describes this process as it was for the early post-apostolic Fathers of the Church; that their forays into the Old Testament and back to the New Testament were tantamount to piecing together the many parts of a mosaic.

Exploring countless scriptural details with an eye toward assembling a full and complete picture marks the most basic ‘method’ of patristic exegesis. To recall Irenaeus’ image of a mosaic, the church fathers worked hard to identify the color, shape, and texture of each small piece of scripture, always thinking about the place of each element in the overarching figure of the handsome king. By paying close attention to the words of scripture, early Christian readers sought to achieve their ambition: to achieve a ‘total reading’ of the Bible. Thus, the overall reading was not developed in broad strokes or with large abstractions; it was carefully constructed verse by verse. In this sense, for all the ambition of patristic biblical interpretation, the church fathers were intensive readers ever on the lookout for hints and signs amid the tiniest detail of the text.<sup>91</sup>

This methodology differs little from the midrashic exegesis of the rabbinic schools, and is evidently the same hermeneutic used by the New Testament writers, who were less interested in quoting chapter and verse for their references, than they were in putting together the whole mosaic. They were certain of the image that would appear to them when this mosaic was assembled: it would be the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. The more systematic and linear interpretive methodology of the post-Reformation Church has perhaps lost sight of the portrait in its attempt to be theologically accurate in its biblical commentary. This is not to say that the more linear ‘historical-critical’ hermeneutic is wrong; just that it is often incomplete – providing a detailed analysis of the brush stroke, while losing sight of the picture.

As a result of this discussion, our approach to ‘Christ in the Old Testament’ will not be the typical concatenation of Old Testament ‘messianic’ passages that are clearly, or not-so-clearly, fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Rather it will be our attempt to paint the portrait of the Messiah – to a very limited extent on account of space and time – as it is developed in the Old Testament Scripture.

We will begin this journey by returning to the two enigmatic ‘messianic’ passages referenced at the beginning of this lesson - Matthew 2 and I Corinthians 10 – to see how ‘insider’ or ‘believer’ exegesis helps to explain the way in which the apostles interpreted two Old Testament passages that were clearly not originally messianic.

### **Matthew 2:14-18**

While Matthew does use the word ‘fulfilled’ in this passage, in reference to both Hosea 11 and Jeremiah 31, we need not conclude that he viewed these passages as being originally messianic in intent. The word ‘fulfilled’ does not necessarily imply the manifestation of the ‘answer’ to a specific prophetic word; it may, and often does, mean the ultimate completion of a biblical concept or principle. Thus we recognize in Christ the ‘ark of salvation’ analogous to Noah’s boat, though we do not thereby dismiss the specific historical reality and context of Noah and the Deluge. ‘Insider’ exegesis opens the readers eyes to see Christ in the Old Testament where He was not originally, explicitly placed. This is what Matthew sees in Hosea 11:1, “*Out of Egypt I shall call My Son.*”

The reference of Hosea 11:1 is undeniably a retrospective look at the deliverance God had wrought in bringing the descendants of Abraham out of the bondage of slavery in Egypt, to bring them ultimately to their own land. The Exodus thus became a motif within Israelite history, and most certainly within Israelite prophecy, of the faithfulness of Jehovah to deliver His own. But Matthew’s reference to this Old Testament passage speaks much more than God’s intention of delivering His people Israel; it unites the identity of Jesus with that of Israel. In *The Lord’s Anointed*, a compendium of essays on the interpretation of Old Testament Messianic passages, J. Gordon McConville writes, “When Matthew lines it [Hosea 11:1] up with the return of the child Jesus from his Egyptian refuge on the death of Herod, he is scarcely claiming that that is what Hosea actually had in mind.



**Gordon McConville (b. 1951)**

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<sup>91</sup> O’Keefe; 46.

Rather he is asserting that there is a true connection, at a deep level, between the two events.”<sup>92</sup> This is a most important discovery with regard to the New Testament interpretation of the Old Testament Scripture: Jesus is not merely the Jewish Messiah, He is Israel.

Looking backwards into the Hebrew Scriptures through the lens of his post-resurrectional experience of Jesus, the evangelist [Matthew] perceives implications not apparent in the text itself...by reading the Hebrew Scriptures in the light of the Raised Jesus, the evangelist has come to believe that the story of Jesus recapitulates the story of Israel.<sup>93</sup>

This identification of Jesus with Israel resounds in the passage in Jeremiah, where Rachel is found weeping for her children, incapable of solace. The prophetic word itself is poetic, for Rachel only had two children – Joseph and Benjamin – with Ramah located in the tribal boundaries of the latter (Joshua 18:25). In other words, the lamentation recorded in Jeremiah 31 could not have been specifically addressed to the situation of Herod’s wicked massacre of the male youths, for these were in Bethlehem, within the territory of Judah. What we have, rather, is Matthew recognizes the overall deplorable condition of *Israel*, graphically illustrated by the horrible actions of a half-breed king, Herod. This reference to Jeremiah 31 also manifest Matthew’s post-resurrection understanding that it was for the whole people of Israel that Jesus came into the world, and to die. Weeping and lamentation are appropriate themes both in Jeremiah’s day and in the days of Jesus’ childhood. The ‘believing’ exegesis employed by Matthew sees in Rachel’s weeping the sorrow of Jesus, as it were, when He wept over Jerusalem, sorrow for the ‘*lost sheep of Israel*.’

Matthew sees Hosea 11:1 and Jeremiah 31:18 as ‘fulfilled’ in Jesus not from the perspective of a specific messianic promise being answered in Him, but rather as a broader picture of Jesus, the Messiah of Israel who was Himself Israel, coming to redeem His people from their bondage and misery. “Matthew’s use of ‘fulfillment’ appears to

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<sup>92</sup> Satterthwaite, Philip; Richard Hess; & Gordon Wenham, eds. *The Lord’s Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock; 1995); 13-14.

<sup>93</sup> Philip A. Cunningham; quoted by Holmgren; 44.

embrace both promise-fulfillment and typology.”<sup>94</sup> The apostle Paul utilizes the Old Testament in much the same manner.

### **I Corinthians 10:1-4**

The Exodus theme is central to Paul’s allegorical homily in I Corinthians 11, as it is to Matthew with his reference to Hosea 11. Paul, in addition, incorporates a Jewish legend with regard to the historical provision of water for the Israelites in the wilderness. The actual occasions of this miraculous provision are found in Exodus 17 and Numbers 20, neither of which betray any overtly messianic connotation. However, ‘believer’ exegesis employed by the apostle recognizes the One who was both the Provider of that water and was the water itself: the pre-incarnate Christ. We hear in Paul’s writings the words of Jesus Himself, *“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink,”*<sup>95</sup> and to the Samaritan woman, *“...but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.”*<sup>96</sup> “Paul feels free to use this Jewish legend [i.e., the ‘rock’ following Israel in the wilderness]...to speak of the significance of Jesus. He has committed his life to preaching Christ, and he employs every possible illustration or analogy that gives strength to his proclamation...He saw in this legend of the water-giving stone an image of what Christ means to the Christian community.”<sup>97</sup>

Paul’s reading of the Scripture (which was for him only what we call the Old Testament) took on new life and new meaning upon his conversion to Christ. He who had studied the Scripture intensely, being trained in the strictest sect of Jewish religious schools, now saw clearly what he once thought he understood. As we find in several other Pauline passages, the apostle comes to realize that all was mystery until it was revealed in Christ – *not* by means of further study, but by the opening of his eyes through regeneration. Now, as it were, Christ is found on every page of the Old Testament. “The

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*; 209.

<sup>95</sup> John 7:37

<sup>96</sup> John 4:14

<sup>97</sup> Holmgren; 32.

New Testament writers can confidently use scripture because they know they have the key to its meaning, in Jesus Christ, and this enables them to decipher all kinds of scriptures.”<sup>98</sup>

Had the apostles Matthew and Paul been influenced by modern textual critical methodology, or guided in their exegesis by the historical-grammatical critique, neither would have found Christ in the passages and stories they referenced. These modern techniques do have their place and their advantages, but we are reminded by Scripture itself – the New Testament’s usage of the Old Testament – that they are not the be-all and end-all of biblical hermeneutics. “Ancient readers of scripture moved within, across, and through the text, exploring its orienting, unifying potency.”<sup>99</sup> If the modern reader wishes to see in the Scripture what Matthew and Paul saw, he must take the same approach.

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<sup>98</sup> Satterthwaite; 196.

<sup>99</sup> O’Keefe; 12.

## Chapter 8 – Jesus in the Old Testament: Typology

**Key Text(s):** Genesis 45 & 50; Matthew 3:16-4:3

*“The prophetic view of history was never directed to secular events of a political nature, disconnected from the Messiah and His people.”*  
(Hans K. LaRondelle)

*“Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.”<sup>100</sup>* Thus did Jesus cause His first disciples to ‘see’ what had been transpiring before their eyes for three plus years, culminating in the death and resurrection of their Lord. Thus Jesus continues to do to all who are born again by the power of the Holy Spirit. And thus we conclude that the understanding of messianic prophecies – not the understanding that such-and-such a passage *is* messianic, but that it is fulfilled in Jesus Christ and no other – comes only by the grace of God through regeneration. Those who have had the scales removed from their eyes begin to see Jesus more and more clearly and frequently in the Law and the Prophets, the Old Testament Scriptures. Those who have been graciously given ears to hear, begin to listen with sharper focus to the voice of the ancient prophets as they proclaim Christ Jesus, to some extent, on every page. This vision and this hearing are not immediately sharp and acute, but rather develop along with the sanctification process whereby the believer is *“washed by the water of the word.”* But before too long, the redeemed saint realizes that Martin Luther was not far off the mark when he claimed to find Jesus on every page of his Bible. Iain Duguid, Professor of Old Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary, echoes Luther in our own day,



**Iain Duguid (b. 1959)**

[Jesus] is not merely present through a physical appearance here and there, or through the right interpretation of this or that Old Testament prophecy or type, but he is there on every page as the central theme and storyline of the entire book. Rightly interpreted, the whole Old Testament is about Jesus Christ.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Luke 24:45

<sup>101</sup> Duguid, Iain *Jesus in the Old Testament* Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed; 2013); 6.

The caveat Duguid offers, ‘rightly interpreted,’ is of critical importance, of course. And it must be said that the history of Old Testament prophecy is full of evidence of not being ‘rightly interpreted,’ and will undoubtedly fail at times to be so in the future. But the basic principle of the presence of Jesus Christ as the central theme of the Old Testament, no less than of the New Testament, is validated through our understanding of the relationship of Jesus Christ to God, and of the latter’s intention to exalt the glory of the divine grace through the Person of the Messiah. There really *cannot* be another theme in Scripture than that of Jesus Christ. Therefore it belongs to the duty and privilege of every believer – having received eyes to see and ears to hear through the Holy Spirit – to seek faithfully at all times to ‘rightly interpret’ the Scriptures, continually and progressive learning more and more about our Lord Jesus Christ.

But the greatest obstacle to a sound understanding of Old Testament Scripture, and messianic prophecy in particular, seems to be a ‘one size fits all’ approach, be it the *literalism* of the Dispensationalist, or the *allegorical* hermeneutic of scholars from Origen to the modern charismatic, or the rigid *particularism* of so many Calvinists who hold that only those passages specifically used in the New Testament can be rightly viewed as messianic. Each of these methodologies runs into countless errors, trying to fit every round passage through the square hole of one hermeneutic. Yet each of them has merit, and undeniable applicability to many passages and prophecies of the Old Testament. May it be that a more accurate and sound system of interpretation will employ elements of each – and perhaps others – as the passage, and the revealed light of the New Testament, dictates?

In this regard, noted Seventh Day Adventist theologian Hans K. LaRondelle outlines three basic categories of messianic interpretation from the Old Testament, in a manner that allows for the presence of Jesus Christ throughout the Old Testament witness while not force-fitting a specific interpretive meaning on each and every passage and verse.<sup>102</sup> The first category is the **direct** or **rectilinear** prophecies that, at least in the light of the fulfillment in Jesus Christ, point most clearly to some aspect of His Messianic Person and ministry. Among these would be the prophecies that place the birth of the Messiah in Bethlehem or, more broadly, as a descendant of King David. This type of prophecy is

most definitively identified through actual New Testament citations or allusions to Old Testament passages and prophecies, although we saw in the last lesson that even some of



**Hans LaRondelle (1929-2011)**

these New Testament ‘fulfillment’ verses are somewhat less than clear when one travels back to the Old Testament passage referenced. Still, there is a solid corpus of Scriptural passages and prophecies that are almost universally recognized as messianic by orthodox Christianity, many of which were also seen to be messianic by rabbinic Judaism. The particularism of many Calvinists may be the safe path in this category – seeing messianic prophecy only in those Old Testament passages specifically cited in the New Testament - but it frequently fails to see Christ in His fullness throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, and generally misses Him completely in the next two categories in LaRondelle’s outline.

The second category LaRondelle notes is that of the **typological prophecy** in which Jesus Christ is set forth in the Old Testament through symbolism and typology. The Passover Lamb is such a messianic type, but so also is the Exodus of Israel, the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies, and the Davidic king. The typological prophecy will therefore have a historical manifestation in the time, or the near term, of its original revelation and it will have a fuller sense – often referred to by theologians as the *sensus plenior* – in its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. “The one intended sense of an immediate historical application or partial realization of the promise is to serve as a historical type, or acted prophecy, which reaffirms the promise and intensifies the hope for the future fulfillment.”<sup>103</sup>

This category of messianic prophetic Scripture is by no means inferior to the more direct, linear prophecy, for all of Scripture is both inspired and Christo-centric. God sovereignly determined that the revelation of His redemptive plan would be a living revelation, mediated through the history of both people and a people. Therefore, it stands to reason that His forecast of the Promised One would be mediated in just the same

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<sup>102</sup> LaRondell, Hans K. *The Israel of God in Prophecy: Principles of Prophetic Interpretation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press; 1983); 60ff.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*; 62.

manner. “We need to realize that the messianic prophecies are not detached and scattered predictions, but all make up one continuous plan of God.”<sup>104</sup>

This is a critical reminder as we consider LaRondelle’s third category, that of the **non-predictive historical** passages of which the Bible primarily consists. Some of these are specifically attributed to Jesus Christ by the authors of the New Testament, as we saw in the case of Matthew and Paul in our last lesson. But others are not to be found in the New Testament. Does that mean that the lengthy historical narratives of the Old Testament have no Christological content? Or does it mean that the content is there and our senses are not yet trained to see it? The danger of subjective interpretation and allegorizing is, no doubt, greatest with this category of messianic Scripture. But the safest path is not to be confused with the best path, and guided by the Holy Spirit and the whole counsel of Scripture, it is not inevitable that ‘historical’ exegesis will go astray. Two particular examples may serve to illustrate both the principle itself and the Christ-glorifying exegetical results of its employment: that of the life of Joseph, and of the Exodus. Neither of these examples have the explicit imprimatur of a New Testament author, yet both so clearly typify and delineate the life of Jesus Christ that it is difficult not to see their messianic thrust.

The life of Joseph is the topic of a fairly large section of the Book of Genesis; disproportionately large when one considers that the lineage of Joseph did not encompass either the lineage of the Messiah, or either of the two anointed offices within the national life. Nonetheless, the life of Joseph is a redemptive story, as the patriarch himself attests toward the end of the narrative, “...for God sent me before you to preserve life.”<sup>105</sup> The milestones of Joseph’s life have distinct associations with the life of Jesus, and the character of Joseph in relation to his family parallels features of Jesus’ earthly life. Joseph was a favorite son, and was thus despised by his brothers; so, too, Jesus. Joseph was rejected by his brethren – and even, in a sense, forsaken by his father – because of the predicted exaltation that was to be his vis-à-vis his family. Joseph was betrayed by those who should have been his protectors, and his life’s trajectory descended into what was essentially ‘death’ – indeed, his father Jacob believed him to be dead. He was ‘*despised and*

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<sup>104</sup> *Idem.*

*rejected, a man of sorrows'* who ended up forgotten and abandoned in an Egyptian prison – as apt a metaphor for the grave as any place occupied by a yet-living man. But Joseph was not forgotten by his God, and was not only restored to 'life,' but was exalted to the right hand of Pharaoh, supreme over all the land of Egypt. In a sense, "all authority" was given unto Joseph, though not in "heaven and earth," most certainly in Egypt.

What was devised against Joseph was intended for evil, as was the betrayal and crucifixion of Jesus, but what was purposed by God was for good – preservation and deliverance. In Joseph's words to his brothers one almost hears the Lord Jesus praying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

*Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come closer to me." And they came closer. And he said, "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt.*

(Genesis 45:4-8)

*Then his brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.*

(Genesis 50:18-20)

A rigid particularistic hermeneutic must reject this pattern in the life of Joseph as having any messianic bearing, and it is true that no New Testament writer alludes to this aspect of Israelite history as forecasting the advent and life of Jesus Christ. But the parallels between the life of the patriarch and the life of Christ are, it would seem, quite striking and apparent; too striking indeed to be denied as 'messianic.' "It is only in the light of the antitype, then, that the full significance of the Old Testament type becomes clear. It may be said, therefore, that it is the antitype which determines the identity of the Old Testament type, making clear its deeper, spiritual meaning."<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Genesis 45:5

<sup>106</sup> LaRondelle; 41.

The second example of this particular category of messianic texts, the ‘non-predictive historical’ narratives, is that of Moses and of the Exodus of Israel from Egypt. The connection here is seen primarily in the Gospel of Matthew, in the apostle’s account of the life of Jesus from his earliest years to the beginning of His earthly ministry. In most of this section of Matthew’s gospel we do not find the formulaic, “*in order that Scripture be fulfilled,*” common with the direct or linear messianic prophecies (with the notable exception of the reference to Hosea 11:1 already discussed). We do, however, find parallels with the life of Moses and with the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt that are undeniable to anyone but the most hardened literalist or particularist.

Certainly it was the intention of the Holy Spirit as He inspired the gospel writer, to draw a connection between the wrath of Herod and that of Pharaoh, the result of each being a massacre of Israelite male children, along with the escape by providential revelation both of Moses and of Jesus. This escape brings Jesus into contact with Egypt, so closely associated with the youth and early manhood of Moses, and Joseph’s return to Palestine with Mary and the child Jesus is meant to be seen as a parallel to the Exodus of Israel, though proleptically. The beginning of Jesus’ ministry is noted by His baptism in the Jordan, which parallels the passing of Israel through the Red Sea. This connection may seem tenuous until one realizes the further association of the subsequent forty years of Israel’s wandering in the wilderness, and Jesus’ forty days in the wilderness, subjected to the temptation of the devil.

Ancient Israel, after its exodus from Egypt and ‘baptism’ in the Red Sea, was tested by God for *forty years* in the wilderness before it could enter the promised land. So Christ was led into the desert for *forty days* to be tempted by the devil concerning His messianic trust in God’s sovereign will, before beginning His unique commission. In His deliberate fasting for exactly forty days, Jesus reenacted the experience of Israel, but manifested ultimate obedience to God by His appeal to the revealed word of God to Israel.<sup>107</sup>

Prior to this experience, and consequent to Jesus’ baptism, the testimony of God is heard concerning His Son, “*This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased.*”<sup>108</sup> This divine approbation of Jesus parallels the divine word concerning Israel in an identification

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<sup>107</sup> LaRondelle; 64.

<sup>108</sup> Matthew 3:17

between the Messiah and the people that we have already noted, “*Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord, ‘Israel is My son, My firstborn.’ So I say to you, ‘Let My son go, that he may serve Me.’*”<sup>109</sup>

Again, recognition of the messianic element of the Old Testament narratives of the life of Joseph and of Moses and the Exodus of Israel, will be hidden to a rigid hermeneutic of literalism or of particularism. But adopting a freer, blended hermeneutic as outlined in LaRondelle’s book, opens up Old Testament passages to eyes that have been opened through regeneration, to see Jesus where He was not visible before. Thus Jesus “fulfills Old Testament texts not because these texts had him in mind, but because what happened earlier was somewhat analogous to what happened to him.”<sup>110</sup> This treatment of the Old Testament by the New Testament writers reveals an attitude that was to continue in the Church – not one of ‘proof-texting,’ but rather of developing a panoramic view of the Old Testament now open to those of whom it is said, *the Lord opened their minds to understand the Scriptures*. “Clearly, the New Testament writers did not first consult the Old Testament and then form their opinion about Jesus. On the contrary, they moved from Jesus to the Old Testament scripture.”<sup>111</sup>

The non-predictive historical and the typological passages of the Old Testament are thus seen to outline the life and ministry of the Messiah. But this pattern of Old Testament messianic foreshadowing is to be seen even more powerfully in the parallels between Jesus Christ and three particular men whose lives are presented to us in the Old Testament, men of whom Jesus was to be the recapitulation, the ‘second’ of each. These three men are Adam, Israel, and David. As we draw the biblical lines between the lives – and the representative typology of each life – of these three men and that of Jesus Christ, both the Person and the ministry of the Messiah move into clearer relief. There are, to be sure, many other characters in the Old Testament whose lives in some manner foreshadowed or paralleled that of Jesus Christ – Isaac, for instance, and Moses; Solomon, Isaiah, and Jeremiah as well. But the three men to be discussed in the remainder of this lesson are three who are *directly* linked to Jesus – who is *the Son of Man*, as well as God’s Firstborn

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<sup>109</sup> Exodus 4:22-23

<sup>110</sup> Holmgren; 41.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*; 54.

Son, and *David's Greater Son*. Together, these three strands of Old Testament typology further define the prediction of the Messiah, and establish the context into which Jesus Christ was born, lived, and ministered as Messiah. And from the words of our Lord during His earthly ministry, as well as the later testimony of His apostles, it is apparent that He *self-consciously* associated with these three men in a powerful and unique way.

### **Adam and the Son of Man:**

Few believers would list Adam among those considered as messianic types of the Old Testament, and the connection between Adam and Jesus is not fully established until the New Testament, where Jesus is referred to as the 'second' or 'last' Adam. This designation is developed by the apostle Paul, who either created out of his own imagination, or received it from direct revelation, or recognized it from his 'new' reading of the Old Testament through regenerate eyes. We reject the first option as a contemptible perspective, and acknowledge the second option as distinctly possible, but choose the third option as being most probable. That is to say, Paul developed his understanding of Jesus Christ as the Last Adam through his newfound perspective on the Old Testament, derived through regeneration and the indwelling light of the Holy Spirit. And what Paul thus saw in the Old Testament, all believers may see as well.

The first indication that the person of Adam would be 'reprised,' as it were, is found in the *protoevangelium* of Genesis 3:15, though the promised Redeemer is linked not to the first Man, but rather to the first Woman, and is called 'the Seed of Woman.' But the seed of Eve was planted by Adam, and Eve's own recognition of this can be seen in her comments after the births of Cain and of Seth, each of which passage begins with the formula, "*Now the man [Adam] had relations with his wife and she conceived...*" What is exegetically significant here is the very name 'Adam,' which is the Hebrew word for 'Man,' making the two terms – the noun and the name – essentially interchangeable. The path from Adam to Christ remains somewhat subterranean through the early books of the Old Testament, except for the obvious separation by God of a lineage – through Seth, then through Shem, then through Abraham – that preserved the promise of Genesis 3:15 through the generations of 'Adam' – Man.

Significantly it will not be until the Babylonian Exile – the removal and seclusion of Israel within the ‘world’ of Babylon – that the attention of divine revelation would return to the ‘Adam line’ through the designation *Son of Man*. The most familiar usage of this phrase, which is full of redemptive meaning with a vast scope, is found in Daniel 7,

*I kept looking in the night visions,  
And behold, with the clouds of heaven  
One like a Son of Man was coming,  
And He came up to the Ancient of Days  
And was presented before Him.  
And to Him was given dominion,  
Glory and a kingdom,  
That all the peoples, nations and men of every language  
Might serve Him.  
His dominion is an everlasting dominion  
Which will not pass away;  
And His kingdom is one  
Which will not be destroyed.*

(Daniel 7:13-14)

Daniel’s night vision remarkably has no reference to Israel, or at least no specific reference to the chosen people, but rather is universal and worldwide in scope, “*That all peoples, nations, and men of every language might serve Him.*” It has been argued by liberal theologians, though quite unconvincingly, that the Son of Man does not represent a messianic term. However, this passage alone clearly associates this person with the universal, even cosmic, authority and honor that could only belong to the Messiah. This fact maintains the connection between the Son of Man prophecies and the nation of Israel, for the Savior of the world was always to be the Messiah of Israel. Apocryphal writings such as Fourth Ezra maintain the messianic identity of the Son of Man during intertestamental Judaism,

*This is the interpretation of the vision: As for your seeing a man come up from the heart of the sea, this is he whom the Most High has been keeping for many ages, who will himself deliver his creation; and he will direct those who are left. And as for your seeing wind and fire and a storm coming out of his mouth, and as for his not holding a spear or weapon of war, yet destroying the onrushing multitude which came to conquer him, this is the interpretation: Behold, the days are coming when the Most High will deliver those who are on the earth. And bewilderment of mind shall come over those who dwell on the earth. And they shall plan to make war against one another, city against city,*

*place against place, people against people, and kingdom against kingdom. And when these things come to pass and the signs occur which I showed you before, then my Son will be revealed, whom you saw as a man coming up from the sea. And when all the nations hear his voice, every man shall leave his own land and the warfare that they have against one another; and an innumerable multitude shall be gathered together, as you saw, desiring to come and conquer him. But he shall stand on the top of Mount Zion. And Zion will come and be made manifest to all people, prepared and built, as you saw the mountain carved out without hands. And he, my Son, will reprove the assembled nations for their ungodliness (this was symbolized by the storm), and will reproach them to their face with their evil thoughts and the torments with which they are to be tortured (which were symbolized by the flames), and will destroy them without effort by the law (which was symbolized by the fire).* (4<sup>th</sup> Ezra 13:25-38)

This passage is remarkable for several reasons, not the least of which is the similarity of the language to the Book of Revelation. For our purposes, however, the noteworthy aspect of this apocryphal passage on the Son of Man is the focus on creation, as opposed to specifically Israel, though it is Mount Zion that lies at the center of the worldwide redemption. Again, this indicates an awareness in late Judaism, just prior to the advent of Christ, of the universal scope of redemption to be mediated through Israel. This reinforces the conclusion that the Son of Man designation was viewed as messianic, though as a technical prophetic term it looks beyond Israel to the world.

Another significant passage within the apocryphal literature seems to link the Son of Man to what we have seen in the Prologue of the Gospel of John with regard to the *Logos*. I Enoch, written sometime around the beginning of the third millennium BC, places the Son of Man at the dawn of Creation, and accords him great honor and worship,

And in that place I saw the fountain of righteousness  
Which was inexhaustible:  
And around it were many fountains of wisdom:  
And all the thirsty drank of them,  
And were filled with wisdom,  
And their dwellings were with the righteous and holy and elect.  
And at that hour that Son of Man was named  
In the presence of the Lord of Spirits,  
And his name before the Head of Days.

Yea, before the sun and the signs were created,  
Before the stars of the heaven were made,  
His name was named before the Lord of Spirits.

He shall be a staff to the righteous whereon to stay themselves and not fall,  
And he shall be the light of the Gentiles,  
And the hope of those who are troubled of heart.

All who dwell on earth shall fall down and worship before him,  
And will praise and bless and celebrate with song the Lord of Spirits. (I Enoch 48:1-5)

The next we hear of the Son of Man in a prophetic sense in the Scriptures is in the prophecy of Ezekiel. The term becomes the primary designation of the prophet himself, so the messianic association seems to be diminished. However, the designation of the prophet Ezekiel by this term is indicative of his role as ‘deliverer’ of Israel through the prophetic word; Ezekiel himself becomes a type of Messiah, who would faithfully witness and prophecy to the nation of Israel, though he would be most assuredly rejected by the nation.

*Then He said to me, “Son of man, stand on your feet that I may speak with you!” As He spoke to me the Spirit entered me and set me on my feet; and I heard Him speaking to me. Then He said to me, “Son of man, I am sending you to the sons of Israel, to a rebellious people who have rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day. I am sending you to them who are stubborn and obstinate children, and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD.’ As for them, whether they listen or not – for they are a rebellious house – they will know that a prophet has been among them.* (Ezekiel 2:1-5)

Only one other person in the Scriptures referred to himself as the ‘Son of Man’ as consistently as the terms is used with respect to Ezekiel, and that person is Jesus Christ. This is the only self-designation we find from the lips of Jesus during His earthly ministry; He does not call Himself ‘Messiah’ or the ‘Servant of Yahweh,’ but only and frequently ‘Son of Man.’ “The great significance of this designation is shown by the fact that according to the Gospels, it is the only title Jesus applied to himself. We have seen that he never calls himself ‘Messiah’; now we shall see that he openly and purposefully replaced that designation with ‘Son of Man.’”<sup>112</sup> Undoubtedly Jesus’ audience heard Him as if He

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<sup>112</sup> Cullman, Oscar *The Christology of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press; 1959); 137.

were Ezekiel revived, with echoes of Daniel 7 also in their ears. By Jesus' day, the concept of the Son of Man had taken on redemptive and messianic connotations initiated by the apocryphal and rabbinic writings of the intertestamental period. But this in itself was problematic, since Man – Adam – was the one who introduced sin and death into Creation. Oscar Cullmann highlights the conceptual difficulty with a redemptive Son of Man.

...even Judaism had difficulty in taking over the theologically fruitful idea of the Son of Man. On the one hand, it had to connect the idea of the divine Man...with the time of creation; the Heavenly Man is man as God willed him to be when he created man in his own image. But on the other hand, since the biblical creation account is connected with the fall of the first man, it was impossible for Judaism without complications to introduce the divine Man who is identified with the first man into its theology.<sup>113</sup>

The trail thus far is sufficient to indicate that major elements of Judaism never lost sight of the fact that the Promised One traced his lineage beyond Abraham all the way back to Adam, and that the promised redemption that was to come through Israel was to benefit the entire world. This was the eschatological meaning of the designation 'Son of Man,' and this was the mantle that Jesus took to Himself with gusto. But it remained for the Apostle Paul to tie up the loose ends, and to identify the Son of Man with the Second or Last Adam, "*So also it is written, 'The first Man, Adam, became a living soul. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.'*"<sup>114</sup> The designation 'Son of Man' emphasizes the humanity of the Promised One, while at the same time not denying his deity (as shown in the apocryphal passages quoted). This focus on Man as the eventual redeemer of mankind begins, of course, in Genesis 3:15, but the idea of the Son of Man – taken up by Jesus Christ, the Last Adam – tints the entire story of mankind, both within the Scriptures and without, with a Christological hue. That the true and final Son of Man was also God has only ever been imperfectly understood, but it is the backdrop to the apostle's paean of praise to the humility of Jesus Christ,

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*; 145.

<sup>114</sup> I Corinthians 15:45

*Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.* (Philippians 2:5-7)

### **Israel – God’s Firstborn Son**

Jesus said of Nathaniel that he was “*an Israelite indeed, in whom there was no guile.*” This is a very important statement with regard to what Israel – all Israel – was supposed to be in the plan and purpose of God’s election. Innocent, without guile, in a very real sense a sheep before its shearers – that was to be Israel’s witness to the nations of her absolute dependence on her God. By and large, the nation failed. But whereas Nathaniel was a true Israelite, the Bible presents the Messiah as true *Israel*. We have already seen God’s own testimony concerning Israel, that the nation was His “*Firstborn Son.*”<sup>115</sup> And we have seen what this meant to Matthew when he pondered the event of Joseph bringing Mary and Jesus back to Palestine from Egypt, “*Out of Egypt I called My Son.*” Neither the Old Testament history of Israel, nor Jesus’ advent and ministry to Israel, can be properly understood until we realize that in Jesus Christ the entire life and purpose of Israel was recapitulated. Jesus was Israel’s Messiah in large part because Jesus was Israel perfected. “As Messiah, Jesus was not only solidary with Israel but was the embodiment of Israel, likewise called God’s ‘firstborn Son.’”<sup>116</sup> Jesus was Messiah to Israel as Israel was to be messiah to the world.

If this be so, then a retrospective look at the Old Testament – the majority of which deals with Israel’s life and history – will increasingly unveil Jesus Christ on every page. The history of Israel flowed in ever more narrow channels (the ‘remnant’) until the identity of Israel resided fully in only One Man, Jesus. His sacrifice was the sacrifice of Israel for the world, and His resurrection was the revivification of Israel in her new and true form, the Body of Christ. Now, in Christ, Israel becomes the witness of God’s redemptive grace to the world – the Son of Man becomes the Messiah of Israel, and as Israel’s Messiah He becomes the Savior of the world.

Nowhere in the Old Testament are the lives of the nation of Israel and the Messiah of Israel so closely identified as in the Servant Songs of the prophet Isaiah. Jewish and

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<sup>115</sup> Exodus 4:22

Christian scholars have debated *ad nauseum* whether ‘Israel’ in these passages from Isaiah chapters 42 through 53 refer to the nation or to an individual. A close comparison of the passages, however, clearly shows that the *Ebed Yahweh* – the Servant of Jehovah – cannot in each and every instance be corporate, national Israel. For instance, in Isaiah 49 the Lord speaks to the life purpose of His Servant in terms of redeeming both Israel and the Gentile world, without in any way implying that the nation of Israel would or could redeem herself.

*And now says the LORD, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant,  
To bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel might be gathered to Him  
(For I am honored in the sight of the LORD, and My God is My strength),  
He says, “It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant  
To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel;  
I will also make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”*  
(Isaiah 49:5-6)

Gordon Hugenberger, former pastor of the historic Park Street Congregationalist Church in Boston, concludes that the Servant of Jehovah is presented in Isaiah’s Servant Songs as ‘everything Israel should have been.’

In summary, although surrounded by texts that refer to corporate Israel as a servant, the servant of the servant songs, who innocently and obediently suffers for the transgression of the people (53:4-12) and who brings salvation to the Gentiles and restores Jacob/Israel to Yahweh (49:5-6), is not to be equated with corporate Israel. By allowing him to share the servant designation of corporate Israel, however, and in one verse even the name ‘Israel’ (49:3), the prophet may be suggesting that this one is everything that Israel should have been, as he faithfully fulfills the role to which Israel had been called.<sup>117</sup>

Much of the content of the Servant Songs in Isaiah has been recognized within Christianity, as well as within rabbinic Judaism, as *messianic*. But the identification of the Servant with Israel, coupled with the identification of Messiah with the Servant, is farther and deeper than many biblical scholars have gone. This is somewhat remarkable, considering the question posed by the Ethiopian eunuch to Philip as the former was

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<sup>116</sup> LaRondelle; 64.

<sup>117</sup> Hugenberger, G. P. quoted in Satterthwaite, *The Lord’s Anointed*; 110-111.

confused reading Isaiah 53, one of the Servant Songs, “*Of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself, or does he speak of someone else?*”<sup>118</sup> Iain Duguid writes,

Who is this mysterious servant? Is the prophet speaking of himself or of someone else? The Ethiopian eunuch asked this very question of Philip in Acts 8, and Philip responded by telling him the good news about Jesus. Jesus is the personification of Israel, who takes on himself the suffering that Israel’s sins deserve and fulfills Israel’s neglected calling to be a light to the Gentiles, uniting in himself the two halves of the servant’s mission described by Isaiah.<sup>119</sup>

### **David – One Shepherd Over them All**

“Jesus is not only the new Adam and the new Israel, he is also the new David.”<sup>120</sup> It should be noted by way of reminder that this lesson is not just about selecting some notable characters of the Old Testament era and recognizing typological similarities between them and Jesus. Rather it is the case that these three men – Adam, Israel, and David – are *identified* with Jesus, or Jesus with them, in either the Old Testament or the New. This identification, and not just analogic parallelism, opens a wider window to our understanding of what Messiah was to be, and consequently as to what Jesus Christ was and is. Jesus identified Himself supremely as the Son of Man, a designation that had developed messianic implications by the time of Jesus’ arrival. Paul later connects the dots by calling Jesus Christ ‘the last Adam.’ Isaiah clearly announces the Servant of Yahweh as a individual both within and distinct from Israel, and Matthew later solidifies the connection between Jesus and Israel. Now we investigate the third personal identification made in Scripture between Jesus Christ and someone from the Old Testament: David.

This identification is also more than the fact that Jesus was a true human being (Adam), or that Jesus was born within the chosen, covenant people (Israel) and of the tribe of Judah (David). This lesson sets forth the equation of Jesus *as* Adam (the last), as Israel (the embodiment), and as David (the true King and Shepherd). Of this last identification the most clear and profound is from the prophet Ezekiel,

*For thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My*

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<sup>118</sup> Acts 8:34

<sup>119</sup> Duguid, *Jesus in the Old Testament*; 33-34

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*; 34.

*sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day. I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams, and in all the inhabited places of the land. I will feed them in a good pasture, and their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel. There they will lie down on good grazing ground and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest," declares the Lord GOD... "Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them; I the LORD have spoken. I will make a covenant of peace with them and eliminate harmful beasts from the land so that they may live securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. I will make them and the places around My hill a blessing. And I will cause showers to come down in their season; they will be showers of blessing.*

(Ezekiel 34:11-15; 25-26)

*My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in My ordinances and keep My statutes and observe them. They will live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it, they, and their sons and their sons' sons, forever; and David My servant will be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever. My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever.*

(Ezekiel 37:24-28)

These prophecies might be taken as allegory, and the references to David only figures of speech. Certainly no Jewish interpreter of Ezekiel considered that David the son of Jesse would rise from the dead and assume the throne, and the Apostle Peter assured his audience on the day of Pentecost, that David was dead and his grave with them to that day. The anticipation of the Messiah as the Son of David was well-established at an early date within Judaism, and Jewish eschatology for centuries contained a strong Davidic overtone. "The two principal motifs dealt with here [i.e., Ezekiel 34], the appointment of David as (under-)shepherd of Yahweh's flock, and the covenant of peace, are fundamental to the Jewish messianism that would flourish in the intertestamental period."<sup>121</sup> It was of the essence of Jewish messianic expectation that the Promised One would be as David to the people of Israel – both as king and as shepherd. Writing in comment on Ezekiel 34,

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<sup>121</sup> Block, Daniel L. quoted in Satterthwaite; 172.

Daniel Block states, “However, both his status as shepherd among sheep and the expression ‘prince over them’ suggest authority as well as identification.”<sup>122</sup>

Just as the biblical identification of Jesus with Adam and with Israel signify the perfect completion of what each of these men/concepts were meant to be, so also with David. David was the ‘*man after God’s own heart,*’ but the man and king David failed ultimately at his calling, as did Adam before him and the entire nation of Israel. Adam, Israel, and David all signified important aspects of God’s relationship to His creation, and of creation’s relationship to God, though each in turn failed to live up to its billing: Adam, created in the image of God; Israel, God’s Firstborn Son; and David, the man after God’s own heart, God’s chosen King and Shepherd. Everything Adam, Israel, and David were to be, Jesus Christ was and is. But it the biblical identification of Jesus with these three characters of the Old Testament that sheds greater light on the Old Testament itself, and opens up text after text to messianic understanding.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the donkey, the adoring crowds acclaimed Him as the ‘Son of David.’ But Jesus Himself took it further when He interrogated the scribes and Pharisees concerning the meaning of David’s Psalm 110,

*Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question: “What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?” They \*said to Him, “The son of David.” He \*said to them, “Then how does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord,’ saying,*

*‘THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD,*

*“SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND,*

*UNTIL I PUT YOUR ENEMIES BENEATH YOUR FEET”’?*

*If David then calls Him ‘Lord,’ how is He his son?” No one was able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone dare from that day on to ask Him another question.*

(Matthew 22:41-46)

The Pharisees could not answer Jesus, and Jesus did not enlighten them with His own answer. He did not ‘*open their minds to understand,*’ the connection between David and Himself. But to those who have received regenerative grace, it is given to understand that Jesus Christ is the Last Adam, the True Israel, and the Shepherd & King of God’s flock.

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<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*; 176.

## Chapter 9 – Jesus in the Old Testament: The Anointed (Two)

**Key Text(s):** Zechariah 4:1-14; 6:11-13

*“In Israel all truths tend to crystallize in personalities,  
and not in some abstract principles.”*

(Edmond Jacob)

We have been studying ‘messianic’ prophecy – or at least the hermeneutic of studying messianic prophecy – and have not yet critically defined the term, *messiah*. But ‘critically’ is meant not just the dictionary definition of the term *mashiach* in the Hebrew, but rather a biblical analysis of the term as it impinges upon the future hope of the Israelite people. It is commonplace for modern Christians to assume that the messianic witness of the Bible to Jesus Christ is clear and unambiguous, and that the Jewish expectation of a Messiah was as well. The lists and tables of ‘messianic prophecies’ often included in theologies and Christologies, along with other apologetical works, present the image of a singular individual widely anticipated within Judaism, an individual who is matched at every point by Jesus of Nazareth. “We are accustomed to think of the Jewish Messiah as if he were an unambiguous, clearly defined figure. In general it is true that the Jews expected a saviour with certain nationalistic and Jewish characteristics. But this common form could hold the most widely varying content.”<sup>123</sup>

It will come as a surprise to most modern believers to find that the term *mashichah* – messiah – is rarely used in the Old Testament, and even more seldom used as a clear reference to a future savior. Walter Kaiser, in his *“The Christian and the ‘Old’ Testament,”* notes that “The word *Messiah* appears only thirty-nine times in the Old Testament...Most of the thirty-nine times refer to the anointed persons: the Israelite kings, Saul, David, and Solomon, who are ‘the anointed’ of the Lord. In four other references, it is



**Walter Kaiser (b. 1933)**

the priest who is ‘the anointed.’”<sup>124</sup> This statistic illustrates the fact that ‘messianism,’ the expectation of an eschatological hero/savior who would be known as the ‘Messiah,’ was a

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<sup>123</sup> Cullmann; *Christology*; 111.

<sup>124</sup> Kaiser, Walter *The Christian and the ‘Old’ Testament* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library; 1998); 145.

developed doctrine within Judaism, and not the response to this or that specific passage of Old Testament Scripture. There is no doubt that ‘messianism’ did indeed arise, and powerfully so, during the generations of Israelite history and expectation. But as with so many facets of the Old Testament eschatological hope, the details of this anticipation coalesced around somewhat ambiguous texts, which often led to different interpretations and, consequently, different expectations. Thus a word search of ‘messiah’ on BibleGateway is unlikely to provide much insight into Old Testament messianic hopes and expectations. “[T]he Old Testament hardly uses the word ‘Messiah’ ...and when it does do so, the term never refers to an eschatological figure who will inaugurate the kingdom of God...It also employs a kaleidoscope of images to describe various messianic roles rather than a single monochrome picture.”<sup>125</sup>

As implied by Kaiser’s comment, the Hebrew word *mashiach* means ‘anointed (one).’ It is directly translated into the Greek by the word *christos*, from *chriō* which means ‘to anoint.’ “*Mashiach* as such in the Old Testament is a neutral term applicable to a range of individuals and contexts and is not limited to a single fixed ideology.”<sup>126</sup> The purpose of anointing in Old Testament Israel was to mark a person as set apart by God for a particular office and duty, and it almost exclusively refers to the royal and the priestly offices, the two anointed offices in Judaism. But the term is not limited to the king or to the priest; even the Persian king Cyrus is called ‘messiah’ in Isaiah 45:1.

*Thus says the LORD to Cyrus His **anointed**,  
Whom I have taken by the right hand,  
To subdue nations before him  
And to loose the loins of kings;  
To open doors before him so that gates will not be shut...* (Isaiah 45:1)

This reference shows that the Old Testament concept of ‘messiah’ was quite broad, and cannot be uncritically applied in every case – or even in any case – to the Promised One whom Israel undeniably anticipated, and whom Christians receive as Jesus Christ. The only usage that may be considered explicitly eschatological – and there is debate here as well – is Daniel 9:25-26.

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<sup>125</sup> Selman, Martin J. “Messianic Mysteries,” in *The Lord’s Anointed*; ed. Philip E. Satterthwaite; 282.

*So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined.*

Martin Selman points out that biblical scholarship with regard to the concept of the Messiah has oscillated between a ‘messianological maximum’ and a ‘messianological minimum.’ He writes,

Traditional messianic interpretation of the Old Testament by the church has usually ridden roughshod over the historical context of many passages, and assumed that each passage looks only to the time of the future. The consequence has been to produce a messianological maximum, which in its uncontrolled forms is liable to find messianic expectation almost anywhere in the Old Testament. Critical scholarship, on the other hand, has been so concerned to underline the particular contexts in which so-called messianic texts have arisen that it has produced a messianological minimum.<sup>127</sup>

Selman offers that “it is in the nature of Old Testament messianic concepts to be expressed in imprecise and mysterious terms.”<sup>128</sup> And not the least of this imprecision is the fact that there were *two* anointed offices in Judaism, while Christianity has rightly recognized only *one* Messiah. But we call Jesus the ‘Christ,’ believing Him to be Israel’s ‘Messiah,’ or Anointed One. Therefore it is incumbent upon believers to seek to understand the biblical meaning of this concept and its development in the living progression of Old Testament Scripture, rather than merely to understand its bare and literal translation. The ‘imprecise and mysterious’ language of Old Testament messianic writings is meant to show us that no one line of meaning fully comprehends who and what the Messiah would be. As with many Old Testament concepts, there are dominant and recessive threads of meaning for the concept of ‘messiah.’ But if we follow the dominant to the exclusion of the recessive, ours will be a lopsided and incomplete picture of the Promised One so long anticipated with faithful Judaism.

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<sup>126</sup> Satterthwaite; 284.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*; 285.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*; 283.

The dominant thread in the Old Testament concept of messianism is, of course, that of the royal anointing – particularly that of the Davidic line of kings, through which the Messiah was long and universally expected among the Jews. The predominance of usage of the term *mashiach* and its cognates in the Old Testament have to do with the royal dynasty of King David, and even the usage with reference to the Persian Cyrus shows that the basic understanding of ‘Messiah’ is that of a political, civil ruler. When Israel demanded a king “*like the nations around us,*” God directed the priest and judge Samuel to Saul, the son of Kish, from the tribe of Benjamin. “*Then Samuel took the flask of oil, poured it on [Saul’s] head, kissed him and said, ‘Has not the LORD anointed you as ruler over His inheritance?’*”<sup>129</sup> Later, when Saul proved himself to be other than “*a man after God’s heart,*” the kingdom was taken from him and given to David, the son of Jesse, of the tribe of Judah, to whom the office rightly belonged (*cp.* Gen. 49:10).

*So he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, with beautiful eyes and a handsome appearance. And the LORD said, “Arise, anoint him; for this is he.” Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward.* (I Samuel 16:12-13)

The identification of the Promised One, the Messiah, with King David becomes an integral part of Jewish eschatology pretty much from the announcement of the Davidic Covenant in II Samuel 7, due to the everlasting nature of the divine promise to David.

*Now therefore, thus you shall say to My servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, “I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make you a great name, like the names of the great men who are on the earth. I will also appoint a place for My people Israel and will plant them, that they may live in their own place and not be disturbed again, nor will the wicked afflict them any more as formerly, even from the day that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. The LORD also declares to you that the LORD will make a house for you. When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, but My lovingkindness shall*

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<sup>129</sup> I Samuel 10:1

*not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.*

(II Samuel 7:8-16)

Two aspects of this covenantal promise are significant to our study. The first is the promise of God to discipline and chastise the Davidic king when he goes astray. This indicates the temporal and mundane characteristic of the Davidic Covenant; that it pertains to the Davidic dynasty and to the lineage of royal princes that would come from David's loins. But the second part of the promise, that the Lord would never remove His 'lovingkindness' - His *chesed* - from the Davidic prince, nor allow the Davidic kingdom to lapse places the first characteristic in jeopardy. This is due to the historical reality, that the lineage of David *did* finally lack a man to sit upon the throne, at the time of the Babylonian Exile, and has since lacked an occupant of the Davidic throne to this day. This decline was almost immediately prefigured in the division of the Israelite nation early in the reign of David's grandson, Rehoboam. The political developments of the civil war, and the subsequent decline of fortune within the Davidic monarchy, caused the Jews to realize that the divine promise was more than political.

This was reinforced by the nature of the poetic and prophetic word concerning 'David.' For instance, it has almost been universally recognized that it is David, or at least the current occupant of the Davidic throne, to whom the Lord refers in Psalm 2, "*But as for Me, I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain.*"<sup>130</sup> The terminology used in the Old Testament concerning 'David' - and meaning by it the Davidic monarchy and the occupant of the Davidic throne - is far too exalted and everlasting to pertain merely to the king of Israel. Gerhard von Rad notes the disparity between the universal scope of Davidic authority and the reality of the actual Davidic kingdom. The Davidic prophecies, von Rad notes, "stress the fact that a petty Judean king was given in God's name a claim to world-wide dominion and a saving office which he could not possibly fulfill. After his



**Gerhard von Rad (1901-71)**

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<sup>130</sup> Psalm 2:6

death this mandate had to be handed on to his successors, along with the question, ‘Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?’”<sup>131</sup> The final defeat and dissolution of the Davidic monarchy as a sovereign political entity, cast the entire Davidic Covenant into question, and has presented Jewish and Christian theologians with seemingly insurmountable problems ever since.

It is significant, then, that in spite of the complete razing of the ‘tree of Jesse,’ the



**Horst Dietrich Preuss (1927-93)**

Jewish eschatological hope never wavered from its Davidic orientation. “The Jewish Messiah is of royal lineage, a descendant of David. For this reason he also bears the title ‘Son of David.’”<sup>132</sup> The emphasis on the Davidic component of the ‘Anointed One’ remained in spite of the absence of an actual Davidic king; in fact, it intensified. “Jewish eschatology has to do with the expectation of a new, last, conclusive, final, and ideal Davidic descendant as the one who brings about the

sovereignty of YHWH in its full realization...the picture of the messiah always sets forth an ideal Davidic descendant.”<sup>133</sup>

This steadfast adherence to a derelict monarchy is, of course, within the very nature of the meaning of ‘messiah,’ as the king was the central focus of ‘anointing’ within Israel. But what is remarkable is that the eschatological hope of Israel did not spiritualize or allegorize the Davidic promise once the actual Davidic kingdom had fallen. The expectation was, as we read in our last study from Ezekiel, *of the return of David*, not resurrected or reincarnated, but in the form of his Greater Son, the Messiah. The actual person of David was far too frail and sinful, and the dominion of the Davidic Kingdom even at its greatest extent far too small and insignificant, to bear the weight of the worldwide salvation that the Psalms and the Prophets placed on David’s shoulders. We

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<sup>131</sup> Von Rad, Gerhard *Old Testament Theology: Volume II* (New York: Harper & Row; 1965); 374-375.

<sup>132</sup> Cullman, *Christology*; 117.

<sup>133</sup> Preuss, Horst Dietrich *Old Testament Theology: Volume II* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press; 1992); 35-36.

are thus reminded that “in Israel all truths tend to crystallize in personalities and not in some abstract principles.”<sup>134</sup>

Due to the fact that the word *mashiach* means ‘anointed,’ and to the reality of the Israelite monarchy under the Davidic Covenant, all eschatological prophecies involving rule, sovereignty, and dominion were necessarily channeled into a Davidic line of thought. Thus the promised Child in Isaiah 9 could be none other than the fulfillment of the eschatological promise in David (and at the time of this particular prophecy, the Davidic monarchy was still quite hale). The echoes of the promise of God through the prophet Nathan to David are quite profound in this popular messianic prophecy given through the prophet Isaiah in the days of David’s *lesser* son, Ahaz.

*For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;  
And the government will rest on His shoulders;  
And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.  
There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace,  
On the throne of David and over his kingdom,  
To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness  
From then on and forevermore.*

*The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.*

(Isaiah 9:6-7)

This prophecy suffers the same difficulty as does the original Davidic Covenant: the fact that the monarchy of the Davidic line *did end*. Biblical prophecy does not sugar coat this reality; indeed, Isaiah himself will refer to the ‘stem’ or ‘root’ of Jesse, a graphic indication of the foreseen demise of the Davidic kingdom. It is conjecture to postulate exactly why God allowed the Davidic kingdom to fail. There is no shortage of justification from within the dynasty itself; very few of the Davidic kings were righteous men, and even fewer walked before God in the manner of their illustrious forebear. Still, the Davidic Covenant itself made provision for the iniquities of David and his seed; they would be chastised with a rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, and yet the lovingkindness of God would never be removed from David, nor His Spirit taken away from the Davidic king as it had been from King Saul.

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<sup>134</sup> Jacob, Edmond *Theology of the Old Testament* (New York: Harper & Row; 1958); 330.

Perhaps the demise of the monarchy lies rooted in the motivation for its inception, that the children of Israel wanted a king so that they might be like the nations around them. God informed Samuel that it was not Samuel, but God Himself, that the nation was rejecting as King over them. First God gave Israel a king after her own heart – a man who stood shoulders above all other men; then God gave Israel a king after His own heart, the shepherd David. Still, even though the Davidic monarchy was prophesied in a sense all the way back in Jacob’s day (*cp.* Genesis 49:10), it has always been the intention of God that He alone should rule over His people, and that they should desire no other king but Him. “Elsewhere the king was a god, but in Israel it was God who was king.”<sup>135</sup> The biblical and prophetic terminology surrounding the Davidic monarchy was like an aura of divine sovereignty, to which the actual monarchy was a pale reflection. Thus, remarkably, Solomon is said to ascend upon his coronation “*to the throne of the LORD*” in the place of his father David (I Chronicles 29:23). Such words were a reminder that the Davidic king was, at it were, a placeholder, and that the entire dynasty was living prophecy, pointing toward the One who would ultimately and completely fulfill all that the royal anointing stood for. Edmond Jacob writes,

The true king and the true throne are to be found in heaven, from where Yahweh directs world history, and if the Chronicler speaks of Solomon as ‘sitting on the throne of Yahweh’ instead of the throne of David, he is less intent on insisting on the religious role of the king’s person than on that of the Davidic dynasty from which the Messiah will come as a guarantee of the presence of God on earth.<sup>136</sup>

The faith of Israel, then, was able to work through the demise of the Davidic kingdom without getting hung up on the lack of continuity from generation to generation. The confidence of faith never doubts the promise of God, though it must search deeply to find the truth often concealed in the divine action. But Israel reasoned, “Since the Davidic dynasty is a tree that has been cut down, then the new savior king must sprout from its stump.”<sup>137</sup> In a passage universally recognized as messianic, the prophet Isaiah transmits

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<sup>135</sup> Henri Berr, quoted in Jacob, *Theology*; 238.

<sup>136</sup> Jacob; 238.

<sup>137</sup> Preuss; 36.

the assurance from the Lord, that the leveling of the tree of David would not eradicate the ‘stem’ of Jesse,

*There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse,  
And a Branch shall grow out of his roots.  
2 The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him,  
The Spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
The Spirit of counsel and might,  
The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.  
His delight is in the fear of the LORD,  
And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes,  
Nor decide by the hearing of His ears;  
But with righteousness He shall judge the poor,  
And decide with equity for the meek of the earth;  
He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth,  
And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked.  
5 Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins,  
And faithfulness the belt of His waist.*

(Isaiah 11:1-4)

The loss of the Davidic monarchy seems to have intensified the Jewish hope and expectation for that which the Davidic monarchy signified: the Coming Messiah, who was *par excellence* the Davidic King. The generations of the exile and return, who were successively under the dominion of the Babylonians, Medo-Persians, Greeks, and finally the Romans, never lost sight of the everlasting component of the divine promise in the Davidic Covenant. “The hope of the eschatological appearance of a king of Davidic descent became particularly active as Jewish nationalism developed under the rule of Greece.”<sup>138</sup> This nationalism would intensify under the Romans and ultimately lead to the First Jewish War and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. Inasmuch as it was focused on David, however, the messianism of the intertestamental period recognized the essence of ‘Messiah’ as the anointed king of Israel, the Son of David to come.

The loss of the Davidic monarchy, however, served to bring back into focus the other anointed office within Israel, that of the *High Priest*. Edmond Jacob reminds us, “The Messianic hope, however, has deep roots which go further back than the institution of kingship, though the latter gave it its dominant orientation.”<sup>139</sup> The lack of a Davidic king

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<sup>138</sup> Cullman, *Christology*; 115.

<sup>139</sup> Jacob; 327.

forced Israel to rely day-to-day ever more heavily on its priesthood, and in the days of the Maccabees the priests themselves would become national rulers, eventually kings. This was not how things were supposed to be, but the historical events leading up to the Hasmonean Dynasty of the intertestamental period also possess strong messianic overtones, due to the fact that the High Priest was also, and previously, an anointed one in Israel.

Long before Israel clamored for a king, Moses anointed his brother Aaron as the first High Priest of the Jewish nation and religion,

*Also Moses took the anointing oil, and anointed the tabernacle and all that was in it, and consecrated them. He sprinkled some of it on the altar seven times, anointed the altar and all its utensils, and the laver and its base, to consecrate them. And he poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head and anointed him, to consecrate him.* (Leviticus 8:10-12)

Since the essential meaning of the term *mashiach* is 'the anointed one,' the role of the High Priest could not but have been somewhat messianic in Israelite eschatology. The priestly aspect of the Messiah, however, fell into the shadows during the era of David and Solomon, and the subsequent emphasis on the Davidic king tended to keep Israel's focus on the political rather than the religious, aspect of the promised deliverer. This was also the tendency of the natural mind, and it comes as no surprise that even Jesus' disciples were anticipating the immediate manifestation of Davidic rule and authority, resulting in military victory over Rome, and political freedom and sovereignty for Israel. Israel, and Christianity's, misconceptions with regard to the Messiah have often had their roots in ignorance of the *other* anointed office, that of the High Priest. Still, and significantly, the priestly aspects of the Messiah did make a comeback, so to speak, during the years of exile and in the post-exilic writings, both canonical and apocryphal.

We search for a reason as to why God ordained the political collapse of the Davidic dynasty, and perhaps we find it in the priestly anointing which had taken such a back seat to the royal anointing during the generations of the kings. To be sure, there were notable High Priests in this age – though this office distinguished itself to no greater measure than did the Davidic monarchy. All in all, however, the limelight belonged to the kings and the priests lived in the shadows. Perhaps the sovereign wisdom of God intended the eclipse

of the monarchy in order to bring back into view the critical aspect of the messianic hope personified, not by the Davidic king, but by the Aaronic priest. “Because of his office, the High Priest is *the* proper mediator between God and his people.”<sup>140</sup>

One thing is for certain from the biblical record: the king was not a minister of atonement or intercession before the Lord God. While latitude was accorded to David (though he was not king yet) when he and his men ate of the showbread, judgment was swift and summary to those kings who arrogated to themselves priestly authority in the area of sacrifice. But since the nature of deliverance outlined in Scripture was far more than just political freedom from oppressive overlords – it was fundamentally reconciliation with God Himself – the royal ‘Messiah’ was an insufficient savior. We may say that the king acted on behalf of God before the people, but it is equally true and important that the priest acted on behalf of the people before God.<sup>141</sup> These two relational vectors cannot be separated in any true understanding of biblical messianism.

During the intertestamental period, and perhaps due to the lack of a Davidic ruler around whom the returned exiles could coalesce, the messianic expectation shifted to some extent – though never totally – from the ‘Messiah from Judah’ to the ‘Messiah from Aaron (Levi).’<sup>142</sup> “When the monarchy no longer existed and when prophetic inspiration was beginning to weaken, the priest eclipses king and prophet and dons to some extent their mantles.”<sup>143</sup>

Thus developed by the time of Christ a twofold consideration of Israel’s Messianic expectation – the Messiah as King (“Messiah ben Judah”) and the Messiah as Priest (“Messiah ben Levi”). Due to the political situation after the Exile, with the absence of a Davidic ruler and the constraints of pagan overlords, Israel’s messianism – especially that of the Zadokites (later ‘Sadducees’) and the Pharisees – placed the priestly Messiah as superior to the royal. “It is especially important that in this context two Messiahs are expected – the priestly and the political, the former being superior to the latter.”<sup>144</sup> At least

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<sup>140</sup> Cullmann, *Christology*; 86.

<sup>141</sup> “The priest’s mediatorial function is more exercised in the opposite direction, that going from man to God.”; Jacob; 249.

<sup>142</sup> Cullman; 116.

<sup>143</sup> Jacob; 250.

<sup>144</sup> Cullman; 116, *cp also* Jacob; 250.

a remnant of Israel learned a compelling lesson from the Exile: the nation's right standing with God was more important than its high standing among the other nations.

From this bifurcation of the messianic hope came the concept of the 'two witnesses' first found in the prophecy of Zechariah (and significantly also in the Apocalypse, though most interpreters of the latter ignore the significance of the former). Zechariah was a post-exilic prophet, sent to a people recently returned to the land though without a Davidic king to guide them and rule over them. The people of Israel were vassals to the kings of the east, and would later become subservient to Alexander, then his successors, then Pompey and the Roman Senate, and finally the Roman Empire. Sovereignty did not return to Palestine with the remnant, though a measure of independence was gained during the successful military uprising of the Maccabees. For the most part, however, the people were confused as to the structure of the new order, the previous order having been so well established between the Davidic king and the Aaronic priest. The former was now represented by a governor, Zerubbabel, and the latter by the High Priest Joshua. Both men are of great significance in the prophecy of Zechariah, but the greater importance clearly rests upon Joshua. The two together, however, are the 'two witnesses' – called 'sons of fresh oil' in Zechariah 4:14 (הַיִּצְהָרִים-בְּנֵי).

These two men – Joshua and Zerubbabel – are treated distinctly in the text, but their offices start to blend and will eventually become unified. First we read of the sanctification of the High Priest Joshua, in Zechariah 3.

Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the Angel.

*Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, "Take away the filthy garments from him." And to him He said, "See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes." And I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head, and they put the clothes on him. And the Angel of the LORD stood by.*

(Zechariah 3:3-5)

In the next vision Zechariah sees the restoration of God's favor (and His enabling Spirit) to the representative of the Davidic line, Zerubbabel, who will rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem,

*This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel:  
'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,'  
Says the LORD of hosts.  
'Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain!  
And he shall bring forth the capstone with shouts of "Grace, grace to it!"  
The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple;  
His hands shall also finish it.  
Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you.  
For who has despised the day of small things?  
For these seven rejoice to see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel.  
They are the eyes of the LORD, which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth.*

(Zechariah 4:6-10)

Thus far the 'ministry' of the two anointed ones is kept within their anticipated channels, and a dual-Messiah eschatology may continue to prosper from such prophetic visions. But woven into this prophetic narrative are two other passages that blur the lines of distinction, to the point of bringing the two messianic lines – Messiah *ben Judah* and Messiah *ben Levi* – into one. The first of these blending passages is in Chapter 3, right on the heels of the vision of Joshua's restoration.

*Hear, O Joshua, the high priest, you and your companions who sit before you,  
For they are a wondrous sign;  
For behold, I am bringing forth My Servant the BRANCH.  
For behold, the stone that I have laid before Joshua:  
Upon the stone are seven eyes. Behold, I will engrave its inscription,'  
Says the LORD of hosts, 'And I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.  
In that day,' says the LORD of hosts, 'Everyone will invite his neighbor  
Under his vine and under his fig tree.*

(Zechariah 3:8-10)

A Jew reading this prophecy might initially think that Zechariah somehow got his signals crossed, for the identity of the Branch had long been established – since the days of Isaiah – as the restored scion of the Davidic monarchy, the Branch springing from the stump or stem of Jesse.<sup>145</sup> It is true that the vision in Zechariah 3 does not explicitly identify Joshua with the Branch, but the proximity of the High Priest with the symbol that most powerfully represented the Davidic Messiah in post-exilic Israel is incredibly significant. The blending of the two messianic concepts becomes full unity, however, in

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<sup>145</sup> Cp. Isaiah 11; Jeremiah 33;14ff.

the prophetic vision of Joshua recorded in Zechariah 6, one of the most significant passages in the Old Testament with regard to messianism.

*And take silver and gold, make an ornate crown, and set it on the head of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Then say to him, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Behold, a man whose name is Branch, for He will branch out from where He is; and He will build the temple of the LORD. Yes, it is He who will build the temple of the LORD, and He who will bear the honor and sit and rule on His throne. Thus, He will be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace will be between the two offices.'* (Zechariah 6:11-13)

The responsibility for rebuilding the temple had just been assigned to the Davidic representative, Zerubbabel, in chapter 4; now it is Joshua the High Priest who will both rebuild the temple and sit on the throne. For the Israelite, and as it should be for all believers, there is *but one throne*: the throne of David. The priest had an altar, not a throne. Martin Selman writes, “despite repeated efforts by some commentators to avoid the conclusion that the passage refers to a joint kingship and priesthood, Joshua the high priest is given the royal title ‘the Branch’ and ‘will rule on his throne and will be a priest on his throne.’”<sup>146</sup> Critical scholars of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, led by Julius Wellhausen of the Documentary Hypothesis fame, explained away this passage by saying that originally the name ‘Zerubbabel’ was in the text, though this contention lacks any manuscript support whatsoever. The conclusion is simple and plain: the High Priest shall be King. Or, to phrase it as the Apostle Peter does in his first sermon, the promised Messiah shall be *both* Lord and Christ.

This confluence of the two anointed offices in Old Testament Israel is confirmed by an example from outside of Israel, the ‘priest of God Most High,’ Melchizedek. Melchizedek is famous, of course, for receiving a tithe from the patriarch Abraham, and consequently blessing the patriarch; an enigmatic narrative to be sure. The obscurity of Melchizedek’s lineage (unknown) and the established reality that he was not of the Abrahamic people would tend toward his memory fading from the messianic consciousness of the chosen people. But the opposite is actually the case. Though Melchizedek is not mentioned frequently, what is said of him in Psalm 110 is truly phenomenal within messianic theory (and it is noteworthy that Psalm 110 is the most

frequently quoted Old Testament passage within the New Testament). A Psalm of David, the poetic prophecy opens with an address to the Davidic king, speaking of the universal rule that was promised to that dynasty through the Davidic Covenant. The prophecy, however, takes a remarkable turn halfway through, introducing the very same confluence of the royal and priestly anointing that we see so clearly in Zechariah, centuries later. In David's day (as in Jesus'), the thought of a union between the Davidic and the Aaronic offices was unpalatable in the extreme. The Holy Spirit, therefore, inspires a different priestly connection: that of Melchizedek.

*The LORD said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet...The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind, 'Thou art a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.* (Psalm 110:1; 4)

These combined characteristics – each of which was represented through much of Israelite history by a distinct office, delineated rigidly by a tribe (priesthood from Levi; royalty from Judah) – were nevertheless foreshadowed in these prophecies as being combined in one Man, the Messiah of Israel who would be *both* the Davidic King and the fulfillment of the Aaronic High Priest. This the New Testament manifestly claims in Jesus Christ, who unites the lineage of David with the ministry of Aaron, and who now “*ever lives to make intercession*” for His saints, while “*seated at the right hand of majesty on high*” where He must reign “*until all His enemies are made a footstool for His feet.*” Yeshua the High Priest sits on His throne, and the counsel of peace is indeed, and gloriously, between the two anointed ones of God.

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<sup>146</sup> In Satterthwaite; 295.

## Chapter 10 – Cur Deus Homo

**Key Text(s):** Isaiah 9:6-7; I John 4:1-3

*“For all that a man can say or know  
still deeper grounds of so great a truth  
lie concealed”  
(Anselm of Canterbury)*

Judaism and Islam each deny the deity of Jesus Christ, though the latter accepts Jesus as the Messiah of Allah, while the former rejects this claim of Christianity as well. The concept of God in the flesh has been a logical and religious stumbling block for to millennia, and is no more acceptable to modern thinking than it was in the first century AD. The Incarnation of God in the man Jesus is a fundamental and non-negotiable tenet of



**G. C. Berkouwer (1903-96)**

the faith of Christianity, and perhaps the one point most vigorously denied by the other great monotheistic religions in the world. The reasons for the rejection of the principle of the eternal deity of the Christ, manifested fully in the flesh through the Incarnation of Jesus, are founded on both religious and logical considerations. For Unitarians, who are philosophically quite similar to Muslims, it is the purity of monotheism that is at

stake, “Unitarians especially have repeatedly objected to the confession of Christ’s deity with the charge that it violates the unity and simplicity of God.”<sup>147</sup> This consideration of the ‘unity and simplicity’ of God is the same that undergirds the Islamic rejection of the doctrine of the deity of Christ, whom Muhammad acknowledged not only as a Messenger, but also as Messiah. Yet in spite of the ‘honor’ accorded to Jesus in the Qur’an, his essential deity was considered heretical and anathema, as we read in *Surah 4 – Woman*,

O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: Nor say of Allah aught but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) an apostle of Allah, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a spirit proceeding from Him: so believe in Allah and His apostles. Say not "Trinity" : desist: it will be better for you: for Allah is one Allah. Glory be to Him: (far exalted is He) above having a son. To Him belong all things in the heavens and on earth. And enough is Allah as a Disposer of affairs. (Qur’an, *Surah 4:171*)

<sup>147</sup> Berkouwer, G. C. *The Person of Christ* (Grand Rapids: W<sup>m</sup> B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1954); 189.

In between the Unitarians of the modern era and Muhammad in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century AD, we find Anselm of Canterbury struggling against the same, persistent objections to the deity of Christ. “And this question, both infidels are accustomed to bring up against us, ridiculing Christian simplicity as absurd; and many believers ponder it in their hearts; for what cause or necessity, in sooth, God became man, and by his own death, as we believe and affirm, restored life to the world; when he might have done this, by means of some other being, angelic or human, or merely by his will.”<sup>148</sup>

This quote from Anselm is found in the early chapters of his monumental work, *Cur Deus Homo*, Latin for ‘For What Purpose God (Became) Man.’ Anselm opens with a monologue in which he acknowledges that he has often been asked this question, though he has, until now, been reluctant to attempt an answer,

You ask of me a thing which is above me, and therefore I tremble to take in hand subjects too lofty for me, lest, when some one may have thought or even seen that I do not satisfy him, he will rather believe that I am in error with regard to the substance of the truth, than that my intellect is not able to grasp it.<sup>149</sup>

Of course Anselm’s associate, Boso, prevails upon him to make the attempt, for which the archbishop wisely cautions, “for all that a man can say or know still deeper grounds of so great a truth lie concealed.”<sup>150</sup> We take up the same challenge in this lesson, one that has been attempted countless times before and after Anselm. In the words of Boso, “The substance of the inquiry was this, why God became man, for the purpose of saving man by his death, when he could have done it some other way.”<sup>151</sup> Our foray into the question will not attempt to be novel, or to plow new ground in a very well furrowed field. Rather it will be to review the biblical and theological data on the necessity of Christ being divine, from the twofold perspective of the *reconciliation of Man to God* and the *revelation of God to Man*. The first of these is by far the more common line of argument employed in traditional attempts to explain *Cur Deus Homo*, and will therefore be treated

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<sup>148</sup> Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo* translated by Sidney Norton Deane, (LaSalle, IL: The Open Court Publishing Company; 1958); 178.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*; 180.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*; 181.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*; 278.

first. The second, however, is perhaps more to the point of the *purpose* of God becoming Man, with the *reconciliation of Man to God* being the result, and not the only result at that.

### **The Reconciliation of Man to God:**

The basic outline of the traditional argument for the necessity of a divine Christ is summarized by Boso in *Cur Deus Homo*, “And this debt was so great that, while none but man must solve the debt, none but God was able to do it.”<sup>152</sup> Anselm approaches the issue in a very logical manner – logical, that is, when one accepts the underlying principle of a Triune God. He accepts the biblical teaching that sin and death entered the world through Man, on account of human sin (Genesis 3; Romans 5). By strict principles of justice, Anselm argues, the payment for the crime must be made by the one who committed the crime. “For, as death came upon the human race by the disobedience of man, it was fitting that by man’s obedience life should be restored.”<sup>153</sup> His continued ‘connections’ between the cause and the remedy, however, become a bit fanciful,

And, as sin, the cause of our condemnation, had its origin from a woman, so ought the author of our righteousness and salvation to be born of a woman. And so also was it proper that the devil, who, being man’s tempter, had conquered him in eating of the tree, should be vanquished by man in the suffering of the tree with man bore.<sup>154</sup>

Anselm’s subtle allegorizing notwithstanding, his line of reasoning is familiar to most evangelicals, and resonates with the average believer’s own understanding of why God became man in the matter of man’s salvation. There are, to be sure, some major holes in the traditional view that have been consistently noted and exploited by the unbeliever. For instance, there is the argument that the payment of a righteous man for a debt he did not owe cannot justly be credited against the debt of millions of other men who justly deserve condemnation. Even Boso posits this objection, showing that it was extant in Anselm’s day. In Chapter VIII, Boso challenges Anselm, “What man, if he condemned the innocent to free the guilty, would not himself be judged worthy of condemnation?”<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*; 279.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*: 183.

<sup>154</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*; 191.

Modern opponents of the traditional Christian doctrine of justification declare the imputation of Christ's righteousness to sinners to be 'legal fiction.' It is a plausible argument against the traditional, foundational view of the divinity of Christ, but it is one that is best addressed under the heading of Justification itself, in a subsequent lesson. Suffice it to say for now that the broad application of Christ's payment – His righteousness in exchange for the believer's sinfulness – fits into the current analysis as reason why the Redeemer must be God, as well as Man.

The context of Anselm's comment quoted above, is not to explain the 'Federal Headship' principle utilized by Reformed theologians to explain how one Man brought sin and death into the world, and one Man brought salvation and life. Rather, Anselm merely seeks to explain why the Redeemer of mankind had to be *a man* as opposed to another being – whether an angel, or another Man created distinctly from the lineage of Adam. While he cannot (nor can any one) establish a direct logical linkage between the righteousness of the sinless Christ and the justification of the sinner, Anselm nonetheless recognizes the fundamental truth that Man in Adam is the cause of the creation's suffering, and thus only Man in Adam can bring relief. This is no more than what the author of Hebrews says in regard to the blood of bulls and goats, which were ordained for the atonement of the sins of God's people, but were at all times provisional and temporary, being unable of themselves to cleanse the sinner's conscience. The principle of direct justice is intuitive because it is biblical, "*The man who sins, his soul shall perish.*"

This is an important principle in the Anselmic argument, for it leads to the conclusion that no man is able to affect his own salvation, and this for several reasons. *First*, even if a man were capable of ceasing from sin and living in perfect obedience to God through the balance of his life, he would not thereby erase the guilt and condemnation of the sin previously committed. "The sinner is held fast in the condition of sin by the duty to bring satisfaction. It is not enough for man to stop sinning, but over and beyond this he must offer satisfaction to God for the sin he has already committed."<sup>156</sup> *Second*, if we consider the impossible circumstance of a man who, from birth to death, never sinned at all, he would still bear the stain of the sin committed by his progenitor,

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<sup>156</sup> Pannenberg, Wolfhart *Jesus – God and Man* (London: SCM Press LTD; 1968); 42.

Adam. *Finally*, if we somehow conjure away Original Sin from our anthropology, and posit a man who lives in complete obedience to God from birth to death, we create the fiction of the perfect man, who nevertheless has only done that which was required of him as a creature of a holy God, and has no ‘extra righteousness’ to bequeath to others. “Therefore to sin is nothing else than not to render to God his due.”<sup>157</sup>

Anselm’s treatise has, at the very least, a full, biblical, and evangelical view of human sin. This is one of its strong points, to be sure. “Just so inexcusable is man, who has voluntarily brought upon himself a debt which he cannot pay, and by his own fault disabled himself, so that he can neither escape his previous obligation not to sin, nor pay the debt which he has incurred by sin.”<sup>158</sup> In Book 1, Chapter 21, Boso admits to the belief that penitence itself was sufficient to blot out sin, to which Anselm offers his classic retort to all such minimalist views of sin and atonement, “You have not yet considered the ponderous weight of sin.”<sup>159</sup> The recognition of the unbearable weight of the guilt and stain of sin, and the realization of man’s utter inability to rid himself of this burden, do not in themselves justify the doctrine of the divinity of Christ, but they certainly indicate that the hope of mankind’s redemption could never rest upon self-justification.

Given this circumstance, could not God have simply *willed* the forgiveness of Man? As the offended party, could He not have simply *forgiven* Man apart from any penalty? Anselm takes up this question by looking from what Man owed to God, to what God owes to Himself, and by so doing the archbishop sets another leg under the pedestal of the doctrine of the deity of Christ. In Chapter XII Anselm leads off the conversation with “Let us return and consider whether it were proper for God to put away sin by compassion alone, without any payment of the honor taken from him.”<sup>160</sup> Boso, of course, sees no problem inherent with the proposition, and offers the answer that God expects His people to forgive the sins of others without payment, so why would it be aberrant in the Deity to do that which He requires of us?<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> *Cur Deus Homo.*; 202.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*; 234.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*; 228. Latin, “Nondum considerasti, quanti ponderis sit peccatum.”

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*; 203.

<sup>161</sup> For much of the treatise it seems that Boso is simply Ed M<sup>c</sup>Mahon to Anselm’s Johnny Carson, but in dialogues such as this one we find serious questions and objections offered by Boso, encouraging us that Anselm did indeed take

Anselm's answer is to establish the absolute priority of justice within the nature and attributes of God, within which relative distribution of mercy and justice may be found to exist. In other words, a believer may be merciful and forgive without repayment, on the basis that ultimate payment will be extracted by God if grace is not first bestowed in salvation. However, this is not a formula of justice that can prevail at the level of the State, or at the ultimate level of the Cosmos, without all moral distinctions becoming meaningless. At the very foundation of all moral thought is the acceptance of a perfect, Holy Being from Whom *law* and *righteousness* and *judgment* properly flow. "In the order of things, there is nothing less to be endured than that the creature should take away the honor due the Creator, and not restore what he has taken away."<sup>162</sup>

Thus we move from that which Man owes to God, to that which God owes to Himself. The first is *obedience* and the second *honor*. The second will be achieved even if the first is not willingly given. "And so, though man or evil angel refuse to submit to the Divine will and appointment, yet he cannot escape it; for if he wishes to fly from a will that commands, he falls into the power of a will that punishes."<sup>163</sup> Man's condition is therefore dire indeed: he cannot pay himself what he owes to God (nor, in fact, is he willing to do so), and he cannot escape the judgment of a holy God who will exact honor either through obedience or through punishment. The only conclusion is that Man has placed himself in a condition in which he is powerless to deliver himself, yet fully and only responsible to do so. God cannot simply forgive the debt without payment without rendering His own honor of no account, and throwing the moral universe into complete and utter chaos. Yet God is the only One who can effect the reconciliation of Man to Himself. The conclusion: God must become Man in order to do just that. Boso summarizes Anselm's argument in what has become the classical Christian understanding of the necessity of God becoming Man for the salvation of men and the vindication of the honor of God.

The substance of the inquiry was this, why God became man, for the purpose of saving men by his death, when he could have done it in some other way. And you, by numerous

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seriously the intellectual difficulties inherent within the doctrine of the deity of Christ. And yes, if these notes are ever to be published, an editor will have to insert a more contemporary analog than Johnny Carson.

<sup>162</sup> *Cur Deus Homo*; 206.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*; 209.

and positive reasons, have shown that the restoring of mankind ought not to take place, and could not, without man paid the debt which he owed God for his sin. And this debt was so great that, while none but man must solve the debt, none but God was able to do it; so that he who does it must be both God and man. And hence arises a necessity that God should take man into unity with his own person; so that he who in his own nature was bound to pay the debt, but could not, might be able to do it in the person of God.<sup>164</sup>

### **The Divinity of the Messiah:**

Anselm – product that he was of the Scholastic Age of Christian theology – attempted to arrive at the answers to questions such as this one through unaided reason, though it is fairly clear from his writings that his reason was aided mightily by his understanding of Scripture. Our age is no less enamored of the alleged power of unaided human reason than was Anselm’s 1,000 years ago. But Jonathan Edwards was more correct when he advocated for ‘sanctified reason’; the vigorous utilization of the human mind guided by the revelation of God in Scripture. Therefore, if reason is able to conclude the necessity of God becoming man for the redemption of man, then this conclusion must bear up under the test of Scripture, for God does nothing “*without first revealing it to His prophets.*” But do we find Scripture confirming the divinity of the Messiah? His humanity is beyond question, to be sure; but what of His divinity? We remind ourselves that Second Temple Judaism was as staunchly monotheistic as Islam or Unitarianism; had there been no biblical preparation or support for a divine Messiah, it is inconceivable that Peter, John, Paul, or thousands of other Jews would have accepted the proposition.

It is common among modern theologians to see the divinity of the Messiah as an evolutionary development within the early Church, and not as an Old Testament prophetic word. While it is true that the majority of Old Testament prophecies that can be considered ‘messianic’ are either entirely ‘human’ in their orientation, or can reasonably be interpreted from this perspective, it is not true that the Old Testament is devoid of references to the divinity of the Promised One. Three such passages span the history of messianic thought in the Old Testament, from the Psalms of David to the magisterial prophetic writings of Isaiah, to the exilic prophecy of Jeremiah. The first is from Psalm

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<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*; 278-279.

110, the most frequently quoted Psalm in the New Testament, and one which Jesus Himself used to challenge the messianic interpretation of His contemporaries.

*The LORD said to my Lord,  
“Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”  
The LORD shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion.  
Rule in the midst of Your enemies!  
Your people shall be volunteers in the day of Your power;  
In the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning,  
You have the dew of Your youth.  
The LORD has sworn and will not relent,  
“You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”* (Psalm 110:1-4)

Jesus’ reference to this passage offers a significant commentary on its true meaning, especially as we consider references in the Old Testament to a divine Messiah. In Matthew 22 we read Jesus interrogating the Pharisees,

*While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?” They said to Him, “The Son of David.” He said to them, “How then does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord,’* (Matthew 22:41-43)

Jesus then quotes Psalm 110:1 and asks his audience, “*If David therefore calls Him ‘Lord,’ how then is He David’s Son?*” Jesus applies the traditional deference of a son to his father, and of later generations to their famous forebears; thus showing that the messianic ‘Son of David’ should owe reverence to his father David, though David *in the Spirit* puts it the other way round. The Pharisees understood the line of reasoning Jesus was employing, and “*no one was able to answer Him a word.*” Jesus was interpreting Psalm 110 not only as messianic – an interpretation with which the Pharisees would have likely agreed – but as a reference to the divinity of the Messiah, for to David ‘my Lord’ could only be Jehovah. Modern liberal theologians are less biblically attuned than the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Pharisees to whom Jesus was speaking: they knew what Jesus was driving at, that the Messiah, in some manner or sense, was *divine*.

The second reference to the divinity of the Messiah is found in another famous messianic passage – though not one that is quoted in the New Testament.

*For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given;  
And the government will be upon His shoulder.  
And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace...* (Isaiah 9:6)

Perhaps no other Old Testament passage has been featured on more Christmas cards than Isaiah 9:6. It is remarkable, given the messianic content of this verse, that it is nowhere cited by a New Testament author. Fredrick Holmgren surmises that this fact may be due to the rendering of Isaiah 9:6 in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, which was the 'Bible' of Second Temple Israel. Holmgren points out that "in the Septuagint the exceptional titles given to the child in the Hebrew are missing. In their place the Greek text gives only the following: 'His name will be called messenger of great counsel.'"<sup>165</sup> But the Hebrew text is well attested and universally accepted among both ancient and modern translators of the Old Testament, so we have no reason to doubt the authenticity of the titles granted to the Child given. Indeed, it is likely that the implications of the Hebrew text were such as motivated the Seventy translators of the Greek to substitute less offensive terms in a passage that was so clearly messianic. The proposition of a divine Messiah was never an easy one to comprehend or accept.

And these titles are most certainly divine. There is debate as to whether one of the titles should be 'Wonderful Counselor,' or actually two titles, 'Wonderful,' and 'Counselor.' The general usage of the first word would argue for the singularity of the term as a title of God. When the Angel of the LORD appeared to Manoah, the father of Samson, Manoah asked the angel's name. The angel's response was telling, "*Why do you ask My Name, seeing that it is Wonderful?*"<sup>166</sup> The same word is used as in Isaiah 9:6. The other terms are even more unmistakable in their divine reference: *Everlasting Father, Mighty God*. The believer is correct in assigning to Isaiah 9:6 a place of priority among the Old Testament witness to the divinity of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Finally for our sampling of Old Testament *divine* messianic passages we turn to the prophet Jeremiah, whose ministry spanned the years prior to and during the Babylonian Exile. Thus these three prophetic words cover the entire era of messianic revelation: from

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<sup>165</sup> Holmgren; 53.

<sup>166</sup> Judges 13:18

the monarchy of David to the divided monarchy to the Exile, showing that the concept of a divine Messiah was not a ‘development’ within Christianity, nor within Judaism, but was present throughout. In Jeremiah 23 we read of the Branch first introduced in Isaiah, but with even clearer divine attributes,

*“Behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD,  
“That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness;  
A King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.  
In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely;  
Now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.*  
(Jeremiah 23:5-6)

There can be no serious denying of the reference to the Branch as being messianic; that has long been established as a pervasive messianic theme among Old Testament prophets. What is remarkable here is the ‘name’ given to the Branch: *The LORD our Righteousness*. Among modern ‘Names of God’ studies, this is the reference to *Jehovah Tzidkenu* (יְהוָה צְדִיקֵנוּ) and in the Hebrew text the word for LORD is the tetragrammaton – the YHWH name that was too holy to the Jews even to pronounce. To deny the divinity of the Messiah from the evidence of this passage is simply a stubborn refusal to accept the proposition *a priori*, and is not a valid exegesis of the text.

When we turn to the New Testament, which we will do in the next lesson, we do not find the divine Messiah conjured from nothing. Rather we see the authors of the New Testament, as ‘*in the Spirit*’ as David was, recognizing both the necessity of a divine Savior and the prophetic promise of a divine Savior from the Old Testament. In the midst of a staunchly monotheistic people, Jesus will be worshiped as God and will accept this worship as right and proper. As C. S. Lewis famously surmised, either Jesus was who He said He was, or He was an imposter who ought not be followed, or a lunatic who ought not be believed. On the basis of the Old Testament prophetic word, and the ‘logic’ of Man’s need, it is quite rational to conclude that Jesus was indeed who He claimed to be.<sup>167</sup>

Thus far we have followed the line of thought most common within Christianity for two millennia – that the necessary divinity and humanity of the Messiah was bound up in

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<sup>167</sup> We must allow that many modern theologians deny that Jesus ever ‘claimed’ to be divine, but must postpone addressing this proposition until our analysis of the New Testament itself.

the condition of Man and the desire of God to reconcile Man to Himself. In other words, this aspect of Christology has traditionally been oriented toward Soteriology, the doctrine of Salvation. Karl Barth introduced a different way of looking at the same problem, the divinity and the humanity of the Messiah, that takes us back from Soteriology to Theology, the study of God. This perspective in no way minimizes the truth of what has already been said. Man owes complete and perfect obedience and honor to God, but has rendered himself incapable and unwilling of fulfilling his just duty toward his Maker. God must preserve the holiness of His nature through strict and proper execution of justice, and cannot allow an affront to His dignity to go unpunished without unraveling the entire moral fabric of the cosmos. The solution, both logically and biblically, is the God-Man as the Promised Messiah. This is all entirely true and right, but it is also ‘reactive’ in the sense that the divinity of the Messiah responds to human sin. Barth offers a valid and helpful reminder that this is not all about Man; it is all about God.

#### **The Revelation of God to Man:**

The purpose for which God became Man is not primarily, but only consequentially, to redeem Man from sin. The ultimate purpose for which God does anything is to glorify Himself in the presence of His Creation. This is, at least, the traditional Reformed perspective on ultimate questions. Being the most sublime Being, the most wonderful and worthy of honor and glory, it is just and right – and not ‘egocentric’ – that God should desire His glory to be witnessed and shared. It is the good of all Creation, once God has ‘decided’ to create, that He should be glorified in it, and it is the good of all rational creatures that they should partake in the glory of God. As Scripture refers to Creation as a ‘good’ work, the student of Scripture ought always to remember Jesus’ comment, *“No one is good but God alone,”* and to know that God will be both the center and the circumference of all that is good. Therefore His becoming Man was not primarily to redeem Man from sin,



**Wolfhart Pannenberg (1928-2014)**

but rather to further manifest His glory. Wolfhart Pannenberg, in his best known work *Jesus – God and Man*, points us to this facet of divine self-disclosure; that God's becoming Man was as much or more about revealing Himself to Man as it was reconciling Man to Himself. Pannenberg writes,

God is as much the subject, the author of his self-revelation, as he is the content. Thus to speak of a self-revelation of God in the Christ event means that the Christ event, that Jesus, belongs to the essence of God himself. If this were not so, then the human event of Jesus' life would veil the God who is active therein and thus exclude his full revelation.<sup>168</sup>

This statement is perhaps a bit confusing at first, but upon reflection proves quite profound. God indicated His intention to reveal Himself through Creation in a special way by the formation of a creature 'in His image.' One does not make an image of oneself except by way of self-disclosure and revelation and, to a great extent, glory. Man, therefore, as the *imago Dei*, was the supreme instrument by which God would reveal Himself and, we discover as we progress through the Scripture, to do so *by becoming Man*. That God becoming Man was not totally oriented toward the redemption of Man from sin is indicated in the passage from the Psalms, later quoted by the author of Hebrews,

*Sacrifice and offering You did not desire,  
But a body You have prepared for Me.  
In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure.  
Then I said, 'Behold, I have come – In the volume of the book it is written of Me –  
To do Your will, O God.* (Hebrews 10:5-7)

The 'scroll of the book' is a prophetic reference to the counsel of God in eternity, and not to any book written during the course of created time. The 'Me' who is reference in that scroll is both Man as created, and Jesus as the perfect Man. It is the Reformed understanding of the sovereignty of God that He ordained the Fall of Man without being the author of Man's sin, so in this sense the coming of God as Man will forever be tied to the redemption and reconciliation of Man to God. But the 'scroll' was written before Adam sinned, and the intent of God that Man should do His will – and by so doing glorify Him before the rest of Creation – predates the Fall of Man in sin. This is to say that the

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<sup>168</sup> Pannenberg; 129.

coming of God as Man predates the Fall of Man in sin. Sin having come into creation through the rebellion of Man, the plan and purpose of God in creating Man was by no means thwarted. “By freely creating man, God as it were bound himself to complete the good which he had begun.”<sup>169</sup> Anselm goes on to conclude that God magnified His glory by redeeming Man through the divine Messiah, by virtue of the fact that redeeming Man was far more wonderful than creating Man. “Therefore God’s restoring man is more wonderful than his creating man, inasmuch as it is done for the sinner contrary to his deserts; while the act of creation was not for the sinner, and was not contrary to man’s deserts.”<sup>170</sup>

But more to the point that Pannenberg makes earlier is the reasoning that God’s self-disclosure was always intended to be perfect and complete. Man in Adam was (is, and forever will be) a creature and as such cannot be more than a facsimile of the divine; an imperfect replica at best. So long as God remained apart from Man – meaning distinct as Being – the divine self-revelation would remain incomplete. Man and Creation would continue to ‘grope for Him in the darkness,’ though in Man the divine Being would never be far away. The situation would prevail that has for millennia within humanity, “The idea of God has the character of a question, which man, certainly, cannot escape.”<sup>171</sup> The final step in the full self-disclosure of God, therefore, was the taking to Himself the nature of Man, while at no time relieving Himself of the nature of God. The argument Pannenberg then makes is that if this self-revelation – the ‘Emmanuel’ promise fulfilled – were not in the form of a Man who was truly and fully God, then the event itself would serve to obscure the divine nature rather than to further its revelation; it would *veil* and not *reveal*. “According to this, God himself is fully and completely present in Jesus; Jesus Christ is not a mere man, but a divine person.”<sup>172</sup> Pannenberg calls this the ‘revelatory unity of Jesus with God,’ and offers it as a powerful confirmation of the true divinity of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.<sup>173</sup> Confirming this concept of Jesus as the supreme and final self-revelation of God are the opening words of the Epistle to the Hebrews,

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<sup>169</sup> *Cur Deus Homo*; 244.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*; 266.

<sup>171</sup> Pannenberg; 131.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*; 121.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*; 132.

*God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power...* (Hebrews 1:1-3a)

### The Logic of it All:



**John Hick (1922-2012)**

The belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ took a massive blow in Western thinking during the Enlightenment of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Even within professing Christendom this fundamental tenet of the faith was roundly denied as being logically irrational. John Hick, one of the most influential philosophers of religion of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, maintained that the statement ‘Jesus is God’ is as devoid of meaning as ‘the circle is a square.’<sup>174</sup> Hick, along with Enlightenment-influenced Christians, agnostics, and atheists, firmly believe that the essential nature of a ‘god’ and the essential nature of a ‘man’ are incompatible identity statements; they cannot be joined together in one being. One is *either* god or one is *man*, but it is absurd to posit that one and the same being can be both in substance God and Man. But the argument against the coextensivity of essences is itself not a logical conclusion; it is a presupposition. In other words, we cannot logically prove that two mutually exclusive substances cannot coexist in one being. We can posit that the essence of ‘god’ is separate in all consideration from the essence of ‘man,’ but it does not logically follow that these two essences cannot co-exist in one being. Herbert McCabe, a contemporary with Hick, notes that “A human person just is a person with a human nature, and it makes absolutely no difference in the logic of this whether the same person does or does not exist from eternity as divine.”<sup>175</sup>

As we move toward the stage in redemptive history when God did indeed take on the essence of humanity, becoming Emmanuel, God with us, the logic of it all will become more important to consider from an apologetical point of view. The Apostle Paul speaks of Jesus as “*emptying Himself*” though He existed from eternity in the “*form of God.*”

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<sup>174</sup> Morris, Thomas V. *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock; 2001); 21.

<sup>175</sup> Morris; 65.

*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.* (Philippians 2:5-7)

This passage has given rise to the ‘kenosis’ theory of the incarnation, from the Greek word which means ‘to empty.’ Incorrectly understood, this word has been taken to mean that Jesus Christ, while becoming fully God, also laid aside attributes of His deity and was therefore no longer fully God. We will have occasion to investigate this theory in a later chapter, but the reasoning behind it is grounded in the same sense of ‘logical inconsistency’ that John Hick maintains against the claim that ‘Jesus is God.’ What Christianity maintains, however, is both more subtle and more accurate: not an identity of the two essences, but the reality that Jesus is both fully Man and fully God, two natures in one person. The logic of it all has challenged men since the first advent of Christ, and will continue to do so until the second. A thousand years ago Anselm had his try at making sense of it, “In the incarnation of God there is no lowering of the Deity; but the nature of man we believe to be exalted.”<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> *Cur Deus Homo*; 191.

## Chapter 11 – The Word Became Flesh

**Key Text(s):** John 1:14; I Timothy 3:16

*“It is not possible that He should save humanity,  
and yet say with David,  
‘I was conceived in sin.’”  
(J. J. van Oosterzee)*

In the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century evangelicals from across several denominations joined forces in an attempt to stem the tide of liberalism that was sweeping



**Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918)**

Western Christianity. C. I. Scofield, J. Gresham Machen, James Orr and many others contributed articles to a compilation of works that would bear the name *The Fundamentals*, and would give rise to the Christian phenomenon of ‘fundamentalism.’ Liberal Higher Criticism had arrived in the United States in the latter decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, imported primarily from Germany, where conservatives like Franz Delitzsch had been fighting a rear-guard action against the slow corrosion of orthodoxy since the middle of the century. Julius Wellhausen led the attack upon orthodoxy with his ‘Documentary Hypothesis’ which divided up the Pentateuch into four or five different author/redactors, none of which was, of course, Moses. This was followed by a further division of the books of the Bible as they had been passed through the generations, as ‘enlightened’ higher critics determined that Isaiah *might* have been the author of the early chapters of the prophecy that bears his name – ‘First Isaiah’ – but that the latter chapters were to be attributed to ‘Deutero Isaiah’ and ‘Trito Isaiah.’ Paul was determined *not* to have been the author of numerous epistles that bear his name, and the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke became products of the later Church, deriving from an unknown ancestral history known as ‘Q.’

This was an unprecedented attack upon the Scripture from within professing Christendom, and the disintegration of biblical integrity was followed logically and

inevitably by the disintegration of biblical orthodoxy. One of the chief targets of this fuselage of unbelief was the doctrine of the Virgin Birth of Christ, deemed by the scholarly communities of such august German universities as Tübingen as beyond the rational acceptance of modern man. Among the German theologians prosecuting the attack on traditional Christian orthodoxy, perhaps none was more effective than Adolf von Harnack, a highly respected Lutheran theologian whose magnum opus, *History of Dogma*, 'demythologized' the New Testament, essentially removing the supernatural and miraculous from the Scriptures. Von Harnack led the charge against such age-old Christian doctrines as the Incarnation, the Deity of Jesus Christ, and, of course, the Virgin Birth. He found a ready audience in Germany, and as well in Great Britain, where the children of the Enlightenment were gaining the ascendancy over staid, antique orthodoxy in both the Lutheran and Anglican communions. But there were stalwart defenders of the biblical faith in both countries, and in the United States, who tried manfully, but with limited success, to stem the tide of liberalism in the Church.



von Harnack (1851-1930)

Among such conservatives was Henry Parry Liddon, an influential Anglican minister who devoted his Bampton Lectures of 1866 to the topic *The Divinity of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, and James Orr of the Free Church of Scotland, whose *The Christian View of God and Man* and *The Virgin Birth of Christ* were beginning salvos in the evangelical response to the liberal invasion of the Church. These works have become classics of modern conservative Christology and are still consulted in defense of the biblical doctrine of the Incarnation and its concomitant, the Virgin Birth. The battle has long since died away, and sadly the vast majority of modern Christian scholarship has accepted the anemic and unbelieving Christology of von Harnack in much the same manner as modern science has imbibed the groundless evolution of Darwin (indeed, the two philosophies have blended at many points in liberal theology, though, of course, evolutionary Biology has no room nor need for Christian theology of any stamp).

One of the primary lines of attack used by the liberals against the doctrine of the Virgin Birth is that it is an irrational paradox: that God could become Man, thus blending

two ‘mutually exclusive’ natures into one Person. The argument has a certain *prima facie* plausibility, especially to the unregenerate modern mind. God is God, and Man is Man, and their individual natures are not compatible in one being – or so the argument goes. This plausibility is, in fact, admitted in Scripture – or at least it is not denied. Rather, however, than calling the Incarnation an irrational paradox, the biblical writers use the term *mysterion* – ‘mystery.’ Apparently one of the earliest hymns of the Christian community celebrated the mystery of the Incarnation, along with the whole of Christ’s humiliation and glorification. Paul quotes what appears to be a portion of a hymn well known to the congregations of Jesus Christ in his day.

*By common confession, great is **the mystery of godliness:***

*He who was revealed in the flesh,*

*Was vindicated in the Spirit,*

*Seen by angels,*

*Proclaimed among the nations,*

*Believed on in the world,*

*Taken up in glory.*

(I Timothy 3:16)

“The mystery of godliness,” Paul writes, is manifested in the Incarnation, “*He who was revealed in the flesh.*” Thus the orthodox Christian tradition has at all times admitted the Incarnation to be a ‘mystery,’ but never an irrationality. The being of God merging in some way with the being of Man is not readily to be explained. D. M. Baillie quotes a former Archbishop of Canterbury as saying that “If any man says that he understands the relation of Deity to humanity in Christ, he only makes it clear that he does not understand at all what is meant by an Incarnation.”<sup>177</sup> Baillie quickly adds that this is not to say that we can know *nothing* about the Incarnation, it is merely to acknowledge, as Christian theologians have done for millennia, that the doctrine is ‘past finding out.’ Baillie describes the doctrine of the Incarnation as an ‘antinomy,’ and offers this excellent definition of the term,

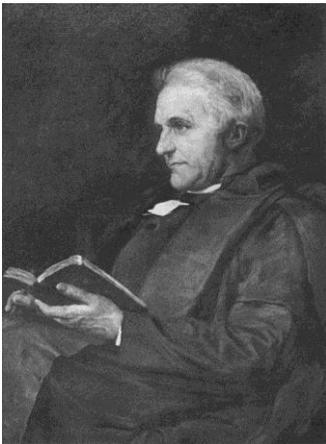
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<sup>177</sup> Baillie, D. M. *God was in Christ* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons; 1948); 106.

An antinomy simultaneously admits the truth of two contradictory, logically incompatible, but ontologically equally necessary assertions. An antinomy testifies to the existence of a mystery beyond which the human reason cannot penetrate.<sup>178</sup>

It has been, hopefully, adequately established that the Messiah was of necessity both God and Man. Thus, if the union of the divine and the human in one being is to be admitted as a ‘paradox,’ it is a necessary one, hence an ‘antinomy.’ But the doctrine of the Incarnation is by no means alone as an antinomy within Christian dogma. Baillie points out two other fundamental tenets of the Christian faith that are ‘antinomies’: *Creation* and *Providence*.

The first of these, *Creation*, also came under severe attack in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, first from the Darwinian Evolution camp, and later from within professing Christianity by theologians who had incorporated evolution into their own theology. But *Creation* and *Incarnation* are of the same cloth, and acceptance or denial of one will be on the same basis as acceptance or denial of the other. Baillie writes, “There is something quite distinctive about the Christian idea of *creation ex nihilo*. It is not found anywhere else. It is peculiar to



H. P. Liddon (1829-90)

the religion of the Incarnation.”<sup>179</sup> What Baillie admits here is that the rational basis for the Incarnation is of the same sort as that of *Creation*. This is because *Creation* posits the formation *from nothing* of something *by God* that *is not God*. Time and Space are maintained to have been created from nothing; *ex nihilo*, though the creationist theology admits that ‘before’ *Creation* there existed nothing but God. Thus *Creation* teaches that the God who is ‘all in all,’ and apart from whom there is nothing, created something that was both apart from Him, and

not Him. “Doubtless when we say that God creates, we imply that He gives an existence to something other than Himself.”<sup>180</sup> This is an antinomy, for the existence of God is self-evident (indeed, Paul maintains its self-evidence *from Creation* in Romans Chapter 1), and

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<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*; 108-109.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*; 110.

<sup>180</sup> Liddon, H. P. *The Divinity of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (London; Rivingtons; 1869)265.

the existence of the created universe is as well. Two undeniable assertions that appear to be in logical contradiction, yet neither of which can rationally be denied.

The second antinomy listed by Baillie is that of *Providence*. He writes, “The whole texture of our life in this world is a network of causes and effects on the empirical level, and everything that comes to us comes through the continuum of history, with all its determinants, of natural law and human action around us.”<sup>181</sup> Yet Providence is the dogma that states, as in the Westminster Confession of Faith, that “*God sovereignly ordains whatsoever comes to pass.*” The particular section of the Confession that elucidates the Reformed Doctrine of Providence reads thus,

God the great Creator of all things does uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, according to His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will, to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.<sup>182</sup>

The Confession immediately confirms the reality and efficacy of ‘second causes,’ meaning the actions and decisions of men, as being fully preserved within the Doctrine of Providence. This is an antinomy. It is the undeniable testimony of all human experience that empirical causes produce recordable and reproducible effects, and that the creature known as Man possesses both the awareness and the reality of a ‘will.’ But it is also the undeniable testimony of Scripture, and of the very nature of ‘god,’ that the Divine Being must be fully knowledgeable and sovereign over all events that occur within His created order. Two seemingly contradictory postulates that necessarily exist side-by-side; the very definition of an antinomy.

All this is to say that denial of the Incarnation is of the same rational cloth as denial of Creation and of Providence. It should come as no surprise that those who have denied the Incarnation have either at the same, or eventually through their disciples, denied both of these other critical antinomies of the faith. Bavinck writes, “Those who consider the incarnation impossible must, in further reflection, also at some point deny creation.”<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*; 111.

<sup>182</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*; V.1.

<sup>183</sup> Bavinck; *op cit.*; 277.

The Incarnation by its very definition presents us with an intellectual challenge, though not with a rational impossibility. The logic of the Incarnation is not irrational, if considered properly, which is what Catholic theologian Thomas V. Moore attempts to do in his book, *The Logic of God Incarnate*. In this work Moore points out that all logic flows from presuppositions or premises, which may or may not be valid. An invalid presupposition or set of premises *may* yet lead to a ‘logical’ conclusion, but that conclusion will be false. More often, however, faulty premises lead to false conclusions, and that is the case in the argument against the ‘rationality’ of the Incarnation.

The basic logical premise for the opponent of the Incarnation is that two species cannot cross identities; they cannot become the other. Therefore God, as God, cannot become Man, and vice versa. But the fallacy of this premise is that it is applied equally to the divine Creator as it is applied to the creation, which is not a valid inference. The impossibility of a divine Being taking on the form of another being cannot be established either rationally or empirically: the very existence of another being other than the One Self-existent Being is itself *a priori* evidence that such an event can occur. And Scripture seems to be very careful – perhaps anticipating the strain of unbelief manifested so late as the 19<sup>th</sup> Century – in speaking of God *taking on* the form of man, or becoming *flesh* as opposed, say, to becoming *Man*.

*And the Word **became flesh**, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.* (John 1:14)

*...who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, **taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.** Being found **in appearance as a man**, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.* (Philippians 2:6-8)

And we have already quoted the Christological hymn from I Timothy 3:16, “*He who was **revealed in the flesh...***” Indeed, if the early witnesses and Apostles had not been so careful in the phrasing of the Incarnation, the heresy of Docetism would never have gained a following. Docetism, from the Greek word that means ‘to seem,’ taught that the humanity of Christ was only apparent; that God did not *actually* become a Man in the orthodox sense of the Incarnation. But a thorough discussion and refutation of this error

will have to wait the discussion on the unity of the natures in the Person of Christ. Suffice it for now to say that the biblical record was careful to keep clear of any diminution of the divine nature in the assumption of the human. Again quoting Herbert McCabe (*cp.* above page 144), “A human person just is a person with a human nature, and it makes absolutely no difference in the logic of this whether the same person does or does not exist from eternity as divine.”<sup>184</sup>

The preliminary conclusion, then, of any discussion on the rationality or the logic of an Incarnation, is to realize that the denial of an Incarnation is tantamount to a denial of Creation and of Providence. In other words, of the entire system of biblical Theism. Those principles that govern within the realm of Creation cannot be held to govern Deity. This is not a cop-out, as if saying, ‘Well, He is God...He can do anything He wants to do.’ It rather the rational conclusion that antinomies exist, and should be expected to exist, if there exists an Infinite Mind who has Created and who Governs the universe. It has been the pattern of Man since the Fall to arrive at the position that whatever cannot be fully explained through the use of human reason, cannot therefore exist. This may be what Man believes, but that does not make it rational.

It is remarkable that the denial of the Incarnation can be found within the professing Church. But even more so is the phenomenon whereby theologians *accept* the Incarnation, but *deny* the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ. Von Harnack was a leader in this arena, and maintained that the silence of two of the Gospels (Mark and John), and of the writings of Paul and Peter and James with regard to the Virgin Birth of Jesus, forms ‘evidence’ that the birth narratives in Matthew and Luke were later additions into the earlier gospels, made by the Church. Harnack’s view was that the Virgin Birth was evidently not an important dogma for the Apostle Paul, and therefore need not be a settled point of orthodoxy in the Christian Church. Again, the argument from unbelief carries with it a sense of plausibility; why, indeed, is Paul silent on the birth of Jesus? And James, the Lord’s brother, should we not expect to hear from him something of his older brother’s advent into the world? The vicious rumors of the Jews concerning Jesus’ earthly genesis

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<sup>184</sup> Morris, *Logic*; 21.

would seem to call forth a more concerted defense of the doctrine of the Virgin Birth than the two narratives in Matthew and Luke.

But an argument from silence is no conclusive argument. To say what someone *should* have written is hardly the same as saying that someone wrote something specific either in defense or refutation of a doctrine. There are really two issues at stake here in terms of biblical orthodoxy: the **first** is the question of the divine and human Messiah. Once that is established, which we attempted in summary form in the previous lesson, then the *form* of God's advent into humanity is open for discussion. The **second** issue is the essential or non-essential nature of the doctrine of the Virgin Birth. There are ancillary issues to this one; for instance, what was the mechanism by which Jesus was preserved from the inherited sin of Adam? Was it a miraculous sanctifying conception wrought by the Holy Spirit in Mary's womb? Was it Mary's own 'immaculate conception' in the womb of *her* mother? But it is sufficient to say, in accordance with Christian orthodoxy throughout the ages, that the reality of a divine/human Messiah necessitates a miraculous advent into the human race. Given that, the validity of a virgin birth may be established biblically, even from passages that do not directly and explicitly speak of it.

*"And the Word became flesh..."*

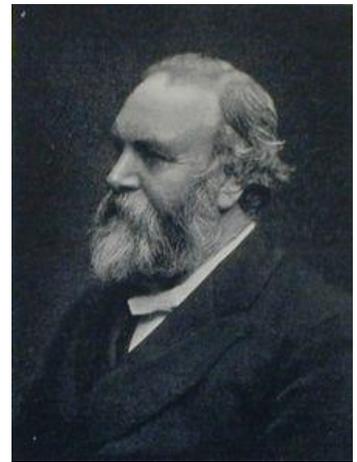
We return to the Prologue of the Gospel of John. John has powerfully established the preexistent divinity of the *Logos* through the first thirteen verses of the opening chapter, and now transitions to the Incarnation, the Advent of the Messiah, the Son of God, into the world as the Son of Man. This is incarnational theology plain and simple, and thus requires, if it be real, a *mode of entry* of the eternal *Logos* into the world of Man. *The Logos became flesh and tabernacled among us..."* The eternal infinite glory of the One True God is by no means diminished by this event; to this fact John is clear,

*And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.* (John 1;14)

H. P. Liddon, in his 1866 Bampton Lectures *The Divinity of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, reiterates the eternality of the *Logos* in the Prologue of John, and offers an excellent summary to our earlier study of this topic.

And indeed St. John's doctrine of the Logos has from the first been scrutinized by the mind of Christendom. It could not but be felt that the term Logos denotes at the very least something infinitely and everlastingly present with God, something as internal to the Being of God as thought is to the soul of man. In truth the Divine Logos is God reflected in His own eternal Thought; in the Logos, God is His own Object. This Infinite Thought, the reflection and counterpart of God, subsisting in God as a Being or Hypostasis, and having a tendency to self-communication, - such is the Logos. The Logos is the Thought of God, not intermittent and precarious like human thought, but subsisting with the intensity of a personal form.<sup>185</sup>

Thus to say that the *Logos* became flesh is to say that God became Man, which is, of course, the essential speech of the Incarnation: Emmanuel, God with us. If we accept the biblical prophecy and fulfillment of Emmanuel, then we have already posited a miracle more noteworthy than any that Jesus did while He ministered during His earthly life. The 19<sup>th</sup> Century Scottish theologian James Orr contributed to The Fundamentals with an article on the Virgin Birth, in which he writes, "...if Christ...was the very Word of God incarnate, there must have been a miracle - the most stupendous miracle in the universe - in His origin. The Infinite entering Time; the Preexistent One *becoming* Man, the Omnipotent and Immutable God taking the form of a weak, limited, and changeable human - these are the thoughts of Incarnation, and necessitate the miraculous if they are to occur. "To me the stupendous miracle is always the Incarnation itself, and any lesser miracle which is involved in that loses its power to offend."<sup>186</sup> The *form* of the miracle is of small concern really, though the form actually taken has critical importance as to the *function* of the Incarnation, a point to be discussed later.



**James Orr (1844-1913)**

What of the form, then? As related by Matthew and Luke in their respective gospel narratives, it is the 'Virgin Birth,' long a central tenet of orthodox Christianity.

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<sup>185</sup> Liddon; 228.

<sup>186</sup> Orr, James *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons; 1907); 221.

*Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming in, he said to her, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God."*

(Luke 1:26-35)

*Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US."*

(Matthew 1:18-23)

It is to be admitted that the advent of Deity into the world in the true form of Humanity constitutes a miracle. The actual miracle presented to us in the biblical record is that of the Virgin Birth. Those who attempt to deny the Virgin Birth, yet retain the Incarnation, are forced to come up with another 'method' by which God entered the world of and as Man. Wolfhart Pannenberg admits as much in his own denial of the historical reality of the Virgin Birth, when he writes, with an imperiousness that can only come from academic prejudice,

Theology cannot maintain the idea of Jesus' virgin birth as a miraculous fact to be postulated at the origin of his early life...Certainly, the concept has in the creed as well as in the Christological conflicts of the patristic church two functions that dogmatically cannot be given up but that can be handled more adequately in another way.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Pannenberg; 149.

The ‘two functions that dogmatically cannot be given up’ that Pannenberg refers to are (1) the adoptionistic Christological view in which God ‘adopts’ the man Jesus of Nazareth to be His particular instrument of revelation, and (2) the docetic view in which Jesus Christ ‘seems’ to be divine, but is actually not. Pannenberg recognizes that these two early heresies were necessarily and successfully combated in the patristic era by the ‘doctrine’ of the Virgin Birth. But Pannenberg, wishing to hold on to the orthodoxy of the Incarnation but abandon the ‘irrational’ doctrine of the Virgin Birth, speaks of handling these errors ‘more adequately in another way.’ This is incredible arrogance, but not uncommon among German theologians in the post-Harnack era. Rationalism cannot accept the Virgin Birth, and attempts to find a ‘more adequate’ way by which the Infinite God enters the world as truly Man. But what is this other than to posit a different miracle for the one presented to us in Scripture?

There are two essential qualities of the Messiah that must be accounted for in the manner of His advent into the world as a man. The first we have already discussed at length, and that is His essential divinity. “Christ’s birth, we are to remember, is not the origin of His Personality, but only its entrance into the conditions of human life.”<sup>188</sup> Of this preexistence the *Logos* Christology of John speaks powerfully in the Prologue of his gospel. “By the word *Logos*, then, St. John carries back his history of our Lord to a point at which it has not yet entered into the sphere of sense and time.”<sup>189</sup> The entrance, therefore, of deity into humanity necessitates a miracle; this has been established. The form of the miracle that actually occurred, however, was perhaps even more necessitated by the second essential characteristic of the Messiah: His absolute sinlessness.

It is one thing to say that the Son of Man was to be without sin, quite another to say that He must also be free of the taint of Adam’s sin which has corrupted every human being from Cain onward. Berkouwer notes that Christ’s sinlessness is a correlative problem with Christ’s humanity; for it is of the nature of mankind (since the Fall) to be born in sin. Furthermore, it is widely believed that a perfectly sinless Christ would not have ‘truly’ been “*tempted in all things such as we are, yet without sin.*” Berkouwer admits,

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<sup>188</sup> Orr, *Virgin Birth*; 215

<sup>189</sup> Liddon; 227.

“One cannot escape the thesis...that the fact of temptation implies the ability to sin.”<sup>190</sup>

Yet, as we shall hopefully establish in detail in a later lesson, Jesus Christ was not merely



without actual commission of sin in His lifetime; He was free of the taint of Original Sin from His very conception. From a biblical anthropological perspective, the sinlessness of Jesus Christ *from the womb* necessitates a miraculous generation no less than the union of divinity with humanity. This is also one of those ‘stupendous’ miracles in the face of which all lesser miracles ‘lose their ability to offend.’ “A sinless man is as much

**A. B. Bruce (1831-99)** a miracle in the moral world as a Virgin Birth is a miracle in the physical world.”<sup>191</sup> James Orr considers the doctrine of Original Sin to be one of the ‘fundamentals’ of the Christian faith, as it indeed is, and exclaims in his essay on the Virgin Birth, “But when, in all time, did natural generation give birth to a sinless personality?”<sup>192</sup> The answer, of course, is ‘never,’ and this fact of history and of Scripture again necessitates a miraculous entry of the sinless Son of Man into the world.

Yet there is another factor in our analysis of the veracity and necessity of the Virgin Birth. This is the fact that Christ’s humanity was not independent of Adam’s posterity, but was, in fact, representative of a *new humanity* to be drawn out from the old. Had Christ’s humanity been independent of Adam’s – had Jesus been formed “*from the dust of the earth*” as Adam had – then He would have had no real connection to the other part of the divine covenant. He would have remained eternally God, and therefore continued His connection with the divine side of the covenant; but His humanity would have been of a different sort altogether than Adam’s, and He could not have ‘stood surety’ for Man’s side of the covenant. As we shall see in reviewing the baptism and temptation(s) of Jesus Christ, His mission was in large part to “*become sin on our behalf*” so as to redeem for Himself a holy people. And so it was necessary that He become not just human flesh, but that He become ‘one of us.’

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<sup>190</sup> Berkouwer; 254.

<sup>191</sup> Alexander Balmain Bruce, quoted by James Orr, *Virgin Birth*; 191.

<sup>192</sup> Orr, James *The Fundamentals: Volume 2* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books; 2008); 258.

*Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.*

(Hebrews 7:17)

So many different theological considerations with regard to the Messiah's advent, all conspire to a miraculous birth. "The perfect sinlessness of Christ, and the archetypal character of His humanity, imply a miracle in His origin."<sup>193</sup> A natural birth would bring into the world a natural man who, while being fully human, could not be fully God. A natural birth would bring into the world a sinful man who, while truly connected to Adam's race, could hardly act as representative for that race in atoning for its sins. "It is not possible that He should save humanity, and yet say with David, 'I was conceived in sin.'"<sup>194</sup> Hence one line of defense that can be made in support of the Virgin Birth is simply this: a miraculous birth was necessary, why not a Virgin Birth? Van Oosterzee interacts with opponents of the doctrine,

And what...if in consequence of this miracle the Son of Mary has remained wholly free from the trace of defilement which, according to the united testimony of Scripture and experience, sullies every child of Adam from his birth up? It is said that God could have kept His incarnate Son free from the hereditary defilement of the race, even without a miraculous conception being necessary. Undoubtedly, but in that case also only by special intervention; in other words, by another miracle, which is substituted for the one objected to.<sup>195</sup>

Denial of the doctrine of the Virgin Birth is an unbelieving house of cards that must ultimately fall to the ground, taking with it belief in the Incarnation, the Atonement, and even Creation itself. We do not say that the Virgin Birth is the most important doctrine of redemptive revelation; only that it is vitally integral to the overall doctrine of redemption, as are a number of other doctrines, the loss of which causes the collapse of the whole biblical system.

Thus can the Virgin Birth be defended from a negative position: without it the whole system of biblical doctrine falls. But it can also be defended from a positive position: as the means of bringing into the world the Son of God as the sinless Son of Man

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<sup>193</sup> Orr, *Virgin Birth*; 229.

<sup>194</sup> Van Oosterzee; 549.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*; 547.

apart from which there was no other means possible. It is really not true that God could have done all of this ‘some other way.’ To say that He could is simply a meaningless statement of the capability of the divine omnipotence. But God does not act in arbitrary power; He acts according to His will, and His will in the advent of the Messiah has been adequately revealed through His word.

The logic of the Virgin Birth is perhaps a bit clearer than that of the Incarnation, though it remains true that the Church has historically pursued quite a few illogical and unbiblical explanations of the event. The truth follows from the nature of human generation and from the *protoevangelium* of Genesis 3:15. From the latter we are promised a Redeemer through the ‘Seed of Woman,’ which prefigures the advent of the Messiah as being of the maternal line and not the paternal. For though He is called the Son of Man, He is the Seed of Woman. This is not an arbitrary designation. Though there was no necessity involved in the choice of the woman – Mary – to be the vehicle of the Messiah’s advent into the world (and Mary is indeed to be considered ‘blessed’ by all her brethren in the Church throughout the ages), there is critical necessity that the birth involve the woman, *and not the man*.

It has often been superficially reasoned that the woman was necessary because – shock of shocks – a man cannot give birth. This is puerile. The choice of the woman was made at the very entrance of sin into the human race, in order to indicate just how the taint of sin would pass from generation to generation throughout time: *through the seed of the man*. The various theories of how Jesus could have been born of a human mother and yet essentially sinless are either too scholastic, entirely unnecessary, or completely miss the point. Here is a brief summary of some of the most prominent theories.

From a Reformed perspective, Herman Bavinck represents the ‘covenantalist’ position by theorizing that the bypassing of Joseph involves the delivering of Jesus from the ‘covenant of works,’ and hence from the responsibility of Adam’s sin under that covenant. Bavinck writes,

The exclusion of the man from his conception at the same time had the effect that Christ, as one not included in the covenant of works, remained exempt from original sin and could

therefore also be preserved in terms of his human nature, both before and after his birth, from all pollution of sin.<sup>196</sup>

This view is a sampling of Reformed scholasticism, wherein theological explanations are produced from covenantal reasoning rather than from Scripture. The ‘Covenant of Works’ is itself a theological construct, which is then enlisted to explain the bypassing of Joseph in the conception of Jesus. But Bavinck is on more solid ground when he theorizes the necessity of the Holy Spirit’s involvement in the conception of Jesus in Mary’s womb.

Conception by the Holy Spirit was not the deepest and final cause of Jesus’ sinlessness, as many theologians say, but it was the only way in which he who already existed as a person and was appointed head of a new covenant could now also in a human way – in the flesh – be and remain who he was: the Christ, Son of God the Most High.<sup>197</sup>

The early patristic theory on the Virgin Birth focuses on the conception of Jesus in Mary’s womb by the Holy Spirit, and claims that in this supernatural act the womb of Mary was sanctified and the inherent sin of the mother was ‘blocked’ from corrupting her child. This view arises from a very materialistic, physiological concept of the transmission of sin, and has its roots in the Greek dualism in which matter is essential evil, spirit only being good. Still, the theory at least recognizes the conceptual (pun intended) difficulties with a sinless child coming from the womb of a sinner, as Mary was originally acknowledged to be within Christian theology.

That acknowledgement sadly changed fairly early in the patristic era, with more and more writers positing a sinless Mary, or at least a fully sanctified Mary, as the basis for a sinless Jesus. In addition, “The early church writers pressed the analogy between Eve and the Virgin Mary.”<sup>198</sup> By the close of the first millennium, theologians like the British monk Eadmer of Canterbury were expanding the sinlessness of Mary to include her own conception in her mother’s womb. Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventura both advocated a sinless Mary, but their views did not extend to Mary’s birth; rather that Mary had lived

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<sup>196</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*; 294.

<sup>197</sup> *Idem*.

such an exemplary life that God purified her from all sin before the conception of Jesus in her womb. The first official pronouncement of the ‘Immaculate Conception’ – the view that Mary was herself conceived without sin – came when Pope Sixtus IV initiated the Feast of the Immaculate Conception in 1476, but the doctrine did not become the stated position of the Roman Catholic Church until 1854, when Pope Pius IX issued his bull *Ineffabilis*, in which he states,

We declare, pronounce and define that the doctrine which asserts that the Blessed Virgin Mary, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God, and in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, Savior of the human race, was preserved free from every stain of original sin is a doctrine revealed by God and, for this reason, must be firmly and constantly believed by all the faithful.<sup>199</sup>

Such Mariolatry, culminating in such doctrines as that of the Immaculate Conception and of the Perpetual Virginity of Mary, stemmed from a false understanding of the transmission of sin across the generations, and led to an exaltation of Mary far above her rightful condition of ‘blessed among woman.’ But the central actor in the Incarnation was God, in the Person of the Son, who “was himself the acting subject who by the Holy Spirit prepared a body for himself in Mary’s body.”<sup>200</sup> To Him be all the praise and glory in the Church for the Incarnation of the Son of God as the Son of Man.

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<sup>198</sup> Orr, *Fundamentals*; 251. The comparison of Mary to Eve was initiated by Irenæus in the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century. “The comparison between Eve and Mary became the principal source of Mariological speculation in the following period.” (Pannenberg).

<sup>199</sup> [http://www.religioustolerance.org/virgin\\_b3.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/virgin_b3.htm)

<sup>200</sup> Bavinck; 293.

## Chapter 12 – Kenotic Christology

**Key Text(s):** Philippians 2:5-7; Colossians 2:9

*“What God can or cannot do is a question to be settled  
by what we have good reason to believe  
He has done”  
(Alva McClain)*

One of the greatest hymns written in Christian history is *And Can It Be That I Should Gain*, by Charles Wesley. Charles Wesley’s life was over-shadowed by his more commanding elder brother, John, and it has been surmised that the younger man’s adherence to Arminian theology stemmed primarily from a fear and a devotion to the elder. Certainly, however, Charles outdid his brother in hymnody, and the younger Wesley’s compositions resonate with the sovereign grace of God quite as much as if they had been penned by a staunch Calvinist. *And Can It Be* is such a hymn, but with one problematic phrase that has frequently been rewritten over the years. The third stanza of Wesley’s otherwise powerful hymn introduces a questionable Christology, the discussion of which forms the topic of this particular lesson.



Charles Wesley (1707-88)

He left His Father’s throne above,  
*So free, so infinite His grace;*  
**Emptied Himself of all but love,**  
*And bled for Adam’s helpless race*

The Trinity Hymnal has revised this stanza thus,

He left His Father’s throne above,  
*So free, so infinite His grace;*  
**Humbled Himself because of love,**  
*And bled for all His chosen race.*

This Reformed rewording addresses two theological problems, the second far more familiar to most modern evangelicals than the first. Wesley seems to question the doctrine of *definite or limited atonement* when he has Jesus dying for ‘Adam’s helpless race,’ a

deficiency the Trinity (and others) felt necessary to correct with ‘chosen race.’ But the issue that we are addressing here is not the extent of the atonement – that will come later – but rather what is meant by the Apostle Paul when he writes to the Philippian Church,

*Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but **emptied Himself**, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.*

(Philippians 2:5-7)

The Christological controversy surrounding the concept of the Son of God ‘emptying’ Himself – and the various theories of just what it was of which Christ was emptied – really belongs to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, not to the 18<sup>th</sup> Century in which Wesley wrote his hymn. Thus it is unlikely that Wesley was intending to advocate a particular Christology (as it is also unlikely that the next line in the stanza was meant to be a statement for or against Definite Atonement). But the advent of ‘Kenotic Christology,’ stemming from the Greek word translated ‘emptied’ in Philippians 2:7, in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries, has given Wesley’s third stanza a new connotation to Reformed ears, resulting in its being rewritten in many hymnals.

A more modern (and far less theologically satisfying) song is the popular *He is Lord*. Many congregations sing only the refrain and are unfamiliar with the fact that there are three verses, the first of which teaches a much clearer ‘kenotic’ Christology than does Wesley’s classic hymn.

**Emptied of His glory, God became a man,**

*To walk on earth in ridicule and shame;*

A Ruler, yet a Servant; a Shepherd, yet a Lamb;

*A Man of Sorrows, agony, and pain.<sup>201</sup>*

“Emptied of His glory, God became a man.” This concept, again stemming from the Greek word *kenosis*, ‘to empty,’ found in Philippians 2:7, has gained traction over the past 150 years as a solution to the most crucial and most difficult question in Christology throughout the ages: How is the relationship of the divine and the human in Jesus Christ to be conceived? Pannenberg states that the Church’s understanding of this relationship in

her Lord Jesus Christ, the ‘unification’ of the divine with the human, “is the fundamental problem of Christology.”<sup>202</sup> For long centuries theologians were satisfied with leaving the question insoluble, and rather holding fast to the classical treatment of the two natures in the one person of Jesus Christ, handed down at the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451.

**THEREFORE**, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the Godbearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the fathers has handed down to us.<sup>203</sup>

The broad acceptance of the Chalcedonian Formula even through the turmoil of the



**Alva M<sup>c</sup>Clain (1888-1968)**

Protestant Reformation, does not mean that theologians did not here and there attempt to develop a ‘rational’ explanation of the relationship of the divine to the human in Jesus Christ. In every attempt something was lost, either as to the deity of Christ or as to His humanity. “Having successfully repelled the Arian assault, the attention of the church had logically shifted to another problem – how to reconcile the proper Deity and true humanity in

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<sup>201</sup> Verse one of *He is Lord* by Tom Fettke; published 1991; copyright 1986 WORD Music.

<sup>202</sup> Pannenberg; 312.

<sup>203</sup><http://anglicansonline.org/basics/chalcedon.html>

the person of the historic Saviour, Jesus Christ.”<sup>204</sup> And in every attempt the Church responded by reaffirming the Chalcedonian Formula, and declaring each particular rationalization of the union of natures as ‘heresy.’ The challenge to human reason is the necessity of maintaining the fullness of deity and the fullness of humanity within the one Person, Jesus Christ lest, by the diminution of either the result becomes a *tertium quid* – a ‘third thing.’ “Even the very idea of a ‘God-man’ in whom the union of the two natures has been replaced by the mingling of the two is an anomaly, with which no one can make any association whatever. Such a being cannot be the mediator between God and humankind, since he is neither.”<sup>205</sup>

One of the most recent, and thus far enduring, of the rational attempts to ‘explain’ the union of the divine with the human in Christ Jesus has the apparent imprimatur of the Apostle Paul, in the passage already quoted from Philippians 2. The *Kenotic Christology* can claim the use of a word employed by the apostle himself, something that trinitarianism cannot (the word ‘trinity’ not being found in the New Testament). The doctrine of an ‘emptying’ of all or part of the divine nature arose from mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century Germany, and particularly the teachings of Gottfried Thomasius, professor of theology at the University of Erlangen. Thomasius was by no means trying to deny the divinity of Jesus Christ; rather, he was attempting to explain how it was that Jesus’ consciousness of himself and of the world around him grew as he grew from infant to child to man. The Lutheran scholar thus tried to ‘preserve’ a measure of divinity by positing – again, using the word employed by Paul in Philippians 2:7 – an *emptying* by Christ the Son of God of the most ‘divine’ attributes of God. “According to the central idea of the Kenotic Theory, what happened in the Incarnation was that the Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, the Divine Logos, laid aside His distinctively divine attributes (omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence) and lived for a period on earth within the limitations of humanity.”<sup>206</sup>

Thomasius attempted to exegete a biblical passage – really, a biblical *word* – in a manner that would ‘make sense’ out of the seemingly impossible union of the divine and

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<sup>204</sup> McClain, Alva J. “Doctrine of the Kenosis in Philippians 2:5-8” *Grace Journal* 8.2 (Spring, 1967); 3.

<sup>205</sup> Bavinck; 303.

<sup>206</sup> Baillie; 94-95.

the human within the person, Jesus Christ. In this attempt he was merely one in a long line of commentators and theologians who wrestled with the *kenosis* of Philippians 2:7. There was no avoiding Paul's usage of the term, which undeniably means 'to empty,' in regard to Christ's transition from heaven to earth, the Incarnation being the obvious backdrop and context to the passage. In the age immediately following the apostles, theologians were careful to guard the full deity of Jesus Christ and were thus unlikely to interpret Philippians 2:7 in a manner that would diminish this attribute of Christ's person. To most of these patristic writers, the 'emptying' meant no more than the assumption of human nature by the divine Son of God.

Origen, Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, Cyril of Alexandria, Augustine, and others who connected Phil. 2:7 to the coming of the Logos in the flesh meant by the term 'self-emptying' the assumption of human nature, but not the complete or partial relinquishment of the divine nature or its attributes...Because patristic theology was most concerned about the true divinity of Christ for the sake of its understanding of redemption, any relinquishing of divine attributes by the Logos at the Incarnation had to be remote from its thought.<sup>207</sup>

Reformation theologians were no less committed to the preservation of the Chalcedonian Formula with respect to the fullness of the divine attributes in Jesus Christ, though they tended to interpret the 'self-emptying' in terms of the cloaking or hiding of the divine majesty in the earthly life of Jesus. The general view among Reformation theologians was that there could be no true relinquishment of divine attributes, but only the 'veiling' of them in the human life of Jesus. "The Logos, in becoming man, retained full possession of His divine attributes...the *kenosis* consisting in His acting as if He did not possess them."<sup>208</sup> Van Oosterzee summarizes the attitude of Reformation commentators in approaching the *kenosis* of Philippians 2:7, "Every view is naturally to be rejected as absurd which would in the least degree derogate from the unchangeableness of the Divine nature itself."<sup>209</sup>

Still, it remained true that the life of Jesus as portrayed in the Gospels was not of a *god*, but rather and distinctively that of a *man*. In other words, Jesus Christ did not obey

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<sup>207</sup> Pannenberg; 308.

<sup>208</sup> M<sup>c</sup>Clain; 5 (a summary of views, not representing the view of M<sup>c</sup>Clain himself).

the Law *as God* but *as man*; He did not perform miracles as the Son of God, but as the Son of Man in whom the Holy Spirit was ‘without measure.’ We read that Jesus grew in knowledge and stature, and are left wondering what this can mean for someone who is the eternal Logos, by Whom all things were created and in Whom all things hold together. If we accept, as we must if we accept the testimony of Scripture, that the promise Messiah was Himself God, then we must reject any Christology that seeks to rationalize the union of the divine and the human in Jesus Christ, by diminishing the reality of the divine. The fundamental position of Chalcedon remains the bedrock from which all biblical Christology must build. “He could not, as some suggest, have actually surrendered the divine attributes; they are functions potential in the very nature of God. Granted that the *active* functioning might cease for a time, still the *potentiality* remains.”<sup>210</sup>

But even this classic statement of the Reformational view on the *kenosis* is not sufficient. How can any attribute of God be held in abeyance for even the slightest period of time, and God not cease to be God? Theologians in this way are making a separation between the divine nature and the divine attributes, and this cannot be done. One point may serve to illustrate. We are told in Scripture that the Logos is the One who “*holds together all things by the word of His power.*” Can this divine function cease at any time to be *active* without the entire created order unraveling? The Logos became flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of God. But the Logos did not cease to be the Logos, nor could He cease to *actively* perform the works of majesty that are ascribed to Him in Scripture. Pannenberg writes,

But even in self-humiliation he did not cease to be himself. Attributes essential to his divinity cannot be absent even in his humiliation unless the humiliated were no longer God. But if they were present in Jesus, then the unity of the divine with the human remains as incomprehensible as ever.<sup>211</sup>

Let us summarize where we stand with regard to Kenotic Christology in any form, whether it be a veiling, a hiding, a partial or even a full relinquishment, of the divine attributes in the Incarnation of the Son of God. When we speak of “*all the fullness of the*

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<sup>209</sup> Van Oosterzee; 543.

<sup>210</sup> McClain; 9.

*Godhead dwelling in bodily form,”* in Christ<sup>212</sup>, we are saying that the *function* as well as the *attribute* essential to the divine nature were in Christ *fully*. The Kenotic Theory of Thomasiaus, and perhaps of the author of the modern song *He is Lord*, is an unbiblical and therefore unacceptable compromise to the limited reach of human reason. “Relinquishment of the relative divine attributes (omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence) results in a ‘relative de-deification’ of Christ. The *vere homo* is achieved only proportionately to subtractions from the *vere deus*.”<sup>213</sup> Every step in this direction is a step away from Chalcedon, and, it may reasonably be argued, a step away from “*that which is written*” in Scripture concerning the two natures of the one Person, Jesus Christ.

All generations of the Church must exegete Philippians 2:7 afresh, though this does not mean that each generation may derive its own meaning from the text. What it does mean is that the Church’s current faith cannot derive entirely from its past faith: the relationship of the current generation to the previous generations of the Church may and should be *symbiotic* but must never be *parasitic*. The modern Church cannot merely echo the words of the Chalcedonian Formula and be satisfied, but must, in a sense, arrive at the Chalcedonian conclusion through fresh exegesis of the relevant passages. This exegetical work, then, becomes a rediscovery of the Christological principles upon which every generation must read and interpret the *kenosis* of Philippians 2:7.

Philippians 2:7, then, presents itself as one of those difficult passages of Scriptures which must be interpreted in the light of other, clearer Christological statements of the Bible; Colossians 2:9, for instance. Two principles that derive from the *whole counsel of Scripture* are first, “What God can or cannot do is a question to be settled by what we have good reason to believe God has done.”<sup>214</sup> Philosophical speculation is not likely to end in biblical truth in matters as complex as the unity of the divine and the human nature in Jesus Christ. And second, we may not, in our Christological musings, depart from the revelation of the Messiah *in the flesh* in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. His *actual* life is our schoolbook with respect to the relationship of the divine to the human in His person.

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<sup>211</sup> Pannenberg; 312.

<sup>212</sup> Colossians 2:9

<sup>213</sup> Pannenberg; 311.

<sup>214</sup> McClain; 6.

“[W]e can perceive this unity only from the perspective of the result, from the perspective of Jesus’ historical reality.”<sup>215</sup>

### Philippians 2:5-8

It is to be admitted that Paul’s usage of the word *kenosis* in Philippians 2:7 – in a passage that clearly refers to the humiliation and exaltation of the Son of God – raises questions regarding the relationship of the divine to the human in Jesus Christ. To read that Christ *emptied Himself* is to immediately ask ‘of what?’ A remarkable aspect of this passage is that it has also been used to ‘prove’ that the Messiah was not truly God, but only existed in the ‘form’ of God (2:6). That is in the exact opposite direction of Kenotic Christology, but will be briefly addressed below in our own exegesis of the passage.

*Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but **emptied Himself**, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

(Philippians 2:5-8)

At first blush it does seem that the apostle is teaching some measure of relinquishment of divine attributes by the Son of God, and this would logically and contextually be at the Incarnation, when He was *made in the likeness of men*. “The very notion of ‘emptying’ inevitably suggests deprivation or lessening, the loss of something that was possessed before.”<sup>216</sup> The traditional view within the Church prior to Thomasius was that this ‘self-emptying’ was not the renunciation of divine attributes, but rather the hiding or ‘de-activating’ of them. “It involved the concept that the divine attributes of majesty communicated to Jesus’ human nature at the incarnation were kept hidden during Jesus’ earthly life or even remained latent, in any case were not really used.”<sup>217</sup> The picture is thus painted of Christ voluntarily divesting Himself of divine majesty and power and knowledge during the time of His earthly sojourn. The union of the two natures in the person of Jesus Christ is maintained, but one of the natures is held in

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<sup>215</sup> Pannenberg; 323.

<sup>216</sup> Motyer, Alec *The Message of Philippians* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; 1984); 112.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*; 309.

abeyance so that the other might ‘properly’ exercise itself: the *divine* veiled in favor of the *human*. But Pannenberg is right to conclude that such a union is not *vital*; it is not a ‘living union’ between the divine and the human in Christ Jesus, and therefore does not accurately describe the historical Messiah contained in the narrative of the Gospels. “For a general renunciation of the use of the divine attributes of majesty by Jesus’ humanity during his earthly life excluded a full living unity of the human with his divine nature. Both natures existed side by side, without a vital unity.”<sup>218</sup>

Rather than correct this deficiency of the kenotic tendencies within historical Christology, Thomasius exacerbated it by making it complete. “At the incarnation, the Son gave up the relative attributes of divinity, that is, those which characterize the *relation* of God to the world: omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence. He retained only the *immanent* perfections proper to God independent of his relation to the world: holiness, power, truth, and love.”<sup>219</sup> But we have already seen that such a ‘de-deification’ of Christ presents serious and insuperable problems with regard to Christ’s mediatorship as Redeemer, as well as to His continued role as Governor and Sustainer of the cosmos. This is too high a price to pay for an interpretation of one passage of Scripture that seems – at least to some – to offer a biblical and rational way out of the mystery of the union of the natures of Christ.

Alva McClain, founder of Grace Theological Seminary in 1937, believes that the errant views associated with so many interpretations of Philippians 2:7 are due largely to theological presuppositions brought *to* the passage, rather than proper exposition *of* the passage. McClain does not deny the validity of what he calls ‘regulative presuppositions,’ but merely argues that they must be valid if the overall interpretation is not to go astray. He offers five ‘regulative presuppositions’ that do seem to be important to the proper exegesis of this difficult passage.<sup>220</sup>

1. No interpretation can be accepted as valid which departs in any respect from the historic Person of the Gospel records.

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<sup>218</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*; 310.

<sup>220</sup> McClain; 5.

2. Due consideration should be given to the whole stream of Biblical testimony which bears on the Person of Christ.
3. The interpreter will logically expect to receive his surest guidance from the writer of the passage, the Apostle Paul himself.
4. It is supremely important that the purpose and spirit of the passage with its context be kept constantly in mind.
5. If metaphysical difficulties arise, they must yield to the moral requirements of the Incarnation

We establish the context and purpose of the passage by remembering that this is an ethical exhortation to the Philippian believers to act in a manner consistent with their testimony as Christians. The opening verses of the chapter set the tone for the passage under consideration, and the focus passage cannot properly be divorced from its context.

*Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.*  
(Philippians 2:1-4)

Having admonished the Church at Philippi to such inter-relational behavior, the apostle enlists the Lord Jesus Christ as the supreme exemplar of the very same ‘attitude’ he is stirring up in them. The passage is not, in fact, a *Christological* treatise at all; though it remains true that nothing said of Christ in Scripture may safely be ignored or relegated to mere ethical teaching. What Paul says about the humiliation of Christ is true, but its purpose is to inculcate the same selfless attitude within all believers. That immediately gives the exegete a clue as to the direction of Paul’s thought; and it is never safe to arrive at an interpretation of any passage that runs in a different direction than the author’s.

Still, we reiterate that the historical context of Paul’s illustration from the life of Christ, is the *Incarnation* – the ‘enfleshment’ of the Son of God. “The Apostle speaks of the one act which needed no explanation to the Philippian Christians, that sublime and voluntary act of Incarnation wherein the ‘Word became flesh and tabernacled among us’ in servant form.”<sup>221</sup> In consideration of this momentous and mysterious act of divine

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<sup>221</sup> *Ibid*; 7.

grace, it is easy to forgive Charles Wesley an unintentional theological *faux pas* in seeming to reduce the glory of the eternal Son of God to the attribute of love. It was the love of God that sent forth His Son into the world, and that same love that engenders in the redeemed a reciprocal emotion. “The voluntary Incarnation is that act of love on the part of the Son of God, by which He assumed our human nature of the Virgin Mary, through the operation of the Holy Ghost, and thus became personally united to our race.”<sup>222</sup> Given the Kenotic Christology developed long after Wesley’s death, perhaps it is best that the third stanza be reworked as it has been, so long as those singing that great hymn do not forget the love of God, and the love of the Son of God, that gave impetus to the Incarnation.

If we put these first two observations together – the purpose of the passage as *exhortation* and the context of the passage as *incarnation* – we immediately realize that Paul cannot be exhorting believers to become incarnate for one another! It must be that the ‘attitude’ that was in Christ is the tie that connects the purpose to the context, for what Christ did on behalf of the redeemed is not something the redeemed can do for one another. The Incarnation serves as an illustration of an attitude, and that attitude is characterized by *kenosis* – ‘emptying.’

By way of a necessary digression, let us now consider the phrase *form of God* in which Paul says the Son of God existed before the Incarnation. The English word *form* seems to indicate something less than the real thing, and thus may cause some consternation to believers otherwise fully convinced of the true and eternal deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Greek word here is *morphē*, from which we derive the words *morphology* and *metamorphosis*. While ‘form’ is an accurate English equivalent, the meaning of the word must be derived from its early Greek content, and not the later content or connotation of its English translation. *Morphe* is a strong philosophical word, found in both Plato and Aristotle where it constitutes the truest nature of something: its essential being as opposed to particular manifestations that are called *accidents*. In his commentary on Philippians, Moisés Silva writes, “If we stress the classical usage of this term, the technical



Moisés Silva (b. 1945)

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<sup>222</sup> Van Oosterzee; 543.

sense of Aristotelian philosophy suggests itself: *morphē*, although not equivalent to *ousis*, ('being, essence'), speaks of essential or characteristic attributes and thus is to be distinguished from *schema* (the changeable, external 'fashion')." <sup>223</sup> It is really this second Greek term, *schema*, to which our less concrete English word 'form' corresponds, although we still employ the Aristotelian logic when we speak of 'form and function' of a thing.

We have confirmation from the apostle, however, that *morphē* is not to be taken in any respect as a degradation of the divine dignity of Christ. He immediately reports that the Son of God did not regard *equality with God* a thing to be grasped. Whatever philosophical or lexical gymnastics might be done to the word *morphē*, to Paul it stands in immediate parallel with *equality with God*, which is as strong a testimony to the eternal deity of Christ as we might find in Scripture. Thus it is from the full majesty of the Godhead that the Second Person *emptied Himself* at the Incarnation, and hence the 'problem' of the union of the two natures, allegedly solved by Kenotic Christology.

As is so often the case with difficult biblical passages, the path to a reasonable interpretation is found in the structure of the passage itself, where an unmistakable parallelism in the Greek, which translates quite well into the English. Silva notes that the passage from verse 6 to the first part of verse 8 can be divided into two strophes. The first of these begins and ends with the use of *morphē*, 'form.' The second begins and ends with the use of *genomenos*, 'becoming.' Observe:

...who in the form (*morphē*) of God existing  
not an advantage considered  
His being equal with God  
but nothing He made Himself (*ekenosen*)  
the form (*morphē*) of a servant adopting

In likeness of men becoming (*genomenos*)  
And in appearance being found  
as man  
He humbled Himself  
becoming (*genomenos*) obedient to death

The arrangement of the passage in this way helps us see the pattern intended by the apostle to assist readers in understanding, and even memorizing, the text. Indeed, most scholars believe that what Paul writes in this passage is an excerpt from an early hymn of the Church, which would be quite ironic given our earlier discussion of Wesley's excellent hymn. Be that as it may, the poetic nature of the passage, and especially the first stanza,

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<sup>223</sup> Silva, Moisés *Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House; 1992); 113-114.

provides us with the answer to the question of *kenosis*. At no point does Paul indicate the least relinquishment or renunciation of the slightest divine attribute. The ‘emptying’ of the Son of God was an act of selflessness in which He ‘took on’ the *morphē* of a servant, without for one moment divesting Himself of the active *morphē* of God. The purpose of this selfless act of the Godhead taking to itself the nature of man was, of course, to redeem man and to reconcile him back to God. The method by which this was to be done, and had to be done, was the death of a perfect man who was Himself God and at the same time the Servant of the Lord.

Alec Motyer appropriately hears echoes of Isaiah 53:12 in Paul’s reference to ‘servant,’ as would most Jewish readers of this passage. Motyer writes in his commentary



**Alec Motyer (1928-2016)**

on Philippians, “The fundamental thought is that of a deliberate, conscious consigning of oneself to a foreseen situation: the Servant of the Lord brought Himself voluntarily and totally into death; Jesus, in order to die, first brought his total being to the condition of the Lord’s Servant.” Thus we can see no reason to attempt an ‘emptying’ of divine attributes in Christ Jesus – whether a mere veiling or inactivity of these attributes, or a complete relinquishing of some or all of them. It will perhaps remain a mystery for ever, just how God could take on the nature of humanity without Himself changing in any way, just as it will remain a mystery how God could create something ‘outside’ Himself, which is not Him, and yet undergo no change. But it is far from irrational to conclude that there are things that God can do, and has done, that are beyond the full comprehension of human reason. We thus end where we began this lesson, with the sage counsel of Alva McClain, “What God can or cannot do is a question to be settled by what we have good reason to believe He has done.” And God, in the form of the Son, has “*become flesh and tabernacled among us*” without ceasing for a moment to be the Logos of Creation.

### Chapter 13 – The Self-Consciousness of Christ: *Son of Man*

**Key Text(s):** Matthew 3:13-15; 16:13-20

*“We shall see that the idea of the Son of Man...  
embraces the total work of Jesus  
as does almost no other idea.”  
(Oscar Cullmann)*

The Christology of the past one hundred fifty years or so has been absorbed with the question of Jesus’ self-consciousness. It is conventional wisdom among liberal theologians and higher critics, that Jesus of Nazareth was never conscious of being a divine Messiah; indeed, Jesus only gained awareness of any messianic component in his ministry shortly before his death. It is granted, somewhat grudgingly, that Jesus was conscious of being different than those who had preceded him in the prophetic ministry to Israel; but this is usually viewed as a difference in *degree* rather than in *kind*. The modern liberal tradition has a convenient method of both arriving at and safeguarding such a view: any passage in the Gospels that seems to indicate a self-awareness of sinlessness, unique and transcendent authority, or divinity on the part of Jesus, is discounted as (1) not an authentic saying from the mouth of Jesus, and (2) a late addition from the Church itself. With this hedge of protection around modern Higher Criticism as regards the person of Jesus Christ, it is impossible to ‘prove’ the view wrong.

Fortunately Textual Criticism comes to the aid of the conservative biblical scholar at this point, showing that the higher critic stands on no solid foundation with respect to the ancient manuscripts of the New Testament, when he or she separates ‘authentic’ Jesus sayings from spurious ones. There is no evidence that allows for later additions of ‘divine’ sayings to be put into the mouth of Jesus of Nazareth, and the biblical scholar is faced with two reasonable choices: either Jesus did not say *anything* that He is purported to have said – and therefore the whole venture is a waste of time – or, on the evidence that we have, all that He is purported to have said, we must accept as authentic. The smorgasbord approach to the sayings of Jesus is simply untenable. It then becomes apparent that the liberal critic cannot accept as authentic any saying of Jesus that violates his own presupposed theological view of who and what Jesus was. In other words, Jesus of

Nazareth is predetermined to have been nothing more than a Galilean rabbi of unusual talent and charisma, and therefore no self-attestation from Jesus that takes Him beyond this limited identity, can be viewed as authentic. Of course, such a Jesus cannot be Redeemer, cannot be the one Mediator between God and man, and cannot be the consolation of Israel and the hope of the nations. One truly wonders why men continue to ‘study’ such a savior.

It is eminently rational to study any figure of history on the basis of the historical literature in which that person is predominantly found. For Jesus, of course, this corpus of historical data consists primarily of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) and the Gospel of John. The first three are called ‘synoptic’ simply because they present a synopsis – a summary – of the life of Jesus from His birth to His death and resurrection. John’s Gospel is far more thematic, rather than chronological, and also tends to come at the matter from a different perspective than the Synoptic authors. Furthermore, in addition to mining biographical data from the predominant sources available, it is equally reasonable that the student take the data at face value, or at least until prevented from doing so from



**Adolf Schlatter (1852-1938)**

equally ancient, but more reliable sources. In other words, we give the benefit of the doubt to the earliest documents, while critically analyzing them against contemporary and later documents. In biblical studies of Jesus Christ, this means forming the general framework of a ‘Life of Christ’ from the Synoptic Gospels, and then comparing the result with the content of the Gospel of John, and with the more doctrinal and practical teachings of the various epistles of the New Testament, especially those of the Apostle Paul. Adolf Schlatter, a rare conservative German Lutheran scholar of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, indicts the entire methodology of the Higher Criticism that surrounded him, “The hope is groundless that, after rejecting the statements of all disciples – of Matthew, of John, of Paul – and thus of the entire first generation of Christians, we will still be able to arrive at a ‘historical’ knowledge of Jesus.”<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Schlatter, Adolf *The History of the Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books; 1997); 31.

We are familiar with the question that Jesus posed to His disciples, recorded in Matthew 16, “*Who do people say the Son of Man is?*” followed immediately with the more personal, “*Who do you say that I am?*” In this lesson, however, we are going to modify the questions somewhat, to “*Who did Jesus say that He was?*” What is revealed to us from the Gospel sayings of Jesus Christ, in regard to His self-consciousness? Did this self-awareness remain static throughout His earthly life and ministry, or did it ‘evolve’? If it changed over time, was that change a development of growth, or did it represent a ‘trial and error’ approach to Jesus’ knowledge of His own self and ministry? These are the types of questions asked by the higher critic, though from an *a priori* suspicion of the integrity and authenticity of the only real source of information any of us has: the Gospels.

Accepting the sources, however, will reveal a consistent, though by no means obvious, pattern of development in the self-consciousness of Jesus Christ that tends to orient around three particular ‘titles’ generally used: the *Son of Man*, the *Servant of God*, and the *Son of God*. The first two place more emphasis on the *human* nature of Christ and are the predominant theme of the Synoptic Gospels and of this lesson. The third, of course, emphasizes the *divine* nature of Christ, is the underlying theme of John’s Gospel, and will be the topic of our next lesson.

The topic of Jesus’ self-awareness is often tackled by scholars by associating relevant passages around one of the ‘names’ that are indicative of Jesus’ self-consciousness. So there will be a section of Jesus as ‘the Son of Man,’ replete with passages from Matthew, Mark, and Luke in which Jesus refers to Himself by this phrase. Then there will be a section on Jesus as ‘the Servant of Jehovah’ – the *ebbed Yahweh* of Isaiah – with the requisite Synoptic passages defending this title. This is also the method frequently employed under the rubric of Jesus as ‘Prophet, Priest, and King,’ a treatment of the Lord’s Person and Work that is more a summary of the finished mission than it is a discussion of Jesus’ self-consciousness during His earthly life and ministry. This thematic approach to the topic is helpful, as is a systematic theology in terms of biblical doctrine. But at times the approach lacks the organic development of the actual biblical text, and therefore, at times, seems forced and artificial. A more fluid approach will be to trace the chronological milestones in the life of Jesus, as recorded in the Synoptic Gospels, and to

ask what this-and-such event teaches us regarding the self-awareness of Jesus at that stage in His life and ministry. Such an approach, done exhaustively, would constitute a ‘Life of Christ,’ which is nothing more than an interpretive commentary on the Synoptic Gospels. This lesson does not purport to be exhaustive, but hopefully sufficient to present the data in a conclusive way, to show that Jesus *was* aware of His identity as ‘the Son of Man,’ as ‘the Servant of Jehovah,’ and – in the next lesson – as ‘the Son of God.’

In addition to a more chronological approach to the Life of Christ, we will also attempt to allow ‘Scripture to interpret Scripture’ by interjecting reflections from the epistles of the New Testament as commentary on the historical narrative of the Synoptic Gospels. As this method constitutes a study in itself, the selections will of necessity be limited and few. The goal, however, is to show the consistency of the New Testament witness to the self-consciousness of Jesus Christ; not only that He was aware of His own identity and destiny, but that this self-awareness formed the cornerstone of the faith of the Church, His Body.

### **The Childhood of Jesus:**

The Church has chronically struggled with the extreme lack of data in regard to Jesus’ childhood. The biblical record is indeed sparse:

- Born in Bethlehem during the census decreed by Augustus Caesar, supposedly the son of the carpenter Joseph and his betrothed, Mary.
- Presented in the Temple on the eighth day, per the Law, for His circumcision and the ritual cleansing of both Himself and Mary.
- Taken to Egypt by His earthly father due to the threat to His life posed by Herod the Great.<sup>225</sup>
- Returned to Judea on the basis of a revelation granted to Joseph, who settled his family in Nazareth of Galilee.

We next encounter Jesus back in Jerusalem with His parents, attending the Feast of Passover as was Joseph’s custom (Luke 1:41). The allusion here is that Jesus was taken to Jerusalem every year at this particular feast, but it may also be the case that He was left home each year until the one mentioned by Luke, corresponding with Jesus’ twelfth year

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<sup>225</sup> Luke omits the journey to Egypt, and records Joseph returning to Nazareth immediately following Jesus’ circumcision in Jerusalem.

and His *bar mitvah*. Prior to this event, as Jesus grew up in Nazareth, we read that “*the Child grew and became strong, increasing in wisdom and the grace of God was upon Him.*”<sup>226</sup> “In this short verse the history of twelve years of the life of Jesus is told. As a true human Child He passed through a process of physical and spiritual growth and increase.”<sup>227</sup> This is the first statement we have in the Synoptics with regard to the period of Jesus’ life between His birth and His baptism, and it is an enigmatic verse, to say the least. It is vague enough to invite conjecture, and unfortunately the early Church did not ignore the invitation.

The *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, dated to the second century, is a ridiculous display of ignorance concerning the topic of our previous lesson: the relationship between the human and the divine natures in Jesus. This gnostic account of Jesus’ childhood had Him speaking from the cradle, informing Mary of His identity: “Mary, I am Jesus the Son of God, that word which thou didst bring forth according to the declaration of the angel Gabriel to thee, and my father hath sent me for the salvation of the world.”<sup>228</sup> The ensuing narrative of Jesus’ childhood is full of Joseph and Mary employing their piety in the prophetic ministry of condemnation or blessing upon various people they encounter in Egypt and in Galilee. Jesus Himself is possessed of full, miracle-working powers, that He sometimes employs in petty, childish, and even vindictive ways. To recount just a few of these stories would quickly show the baseness of the overall treatise, and would not be germane to our topic. However, this pseudo gospel does contain interesting references to Jesus’ self-awareness – as the Son of God, already noted in the quote above – but also as the King of Israel,

In the month Adar Jesus gathered together the boys, and ranked them as though he had been a king. For they spread their garments on the ground for him to sit on; and having made a crown of flowers, put it upon his head, and stood on his right and left as the guards of a king. And if any one happened to pass by, they took him by force, and said, Come hither, and worship the king, that you may have a prosperous journey.

(*The Infancy Gospel of Thomas* XVIII.1-3)

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<sup>226</sup> Luke 1:40.

<sup>227</sup> Geldenhuys, Norval *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1972); 122.

<sup>228</sup> <http://www.pseudepigrapha.com/LostBooks/infancyall.htm>

There is no reason to admit such stories into the database of Jesus' early life history, as the document is overall so clearly fantastical as to be almost universally rejected by orthodoxy. Yet even the ridiculous, and the scandalous, narratives illustrate the challenge facing any student of the Synoptic Gospels in attempting to understand the meaning of Luke's too-brief statement, "*And the Child grew...increasing in wisdom...*" Jesus is certainly presented to us in this passage as fully human, and His development progresses in the same manner and path as every other human being since Cain. Geldenhuys writes,

This verse expressly tells us that the intellectual, moral and spiritual growth of Jesus as a Child was just as real as His physical growth. He was completely subject to the ordinary laws of physical and intellectual development, except that in His case there was nothing of the influence of sin or shortcoming. Physically and spiritually He grew up perfectly as no one before or after Him. He was truly Man, but a perfect Man, even in childhood.<sup>229</sup>

How are we to interpret these words and do justice to the childhood and young adulthood of Jesus, about which period we have so little data? Perhaps the later testimony of Scripture will shed light on the problem. In terms of the context of Jesus' growth in knowledge, wisdom, maturity, etc., we have the statement in Galatians 4 that orients the development of the child Jesus to that which most mattered both in His life as the Messiah, and in the life of Israel, His people.

*But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under [the Law](#), so that He might redeem those who were under [the Law](#), that we might receive the adoption as sons.* (Galatians 4:4-5)

"Born under the Law," sets the entire backdrop for the life of Jesus prior to His entry into the Messianic ministry. This includes, of course, His circumcision, though that was an act of obedience on Joseph's part and not Jesus'. From the point of human self-consciousness, we may say that Jesus was aware of His being a part of the covenant people Israel, and therefore submissive to Israel's God through the Law. Jesus 'learned obedience' not only through the sufferings that would come later at Gethsemane and Golgotha, but also throughout His life of submission to the divine Law. In this obedience

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<sup>229</sup> Geldenhuys; 122.

Jesus was the true Israelite, and was Himself true Israel as representative. He alone fully manifested what it meant to be an Israelite, and this He did from the earliest moments of His earthly life.

The event that occurs next in the Lucan narrative highlights this orientation of the Child Jesus to the Law of God, and of the centrality of that Law to the life and well-being of God's people Israel.

*Then, after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers. When they saw Him, they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, 'Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You.' And He said to them, 'Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's 'house?'' But they did not understand the statement which He had made to them.* (Luke 2:46-50)

This is a passage that one is tempted to associate with the designation of Christ as the *Son of God*, as Jesus refers to 'My Father' so specifically. But such a conclusion would be incongruous with the overall context of Luke's narrative, which is firmly planted in Jesus' human life with His parents. This is not to deny a nascent self-awareness on Jesus part that He was uniquely the Son of God, but in light of the previous comment by Luke regarding Jesus' growth in wisdom and the grace of God, it is probably better to hear again the child, at the moment in life when tradition would have Him declare His independent relationship as a man to God's Law - His *bar mitvah* - found in the midst of the scribes, discussing the Torah. Jesus' comment to Mary also should not be viewed as impertinent or rude; rather, He merely wonders why Joseph and Mary did not look *first* in the Temple, the House of Jesus' and Israel's Father, to find Him. "In His answer He especially expresses surprise that they had not known where to find Him and had sought Him so anxiously."<sup>230</sup>

In these events Jesus is manifested to our understanding as fully human, and as showing the way that a human being born without sin - without the least taint of Adam's rebellion - ought then to develop in knowledge and wisdom vis-à-vis God's Law. The puerile notions that patristic and medieval scholars developed concerning Jesus' arbitrary

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<sup>230</sup> Geldenhuys; 128.

miracles and His wide knowledge of advanced science all completely miss the point of His advent. He did not come in the flesh to learn all that Man might learn with respect to God's natural creation, nor to perform before an audience as a Man who was also eternal God. Rather He came, *born under the Law*, that He might grow in wisdom and knowledge and grace *under the Law*, and thus redeem all who are likewise born but in sin.

### **The Baptism of Jesus:**

From the perspective of later Scripture bearing testimony on the earlier narrative, the events of Luke 2 are a microcosm of that overall submission and perfect obedience of which Paul speaks in Romans 8:3, "*For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh.*" Jesus' submission to the Law as a child and through His young adulthood was clearly not for Himself alone. For Himself, yes, as He knew Himself to be a child of the Abrahamic Covenant and desired only to be submission to the God of Abraham who was His Father. But passages like Galatians 4 and Romans 8 also instruct us of the *representative* element in Jesus' life, something that Jesus was aware of at least by the time of the next major event in the narration of His earthly life, His baptism by John. All the synoptic writers include the baptism of Jesus, but only Matthew voices every reader's struggle with the notion of a sinless Christ receiving a baptism of repentance.

*Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. But John tried to prevent Him, saying, 'I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?' But Jesus answering said to him, 'Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he permitted Him.* (Matthew 3:13-15)

Those who conclude from Jesus' insistence on being baptized that He somehow recognized in Himself the necessity of personal repentance have no biblical basis for such a conclusion – there is no evidence either before or after Jesus' baptism that He committed the least sin, and it has already been established from Scripture both the necessity and the reality of His sinless birth. Furthermore, such a conclusion from this text completely ignores John's own protest; *it was John who needed to be baptized by Jesus, and not the other way round.* If these words mean anything, they are the witness of the Baptist to the

sinlessness of the Christ. Therefore we must find another explanation for Jesus' insistence on being baptized by John.

Jesus' own explanation is not so clear that theologians have been able to offer a uniform and consistent interpretation, "*for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.*" At the most basic level, Jesus is saying that He must be baptized because it is necessary, what Schlatter terms 'unconditional ethical necessity.'<sup>231</sup> *Why* it is necessary to fulfill all righteousness is the tricky point. We have established that it was not necessary on account of Jesus' own sin and need for repentance. Therefore, it must have been necessary for *others'* sin and need for repentance. As the initial prophecy concerning the Christ Child was that "*He will save His people from their sins,*" it is most logical to conclude that Jesus' baptism was *representative* of the people He had come to save. Thus has been the general tenor of orthodox commentary on the passage, with variations on the theme from commentator to commentator.

Righteousness in biblical usage does not always mean a specific act or behavior; more often it designates a paradigm of life that is in complete submission to and coordination with the will of God. Jesus, considered merely as the Son of Man, was required to fulfill all righteousness in terms of His own moral perfection, His own absolute and unstinting obedience to God's Law. That He did so *personally* is the undeniable witness of the New Testament as well as the prophetic forecast of the Old Testament. And Jesus' many comments concerning 'His bread' being to do the will of His Father, and that He did not act on His own initiative, but only what He saw the Father do, that He did, prove that Jesus' self-consciousness *personally* was as a man wholly (and holy) subordinate to the will and commandment of God. "He shows that he conceived of his relationship with God as *personal* and that he was oriented toward the Father in his thought and will and was subordinate to him."<sup>232</sup> But in order for Jesus to fulfill all righteousness, as the Son of Man rather than as the Son of God, it was not sufficient for Him to do so only for Himself; He was destined from eternity to be the *representative Man* for Israel, and through Israel for the whole world.

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<sup>231</sup> Schlatter; 80.

<sup>232</sup> *Idem.*

Thus he accomplished all righteousness. He would not have done his entire duty toward God and the community if he had preserved merely himself pure, decisively distanced from sinners. Now, however, he did it completely, when he united himself with them and made their need his. In the same vein, the Baptist would not have fulfilled his calling entirely, either, had he baptized only the Jewish community and not the Christ.<sup>233</sup>

Biblical commentary on this historical act of Jesus' baptism moves forward to the writings of Paul, but also backward to the prophecy of Isaiah. The two passages in mind – II Corinthians 5 and Isaiah 53 – are of a piece in describing the vicarious, representative mission of the Messiah with regard to sins that were not His own, but were freely admitted to be the sins of His people. Jesus' baptism by John is the historical manifestation of the truth of these two magnificent passages,

*He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*  
(II Corinthians 5:21)

*Surely our griefs He Himself bore,  
And our sorrows He carried;  
Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,  
Smitten of God, and afflicted.*  
(Isaiah 53:4)

### **The Servant of Jehovah:**

This last passage, and the entire Servant Song of which it forms a part, provides an excellent transition in thought from one characteristic title of the Messiah to another. In large part, the narrative of Jesus' life on earth, as recorded by the Synoptic writers, focuses on His identity as the Son of Man. This title had long developed into a Messianic denomination within Judaism, stemming as it does from the prophecy of Daniel. But because of that prophecy, the character of the Son of Man was typically viewed, and anticipated, as majestic and powerful – a dominant ruler who would defeat Israel's enemies and restore her from exile into the prosperity of her God.

*I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven  
One like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days  
And was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion,  
Glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language*

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<sup>233</sup> *Idem.*

*Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion  
Which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed.*

(Daniel 7:13-14)

It has already been noted that the title ‘Son of Man’ was Jesus’ favorite self-designation during His ministry in Judea and Galilee. “The great significance of this designation is shown by the fact that according to the Gospels it is the only title Jesus applied to himself.”<sup>234</sup> Again, modern liberal critics have tried to downplay the significance of this title, but the evidence is overwhelming that it was both messianic and authoritative. The person of the Son of Man was anticipated by the Jews and His kingdom was yearned for with devotion and, at times, violence. Jesus was undoubtedly aware of this, and also undoubtedly knew that by associating Himself with this title, He invited correlations between Himself and the prophetic king and kingdom from Daniel 7. It should come as no surprise that people tried to take Jesus and make Him king, for He never shied from referring to Himself as the Son of Man. Even the classic identity question of Matthew 16 contains the direct connection by Jesus of Himself and the prophetic Son of Man.

*Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, “Who do people say that the **Son of Man** is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.” He \*said to them, “But who do you say that I **am**?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”*

(Matthew 16:13-16)

The expectation among the Jews of the Second Temple period, burdened as they were by the Roman oppression, and longing as they did for the restoration of their nation’s sovereignty before God and among the nations, was predominantly for a *conquering* Messiah in the mold of the Son of Man from Daniel 7. Even the forerunner’s message concerning the coming One was a message of judgment,

*As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. (Matthew 3:11-12)*

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<sup>234</sup> Cullmann *Christology*; 137.

John's expectation mirrored that of the nation as a whole. "The Messiah in whom he believed was one who was pre-eminently the Judge: when He came, it was to punish the wicked, and especially to right the wronged."<sup>235</sup> However, when Jesus came to be baptized by John at the Jordan River, He introduced an element into Jewish messianic thinking that was probably both new and astounding to many: He joined together the prophetic Son of Man with the prophetic Servant of Jehovah. By submitting to John's baptism of repentance – something that even John thought unthinkable – Jesus identified Himself with the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53, without divesting Himself for one moment of the self-awareness that He was the Son of Man as well. This was an unexpected and revolutionary development in messianic thinking, and Jesus' uniting of the two prophetic personages into Himself and His ministry probably motivated John to later ask of Jesus, "Are You the One, or should we look for another?"



**James Denney (1856-1917)**

Jesus never denied the judgment aspect of His coming, and was conscious that all judgment had been given to Him by the Father. In this regard, Jesus maintained the reality of His favorite self-designation. But He also declared, in terms whose radical nature escape most modern readers, "The Son of Man comes not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."<sup>236</sup>

In uniting these two prophetic concepts into His own self-consciousness and, more importantly, His own understanding of His identity and ministry as Israel's Messiah, Jesus announces what it is the Son of Man has come *to do* rather than *to be*. "This is the unheard-of new act of Jesus, that he united these two apparently contradictory tasks in his self-consciousness, and that he expressed that union in his life and teaching."<sup>237</sup> This act of uniting the two prophetic characters is something supremely manifested in Jesus' baptism, and forms one side of this event's sublime meaning. The other side stems from what immediately follows – the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus and the heavenly words of

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<sup>235</sup> Denney, James *Jesus and the Gospel: Christianity Justified in the Mind of Christ* (New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son; 1909); 229.

<sup>236</sup> Mark 10:45

<sup>237</sup> Cullman; 161

love and approbation from the Father – but this discussion is reserved for our next lesson. In regard to Jesus as the Son of Man and as the Servant of Jehovah, the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River informs us of the *path* by which the Son of Man would eventually appear before the Ancient of Days. The Jewish expectation stemmed from Daniel 7:13-14 without the realization that this vision was the result of a completed work, the work of the Servant of Jehovah, the Incarnate God Jesus Christ. The path to the throne of the Most High was through the Incarnation, to be sure, but also through serving and suffering, and “*giving His life a ransom for many.*” This redemptive journey is what the Apostle Paul recounts, from beginning to end, in Philippians 2. Consider again the powerful hymn of Philippians, this time from the vantage point of the prophetic vision of Daniel 7, the Servant Song of Isaiah 53, and the incredible submission of Jesus Christ to the baptism of repentance.

*Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

(Philippians 2:5-11)

## Chapter 14 – The Self-Consciousness of Christ: *Son of God*

**Key Text(s):** Matthew 11:25-27; John 8:54-58

*“God has devolved upon Jesus  
what it is His own prerogative:  
the task of revealing the whole truth in all its wide extent.”  
(Geerhardus Vos)*

Let us be reminded of the challenge that faces any student of the Gospels in seeking to understand the life of Jesus Christ. On the one hand, room must be allowed for the fulness of the Godhead to dwell in Jesus' body (Col. 1:19), guarding against any measure of *kenotic* Christology. On the other hand, Jesus must be allowed to be fully human as well, and His development cannot be short-circuited in a manner that derogates from His humanity. Though little is provided by way of historical record, what is given in regard to Jesus' childhood and young adulthood manifests what must have looked, in all outward respects, like a very normal life. To be sure, there were events that foreshadowed the momentous impact He was to have on His nation and the world, and these were those times that Mary *“treasured in her heart”* without, we can be confident, fully understand their meaning. Perhaps the most uncommon aspect of Jesus' life prior to His entering into the active Messianic ministry, was the fact that He never married, a matter to which He seems to allude in Matthew 19:11. But in all other respects His was a normal human life, albeit without any trace of sin, inherited or personal.

The full divinity and the full humanity of our Savior, dwelling as two natures within one Person, can never be taken from the realm of mystery where Paul places it (I Tim. 3:16). As we study the gospel accounts of Jesus' life and ministry, we must remember that the gospel writers were no more capable of bringing crystal clarity to the *mystery of godliness* in their writings than we are in our reasonings. In other words, though inspired, Matthew, Mark, and Luke were nonetheless limited by the human language they employed, and had to employ, to describe someone whose comprehensive Being is beyond language to encompass. They struggled to describe, as we struggle to understand, a Person who was so fully human as to be beyond the grasp of mere human reason, and so

fully God to be *'past finding out.'* But if this is the case, then why bother trying? What is the benefit to seeking to understand the 'self-consciousness' of Jesus?

The primary advantage of such a study is great indeed, for Jesus is the One into whose image we are to be conformed by the Holy Spirit, through the *renewing of our minds.*<sup>238</sup> Now clearly we cannot be conformed into His eternal deity, which leaves His perfect humanity as our pattern for sanctification. He who is in Christ has "*put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.*"<sup>239</sup> Jesus' human life was, is, and will forever be our standard of perfection and the model to which the Holy Spirit shapes and molds us as living stones. Thus the development of Jesus as a man cannot be merely viewed in light of His Messianic purpose, but must also be seen as the *form* to which every believer is being *conformed*. As a result, it is incumbent upon us to seek wisdom in discerning what it was in Jesus that we may, and must, imitate, and what it was in Jesus that remains beyond our creaturely reach. That is what we seek to do in studying the 'life of Christ.'

And of particular importance to this study is the 'self-consciousness' of Jesus Christ, as manifested in His own self-disclosure in the gospels. Apart from the inspired record as to what Jesus said regarding Himself – and what He *allowed* to be said of Him, as well – all reasoning concerning His nature will be conjecture, and will be guided *a priori* by what the student's reason will or will not allow. We have seen that this was the great fallacy of the liberal Higher Critics of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries: they *could not* allow to be true of Jesus what their reason *would not* allow to be true at all. The liberal pre-judges Scripture and arrives at a foregone conclusion. The conservative also pre-judges Scripture, but in such a way that admits up front, "*with God all things are possible.*" It is to be hoped that this second 'prejudice' will bear more wholesome fruit than the first.

Scripture itself seems to anticipate our challenge in attempting to understand the Person of Jesus Christ. Recognizing the need to see Jesus as fully human, we have the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. But also recognizing the need to see Jesus as fully God, we have the Gospel of John. This is not to say, by any means, that the deity of Christ is absent from the Synoptics, or that the humanity of Christ is not to be found in

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<sup>238</sup> Romans 12:2

John's Gospel. It is only to remark upon what every generation has found apparent in the reading: the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John are different in tone and focus, a difference that seems almost as great as that of human versus divine. Together, however, the four gospels present to us a Christ who answers both to the covenant promises and messianic prophecies of the Old Testament and to the developed theology of the Pauline epistles.

The point in the narrative of Jesus' life where all four gospels converge, and from which they then diverge in terms of focus, is that of Jesus' baptism by John. In the shortest gospel, that of Mark, the baptism of Jesus occurs very early in the first chapter. Matthew and Luke are the two who establish what little we do know of the years of Jesus' life prior to the baptism, and John presents us with the transcendent eternality of the *Logos* who came to earth, became flesh, and was baptized by John in the Jordan River.<sup>240</sup> Thus Mark starts with the baptism, Matthew and Luke arrive their via a distinctly *human* path, and John arrives by a much more *divine* path. The Synoptic journey runs through Bethlehem; the Johanne story through eternity. But both end up at the same place: the Jordan River and the baptism of Jesus the Messiah. This event is clearly a watershed in the life and ministry of Jesus, and deserves more attention than it is usually given. This is true not only in regard to the meaning of baptism in the life and ministry of Jesus the Messiah, but beyond that, the meaning of baptism in the life of every believer. We will return to this latter point toward the end of this lesson, but for now we take the baptism of Jesus as the focal point of His true humanity (the previous lesson) and of His true divinity (this lesson).

Let us first reconsider the accounts themselves:

*Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him. When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."* (Matthew 3:13-17)

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<sup>239</sup> Colossians 3:10

<sup>240</sup> To be sure, John's gospel does not explicitly narrate the actual baptism of Jesus; it is rather implied by the testimony of the Baptist and by the similar statements in John's gospel with the other three.

*It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."* (Mark 1:9-11)

*When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased."* (Luke 3:21-22)

*The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.' I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water." And John bore witness, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God."* (John 1:29-34)

It takes no time at all to see that John's record of events is different from that of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. John's gospel is believed to have been written late in the first



**Leonhard Goppelt (1911-73)**

century, after the Synoptics had circulated in the church for years, perhaps even decades. John's gospel, perhaps because of its greater emphasis on the *Logos* Christology, depended on the historical narratives of the Synoptics as the established possession of the early Church; the Apostle felt no need to present a fourth synopsis of Jesus' life. "The Gospel of John makes a more prismatic portrayal of the course of Jesus' ministry than do the synoptics, For the synoptics, Jesus commences his work in Galilee and journeys once to Jerusalem

for the Passover of his death. For John, Jesus is actively ministering in Jerusalem, in Galilee, and even in Samaria."<sup>241</sup> In John's gospel the Person and Ministry of Jesus Christ is very much like Jesus' own description to Nicodemus of the man who is born again of

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<sup>241</sup> Goppelt, Leonhard *Theology of the New Testament Volume 1: The Ministry of Jesus in its Theological Significance* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1981); 14.

the Holy Spirit, “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”<sup>242</sup> John does not



**Christoph Luthardt (1823-1902)**  
ined in every such word that we cannot view and comprehend the whole at one moment.”<sup>243</sup>

present a different Jesus, nor in any way does he invalidate the narratives of the synoptic writers. Rather he elaborates on the event consequent to Jesus’ baptism that is presented in simple indicative prose in the other gospels: the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus at His baptism. Luthardt comments on John’s gospel that “It is like history, and yet again like great ideas. We think that we must have understood it, and nevertheless feel that there is always something left which we have not perfectly

comprehended...It seems to us as if there were so much combined in every such word that we cannot view and comprehend the whole at one moment.”<sup>243</sup>

### **This is My beloved Son...**

The advent of the Spirit is one common feature among the four accounts of Jesus’ interaction with John the Baptist. Another is the testimony from heaven that Jesus was the *Son of God*. It has been taught sporadically throughout the history of the Church, that it was at the baptism that Jesus *became* God’s Son; that God ‘adopted’ the man Jesus of Nazareth in a special and powerful way at His baptism. The first to propound this view in an influential way was a teacher of unknown origins by the name of Cerinthius (c. AD 100), against whom it is quite possible that John wrote both his epistles and his gospel. Cerinthius was a *gnostic*, who believed that the path of salvation lay through successive attainment of ‘knowledge’ – the meaning of the Greek word, *gnosis* – until a person reached ‘true knowledge’ or *epignosis*. A derivation of ancient Greek dualistic philosophy, Gnosticism had no place for a ‘God-man,’ and taught that the Divine Being merely utilized the body of the man, Jesus, to perform and teach what was necessary for others to attain greater knowledge. Thus Cerinthius denied the pre-existence of Christ, maintaining rather that the *Logos*/Christ came upon Jesus only at His baptism.

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<sup>242</sup> John 3:8

One can see how John's gospel could be interpreted as a refutation of Cerinthus, or of a prior teaching that developed under Cerinthus, since the dates of the two men's active ministry do not seem to overlap. John makes a strong point to establish the pre-existence of the Christ more so than do the synoptic authors, setting forth at the very beginning of his work the *Logos* Christology that includes the true Incarnation of God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Thus we rightly conclude from John's gospel that, as noted earlier, the path to the baptism was as much through eternity as it was through Bethlehem, and any account that has the one without the other is both incomplete and dangerously heretical.

But recognizing that Jesus' path to the Jordan originated in eternity as it did in Bethlehem raises the similar question concerning His self-consciousness with regard to His divinity as it did with regard to His humanity: What was Jesus' own cognition with regard to Himself being God's Son? In what sense did He consider Himself the Son of God? Was this too a matter of development, or was His self-awareness of divinity always full and acute?

Answers to these questions are not as clear as simply saying – and truly saying – that the divine nature of Jesus Christ could never have *not* known of His eternal deity. This is simply to acknowledge that the eternal *Logos* continued to be the eternal *Logos*, the Second Person of the Triune God, after '*becoming flesh and tabernacling among us.*' But what we are about is an attempt to understand the biblical self-disclosure of Jesus the Messiah of Israel and Savior of the world. In order to fully appreciate what God has done in and through Jesus Christ, we must understand – as much as possible considering the magnitude of the mystery with which we deal – what was done in the power of the divinity of Christ, and what was done in the power of the Spirit-filled humanity of Jesus. As the representative of His chosen, both from among the Jews and from among the Gentiles, Jesus Christ must be seen to act fully as the last Adam, and Christological shortcuts that essentially overpower the human nature by the divine in Christ, are to be avoided.

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<sup>243</sup> Luthardt, Christoph Ernst *St. John's Gospel* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark; 1876); 18-19.

We have already visited the passage early in Luke’s gospel where Jesus was found in the temple, listening to, questioning, and answering the scribes and teachers of the Law. At that time He made reference to most naturally being ‘*in My Father’s house,*’ thus indicating at such an early age an understanding of God as His Father. While it is true that the phrase ‘son of God’ or ‘child of God’ can be interpreted more generically as any faithful member of the covenant community, it must also be noted that Jesus here begins what would be the pattern of His entire ministry: referring to the Father in the first person possessive. Rather than saying *the* Father’s house, Jesus emphatically refers to the temple as *My* Father’s house. This, as noted, would be the repeated pattern throughout the gospel narratives, as Jesus would consistently make the distinction between *My* God and *your* God. Not, of course, in any way indicating two different Gods! But rather establishing His own singular and unique relationship to the Father in heaven. One of the ‘divine nature’ passages in the Gospel of Matthew, otherwise noted for its ‘human nature’ approach to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, concerns this intimate relationship between Jesus and the Father.

*At that time Jesus answered and said, “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and **no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.**”* (Matthew 11:25-27)

In light of our previous lesson, it is worth noting that the setting for this passage is the deputation from John the Baptist questioning if Jesus was indeed the Christ, or if they should continue looking. What is significant to this particular aspect of our study, however, is the incredible intimacy of knowledge (John’s gospel was certainly not the only one to deal with ‘knowledge’) possessed mutually between Jesus as the Son, and the Father in heaven. “The intimacy is such that God alone can know Him, and that He alone can know God...God knows Him and He knows God with an exclusive knowledge...It is a knowledge such as only a



**Geerhardus Vos (1862-1949)**

father can possess of a son, only a son can possess of a father.”<sup>244</sup> Vos’ insight is typically thorough, but his analogy between a father and son misses the mark. For the knowledge shared between the eternal Son and the heavenly Father transcends any analog, and certainly we cannot be aided in our comprehension of it by a comparison to the knowledge that exists between a human father and his son. Vos corrects himself one page later when he notes that this knowledge of which Jesus speaks cannot be viewed as one that develops over the course of a relationship – as it is and must be between a human father and son – but is a knowledge as deep and eternal as the natures of the two Persons thus joined. “It is not a knowledge acquired by a learning to know, but a knowledge possessed in virtue of a state of being.”<sup>245</sup>

This is to say that Jesus’ monologue in response to John the Baptist’s query constitutes a clear and unmistakable self-awareness of His union with the Father as the Son. He does not simply accept the age-old denomination of being a ‘son’ of God through the covenant and by virtue of obedience to the Law. Rather He sets forth an exclusive relationship in which He and His Father are mutually co-extensive and co-intensive in their knowledge, and *no one else is in this set*. Oscar Cullman notes that “...the conviction that in a unique way he was ‘God’s Son’ must belong to the very heart of what we call the self-consciousness of Jesus.”<sup>246</sup> It is also evident from Jesus’ own lips that He understood being ‘God’s Son’ as being equal in nature and authority with the Father, something His Jewish opponents also clearly recognized, and for which they accused Him of blasphemy.

Jesus, we read, “*taught as one with authority, and not as the scribes.*” Undoubtedly this conclusion derived partly from the manner in which Jesus taught as well as the content of His teaching. But perhaps the most powerful witness of Jesus’ self-consciousness of being the divine Son of God, was the “*You have heard it said...I say unto you*” paradigm He so often used. “The prophetic argument, addressed to the conscience of Israel, was ever ‘Thus saith the Lord.’ How significant, how full of import as to His consciousness respecting Himself is our Lord’s substitute, ‘Verily, verily, I say unto you.’”<sup>247</sup> But again we must ask whether this self-consciousness on the part of Jesus pertained only to His

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<sup>244</sup> Vos, Geerhardus *The Self-Disclosure of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; 1954); 148.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*; 149.

<sup>246</sup> Cullmann, *Christology*; 282.

eternal oneness with the Father in the Trinity, or whether it also – and maybe even primarily – applied to His being the Son of God *as man*.

In this regard it is significant to note that Jesus Christ – the eternal *Logos* come in the flesh – did not begin His ministry on earth at the time He was astounding the scribes with His understanding of the Law. Nor do we hear the ‘verily, verily, I say unto you’ prior to the baptism by John and the momentous event that occurred at that time: “*the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him...*” Our understanding of the self-consciousness of Jesus Christ should be guided by His own actions, including the significant chronology of those actions. Denney writes, “It is not until the man Jesus, in the maturity of His manhood, has been anointed with the Holy Spirit and power, that He begins to act in the character of the Anointed.”<sup>248</sup> Once again we find the baptism front and center as a milestone in the life of Jesus Christ, and recognize that this event was both the culmination of His self-consciousness and the inauguration of His self-disclosure. The full and final manifestation of the Son of God as the *man* Jesus Christ would come with His resurrection from the grave, as Paul so emphatically states in the salutation of his epistle to the Romans,

*Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning **His Son Jesus Christ our Lord**, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and **declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.***

(Romans 1:1-4)

The fact that Jesus did not embark upon His ministry until His baptism and reception of the Holy Spirit, teaches us that the ‘verily, verily’ authority that permeated His subsequent life was that of the divinely anointed Man, who was uniquely the Son of God. This is by no means to say that Jesus *became* the Son of God at the baptism, any more than it is for Paul to say that Jesus did not become the Son of God until the resurrection. What we are referring to is the *manifestation* of the glory of the Son of God *in the flesh* – the true Emmanuel – which commences at the baptism and culminates at the resurrection. But Pannenberg is correct when he writes, “If Jesus as a person is ‘the Son of God,’ as

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<sup>247</sup> Liddon, *Our Lord's Divinity*; 167.

becomes clear retroactively from his resurrection, then he has always been the Son of God.”<sup>249</sup> The baptism of Jesus, and the subsequent divine witness by word and by Spirit, were not the beginning of His Sonship, but rather the *revelation* of it. This revelation then became the authoritative basis for the messianic ministry that was to follow from the Jordan to the Cross. Adolf Schlatter writes, “By the fact that the sign consisted of the sending of the Spirit and of the attestation of his sonship, his internal relationship with God, which determined his personal existence, was made the foundation for his entire work.”<sup>250</sup>

This ‘internal relationship’ is most powerfully revealed to us in the Gospel of John, though we have seen it is by no means absent from the Synoptic Gospels. H. P. Liddon acknowledges that “It is undeniable that the most numerous and direct claims to Divinity on the part of our Lord are to be found in the Gospel of John.”<sup>251</sup> In the Synoptic Gospels the self-revelation of Jesus as to His relationship with the Father in heaven can almost always be interpreted in a manner that diminishes His eternal unity with the Father, His essential deity. This is not to say that these passages – Matthew 11 quoted above, Matthew 13:16-17, or Matthew 17:24-27 – *should* be explained away as simply Jesus acknowledging Himself to be a ‘cut above’ the average Israelite in terms of His obedience to the divine Law. It is simply to acknowledge that this is how liberal scholarship has treated such passages over the years. But John’s gospel does not give such liberty; the self-awareness of Jesus as recorded by John is much more forthright with regard to His essential deity. Nowhere is this more the case than in John 8.

*Jesus answered, “If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing. It is My Father who honors Me, of whom you say that He is your God. Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him. And if I say, ‘I do not know Him,’ I shall be a liar like you; but I do know Him and keep His word. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.” Then the Jews said to Him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?” Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.”* (John 8:54-58)

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<sup>248</sup> Denney; 180.

<sup>249</sup> Pannenberg; 141.

<sup>250</sup> Schlatter; 85.

<sup>251</sup> Liddon; 207.

There is no getting around this passage, with its powerful self-attestation on the part of Jesus of His own pre-existence. Certainly the Jews who heard Him did not fail to catch His meaning, for they immediately took up stones to stone Him. Jesus starts by referring to Abraham as ‘your father,’ and not in the common Jewish parlance, ‘our father.’ This probably set His audience’s ears tingling, but more was to come. Jesus ends His profound statement of pre-existence by attributing to Himself the very name of God - *I AM*. This passage illustrates the tendentious and circular logic of the higher critic: the statement is so obviously a self-conscious manifestation of a belief on Jesus’ part that He was pre-existent, even eternal, that it therefore must be an interpolation from the later Church, for Jesus would never have said such a thing. It does not occur to the unbelieving critic that the early Church believed Jesus to have been divine and pre-existent on the basis of Jesus’ own statements of divinity and pre-existence, and that words such as these recorded in John 8 are the most reasonable explanation as to why the early Christians considered Jesus to be a divine Messiah essentially immediately upon their first assembly at Pentecost.

Jesus testifies to His own nature exactly what John the Baptist testified concerning the same, for John bore witness that the One who was coming after him was greater than he was, because He was *before him*. And this witness of John, and later of Jesus, merely echoes what the Father testifies on Jesus’ behalf at His baptism; again, the point where the four gospels come together to initiate the messianic ministry of Jesus Christ. The Synoptic Gospels each record virtually the same announcement from heaven upon Jesus’ baptism, “*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.*”<sup>252</sup> In John’s gospel the divine announcement is not recorded, but the Baptist’s testimony to its occurrence is,

*And John bore witness, saying, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.”* (John 1:32-34)

The heavenly witness is itself a confluence of Old Testament prophetic language used in reference to God’s Anointed Servant/King. Psalm 2 and Isaiah 42 are combined in

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<sup>252</sup> Matthew 3:17; *cp.* Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22

the Father's pronouncement of love and approbation of Jesus, with the former alluding to the kingship of the Messiah, and the latter His servant nature.

*Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion.*

*I will declare the decree:*

*The LORD has said to Me, 'You are My Son,*

*Today I have begotten You.*

(Psalm 2:6-7)

*Behold! My Servant whom I uphold,*

*My Elect One in whom My soul delights!*

(Isaiah 42:1)

The narrative of the descent of the Holy Spirit as a dove is so familiar to Christian readers, that the significance of the event is often lost. The first question to ask is to the sense in which Jesus is called God's Son, by God Himself. The second question has to do with the nature of the anointing by the Holy Spirit. The answer to these questions is of critical importance both to our understanding of the *work* of Jesus Christ, and to the whole nature and purpose of Man as created in the image of God.

To the first question, then. *In what sense is Jesus proclaimed to be the Son of God?* We have already established, hopefully convincingly though by no means exhaustively, that the pre-existent *Logos*, the Second Person of the Godhead, dwelt in bodily form in Jesus of Nazareth from the moment of conception within Mary's womb. In this sense it cannot be that Jesus *became* God's Son at the baptism, for the relationship of the divine Father to the divine Son is as eternal as the Godhead: there was never a 'time' when God was not 'Father,' or Jesus was not 'Son.'

So perhaps we are to interpret the announcement at the baptism as the point in time at which Jesus' *human nature* was adopted by God as His 'Son.' This is a plausible conclusion, and one that has been made repeatedly over the history of exegesis of these passages. It provides for a period of probation on the part of Jesus, similar to the probation experienced (and failed) by Adam, prior to His adoption by the Father as His beloved Son. But this interpretation also has a fatal flaw, in that it divides the perfect union between the divine and the human in the person of Jesus, and violates the Christological principle from John's Prologue, that it was the *Logos of God*, who is the eternal Son, who *became flesh and tabernacled among us*. If Jesus of Bethlehem/Nazareth was not the Son until

His baptism, then there was a *disunity* within His person; the divine nature and the human nature were not yet in harmony. But everything we read concerning the Incarnation – both prophetically and historically – teaches us that the two natures were never out of harmony with each other, and that the *Logos* dwelt in perfect unity with the humanity of Jesus, “*For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.*”<sup>253</sup>

If Jesus did not *become* the Son of God at His baptism – either with respect to His divine nature or to His human nature – then we conclude that He was at all times the Son of God as respects both natures, and this is the consistent witness of Scripture. Thus the only reasonable interpretation of the divine voice at Jesus’ baptism is that it was at this time that the Father *reveals* His Son in the role of the promised Messiah. James Denney writes,

...the life of Jesus, wherever we come into contact with it, is the life of the Person who is revealed to us in the Baptism. It is not the life of the carpenter of Nazareth, or of a Galilean peasant, or of a simple child of God like the pious people in the first two chapters of Luke. It is the life of one who has been baptized with divine power, and who is conscious that He has been called by God with a calling which if it is His at all must be His alone.<sup>254</sup>

This consideration leads us to answer the second question, concerning the nature of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus consequent to His baptism. Again, we cannot conclude that this was the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus in His divine nature, for the *fullness of the Godhead* was incarnate in Jesus; the divine Persons are not divisible in the sense that the *Logos* dwelt for thirty or so years in the man Jesus, without the Holy Spirit. The vision of the Spirit descending upon Jesus answers to the oil being poured over the head of the anointed priest or king, as the fulfillment to the type, or the reality to the shadow. This was an anointing unto ministry, the messianic ministry upon which Jesus immediately embarks. Adolf Schlatter comments with regard to the baptismal event,

The account does not see the event’s importance in the fact that Jesus had now become the Son of God. For it does not give to Jesus his conversion or his call to God nor his reception

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<sup>253</sup> Colossians 2:9

<sup>254</sup> Denney; 185.

into God's love. It rather reveals what he is, since God testifies to him that he is his Son, and therefore grants him now the Spirit through whom he is able to act in God.<sup>255</sup>

It can hardly be denied that the baptism of Jesus stands at the beginning of His earthly ministry as the Messiah of Israel. The nature of Jesus' commission is very significant to our understanding of that mission, and to our understanding of man's general relationship to God, beginning with Adam in the Garden. Jesus did not begin His ministry in the power of His divinity, but rather in the weakness of His humanity filled with the Holy Spirit of God. Jesus subsequently fulfilled the entirety of His calling as the Messiah – both in the royal sense of the Son of Man, and in the servant sense of the *ebed Yahweh* – likewise in the weakness of His flesh through the power of the Holy Spirit. Peter testifies to this fact as he bears witness to Jesus while in the home of the Roman centurion Cornelius,

*The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ – He is Lord of all – that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how **God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power**, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.* (Acts 10:36-38)

Scripture speaks of Jesus Christ possessing the Holy Spirit *without measure*, and this means that God the Father has equipped Jesus Christ with the Holy Spirit for the performance of all that Christ was sent to be and to do. "With the gifts are meant those which equipped the man Jesus Christ for the fulfillment of his official calling. This is not a granting of the supernatural to the human nature but the equipment, by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, of Jesus Christ for the completion of the work assigned to him."<sup>256</sup>

In this equipping of Jesus' human nature for the work of the ministry assigned to Him, we see the essential component of all human life that is oriented toward and pleasing to God. The pattern of Jesus' baptism becomes that of every believer, and the anointing of Jesus as equipping Him for service, the pattern of every believer's life in Him. Because of who Jesus is and what He has done, now believers are equipped and called to *walk in the Spirit* and not in the flesh.

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<sup>255</sup> Schlatter; 82.

<sup>256</sup> Berkouwer, *The Person of Christ*; 295.

## Chapter 15 – Tempted in All Things Such as We...

**Key Text(s):** Luke 4:1-13; Matthew 4:1-11

*“It is the terrible fact,  
which confronts every one who is interested in the Kingdom of God,  
that evil in the world is enormously strong.”  
(James Denney)*

Immediately upon receiving the baptism of John, and the vocal approbation of His divine Sonship, Jesus is led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit, to be tempted by Satan for a period of forty days. The parallelism of the forty days with the forty days of Moses on Mt. Sinai, and the forty years of Israel’s wandering in the wilderness, are too obvious to require much comment. Suffice it to say that, once again, Jesus is represented as the true Moses and the true Israel, even in the duration of His particular probation. Rather, the temptation of Jesus presents us with a far deeper and insoluble problem with regard to His sinless nature. Fallen man cannot conceive of temptation without the implication of sin, of succumbing to the temptation. But how are we to consider the temptation of a sinless man? Can it be considered that Jesus was tempted if He was not capable of sinning? Or, to put it in a more disturbing way, does the temptation of Jesus imply His capacity to sin? These are not merely academic questions, for the temptation of Jesus – and not only during the forty days recorded in Matthew & Luke – is an event that lies at the very core of Jesus’ identification with His people, as the author of Hebrews so plainly states,

*Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. **For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.*** (Hebrews 2:14-18)

*Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but **One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.** Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.* (Hebrews 4:14-16)

Thus for the connection between our High Priest and our own consciences to be this complete, this intimate, we must consider the temptations that Jesus encountered to have been *real*, and not merely form. In other words, His sinlessness cannot be allowed to mitigate the power of the temptations that He suffered. Otherwise Jesus' experience is nothing but a charade when compared to our own; He cannot be the sympathetic High Priest that He is promised to be, and that we so desperately need. However, in granting the full power of the temptation we must hold back from also allowing for the possibility that Jesus might have succumbed and sinned. Even on a theoretical level, the hypothesis that the Son of God might have fallen, as the Son of Man, into temptation and sin is too thoroughly damaging to the unity of the two natures wrought in the Incarnation to be worthy of the least consideration. Thus, when we consider the temptation of Jesus, we find ourselves on the horns of a dilemma.

One path of inquiry available to us in seeking a solution to this problem, is to analyze the nature of temptation when experienced by a sinless man as compared to temptation when experienced by one who is already fallen in nature. We have only two examples of the former; and need look no further than our own selves for an example of the latter. James addresses our fallen condition when he traces the genesis of sin derived from temptation,

*But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.*

(James 1:14-15)

The context of James' formula is, of course, the common condition of fallen men as they encounter, and succumb to, the temptations of this world. The nature of such temptations is summarized concisely and poetically by John in his first epistle: these are the "*the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life.*"<sup>257</sup> And James' contention is that the fallen man cannot blame God for his own weakness in the face of temptation, for the germ of sin already lies within him through lust. But it is this very *lust* that presents us with what may be the answer to the conundrum: How is it that a sinless

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<sup>257</sup> I John 2:16

man can truly experience temptation without there ever being a danger of his succumbing to it?

The Greek word translated ‘lust’ in the New Testament is *epithumea*, and its most basic meaning is that of a very strong desire. Obviously its usage is predominantly negative within the context of Scripture, but it is not always so. For instance, when Jesus tells His disciples how He has earnestly desired to eat that final Passover meal with them, this is the term used.<sup>258</sup> This is perhaps the only time the term is used in a positive manner, and our translators have appropriately rendered *epithumea* as ‘earnestly desired’ rather than ‘lusted.’ Still, the word is the same. This indicates that the moral content of such desire is not measured by its intensity, but rather by two other characteristics: its *source* and its *object*. Man is constituted as a creature with desires, but the moral quality of these desires – even seemingly benign desires such as food to satiate hunger – cannot be measured simply on the basis that the desire exists, but rather on the basis of from whence the desire arises and to what the desire is set.

In the case of fallen man, *epithumea* is already pejorative on account of the corrupt and depraved quality of the will. Paul speaks of this source-corruption in Romans 7, as something that no man can escape who has been born in sin,

*For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.* (Romans 7:18-23)

This condition of corruption and depravity is what informs James’ wholly negative assessment of the progression from temptation to sin to death; this is the condition of all men born of Adam’s line through natural generation. The *source* is corrupt, therefore the *desire* will be corrupted. But what of the two men in history who encountered temptation *without* indwelling sin – Adam and Jesus? For if we question the reality of Jesus’ temptation, we must also question the reality of Adam’s. And if we do, then we find

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<sup>258</sup> Luke 22:15

ourselves in an insoluble quandary, for it is evident that Adam did sin, he did succumb to a temptation that must have seemed quite real to him. It fits the historical data far better to conclude that the temptation that Adam faced in the garden was *real*, as was the temptation faced by Jesus Christ in the wilderness. But how can a sinless man sin? And how can it be that the Son of Man could be tempted, yet without the danger of succumbing and sinning?

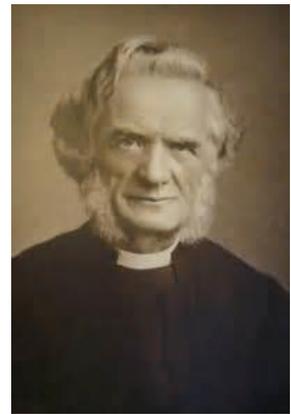
If we accept both the creation of Adam in the image of God, and the Incarnation of Jesus Christ as the eternal Logos come in the flesh, then we also accept that neither man possessed the slightest trace of sin within him at the time of temptation. Therefore the fault cannot be laid at the *source* of desire; it must be found in the *object*. And this is where we encounter the fundamental difference between the first and the last Adam: the first set his desire to be like God, the second did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped. The goal of Adam's desire was positive in and of itself, but he set that desire as the ultimate good for himself, rather than the goal of glorifying God through obedience to the divine command. *Strong desire* exercised in pursuit of a lesser goal resulted in Adam succumbing to Satan's temptation, and the Fall of mankind into sin. The temptation was real, and not just form, and though Adam approached the situation in a sinless state, he was capable of sinning on the basis of his own composition of desire. In this the temptation of Jesus presents a direct parallel, with a gloriously different result.

Thus we can maintain the biblical and historical reality both of Jesus' sinlessness and of the power of the temptations He endured. Much of what Satan presented to Jesus in the wilderness temptation, and much of what was presented to Jesus through the remainder of His earthly ministry, constituted valid, legitimate, and even biblical goals. But, unlike Adam, Jesus' supreme purpose was to obey His Father in all things, and thus to glorify Him, and this steadfast *goal* of all His most earnest desire – His *epithumea* – guarded His heart from the least inclination to succumb to Satan's fiery darts. But this does not mean that the temptation did not register as such in Jesus' mind and heart. If this analysis is correct, then it also stands to reason that the more pure a man is in heart, the more intense the temptation will be felt if the goal presented is, in itself, a noble and righteous one. Satan's "*if Thou art the Son of God...*" must have burned in the ears of the

One who knew Himself to be that Beloved Son, and knew His destiny to encompass all that with which Satan now tempted Him. Norval Geldenhuys, in his commentary on the Gospel of Luke, writes,

The fact that the solicitations came wholly from without, and were not born from within, does not prevent that which was offered to Him being regarded as desirable. The force of a temptation depends, not upon the sin involved in what is proposed, but upon the advantage connected with it. And a righteous man, whose will never falters for a moment, may feel the attractiveness of the advantage more keenly than the weak man who succumbs.<sup>259</sup>

Thus is preserved the intimate connection between the Savior and the saved, in regard to Jesus' High Priestly sympathy with the struggles of His own. This sympathy was by no means diminished on account of Jesus' sinlessness, but rather it was accentuated by the reaction of a completely pure heart in the presence of temptation against obedience to the Father in heaven. Brooke Foss Westcott comments on the passage in Hebrews chapter 2, "Sympathy with the sinner in his trial does not depend



**B. F. Westcott (1825-1901)**

on the experience of sin, but on the experience of the strength of the temptation to sin, which only the sinless can know in its full intensity. He who falls yields before the last strain."<sup>260</sup>

The temptation of Jesus is an event that transcends His character and destiny as Israel's Messiah, and enters into His purpose as the Savior of the World. While the connection between Jesus' forty days of temptation in the wilderness and Israel's forty years of wandering in the wilderness is clear and unmistakable, Jesus' temptation by Satan also harkens back to the Garden of Eden, and the failure of the first Adam to withstand an infinitely milder temptation. And while the context and venue of Jesus' entire ministry is both undoubtedly and importantly Israel, it is equally important that we recognize those events in His life and work that foretold His redemptive reach beyond Israel, to the world.

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<sup>259</sup> Geldenhuys, Norval *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1972); 157.

<sup>260</sup> Quoted by Geldenhuys; 157.

This whole strand of redemptive history is, from Jesus onward, the reverse effect of the narrowing of divine grace, as Cullman cogently summarized, “the way proceeds from the whole creation to humanity, from humanity to the people of Israel, from the people of Israel to the ‘remnant,’ from the ‘remnant’ to a single man, Jesus.”<sup>261</sup> And so the event of Jesus’ temptation cannot be interpreted solely within the context of His role as the Jewish Messiah, but must be seen as a cosmic struggle – one of many – between the Son of Man and the enemy of mankind, Satan. Schlatter writes, “His temptation arose at a more profound level where the Jew did not seek it and where prevailing messianic doctrines did not extend. The struggle involved the basic will to piety.”<sup>262</sup>

Thus the corollary to the temptation of Jesus, and His own understanding of its significance, is to be found not only in the Genesis narrative of the Fall, but also in our Lord’s enigmatic words to the scribes and Pharisees who claimed that He cast out demons by the spirit of Beelzebub. Recorded in Matthew 12, Jesus’ words manifest His own comprehension of the underlying struggle – the all-important struggle – that characterized and defined His mission,

*And knowing their thoughts Jesus said to them, ‘Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and any city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand? If I by Beelzebub cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? For this reason they will be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. **Or how can anyone enter the strong man’s house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.**’* (Matthew 12:25-29)

Throughout His subsequent ministry, Jesus will chronically allude to the more fundamental struggle that He is fighting, not merely on behalf of His people Israel, but also on behalf of those ‘from every tongue, tribe, and nation’ who were given to Him by the Father from before the foundation of the world. Their mutual enemy – the enemy of both Jew and Greek – was the accuser, Satan. And it was with Satan that Jesus fundamentally had to fight. Schlatter adds, alluding to the ‘binding’ mentioned in Matthew 12, “he saw in Satan the opponent with whom he had to wrestle because from now on his regal calling

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<sup>261</sup> Cullmann; *Christology*; 55.

<sup>262</sup> Schlatter; 91.

made him the dispenser of grace for mankind. By this grace he deprived Satan of his privilege and power.”<sup>263</sup> Thus Jesus’ temptation cannot be fully understood simply as a successful reenactment of Israel’s wilderness probation, but rather as the rejoining of the conflict between Man and Satan, Round One having been lost by the first man, Adam. But this round, and consequently the entire bout, goes to the Son of Man, the last Adam. “He faced and vanquished the enemy of His calling, and of all the work and will of God for man.”<sup>264</sup>

This point cannot be overstated. A great deal of emphasis has been placed, and rightly so, on Jesus’ role as the Servant of Jehovah and one His absolutely spotless obedience to God and to the Law. All of this defines the content of His righteousness; the



**Frederick Godet (1812-1900)**

temptation defines the context. He was Israel’s Messiah that He might become mankind’s Savior, and in this pursuit the enemy was not the Law but Satan. Frederick Godet, in his commentary on the temptation account found in Luke, writes that “His decision on this critical occasion would determine forever the tendency and nature of His Messianic work. Christ or Antichrist was the alternative term of the two ways which were opening before Him. This trial is...not simply a question, as it is in our conflicts, whether a given individual shall form

part of the kingdom of God; it is the very existence of this kingdom that is at stake.”<sup>265</sup>

The narrative of the temptation of Jesus, recorded in fullest form in Matthew and Luke, is but a vivid and concentrated example of what Jesus endured throughout His life, a full frontal assault by the evil one, who would hereafter lurk in the shadows and execute more guerilla tactics in his opposition to the Savior. “The temptation during the forty days in the wilderness and His triumph over them are merely an example of what He experienced and attained throughout His life on earth.”<sup>266</sup> This fact is accounted for in the subsequent history of Jesus’ ministry as we read it in all four Gospels, where, as Luke

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<sup>263</sup> Schlatter; 87.

<sup>264</sup> Denney; 187.

<sup>265</sup> Godet, Frederick *A Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke* (New York: I. K. Funk & Co.; 1881); 134.

<sup>266</sup> Geldenhuys; 157.

records, *“Satan departed from Him until a more opportune time.”*<sup>267</sup> Such an opportunity would come through the opposition presented against Jesus by the religious leaders of Israel, whom Jesus called the sons of the devil who was a liar and murderer from the beginning. Another opportunity would be afforded by Peter himself, who would represent the accuser of the brethren in attempting to prevent Jesus from going to the Cross. The demons would testify that Jesus was the ‘Holy One of God,’ and ultimately Jesus Himself would prepare for the for the final round of the fight, saying, *“the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me.”*<sup>268</sup>

It is also probably, from the phrasing of the introductory comments in all three Synoptic Gospels, that the temptations lasted the duration of the forty days, and not just on three specific instances at the end of that period. This was the purpose of His being led (Mark: *impelled*) into the desert, to be tempted by the devil.

*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry.* (Matthew 4:1-2)

*Immediately the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness. And He was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts, and the angels were ministering to Him.* (Mark 1:12-13)

*Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry.* (Luke 4:1-2)

This observation indicates that the specific temptations that are recorded – the particular dialogue between Jesus and Satan – are either examples of the overall gist of Satan’s attack, or are stylized conversations that capture the tenor of the whole event. This conclusion is perhaps strengthened by the fact that only Matthew and Luke record the dialogue, and the two evangelists do not place the three interchanges in the same order. Thus we may reasonably interpret the three ‘temptations’ of Jesus as representative of the thrust of Satan’s intrigue – though they may indeed be verbatim records of the dialogue

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<sup>267</sup> Luke 4:11

<sup>268</sup> John 14:30

between the accuser and our Lord, they are also indicative of the *schemes of the adversary*, of which we are not unaware.<sup>269</sup>

Significant in the temptations is the accusatory, unbelieving, and intentionally doubt-provoking jibe of Satan, *“If You are the Son of God...”* Both Matthew and Luke intend, no doubt, for the reader to associate this false-hearted query with the divine announcement that followed Jesus’ baptism, *“This is [Luke: You are...] My Beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased.”* The form of Satan’s attack is similar in essence to the words he used in tempting and deceiving Adam and Eve, *“God has not truly said...”* In this case, the Father’s pronouncement of divine Sonship is called into question, or, if not absolutely thrown into doubt, used as leverage against Jesus to get Him to manifest this Sonship in an illegitimate manner. The force of Satan’s words probably tend toward the latter: instead of ‘if’ we might just as correctly render it as ‘since’: *“Since You are God’s Son...”* The satanic strategy in this assault is to play upon the undeniable (by virtue of the divine word at Jesus’ baptism) relationship between Jesus and God, to induce the former to ‘take control’ of His destiny, and to ‘act’ in accordance with His dignity.

In a manner of speaking, the plan of attack of the accuser has not changed over the millennia. It has been announced by God through His Word, that if any man be in Christ, he is a son of God as fully as is Jesus Himself – even a joint-heir with Christ. Thus the devil’s attacks (through his minions, as he is by no means omnipresent) is either to cast doubt upon the relationship of adoption, *“If you are the son of God...”* or to encourage hubris and illegitimate presumption on the part of the believer, *“Since you are the son of God...”* The believer’s weapon against these well-known schemes is the same as used by his Lord, the Word of God, rightly interpreted and applied.

The pattern of the satanic temptation as recorded by Matthew and Luke is also very indicative of its representative nature with regard to all temptation. The three objects placed before Jesus by the devil are each examples of the threefold nature of temptation that faces every man, *the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life.*<sup>270</sup> Both Matthew and Luke record as the first temptation the most natural, that of physical sustenance after Jesus has gone without food for forty days. The temptation is, of course,

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<sup>269</sup> II Corinthians 2:11

deeper than just nourishment; it is a challenge to Jesus – as was the temptation of Adam – to take matters into His own hands, and to exercise His divine authority to bring about something good in itself, and necessary for His survival.

We are given insight here into a common vulnerability of fallen man to temptation: *practical necessity*. Somehow the unbiblical phrase “*God helps those who help themselves*” has entered into the collective psyche of believers, so that Satan is furnished with an open door of temptation by simply pressing the ‘need’ of the moment upon the believer’s mind and conscience. This is not to deny need, nor to advocate a complete apathy to industrious labor and responsible care for oneself and one’s own. But when Jesus is faced with alleviating what must have been painful hunger by exercising His authority over nature – something He *will do* later with regard to the feeding of the multitudes – He responds with Scripture, quoting Deuteronomy 8:3; reminding Himself and reprimanding Satan,

*He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD.*

In His representative character, Jesus rejects the first temptation on behalf of those who He has come to free from the bondage of the devil. “In these words He declares that He and every person are, ultimately, not dependent on bread, but on God, the giver and supporter of all life.”<sup>271</sup> Godet adds,

The experience of Israel in the wilderness, to which Moses’ words refer, proves that the action of divine power is not limited to the ordinary nourishment of bread. God can support human existence by other material means, such as manna or quails; He can even, if He pleases, make a man live by the mere power of His will. This principle is only the application of a living monotheism to the sphere of physical life.<sup>272</sup>

The second temptation recorded by Matthew (and third as recorded by Luke) represents the boastful pride of life: “*If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down...*” In this instance Satan resorts to quoting Scripture which, as one who masquerades as an angel of light, he is quite adept at doing, even through his agents. This is by no means an

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<sup>270</sup> I John 2:16

<sup>271</sup> Geldenhuys; 159.

empty temptation, for later Jesus Himself will retort to Pilate that, if He so desired, He could command legions of angels to come to His aid and rescue. But the temptation in the wilderness, and Jesus' subsequent ministry, prove that He should only so desire if it were the will of the Father that it be done so. This particular temptation will be repeated against Jesus by the soldiers who scourged Him, "*Prophecy, who is it that hit you?*" and by the mockers who passed by His cross, "*Let Yourself down from there, and then we will believe in You!*" It is of the nature of the boastful pride of life to defend oneself when unjustly tormented, rather than to allow God to defend in His good time. This is probably why the Holy Spirit exhorts all believers, through the pen of James, "*Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.*"<sup>273</sup>

The final temptation in Matthew's account manifests the lust of the eyes, as Jesus is shown a pathway to glory and dominion. This temptation is not unlike the manner by which the devil beguiled Eve by showing her the beauty of the forbidden fruit. That fruit promised knowledge, something God intended to furnish to His supreme creation in His own time and His own way. So also the kingdoms of the earth here shown to Jesus have indeed been promised to Him, but He refuses to short circuit the process by which "*the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ.*"<sup>274</sup> Again, this satanic temptation will be repeated through human agents during Christ's earthly ministry; by Jesus' brothers, who encourage Him to go up to the feast and to publicly declare Himself as the Messiah, and by Peter, who tries to interfere with Jesus' foreordained path to glory through the cross. Even Jesus' mother is somewhat guilty of channeling Satan at the wedding of Cana, and Jesus rebukes her, saying, "*My hour has not yet come.*"

As to the difference in the order of the temptations between the two Synoptic accounts, it may be that Luke is following what was probably a standard pattern of consideration with regard to temptation and sin, the same pattern that John sets out in his first letter. Matthew, on the other hand, seems to follow a pattern of ascending intensity of temptation, ending with the temptation that strikes nearest to the heart of Jesus' divine

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<sup>272</sup> Godet; 137.

<sup>273</sup> James 4:10

<sup>274</sup> Revelation 11:15

mission, and to His submission to the will of His Father. But Satan erred – or perhaps knowingly misstated the sphere of his own authority, as he is the master deceiver – in claiming the right to transfer the sovereignty of the world to Jesus. It is true that Satan has a measure of authority here; even Jesus will speak of the devil as the ‘ruler of this world.’ But that right is by usurpation, and is held in fief to the true sovereign, God. “Only to the extent that mankind surrender themselves in sin to the evil one does God permit him to rule over the world of men.”<sup>275</sup> And here was the Son of Man, the last Adam, to reclaim the sovereignty that was original devolved upon Man in the Garden, before Adam’s fall. The temptation itself was a lie, from the father of lies. Nonetheless it did represent a ‘good’: that Jesus assume the lordship of the whole earth, the very thing that He was sent to do.

Godet refers to Jesus’ response to Satan as a ‘declaration of war,’ and the battle that has now been joined will continue for the span of three and half years, culminating in the cross. Satan controls the powerful forces of the world – both Jewish and Roman – that will array themselves against Jesus, and will hound Him to death at Golgotha. This Jesus knows, and still refuses to attain the glory set before Him in any other way than the path of sorrow, suffering, and death that will fully answer to the will of the Father. “Jesus condemned Himself to struggle, unaided by human power, with an adversary having at his disposal all human powers; to march with ten thousand men against a king who was coming against Him with twenty thousand. Death inevitably awaited Him in this path. But He unhesitatingly accepted all this, that He might remain faithful to God, from whom alone He determined to receive everything.”<sup>276</sup>

In this struggle Jesus will also limit Himself as to His own divine resources. It must be understood that the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness was the temptation of the last Adam – as *man* and not as eternal God. “Here we do not find a description of the temptation and of the victory of a superhuman being but the dire need that always plunges human lives into turmoil.”<sup>277</sup> It is to this purpose that we are told of Jesus’ hunger, a hunger that must have constituted real physical weakness at the time Satan

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<sup>275</sup> Geldenhuys; 160.

<sup>276</sup> Godet; 139.

<sup>277</sup> Schlatter; 90.

leveled his most powerful shots at Jesus. The Son of Man is here portrayed in a condition far below that of the first Adam when he fell, in order to show that as a man Jesus gained the victory over the accuser but fully submitting Himself to the will of the Father. “Although He had found Himself in the most unfavourable circumstances when the devil launched his most ruthless attacks against Him, He was nevertheless victorious.”<sup>278</sup>

The victory of Jesus over the devil in the wilderness establishes His bona fides as the Messiah of Israel and Savior of the world. He has withstood attack from the enemy of mankind, and has returned the attack upon Satan. Now Jesus will go forth preaching the kingdom of heaven as having come, and giving multitude proofs of having broken down the strongman’s door and bound the strongman that He might plunder the devil of his ill-gotten treasure, the souls of the elect. Jesus establishes also the bona fides of His divine Sonship. He has met Satan’s “*If You are the Son of God,*” with ample proof that He is truly, most truly, the Son of God in filial obedience and love. In the temptation, Jesus “permanently united his confidence with the rule that made obedience his calling and that considered his sonship never to be an exemption from obedience, and his obedience never to be an infringement of his filial privilege.”<sup>279</sup>

The victory of Jesus over Satan translates into the power to resist temptation on the part of every believer, as James succinctly puts it, “*Submit therefore to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you.*”<sup>280</sup> Jesus provides us with the supreme example of the efficacy of this exhortation, for both Matthew and Luke record that the devil did indeed leave Him, and angels then came and ministered to those needs that He refused to illegitimately meet on His own. To borrow from the Apostle Paul, “*Let this mind be in us as was in Christ Jesus.*”

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<sup>278</sup> Geldenhuys; 158.

<sup>279</sup> Schlatter; 91.

<sup>280</sup> James 4:7

## Chapter 16 – Repent! For the Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand

**Key Text(s):** Matthew 4:17; 13:1-17

*“The ministry of Jesus revolves around a fascinating term –  
the kingdom of God.  
everything else is related to it and radiates from it.”  
(Leonhard Goppelt)*

There is probably no concept related to the ministry and teaching of Jesus that has caused more confusion and opinions than that of the ‘kingdom of God.’<sup>281</sup> Unfortunately this is hardly a peripheral issue; Jesus returns from the temptation in the wilderness and begins His preaching ministry with the call, *“Repent! For the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!”* This was not a new concept with Jesus; the idea of the kingdom and reign of God is found in various forms throughout the Old Testament Scripture. As such there was already various opinions settled within Second Temple Judaism, and Jesus’ proclamation would have encountered a variety of comprehensional paradigms within His audience. What was unique about Jesus’ announcement was not the kingdom itself – though the meaning He associated with that phrase would prove to be radically different from any of the current ideas – but rather that He was proclaiming its arrival, and inextricably associating the kingdom with Himself. “When Jesus announced the coming of the kingdom he was not introducing a new term. He proclaimed not that there was a kingdom of God, but that it was now coming.”<sup>282</sup>

What has caused all of the consternation among biblical scholars throughout the ages is not the notion of the kingdom, but the seemingly apparent fact that such a kingdom *did not* appear either in the earthly ministry of Jesus or upon His death and resurrection. This consternation is compounded by the relative lack of mention of the kingdom in the balance of the New Testament, as if the concept that was of such central

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<sup>281</sup> The phrase ‘kingdom of heaven’ will be treated as essentially synonymous in this lesson, as is supported by the usage in the Matthew compared to that of Luke and Mark. This is, of course, one of the various confusions that has arisen with regard to the concept of the ‘kingdom,’ but not one that we have time or purpose to deal with here. Suffice a comment from Leonhard Goppelt, “The parallel tradition [i.e., among the Synoptic Gospels] demonstrates that the expression, ‘the kingdom of heaven,’ was substantially identical to ‘the kingdom of God.’... The popular notion that the kingdom of heaven is a heavenly world located above the firmament, and into which the pious enter after death, is not found in the New Testament; rather it is found in the Jewish apocalypses and, in a different form, in Gnosticism.” (Goppelt; 44).

<sup>282</sup> Goppelt; 45.

importance to Jesus' own preaching, became of little or no concern to His apostles. Thus every student of Christology must wrestle with the preaching of the kingdom by Jesus, the lack of the same by the apostles, and the overall meaning of this phenomenon. The conclusions reached in each generation have often differed wildly from the previous, and most have been found lacking with regard to the biblical record, and with regard to the integrity and dignity of Jesus Christ.

Mark Saucy, chair of the Theology Department at Talbot Theological Seminary, offers a helpful study of the various interpretive views of the 'kingdom' in the modern era, particularly in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In his book, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus*, Dr. Saucy summarizes the key positions that have directed modern scholarship – and much of modern Christian thinking – on the topic for the past 300 years. According to Saucy, the modern discussion of the kingdom of God in relation both to Jesus' own thought and to that of the church after Him, began in earnest with the writings of Hermann Reimarus, a pioneer in the Historical Criticism methodology and in the 'search for the historical Jesus' movement that would become so popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Reimarus, notes Saucy, "observed that where the Kingdom was concerned, Jesus never offered his own definition of the Kingdom, he simply announced it." Reimarus concluded from this 'fact' that Jesus simply adopted the perspective of the 'Kingdom' that was prevalent in Judaism at that time. But as influential as Reimarus' views would become, they were consistently



**Hermann Reimarus (1694-1768)**

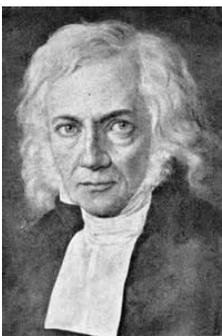
simplistic in their analysis of the biblical record and of the history of Second Temple Judaism and Palestine.

The first rejoinder to Reimarus' view is that Jesus *did* offer a definition of the Kingdom through His identification of it with Himself, with His ministry, and with life eternal. Jesus' form of definition might not adapt itself well to German philosophical and scientific thought in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, being as it was woven throughout His teaching (and often presented in the form of parables), yet the Lord did not leave the term undefined. Perhaps Reimarus was looking for a passage in the Gospels where we might read, "God,

Kingdom of; *noun*, etc., etc.” Still, the dominical definition of the phrase is there to be found by those who tie together the various indicators from the Lord’s teaching as well as from His life.

The second point to be made against Reimarus’ view is that there was no singular and pervasive ‘Jewish definition’ of the Kingdom in Jesus’ day (or at any time before His day, or after). As with much of Second Temple Judaism, the rabbinic views of the ‘Kingdom of God’ were quite varied, and to these were added the perspectives of the Qumran community, of the Essenes, and of the Zealots. These views were largely represented even within the disciples of Jesus. So it cannot be said that Jesus simply adopted the prevailing view of the culture around Him. Indeed, it would be closer to the truth both of the biblical record and of history, that Jesus rejected each and every opinion extant concerning the Kingdom of God, accepting only the reality of the kingdom itself, and its advent in Himself and through His own advent.

For all of its faults, Reimarus’ view did at least attempt to take the historical setting



**Schleiermacher**  
(1768-1834)

of Jesus’ teaching on the Kingdom of God seriously, and tied it closely to the eschatological anticipation of the Jewish nation in the Second Temple era. Reimarus, however, lived at the end of an intellectual era that took history seriously, and at the beginning of an era that took only human rationality seriously – the Enlightenment. Reimarus’ views had little impact on his own time, and only became influential as revived in the teachings of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Higher Criticism

school. In between we find the relativizing philosophy of Immanuel Kant, which strongly influenced the man-centered and ethically-focused theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher and his disciple, Albert Ritschl. Each man took as his starting point Kant’s definition of the ‘Kingdom’ as “an association of men bound together by laws of virtue,”<sup>283</sup> and thus distilled the biblical essence of the Kingdom to that of an ethical order of human society, governed by just laws and mutual concern. Saucy quotes Ritschl from the latter’s *the Christian Doctrine of Just-*



**Ritschl (1822-89)**

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<sup>283</sup> Saucy; 6-7.

*ification and Reconciliation*, “The Kingdom of God, then, is the correlative of God’s love in as far as it is the association of men for reciprocal and common action from the motive of love...Accordingly, the instances of human action from love which are comprehended under the Kingdom of God constitute, as the correlate of God’s personal end and as His specific operations, the perfect revelation of the truth that God is love.”<sup>284</sup>

This quote illustrates the fact that the modern ‘God is Love’ mantra actually goes back at least as far as the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century. More significantly, however, it reflects a tendency in professing Christianity to moralize the Kingdom of God into a perfect human



**Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965)**

society, or at least the *goal* of a perfect human society, rather than the direct rule and reign of God through Jesus Christ. This ethical and humanistic perspective would be solidified in the teachings of the famous Albert Schweitzer, whose ‘Quest for the Historic Jesus’ would powerfully influence 20<sup>th</sup> Century theology in a very unbiblical and damaging way. Schweitzer viewed Jesus’ teachings concerning the Kingdom of God as being the wishful thinking of a semi-delusional rabbi. In the end, according to Schweitzer, Jesus realized that

His view of the kingdom would not come to pass without his own martyrdom. Thus Jesus pursued his own demise in the hope that it would stimulate his disciples to action and to the ‘faith’ in the kingdom that they failed to manifest during his life.

These views manifested a faith in human nature that was unjustified by the events of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, particularly the Great War, and were certainly devoid of faith in Jesus Christ. As human relationships imploded in Europe (and in Germany, where all of these brilliant men lived and taught), the ethical and humanistic views of the Kingdom of God imploded as well, and scholars began to revisit the more spiritual and eschatological aspects of the biblical teaching. C. H. Dodd, an influential Welsh theologian, introduced the concept of “Realized Eschatology” in an attempt



**C H Dodd (1884-1973)**

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<sup>284</sup> Quoted in Saucy; 7.

to give serious meaning to the kingdom teaching of Jesus in its historical context and fulfillment, without the unbiblical dilution of humanism and ethics that had proven so anemic in the German school. Dodd gave credence to the obvious connection made by Jesus between the Kingdom of God and Himself, and refused to follow Schweitzer in considering this connection delusional. “To Dodd’s way of thinking, these Matthean and Lucan passages, along with the parables, revealed that Jesus only expected the Kingdom to be active in his person and the events of his life. Consequently, where Jesus is, there is the fulfillment of the Kingdom.”<sup>285</sup>

The problem with Dodd’s view is that he left little or nothing for the future of the kingdom. As Saucy summarizes, “The Kingdom of god that Jesus taught was realized in the first century, and no further manifestations of it are to be expected.”<sup>286</sup> Dodd apparently recognized this weakness of his perspective and in later editions of his work acknowledged the future consummation of the Kingdom. However, it has become typical of this particular school of thought that the present aspect of the ‘Kingdom,’ manifested in the religious and social actions of the Church, represents the predominant meaning of the Kingdom as Jesus taught it. Nonetheless, Dodd provided a valuable reminder of the literal historicity of the Kingdom as Jesus understood and taught it, and he returned the discussion to the connection between the Kingdom and Jesus, as we find it in the Gospels.

The next modern development of Kingdom teaching and interpretation actually follows a separate strand of biblical logic than those already discussed. This is the Dispensational view, popularized in the United States through the Bible study notes of C. I. Scofield in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and systematized at Dallas Theological Seminary in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century by Louis Sperry Chafer, Charles Ryrie, and John Walvoord. These teachers rejected the ethical dilution of the Kingdom that arose in the German schools, and also the ‘realized’ aspect of the Kingdom as taught by Dodd and others. The Dispensational view is an either/or proposition: either the Kingdom came fully and finally with Jesus, or it did not. To accommodate this view to the biblical record, a distinction was made between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven, with the former pertaining to the Gentile

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<sup>285</sup> Saucy; 15.

era and the church, and the latter to the literal fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies to the nation of Israel. Although Jesus came preaching the Kingdom of Heaven, the rejection of this message by the nation of Israel necessitated an alteration in the message, introducing the Kingdom of God into which people from all nations may enter on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ. The true, biblical, and prophetic Kingdom of Heaven was therefore withdrawn from Israel and has been held in abeyance until the return of Christ to earth, and His Millennial reign from David's throne in Jerusalem.

Reformed theologians have consistently felt that none of these views does full justice to the teachings of Jesus in regard to the Kingdom, especially the teaching of the Kingdom Parables.<sup>287</sup> 20<sup>th</sup> Century Reformed theologians such as Oscar Cullmann, Herman Ridderbos, and George Eldon Ladd attempted to reevaluate the biblical evidence



**George Eldon Ladd (1911-82)**

and to develop a systematic teaching on the Kingdom that did full justice to the imminent nature of the phenomenon in Jesus' teaching, "Repent! For the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" as well as the realization of the incompleteness of its arrival. Through this effort was developed the concept of the 'now and the not yet' with regard to Jesus' Kingdom teaching, especially that of the Kingdom Parables, in which the dual characteristics of *presence* and *delay* are undeniable. Their goal was to realize all biblically proper influence of the Kingdom to the presence age, while at the same time accentuating the hope

of all believers for the consummation of the Kingdom at Christ's promised return. Certainly Cullmann's *Christ and Time*, Ridderbos' *The Coming of the Kingdom*, and Ladd's *The Presence of the Future* failed to convince everyone of the correctness of their methodology (which was not identical between the three). Nevertheless, their works have been powerfully influential in Reformed eschatology well into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, and seem to be the best treatments yet of the enigmatic preaching of our Lord concerning the Kingdom. Ridderbos provides a useful and concise summary of this interpretive view,

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<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*; 16.

“The fulfillment is there, yet the kingdom is still to come. The kingdom has come, and yet the fulfillment is in abeyance. Keeping this unity in view is one of the fundamental presuppositions for the understanding of the gospel.”<sup>288</sup>

### **The Central Message:**

The hermeneutical and interpretive problem will not go away soon, due both to the veiled nature of Jesus’ teaching on the Kingdom, and to the centrality of that teaching to His overall message and ministry. In this sense there is a remarkable agreement among scholars, “Modern scholarship is quite unanimous in the opinion that the Kingdom of God was the central message of Jesus.”<sup>289</sup> We are reminded, however, that the concept of a ‘Kingdom of God’ was by no means new with Jesus, as we have seen just from the Son of Man prophecy in Daniel 7. The idea of the full manifestation of God’s rule on earth among His people forms a central core of the prophetic message of the Old Testament, and of the hope of the people of God under the Old Covenant. Thus when Jesus came into Judea preaching the Kingdom of Heaven, having just received the initiation into His Messianic ministry through the baptism of John and the temptation in the wilderness, He most certainly did so in the fulness of the Jewish Scriptures and the prophetic anticipation of the reign of God amidst His people. This is also undoubtedly how Jesus’ audiences heard Him as He proclaimed the presence of the Kingdom and its openness to them through repentance. “The presence of the Kingdom of God was not a new teaching about God; it was a new activity of God in the person of Jesus bringing to men as present experience what the prophets promised in the eschatological Kingdom.”<sup>290</sup>

The proper place to begin any study on the Kingdom of God, therefore, is in the Old Testament. This being a study on the Person and Work of Jesus Christ, however, will preclude a thorough survey of the Old Testament teaching on the Kingdom of God. Some

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<sup>287</sup> Dr. John MacArthur presents an interesting and unique brand of biblical scholar in this regard, holding to a Reformed soteriology and a Dispensational eschatology. His school is, however, the exception that proves the rule with regard to the general incompatibility of these two views.

<sup>288</sup> Ridderbos, Herman N. *The Coming of the Kingdom* (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Company; 1962); 106.

<sup>289</sup> Ladd, George Eldon *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans; 1974); 57.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*; 79.

salient points may be made that will help guide our study of the Kingdom in Jesus' own teaching.

The first such point is that the prophetic eschatological teaching was distinctly *this-worldly* as opposed to ethereal or heavenly. The anticipation of the reign of God among His people was at all times centered in the Promised Land and on this earth, and not in heaven in the 'great by and by.' "The Kingdom was always an earthly hope, although an earth redeemed from the curse of evil."<sup>291</sup> Jewish eschatology did not incorporate an end to the Space/Time aspect of this world, but rather transformed it into a righteousness abode for the faithful, who lived in the presence of Jehovah and served Him in obedience to His law. The modern Western fundamentalist concept of a cataclysmic end of the Earth is neither biblical nor did it constitute an element in Jewish end-time thought. The Kingdom of God was, therefore, the reign of God *here*, and particularly in the land that was promised to Abraham and his descendants.

A second characteristic of the Kingdom of God as it is portrayed in the Old Testament, and especially the prophetic writings, is that the advent of this Kingdom would coincide with the utter and complete defeat of all of Israel's enemies. "In any case, throughout all of Judaism, the coming of God's Kingdom was expected to be an act of God – perhaps using the agency of men – to defeat the wicked enemies of Israel and to gather Israel together, victorious over her enemies, in her promised land, under the rule of God alone."<sup>292</sup> While the focal point of God's reign in this earthly kingdom is clearly Israel, the scope and extent of His dominion is worldwide. "Not only does it place Israel, but also the heathen nations, the world, and even the whole creation, in the wide perspective of the realization of all God's rights and promises."<sup>293</sup> This concept



**Herman Ridderbos (1909-2007)**

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<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*; 61.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*; 63.

<sup>293</sup> Ridderbos; 23.

Is reflected in the prophetic hope that the day would come when *“The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”*<sup>294</sup>

A third characteristic of the prophetic word concerning the Kingdom of God is somewhat multifaceted. This is due to the fact that multiple strands of prophetic perspective tended over time to coalesce into an overall amalgamation that was the ‘Kingdom.’ For instance, the Day of the Lord came to be associated with the advent of the Kingdom, though Israel often and conveniently forgot that the judgment ushered in by that *“great and terrible Day”* would begin with her. Also, the coming of the Kingdom came naturally to be associated with the advent of the Messiah, who was David’s Son and therefore the rightful heir to the only true royal lineage within Israel. As we have seen, the prophecy concerning the Son of Man - also widely recognized as the Messiah - in Daniel 7 was seen as representing the establishment of the Kingdom of God, the kingdom that would have no end in either Time or Space. In short, the concept of the Kingdom of God became, in a sense, a catch-all for the plethora of messianic prophecies and allusions found in the Old Testament.

In practical belief during the Second Temple era, this facet of the Kingdom allowed individual schools of thought to appropriate the Kingdom to their particular purposes. Thus the Zealots could preach the Kingdom as Jewish militarism against the Roman oppressors, while the Essenes and Qumran community could use the same Kingdom to advocate separation from the apostate nation and personal/communal purity. A few, such as the aged Simeon, saw the advent of the Kingdom as the *“glory of God’s people Israel and the light of revelation to the nations,”*<sup>295</sup> which is, of course, an allusion by Simeon to the prophecy of Isaiah.

Finally, with regard to the Old Testament concept of the Kingdom of God, it must be noted that *Israel* stands at the center of all allusions and references to God’s reign on earth, and *Jerusalem* at the center of Israel. Hence the view that arose through Dispensationalism, that the Kingdom of God cannot have come if there is no theocracy in Israel and no Davidic king in Jerusalem. These are weighty considerations, and it must be acknowledged that any view of the Kingdom of God that discounts the nation of Israel

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<sup>294</sup> Isaiah 11:9

in totality represents a serious deviation from the prophetic concept to which Jesus was the direct heir. Thus also any interpretation of the teachings of Jesus, and the reality of history that follows upon His death and resurrection, must wrestle with the fact that the Kingdom *did not* appear on earth in the manner anticipated on account of the Old Testament prophecies. Great care must be exercised that these prophecies not be allegorized or spiritualized away; their original meaning lost in some merging of Israel into the Church. On the other hand, it is equally crucial that the teaching and activity of Jesus not be neutered with respect to the Kingdom on account of the general rejection by Israel of both His message and His messiahship. If the advent of the Kingdom was to be an act of God – and clearly this is the thrust of the prophetic word with regard to the Kingdom – then it is in error (and verging on blasphemy) to suggest that the will and purpose of God could be thwarted by the unbelief of Israel. Still, Israel's rejection of her Messiah – a historical reality – cannot be easily dismissed, but must rather be taken fully into account in any assessment of Jesus' Kingdom teaching and the meaning of the Kingdom in light of Jesus' death and resurrection.

### **Binding the Strongman:**

We turn then to the teaching of Jesus concerning the Kingdom of God, though as with the Old Testament teaching, only in the briefest of summaries. What is central to our current study of the Kingdom of God, is the manner in which Jesus' teaching portrays the 'now and the not yet' aspect of its reality. Can this view be supported by the biblical record, particularly that of Jesus' own witness recorded in the Gospels? In seeking to answer this question, we will evaluate the concept of the Kingdom of God, through the teaching of Jesus Himself, along three lines of inquiry.

1. The association of the coming of the Kingdom with the coming of Jesus into the world,
2. The characteristic of the presence of the Kingdom, as well as its delay, in the Parables of the Kingdom, and,
3. The essence of the Kingdom as a final struggle between Jesus and Satan.

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<sup>295</sup> Luke 2:32

### **Jesus and the Kingdom:**

The association of the Kingdom of God with the advent of Jesus Christ is not difficult to establish, as it forms a part of the preaching of both John the Baptist, the forerunner, and of Jesus Himself. In an enigmatic passage concerning the Kingdom, Jesus marks the beginning of its current present form with the preaching of John,

*From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force. For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.*

(Matthew 11:12-15)

In this passage, and the parallel one in Luke 16:16, Jesus does not explicitly refer to Himself as the one to whom John pointed, but His reference to Elijah the promised forerunner of the Messiah leaves little doubt that Jesus considered John to be His 'Elijah,' and Himself to be the promised Messiah. Unlike all other prophets of the Old Testament, and all rabbis of the Second Temple era, Jesus clearly and consistently associated the New Israel with Himself, and oriented the full authority and salvation of God to Himself. Ladd correctly notes of Jesus that "He did not simply assure men of the future fellowship of the Kingdom, he invited men into fellowship with himself as the bearer of the Kingdom."<sup>296</sup>

We are reminded again that Jesus did not come saying that there was a Kingdom to come; all Israel both believed and looked forward to that fact and event. Rather Jesus proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom coincident with His own coming, a claim that put an insuperable chasm between Himself and the scribes, Pharisees, and rabbis of His day, and one which earned Him the deadly animosity of the latter groups. This particular aspect of Christ's teaching is perhaps the strongest contribution to making Jesus 'crucifiable,' as N. T. Wright so cogently put it. Jesus' claim to have the authority both to include and to exclude *Israelites* from the Kingdom was radical beyond comprehension to those who did not believe, and constituted the highest blasphemy imaginable.

The aim of Jesus' sayings and parables therefore consisted solely in an effort to show who could gain a share in the kingdom and how one could obtain assurance now rather than only later...The key aspect of Jesus' proclamation of God's rule was therefore the saying by

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<sup>296</sup> Ladd; 80.

which Jesus indicated through which procedures God was now manifesting it and of what man's transposition into his kingdom consisted...Since he connected with his sending not limited but complete grace, one could now gain the kingdom by obeying its call.<sup>297</sup>

For sheer audacity of prophetic voice, one would be hard pressed to find a more sterling example than Jesus' praise of the faith of the heathen centurion compared to that of God's people Israel,

*Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled and said to those who were following, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."* (Matthew 8:10-12)

Passage upon passage could be added to solidify the conclusion that Jesus associated the coming of the Kingdom of God with His own advent into the world, and inseparably identified the presence (and entrance) of the Kingdom with His person and work. He was the 'door,' the 'gate,' and the only way to the Father, and His message was undeniably exclusionary to all who failed to repent and to believe in Him. They would be on the outside of the Kingdom looking in. Goppelt concludes,

The claim and the promise [of the kingdom] alike find their fulfillment in the Messiah. In him man has his sufficient representative before God, and in him God's presence is signified and the rule of the world is actualized. In the person of the Messiah God's purpose in History finds its embodiment.<sup>298</sup>

### **The Parables of the Kingdom:**

All of this is to say that, according to Jesus' own teaching, where He was was the Kingdom. But there has been little doubt through the history of interpretation concerning the Kingdom, that Jesus did thus associate the Kingdom with Himself and with His ministry. Indeed, this intimate and inseparable identification is one of the reasons Schweitzer concluded that Jesus was a mistaken, deluded, and morbidly disappointed rabbi! The question remains to those who take the teachings of Jesus seriously, and refuse

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<sup>297</sup> Schlatter; 123.

<sup>298</sup> Goppelt; 25.

to doubt either the sanity of His mind or the validity of His statements, ‘Why did the Kingdom not come in any outward, visible manifestation as a result of His work on earth?’ To this question another must be added, ‘Given that the Kingdom did not come visibly and in the socio-political form that was anticipated, how then are we to interpret the Kingdom’s status upon Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension?’ The anticipation of the Old Testament prophecies notwithstanding, these questions are most clearly addressed – though by no means ‘clearly’ – through the Kingdom parables. Jesus’ most frequent method of teaching about the Kingdom of God was through the use of parables; a method, He explained to His disciples, perfectly suited to both clarify and cloud the content of the message.

*And the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?” Jesus answered them, “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.* (Matthew 13:10-13)

Earlier we noted Reimarus’ contention that Jesus never *defined* the Kingdom, and therefore simply adopted the prevailing definition current in His day. It was noted at that time that this was no solution, since there was no consistent definition of the Kingdom current in Jesus’ day. But Reimarus was not entirely wrong in noting the fact that Jesus consistently did not offer up a technical, clear and concise definition – a la Websters – of the Kingdom that formed such a central part of His teaching. To this undeniable phenomenon Geerhardus Vos comments, “His method is not the philosophical one of framing conceptions, but the parabolic one of illustrating the realities of the spiritual world in their various manifestations and embodiments. Hence we never find Him defining, but always describing the kingdom.”<sup>299</sup> Thus we turn to the parables to discover the meaning Jesus Himself attributed to the Kingdom, to His role vis-à-vis the Kingdom, and to the Kingdom’s manifestation relative to history. In so doing, we are met with a consistent message of presence and delay, with hiddenness and powerful activity, with inauspicious

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<sup>299</sup> Vos, Geerhardus *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: “The Kingdom of God”* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing; 1980); 311.

beginning and magnificent ending. Indeed, the Kingdom Parables are perhaps the most influential biblical teachings with regard to ‘the Now and the Not Yet’ concept of prophetic fulfillment without full consummation. “The mystery of the Kingdom is the coming of the Kingdom into history in advance of its apocalyptic manifestation. It is, in short, ‘fulfillment without consummation.’”<sup>300</sup>

By the use of natural and intimately human circumstances, Jesus taught through the parables that the Kingdom was an immediate presence – whether as the leaven in the dough, or the mustard seed in the ground, or even the kingdom whose king had gone on a long journey. In each of these parables there is the Kingdom *present* in influence, but *hidden* in visible manifestation; the presence of the Kingdom – or the *authority of the king* – cannot be denied on account of the lack of visible manifestation. That is the point of the parables, to show the powerful reality of a Kingdom whose visible appearance has not yet come. “The smallness and relative insignificance of what is happening in his ministry does not exclude the secret presence of the very Kingdom of God.”<sup>301</sup> The error of the Dispensationalist is to deny the present reality on account of the lack of visible appearance, and the error of Dodd is to emphasize the hidden influence at the expense of the anticipated visible consummation. To the former one might ask, ‘How does the bread rise without the hidden working of the leaven?’ and to the latter, ‘What is the value of the leaven in its working if not to produce a loaf of bread?’

### **Binding the Strongman:**

But why has the visible manifestation of the Kingdom been delayed? Ultimately no answer can be given to this question than the one we resort to on many occasions, “*Even so, Father, for it seemed good in Your sight.*” But we can assess why the question has been asked, and the reason is mainly due to a misunderstanding of the *purpose* of the coming of the Kingdom, or at least a serious error in emphasis as to that purpose. Jews of the Second Temple era, and Christians throughout this current age, have consistently misinterpreted the basic meaning of the coming of the Kingdom to be that of re-establishing the Davidic

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<sup>300</sup> Ladd; 93.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*; 98.

dynasty of Israel to Jerusalem and asserting the supremacy of God's people over the rest of the world. This conclusion comes from a twofold hermeneutical error

First, there has been an over literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecies in which Israel is taken as the political entity of Palestine *only*, and not recognized as the worldwide realm of submission to God's righteous rule. The fundamental definition, if we may offer one, of any kingdom is the extent of a king's rule and not merely the extent of his nominal territory. Indeed, it can be reasonably claimed that the territorial extent of a kingdom is inconsequential if the sovereignty of the king is not recognized. Even the parable of the absent king serves to show that, in this circumstance, the king must return with force to reestablish his rule, and thus confirm the territory of his kingdom through the obedience and submission of his subjects.

The second hermeneutical error is to limit the scope of the Kingdom, and of God's sovereign and visible rule, to Israel. "*The earth is the Lord's...*" testified the Old Testament throughout, and thus ultimately subject to His sovereignty under the Kingdom. Therefore it was not the foundational purpose of Jesus to return the Kingdom to Jerusalem, but rather to assert the lordship of the one true God, through His promised Messiah, over both Israel and the entire world. Throughout the Old Testament prophecies concerning this coming Kingdom – whether explicitly or implicitly – the reestablishment of Israel as the center of the nations coincided with those nations acknowledging the God of Israel as their own. "God's reign would be established when he rescued Israel out of servitude under the nations through the historical and cosmic demonstration of his might, *and forced those nations to recognize him.*"<sup>302</sup>

The twofold focus of Israel with respect to the coming Kingdom of God masked an underlying fact no less present in Scripture; that the ultimate enemy of God's people was not Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, or Rome. It was Satan, who was also the sinister enemy of those pagan nations that he used and manipulated to torment and oppress God's people Israel. Thus ultimate delivery from bondage and servitude could not come through merely political emancipation, but only by full and final spiritual deliverance from the power of the devil. It was not Caesar who was to be defeated, but the evil power behind

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<sup>302</sup> Goppelt; 49, italics added.

Caesar. And it was to this purpose that Jesus came, bringing the Kingdom through His own victorious binding of the ‘strongman,’ and subsequent plundering of his domain. Note the close connection of the Kingdom with Jesus’ self-prophecy of His struggle with Satan,

*Then a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute was brought to Jesus, and He healed him, so that the mute man spoke and saw. All the crowds were amazed, and were saying, “This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?” But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, “This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons.” And knowing their thoughts Jesus said to them, “Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and any city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he <sup>is</sup> divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand? If I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? For this reason they will be your judges. **But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.** Or how can anyone enter the strong man’s house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.*

(Matthew 12:22-29)

This passage cannot be understood as anything other than Jesus claiming to be doing exactly what He refers to in His question, “How can anyone enter the strong man’s house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man?” If the one who enters the strongman’s house is not Jesus, and if the strongman is not Beelzebul/Satan, then this passage makes no sense whatever. “In these words, Jesus declares that he has invaded the kingdom of Satan and has ‘bound’ the strongman.”<sup>303</sup> And if this is so, then we have here a powerful biblical explanation of the fundamental purpose of Christ coming into the world, bearing the Kingdom of God with and within Himself: to defeat fully and finally the evil one and to deliver God’s people from the domain of darkness in to the kingdom of light.

It is the contention of those who maintain both the presence of the Kingdom of God and the promise of its future visible consummation, that the hallmark of the Kingdom’s appearance *was not* the reestablishment of the Davidic throne in Jerusalem, but rather the defeat of the evil power that has held the world in bondage since the Fall of Man in Eden. The resurrected Jesus, by virtue of His victory over Satan’s chief weapon and the universal enemy of mankind – death, thus claimed “*all authority in heaven and on earth,*” which is a

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<sup>303</sup> Ladd; 66.

statement of royal prerogative *par excellence*. What Jesus did in His life, death, and resurrection, He did provisionally for all the elect throughout history – the treasures that were held captive in the strongman’s house, now to be plundered by the One who bound the strongman through His righteousness.

Jesus has done this work, and by so doing has inaugurated the Kingdom of God. He now sits at the right hand of majesty on high, where “*He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.*”<sup>304</sup> To deny the advent of the Kingdom through the coming and victorious life and resurrection of Jesus Christ, is to deny Him the hard-fought victory He has won over the devil, and the sovereignty that He has gained through that victory. As the Son of Man, Jesus Christ has received the Kingdom from the Ancient of Days. He has also received the Spirit, whom He now pours out upon those who are redeemed in time from the house of the strongman. Ladd thus summarizes the ‘Now and Not Yet’ view of the Kingdom,

Our central thesis is that the Kingdom of God is the redemptive reign of God dynamically active to establish his rule among men, and that this Kingdom, which will appear as an apocalyptic act at the end of the age, has already come into human history in the person and mission of Jesus to overcome evil, to deliver men from its power, and to bring them into the blessings of God’s reign.<sup>305</sup>

We cannot deny that the work of the Kingdom continues through the redemptive activity of the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus Christ, the King. Therefore we cannot deny the presence of the same Kingdom, while we eagerly anticipate its consummation. To do so would be to deny the glory of royal sovereignty to the One who has received the Kingdom and is now exercising royal authority and power to rescue His elect subjects from the domain of His defeated and bound enemy.

*For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.* (Colossians 1:13)

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<sup>304</sup> I Corinthians 15:25

<sup>305</sup> Ladd; 91.

## Chapter 17 - The Suffering Servant - The Passion of Christ

**Key Text(s):** Matthew 16:21-23; Mark 10:32-34; Luke 22:19-20

*“Jesus was not only conscious that He is a problem to man,  
He assumes that He ought to be.”*

(James Denney)

The Roman satirist Juvenal is credited with having said, “The grave is the true measure of every man.” The dimensions of the grave are the only final possession of a man, and even that is not really true. Whether immediately by way of cremation, or over time by way of disintegration, our human bodies will return to the dust from which they were formed, and “*the earth will remember*” us no more. Now is that not a lovely and heart-warming thought?

Nonetheless it is a necessary one, for death is “*the way of all flesh,*” and a man’s consideration and attitude toward death is indicative of his overall view of life. Death is the most vicious and implacable of human enemies: it begins to threaten our life’s work while we are yet in the midst of it, and always comes before that work is, in the mind of the man himself, completed. The reason for this lies not with the amount of work accomplished – Alexander the Great had conquered the known world by the time he was 32 years old – but rather due to the insatiable ambition within man to live and to continue to accomplish. This is by no means to say that every man’s ambition is noble, only that no man is allowed to achieve his ambition without first the threat of, and then the reality of death. Berkouwer simply states that “The grave is the sinner’s deepest humiliation.”<sup>306</sup> Qohelet waxes eloquent about death as the great equalizer, and at the same time the ultimate evidence of the ‘vanity’ of life.

*Then I said to myself, “As is the fate of the fool, it will also befall me. Why then have I been extremely wise?” So I said to myself, “This too is vanity.” For there is no lasting remembrance of the wise man as with the fool, inasmuch as in the coming days all will be forgotten. And how the wise man and the fool alike die! So I hated life, for the work which had been done under the sun was grievous to me; because everything is futility and striving after wind. (Ecclesiastes 2:15-17)*

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<sup>306</sup> Berkouwer, G. C. *The Work of Christ* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1965); 169.

The situation is exactly as Qohelet reports. The ambitions of a man are circumscribed by mortality, a fact with which every man beyond the age of 40 is well aware. But the ‘vanity’ of it all lies in the fact that the human psyche is so incredibly, and incorrigibly, ambitious. I may be said that some men die well, but it cannot be said that a man is ready to die, that he has no more will to live.<sup>307</sup> Taken at face value, the stage play of every human life is a farce, a Greek tragedy in which the hero is destined to failure no matter what he accomplishes in life, no matter how close he may get to achieving his ‘goals,’ he will die. What could have been the intent of creating such a being that cannot stop thinking and dreaming and, in a word, *living*, but who also cannot keep living? Either the creation of Man is perhaps the greatest cruelty imaginable – subjecting each and every individual human to the vanity and futility of a life full of ambition that cannot be realized – or death itself cannot be an original component in the design parameters of the human composition. From a purely biblical perspective, the second of these options is the only one that resonates with the Holy Word. From a broader anthropological and psychological perspective, it is the only option that offers any meaning and hope to human life. Thus Anselm concluded, “I do not think mortality inheres in the essential nature of man, but only as corrupted.”<sup>308</sup> This is also, of course, the opinion of the Apostle Paul, who inseparably links the advent of death with the advent of sin into the human race.

*Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned – for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.*

(Romans 5:12-14)

Be this as it may, the reality of death is undeniable and unconquerable by the most ardent attempts of human science. So pervasive is the specter of death over the human race, that no religion or philosophy can lay reasonable claim to the adherence of mankind that does not in some manner deal fully and finally with Death. Of course, this is also to

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<sup>307</sup> Caveats are in order here, for it is undeniable that the ravages of physical decay often rob a man or woman of the will to live. It is also true that the decay of the body can influence the functionality of the mind, which in turns deprives the human of the natural ambition that accompanies life. These physical and physiological aspects of disease and decay aside, it is nevertheless a universal characteristic of the human psyche to *will to live*, and to continue living while life remains.

say that no religion or philosophy is deserving of a following that does not deal fully and finally with Sin, the source and sustainer of Death. As this very basic level, we cannot treat death as a ‘natural’ component of life without robbing life itself of any sense or hope, and without condemning mankind to the futility of which Qohelet writes so somberly. If death is the ultimate reality, “*let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.*”<sup>309</sup>

From the perspective of a biblical Christology, we extrapolate these observations to say that the coming of the Christ would have no ultimate meaning and furnish no lasting hope to either Israel or the rest of the world, had not Jesus dealt summarily with both sin and death. The thought of Jesus assuming the Davidic throne in Jerusalem upon the acceptance of Israel of His announced Messiahship, and thereby bypassing Golgotha entirely, betrays a complete lack of understanding of the human condition – which, by the way, was and has always been also the *Jewish* condition, for Israel is but a microcosm and representative of the whole race – and evidences a horribly incomplete accounting of sin.<sup>310</sup> Without a *Passion* of Christ, there can be no *Kingdom* of Christ, as an implacable enemy yet remains undefeated: Death. That dealing with Death was not simply a part of Christ’s mission, but the most important part, is evidenced by the disproportionate narrative space devoted to Jesus’ passion in the Gospels.

Scholars have noted how un-biographical the Gospels are, in the sense that large segments of Jesus’ life go undocumented, and the largest sections of each Gospel is devoted to the few weeks preceding His death on the Cross. James Orr summarizes, “One authority tells us that the Synoptic Gospels do not contain the record of the events of more than forty separate days. But of the Gospels of Matthew and Mark fully one-third is devoted to the events of the Passion Week and their sequel in the resurrection; Luke has several chapters; John gives half his Gospel to the same period.”<sup>311</sup> As to the amount of ink devoted by the evangelists with regard to the events of Jesus’ death, Geerhardus Vos comments,

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<sup>308</sup> *Cur Deus Homo*; 255.

<sup>309</sup> I Corinthians 15:32

<sup>310</sup> Again Anselm, ‘Nondum considerasti, quanti ponderis sit peccatum.’ – *You have not yet considered the ponderous weight of sin.*

<sup>311</sup> Orr, James *The Faith of a Modern Christian* (London: Hodder and Stoughton; nd); 125-126.

But, while from the point of view of biography a brief statement of the fact [i.e., of Jesus' death] and its circumstances would have been sufficient, what we are actually offered is a passion-epos stretched to the utmost limit of what the subject matter will bear, the length and fulness of which render the Gospels, considered merely as pieces of literature, ill-shapen through the disproportion of their parts.<sup>312</sup>

Taking the structure of the Gospel narratives as being as important as the content, we may conclude that the death of Jesus Christ was of disproportionate importance in assessing the overall meaning and significance of His life and work. From the announcement by Jesus that He was headed to the Cross - immediately following the confession of the disciples through Peter that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God - the bulk of the Gospel narratives either directly allude to, or are manifestly colored by, the reality of Jesus' impending death. Yet it cannot be said for a moment that this seemingly morbid fascination with the death of the Messiah was defeatism or a desperate bid on Jesus' part for the 'glory' of martyrdom. Throughout the Passion narratives Jesus' coming death is presented as the *will of the Father* and as the *centerpiece of Christ's earthly work*. The necessity and inevitability of Jesus' death, viewed from the perspective of His messianic calling, present us with the most powerful manifestation of both the **love of God** and the **wrath of God**. Death becomes the only proper and complete terminus for a life of humiliation and, as such, the only true source for the ultimate victory of Christ's mission on earth.

Studying the death of Christ from a theological and soteriological perspective, in addition to the redemptive historical perspective already noted, will bring us into contact with two terms that are generally unfamiliar, and one that is quite well-known, but not always well-understood. The first two are *propitiation* and *expiation*, terms by which the death of Christ is described in its effectiveness with regard to human sin. The third term is *ransom*, which describes in several places in the New Testament the ultimate effect of Christ's death as a benefit for those for whom He died. Thus we will parse the biblical teaching concerning the Passion of Jesus Christ, first along the lines of redemptive historical purpose of His death, and then with regard to the soteriological aspects and

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<sup>312</sup> Vos, *Self Disclosure of Christ*; 273. 'Epos' is essentially an epic narrative or poem.

consequences of that death. There will be, as always, overlap between these two line of study, but hopefully the divisions will clarify the topic rather than cloud it.

### **Redemptive Historical Analysis of the Passion of Christ:**

It should not come as a surprise to any Reformed student of Scripture to note that the death of Christ was according to the eternal plan and purpose of God. There is no room in a biblical analysis and interpretation of Christ's death, for the notion that Jesus was Himself the originator of the idea, and that He single-handedly undertook to assuage the wrath of a judgmental God. Though this errant view has persisted within professing Christian teachings, and though it continues to misinform the minds of un- or underinformed believers, it stands in complete contradiction to the testimony of the Bible. That the death of Jesus was the intended purpose of the Father is nowhere more explicitly stated than in Peter's first sermon,

*Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know – this Man, **delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God**, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. (Acts 2:22-23)*

This divine purpose of the Deliverer's death can be traced all the way back to the *proto-evangelium* of Genesis 3:15, in which God Himself prophesied the destiny of the Seed of Woman. It is present as well in the Psalms, where the exalted Son of David is "not abandoned to Sheol" nor is God's Holy One allowed "to see decay." Even the manner of the Messiah's death is predicted with amazing accuracy in Psalm 22, where death by crucifixion – and particularly the crucifixion of Jesus Christ - is quite graphically depicted.

*I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint;  
My heart is like wax; it is melted within **me**.  
My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaves to my jaws;  
And You lay me in the dust of death.  
For dogs have surrounded me; a band of evildoers has encompassed me;  
They pierced my hands and my feet.  
I can count all my bones. They look, they stare at me;  
They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots (Psalm 22:14-18)*

The most powerful passage from the Old Testament regarding the fore-ordained demise of the Savior is, of course, the ‘Gospel’ of Isaiah found in Isaiah 53. In spite of the modern attempts to divide the Book of Isaiah into multiple authors, this passage continues to stand as a remarkable prediction of the suffering of the Messiah, as no authorship theory places the 53<sup>rd</sup> chapter *after* the advent of Jesus Christ. In other words, *whoever* penned the words (and there is no reasonable argument for any other authorship than Isaiah) he lived and prophesied *before* Jesus was born, lived, suffered, and died. If we accept, as we should, that prophecy that comes true evidences its source as being from God, then Isaiah 53 is a decisive passage regarding the *purpose* of God to put His Servant to death.

*He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth;  
Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,  
So He did not open His mouth.  
By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered  
That He was cut off out of the land of the living  
For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due?  
His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death,  
Because He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth.  
But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief...I* (Isaiah 53:7-10a)

To what purpose did God intend the death of His Promised One? This question has a twofold answer which thereby gives the death of Christ a twofold aspect. The first answer is *to redeem for Himself a people*, and the divine motivation for this purpose was *love*. The second answer is *to defeat forever the rebellion of Satan and to reestablish the primacy of life over death*, and the divine motivation for this purpose was *justice*. Hence in one and the same act, which itself is the beating heart of the Gospel of salvation, we find the dual purposes of God to manifest both His *love* and His *wrath* to the cosmos. This is nothing more than what the apostle describes as being encompassed in the Gospel of which he was not ashamed.

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.’ For the wrath of God is*

*revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness...* (Romans 1:16-18)

Elsewhere, in his epistle to the Corinthians, Paul speaks again of the dual purpose of the Gospel as being “*the aroma of life unto life to those who are being saved, and the stench of death unto death to those who are perishing.*” The designation of the ‘righteous’ versus the unrighteous, and of those who are being saved contrasted with those who are perishing, hinges on an individual’s response to the death of Jesus Christ – it is a “*stone of stumbling and a rock of offense*” to those who are perishing, but a powerful victory over sin and the grave to those who are inheriting eternal life. The Gospel must contain both messages if it is to be both true and convicting: it must indeed speak of the love of God that sent the Son into the world, but it also must speak of the wrath of God that is poured out upon all unrighteousness.

**For God so Loved the World:**

Because the divine attribute of love has become so predominant in modern professing Christianity, to the exclusion of the divine justice and holiness of God, many conservative Reformed soteriologies have reacted too far in the other direction. While an emphasis on the righteous wrath of God poured out upon sin through the death of Jesus Christ is a necessary corrective to an unbalanced focus on the divine love, it too can become imbalanced, resulting in a portrayal of the divine work of redemption through Jesus’ death that is devoid of the manifest love of God that we read of in Scripture. Two passages stand out in our consideration of the ‘love motive,’ – John 3:16 and Romans 5:8

*For **God so loved the world**, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.* (John 3:16-17)

*For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But **God demonstrates His own love toward us**, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.* (Romans 5:6-8)

Although the Johanine passage mentions the absence of *judgment* within the motivation of God sending Jesus into the world, we must not apply that statement too broadly so as to miss the element of judgment that is contained within the work of Jesus Christ on the Cross – judgment not against the world, but against death and against its lord, Satan. Still, the overarching theme with regard to God’s delivering, redeeming, sustaining, and sanctifying work in the midst of the people that He has created, is *love*. The instigating power leading to the death of Jesus Christ on the cross was the omnipotent desire on the part of God to reconcile man to Himself and to recover that which was lost through man’s sin. “The New Testament does not speak of God being reconciled to man, but of man being reconciled to God, and of God as the Reconciler, taking the initiative in Christ to that end.”<sup>313</sup>

The love of God in the matter and manner of man’s redemption is not to be considered as appearing first in the sending of His Son into the world, though without a doubt this event is the most powerful display of the divine love. Yet even to Moses God announced Himself as full of “*lovingkindness and compassion*,” and in the midst of the Levitical liturgy of sacrifice, God’s love is yet paramount. This may come as a surprise to many modern evangelicals, that the God of the Old Covenant was a God of love, and that the Law and the Sacrifice were manifestations of that love. Many conceive that the love of God does not show up on the scene until Jesus comes. But the Law was given to a people who were chosen for no other reason than the love of God undeservingly settled upon the patriarchs (*cp* Deut. 7:7-8), and the Law itself was an intimate display of the holiness of God to that people.

Even the sacrifices were provided to His people as an act of love wherein God graciously provided something, albeit temporary, that He gave to no other people on earth: atonement. Unlike the pagan religions and rituals, those of Israel were not internally developed; they were not manmade for the purpose of appeasing an angry God, but were rather given for the purpose of reconciliation and fellowship by a loving God. Leviticus 17:11 is often and correctly cited as a key verse concerning the role of the blood

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<sup>313</sup> Baillie; *God was in Christ*; 187.

in the sacrificial system. But note the terminology regarding the source of the entire blood-sacrifice paradigm,

*For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement.* (Leviticus 17:11)

D. M. Baillie writes, “it was God Himself who was regarded as having mercifully appointed the ritual of expiation, though man had of course to supply the victim.”<sup>314</sup> Thus to associate the love of God too strictly with the advent of Christ so as to essentially remove it from the redemptive historical narratives of the Old Covenant, is to thoroughly misunderstand the constant and steadfast affection that God has for Man, and the consequent work from the beginning to bring about a redemption that would manifest that love to a people called by God and graciously given the means of atonement and fellowship with God in that love. Again, we do well to remember that the promise of the One who would triumph over Satan on behalf of Man was made at the very beginning of mankind’s foray into sin and corruption, and that the love of God that motivated that primeval promise moves through all of the redemptive works of God throughout history, culminating but not beginning with the sending of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

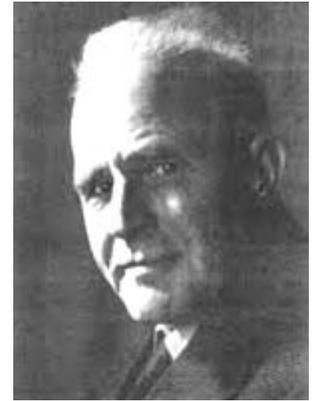
Yet with this proper emphasis on the divine love in the work of Jesus Christ on the Cross, we must not lose sight of the righteous judgment of God contained in the event, for Paul informs us the “*the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness...*” But how can we reconcile the words of John, that “*God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world...*” with any characteristic of the work of Jesus Christ in terms of judgment? We know that the term ‘judgment’ in its consistent biblical sense carries the weight of *condemnation*, and not merely adjudication. And the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross was most certainly a *condemnation* of something, a judgment rendered by God through Christ. But it was not a condemnation of the world that is on display in the Cross, but rather in that instrument of death “*God condemned sin in the flesh.*” This is the teaching of Paul again in Romans,

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<sup>314</sup> Baillie; 188.

*Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of <sup>le</sup>sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh* (Romans 8:1-3)

Read Paul carefully here. In order that there might be *no condemnation*, God *condemned* sin in the flesh. It was not the sinner that God desired to condemn through the death of Jesus Christ, but rather sin. The sinner's judgment will be consequently determined with respect to the condemning *of sin* through the death of Jesus on the Cross. But that death itself, and the subsequent victory over both death and the grave through the resurrection, was an act of judgment and condemnation against sin. A caveat is in order here, for this is not the trite and shallow "God loves the sinner but hates the sin" teaching made so popular in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Sin cannot be so easily separated from its moral companion, the sinner. Yet sin may be viewed as an entity and enemy in its own right, and especially when we consider the biblical consideration of sin's closest companions: Satan and Death. God's wrath is directed at sin and Satan, and Jesus' self-sacrifice on the Cross was a terminal blow to the one true enemy of mankind, Death. Emil Brunner is correct when he writes, "The wrath of God is not the ultimate reality; it is the divine reality which corresponds to sin."



**Emil Brunner (1889-1966)**

### **The Serpent versus the Seed:**

With respect to the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross as a manifestation of God's enmity toward sin, and His intention to defeat and destroy it, we cannot fail to view Christ's work in light of the primeval battle lines drawn in Genesis 3 between the Serpent who deceived Man and the Seed who would redeem him.

*And I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
And between your seed and her seed;  
He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.* (Genesis 3:15)

The most powerful weapon possessed by the devil, on account of his successful enticement of Adam and Eve to sin, has from the beginning been Death. Even over those individual humans who largely resist the temptations of sin and who strive to live righteously before God, there is the inevitable specter of death to remind all mankind of the failure of our first father. The unique experiences of Enoch and Elijah may stand for no other purpose than to keep us aware that death is not of the essence of human nature, but of its corruption. Though they were corrupt they were mercifully spared the passage of death as a prophetic and living word toward the ultimate defeat of Death and of the one who stands behind it as its 'power.' This designation is not an undue exaltation of Satan's authority, but is granted to him by Scripture, in a passage that speaks to our topic in this lesson, the death of Jesus Christ.

*Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that **through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death**, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.*

(Hebrews 2:14-15)

The greater part of attention with regard to Christ's death within evangelical scholarship is directed toward the fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrificial rituals. This is accurate, as far as it goes. But it does not go far in explaining the necessity of those ritual sacrifices in the first place. Leviticus 17:11 informs us that God has given the blood on the altar as atonement for sin, but it does not explain the sin structure within the cosmos that makes this atonement necessary. This structure is foreshadowed in the very prohibition by which the fruit of the forbidden tree is set off limits to Adam in the garden, "*In the day that you eat thereof, dying you shall die.*" Upon Adam's rebellion, therefore, Death becomes the reality that characterizes all of life, and a power capable of holding the entire Creation in its thrall. Man quickly learns how to use death for his own gain, as exemplified in the murder of Abel by Cain and the boast of Lamech to his wives. But even the murderer himself will die, and this gives rise to the principle, "*He who lives by the sword shall die by the sword.*" Truly it is impossible to overstate the significance of Death with regard to human history, or in relation to redemptive history.

Jesus did not come to die simply to fulfill arbitrary Levitical sacrificial rituals; He came to defeat Death, the enemy of Israel and of all mankind. And to do that meant to defeat the one who had the power of death – albeit by usurpation and deceit – the devil. Fundamentally, therefore, the death of Jesus Christ was the ultimate joining of the battle between the Serpent and the Seed and must be viewed in such martial terms if it is to be understood and appreciated. The language of binding the strongman is even present in the words just quoted from Hebrews, “*that He might render powerless him who had the power of death.*” G. C. Berkouwer puts it succinctly and accurately, “All of Christ’s suffering was at the same time a battle with Satan.”<sup>315</sup>

Again, this is not to say that Satan had right and title to human souls by any other reason than the abdication by Man of that right through disobedience to God. Even when Jesus rebukes Peter, who had just confessed Him to be the Christ but was now hindering Him from pursuing His foreordained path to the Cross, the ‘interest in man’ that Satan has is not for man’s good, but for his ultimate destruction.

*From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, ‘God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.’ But He turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.’*

(Matthew 16:21-23)

Thus the death of Christ was not only a manifestation of the love of God, but also of the wrath of God against sin, and against death itself. The wages of sin is death, and that wage was either to be paid by each individual sinner, or by an innocent and divine victim who would parlay His vicarious sacrifice into the death of death, and the liberation of His people. Though it did not play a major role in the narrative of His life, the conflict between Jesus and Satan was never out of the picture, and chronically came to the forefront of the story. On the night of His betrayal, Jesus was well aware of who was behind the events as they were unfolding, and also of His relationship vis-à-vis the devil,

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<sup>315</sup> Berkouwer, *The Work of Christ*; 179.

*“I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me.”<sup>316</sup>*

Gethsemane is, of course, the full distillation of the sufferings of Christ, where He sweat, as it were, drops of blood in facing the task before Him. He asked His Father if it were possible that the cup ordained for Him to drink might pass from Him. Too often this has been viewed as a flagging in the ‘human’ will of Jesus toward the destiny of the ‘Christ.’ It would be better to recognize what it was Jesus was facing – Death – and to understand His righteous abhorrence of that horrible enemy. James Orr speaks of Jesus’ “view of suffering and death as something alien to the true destiny of man – absolutely foreign to Himself – and an expression of God’s judgment on the sin of the world.”<sup>317</sup>

Death was naturally to such an One a thing of horror, something to which, as Prince of Life and life-giver, He was under no need of submitting, a contradiction of His whole nature and destiny.<sup>318</sup>

### **Propitiation, Expiation, and Ransom:**

It is in the context, then, of the ultimate battle between Christ and Satan that we come to investigate, and hopefully better understand, some of the terms most frequently used to designate the meaning and results of Jesus’ death. The death of Christ is said to be a *propitiation* for sins, an *expiatory sacrifice*, and a *ransom*. As noted before, the first two terms are unfamiliar to us from common language and interaction; the third is something that we are familiar with, but usually not from personal experience. These terms are used by the authors of the New Testament to weave the Old Covenant significance of sacrificial death in with the cosmic conflict between the Christ and the devil. The first two terms are actually independent translations of the same Greek word, *hilastarion*, which harkens back to the establishment of atonement in the Old Testament, and of the ‘mercy seat’ in the tabernacle. The English term used by translators, therefore, represents a subtle interpretive distinction as to the perspective of the work of Jesus’ blood shed on the Cross, for it is always the blood that makes *hilastarion*.

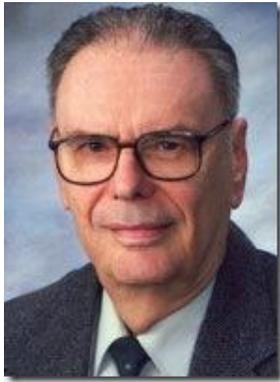
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<sup>316</sup> John 14:30

<sup>317</sup> Orr, *Faith of a Modern Christian*; 133.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*; 130.

To expiate is to cover, as in removing or negating the force of something, in this case, sin. Sin is expiated when it is paid for by a satisfactory substitution acceptable to the one to whom the payment is being made. This is why it was God, and it had to be God, who gave to His people the blood of the altar for atonement (the Greek word used to translate the Hebrew for atonement in the Septuagint is frequently *hilastarion*, as in the reference in Leviticus 25:9 with reference to the Day of Atonement). Thus the rendering of *hilastarion* as ‘expiation’ is appropriate when the effect of the blood of Christ is viewed from the perspective of the sinner’s sin. But from the perspective of the effect of Christ’s blood on the wrath of God, turning that righteous anger away from the sinner, the term is



**Donald Bloesch (1928-2010)**

best translated *propitiation*. It is not always easy to perceive the subtle perspective nuances in the passages in which *hilastarion* and its close associate *hilasmos* are used, as to whether the best English translation would be *expiation* or *propitiation*. But fortunately it does not matter all that much, as it is the blood of Jesus Christ that *both* expiates and propitiates – covers forever the sin of the sinner, and forever averts the wrath of God from the sinner thus covered by the blood. Donald Bloesch summarizes the

distinction between the two terms as both being integral aspects of the atonement effected by Christ’s blood.

In conclusion, the doctrine of the atonement includes both the dimensions of propitiation – averting the wrath of God – and expiation – taking away or covering over human guilt. By the expiation of human guilt, the wrath of God is turned away, the holiness of God is satisfied. Yet it is God who in the person of His Son performs the sacrifice of expiation. It is God who in the person of His Son swallows up evil within Himself through vicarious identification with the sin of His people.<sup>319</sup>

The use of *hilastarion* and *hilasmos* by the New Testament writers would have met with comprehension by their Jewish audience. Even the Greek pagans would have understood the words to have reference to the appeasing of the gods. The shedding of His perfect sacrificial blood would therefore have reference to the universal guilt and stain of

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<sup>319</sup> Bloesch, Donald G. *Holman Bible Dictionary: Expiation, Propitiation*”  
<https://www.studydrive.org/dictionaries/hbd/e/expiation-propitiation.html>

sin; it would *expiate* or cover the debt of sin that the sinner could not pay, and it would *propitiate* the just wrath of God by offering the one perfect gift sufficient to reconcile the sinner to a holy God. It was only in the definitive claims made by Jesus with regard to His death – and, of course, the fact that His was the death of a *man* and not an animal – that made His sacrifice substantially different from the Levitical sacrifices with which the Jews were intimately familiar. Jesus' blood was to be shed *once for all*; it was to bring universal redemption and open the kingdom to all who placed their trust in it. "This universal significance distinguished it fundamentally from contemporary Jewish concepts of expiation, as the expiation accomplished by Jesus' death is to be understood as ultimate and final, requiring no further supplementation."<sup>320</sup>

Yet in spite of this very significant difference in the scope of Jesus' *expiation*, the concept itself was familiar enough to be both comprehensible and somewhat non-controversial. The third term in our study of the effects of Christ's sacrifice – *ransom* – stimulates an entirely different image and reaction. The blood of the sacrifice is related to the undeniable presence, guilt, and stain of sin. But the concept of a ransom connotes *bondage*, for a ransom is that which is paid to set a person free from some force – whether just or unjust – binding him. "Jesus does not speak simply of giving His life to set an example for others to follow, nor of giving His life to benefit others in some unspecified manner, but specifically of *giving His life as ransom for others*."<sup>321</sup> The concept of being set free was not, to be sure, foreign to the Old Testament conception of the redemptive work of the promised Messiah. Once again we find this New Testament aspect of Jesus' mission in the previously cited passage in Isaiah 53, where the concept of the Suffering Servant giving Himself for others is patent. Thus Israel was awaiting her Redeemer, and the terms *redemption* and *ransom* are clearly related.

The community described the Promised One as the 'redeemer and liberator.' Jesus related to these conceptions by comparing the surrender of his life to the payment of a ransom, by which a person subject to punishment was freed from the penalty or a slave was set free from slavery.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> Pannenberg; 248.

<sup>321</sup> Vos, *Self Disclosure*; 281.

The concept of ransom was one that offended the unbelieving Jew, who refused to believe that he was in bondage to any man. To the militant zealot, the concept of a ransom was not as offensive, but the bondage would represent the oppression of Rome, and the promised deliverance and redemption would mean the restoration of Israel's sovereignty under a Davidic monarch. But to Jesus, and undoubtedly to some extent the faithful Jew, the need for ransom did not have reference to the Romans, nor even to sin *per se*, but rather to the bondage of Death. It is this bondage that lies at the deepest root of the Jew's problem, and the payment of full ransom that takes the promised redemption of God beyond Israel to the whole world, which shares the same bondage as the Jew. It was the ransom of Christ's blood that would liberate those "*who through the fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.*"

But to whom was the ransom paid? Patristic and Medieval theologians toyed with the idea that the ransom was paid to the devil, who held the power of death over mankind. This theory has plausibility in the sense that the ransom is always paid to the one who holds the power of bondage, the one who has bound the victim. That the ransom should be paid to Satan in no way legitimizes the devil, for in general the concept of a ransom implies an illegitimate assertion of bondage and slavery on the part of the one demanding the ransom. Still, the thought that Satan would benefit in any way from his usurpation of Man's rightful place as co-regent of Creation, or to be honored even so much as to receive a payment from the Son of God for that which he gained through deception, is abhorrent to most scholars, as it should be to all believers.

The ransom cannot be paid to the devil, for although he has been granted for a time the administration of this world, through which he continues to oppress and torment mankind with corruption, disease, and death, the One who subjected mankind to the bondage of death on account of sin is God. It was God who stipulated the penalty of the primeval sin, "*dying you shall die,*" and it is God who infallibly determines the length of every man's days before he is even born. Recognizing death as the corruption of life and not as an entity of its own essence and reality, we realize that the *bondage* of death is the deprivation of *life*. Payment for redemption from this bondage could only be paid to the

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<sup>322</sup> Schlatter; 315.

Giver of Life, and only by the One who has Life in Himself, and only through that One's death. For only then could Life triumph over Death, when the Prince of Life Himself voluntarily submitted to death – Death that had no claim on Him and could not hold Him its grip. It is Death that Jesus conquered by His death, and in so doing rendered powerless the one who had illegitimately held mankind in bondage to the fear of death. By His stunning victory over the grave – the topic of our next lesson – Jesus secures life everlasting to those for whom He died. “By his death, Jesus overcomes the murderer who wants to rob the community of its life and thereby acquires life for it.”<sup>323</sup> Adolf Schlatter offers a deeply meaningful summary of this aspect of Christ's work on the Cross, worthy of some meditation.

Again, his soul was the ransom since he opposed Satan unto death...From Jesus' consciousness of power his gaze fell downward upon the adversary who kills men and therefore also would seek to kill him, and whom he would overcome by dying. From Jesus' mercy that placed him in the service of those who were bound, his gaze ascended to God, whose judgment gave men over to death and whose grace granted him life.<sup>324</sup>

Worthy of deeper meditation, however, are the words of the Apostle Paul, in which the aspects of atonement and of redemption are united in one stirring passage as only the inspired pen of Paul could do,

*When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.* (Colossians 2:13-15)

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<sup>323</sup> Schlatter; 319.

<sup>324</sup> *Idem.*

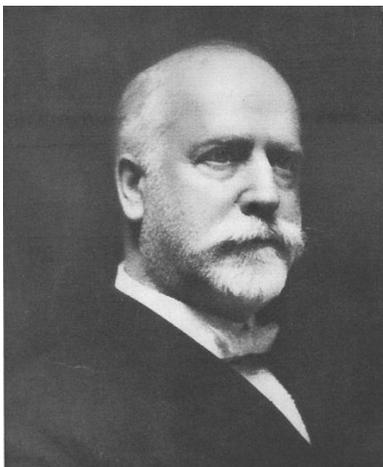
## Chapter 18 – He is Risen!

**Key Text(s):** I Corinthians 15:1-8

*“The Jews could not suppress it  
nor the Greeks resist it.”  
(Adolf Schlatter)*

“The Fundamentals” were a series of essays published in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, setting forth the opinion of evangelicals from the United Kingdom and the United States regarding those doctrines of Christianity considered to be non-negotiable. Such topics as the Inspiration of Scripture, the Deity of Christ, and the Virgin Birth were ably defended as being fundamental to the profession of Christianity. The premise for this assemblage of scholarly essays was both simple and reasonable: in order to call oneself a Christian, one must agree to a certain baseline of ‘Christian’ doctrines. The effect of the essays was to strengthen those who already held to the ‘fundamentals,’ and thus it was somewhat a manifestation of ‘preaching to the choir.’ It had little notable effect at the time upon the wave of liberalism that was then sweeping Western Christianity, and has had no tangible impact on liberalism in the decades since. Sadly, even the authors of these essays were not capable of maintaining much of unified front beyond the writing of the essays, and quickly divided into disagreements over ‘non-fundamentals.’

The impotence of truth against unbelief is certainly no testimony against the truth,



**R. A. Torrey (1856-1928)**

and the essays comprising The Fundamentals remain excellent and faith-strengthening reading even a century after their first publication. R. A. Torrey, a Congregationalist minister and evangelistic partner of D. L. Moody, was the primary force behind the compilation, one of three editors of the essays, as well as a contributor. Torrey defended one of the doctrines of evangelical Christianity most maligned by liberalism, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Torrey begins his essay, *The Certainty and*

*Importance of the Bodily Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the Dead* by simply stating “The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the corner-stone of Christian doctrine.”<sup>325</sup>

In the previous lesson we maintained that all of the works of Jesus Christ would have been for naught had He not died on the Cross, a position that would seem to make the *death* of Jesus Christ the cornerstone of Christian doctrine. Earlier it was maintained that the power and efficacy of Christ’s work was predicated upon Him being both fully God as well as fully Man, a composition of natures that, in turn, necessitates the Virgin Birth. Hence argument could be made that *this* is the most fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith. But in determining the cornerstone of Christian doctrine, subtle distinctions must be made with regard to the necessity of various ‘fundamental’ tenets as to their particular application. For instance, the Virgin Birth of Jesus is fundamental to the doctrine of the Incarnation – God coming fully and truly in the flesh to bring about the deliverance that He Himself promised for His people. This Incarnation, in turn, is necessary in terms of biblical *Hamartology* – the doctrine of sin - and to biblical *Soteriology* – the doctrine of salvation. These ‘ologies’ are undoubtedly critical pillars of the Christian faith, and none of them can be removed without the entire structure falling to the ground.

But what is the *cornerstone* of Christian doctrine? The *death* of Jesus Christ, it was maintained in the previous lesson, was the *sine qua non* of Jesus’ messianic work. Had Christ not died, all of His obedience, all of His miracles, and all of His promises would have been in vain, for the ultimate enemy of mankind – Death - would have yet lived. So when we speak of the death of Jesus Christ, we are certainly speaking of matters “*of first importance,*” as the Apostle Paul puts it in I Corinthians 15, “*For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures...*”<sup>326</sup> To theorize a course of redemptive history that might have happened, by which Jesus Christ would not have died – nor have had to die – is to manifest a complete misunderstanding of the purpose of redemptive history, and to border dangerously close to heretical blasphemy.

But can the death of Jesus Christ possibly be conceived as the end of the story? Would that situation not declare the victory of Death rather than of Life? “the crucifixion

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<sup>325</sup> Torrey, R. A., ed. *The Fundamentals: Volume II, Chapter XIV* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books; 2008);298.

loses its meaning without the resurrection. Without the resurrection, the death of Christ was only the heroic death of a noble martyr."<sup>327</sup> Thus Paul continues, including in the matters "*of first importance,*" Jesus' burial and His resurrection.

*For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...* (I Corinthians 15:3-4)

Paul proceeds immediately to collate eyewitness evidence to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ending with his own testimony of having seen the risen Lord, though "*as one untimely born.*" If the death of Christ was crucial to the full completion of His messianic mission – and this must be the case if we accept that the deepest purpose of that mission was to reverse the damage done in the Garden through Man's first sin – then the necessary concomitant of that death must be the resurrection. A Christ-in-the-grave is no Victor over Death, but rather just another man for whom death was the true measure of his work. Again, Paul in the same chapter quoted above,

*For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. **Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.** If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.* (I Corinthians 15:16-19)

Listen to those words, "*Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.*" They are beyond hope, as are all who die in their sins, for Death remains victorious if Christ is not risen. Thus this or that tenet may truly be the foundation of this or that 'ology.' But the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of Christian *doctrine*. For without the resurrection of Jesus Christ – *bodily from the grave* – all other doctrines are empty words. Death has won the game, and mankind has lost.

It is truly a marvel that professing Christian scholars – again primarily from the German school of Higher Criticism in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century – have so vehemently attacked the doctrine of a bodily resurrection of the Messiah Jesus. The power of Rationalism so permeated the theology of Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, that the theologians of the 19<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> I Corinthians 15:3

<sup>327</sup> Torrey; 299.

Century could no longer ‘accept’ such an irrational doctrine as bodily resurrection. Nature must have its course, they reasoned, and Science has ‘taught’ us that death is the natural conclusion of all life. R. A. Torrey would have justifiably said that, while every man has a right to such a view, such a view precludes that man from claiming to be a Christian. James Orr, also a contributor to *The Fundamentals*, simply concludes, “The disproof of it [i.e., the bodily resurrection of Jesus], if such a thing were conceivable, would be the overthrow of Christianity.”<sup>328</sup> Even one of the prominent of the German Tübingen School, David Friedrich Strauss, recognized the centrality of the Resurrection to biblical Christianity, “Christianity, in the form in which Paul, in which all the Apostles understood it, as it is presupposed in the Confessions of all Christian Churches, fall with the resurrection of Jesus.”<sup>329</sup> This was not a problem for theologians like Strauss, for he believed that the Christianity of the ‘catholic’ church was that of the Apostles, and especially that of the Apostle Paul, but not that of Jesus Himself. Thus Strauss could maintain his own profession of Christianity, as defined in his own terms.



*D. F. Strauss*

**D. F. Strauss (1808-74)**

Among those who have attempted to maintain a Christian profession alongside a denial of the historical event called the resurrection of Jesus Christ bodily from the grave, there have been two predominant schools of thought. The first has attempted to label the resurrection stories as ‘legends’ concocted by the early church in order to glorify a revered but departed Leader; the second falls under the rubric of ‘vision,’ a powerful but self-induced effect of the overwrought emotions of those who watched their rabbi and ‘Lord’ die. Space does not allow a full summary of the capable refutations that have been amassed against these views by evangelicals over the past century and a half, but a few comments may suffice to show the irrationality of the liberal argument.

With regard to the ‘legend’ allegation, it may simply be said that the narratives of Christ’s resurrection are completely devoid of the stuff of legend literature from the

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<sup>328</sup> Orr, *The Faith of a Modern Christian*; 135.

ancient world. This is remarkable considering what the church would later claim with regard to what Jesus did through His death, and considering the fact that it was universally maintained that Jesus spent three days in the tomb. What is remarkable is that *nothing* is said concerning this time in the tomb, nor anything concerning the struggle that Jesus waged against the devil. The *results* are announced, but the battle itself is shrouded in mystery. Paul reports that Jesus “*descended into the earth,*” but is remarkably reserved about what it was that Jesus *did* there.<sup>330</sup> While not a solid proof that the resurrection narratives are not legends, it is still quite remarkable that so little that is ‘legendary’ is reported, when so much might have been.

As to the ‘vision’ perspective, the response is admittedly psychological rather than biblical. The contention is that the disciples, exercised by such profound grief over the death of their Lord and because of the incredibly deep disappointment that death brought to them, ‘saw’ that which their hearts wanted to see. Some advocates of this view go so far as to say that Jesus – in spirit but not in body – *allowed* them to see visions of Him as risen from the grave. Schlatter describes the ‘vision’ hypothesis, though he himself does not hold it.

The disciples entered the Easter account in a mood oscillating between despair and hope, unable to give up their faith in view of Jesus’ earlier words and deed, and unable to retain it in view of his death, and from these waves of emotions visions emerged that ended all doubt, experiences of highest value for the disciples although they were found merely in their own subjective realm.<sup>331</sup>

Schlatter goes on to refute this psychological phenomenon by simply pointing out that such a consistent and collective apparition has never been recorded in the history of religious experience. He points out that the various gospel accounts of the disciples’ encounter with the Risen Lord “are unlikely to be descriptions of visions, since they always involve a multitude of disciples at the same time who are simultaneously part of

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<sup>329</sup> Quoted by Van Oosterzee; *Christian Dogmatics*; 565.

<sup>330</sup> A fact that must cause theologians great consternation, considering the multitude of opinions offered by them as to what it was that Jesus did while in the tomb.

<sup>331</sup> Schlatter; 377.

the action...Simultaneous visions of this description, if we call them visions, become virtually inexplicable."<sup>332</sup>

These observations are directed at the general tenor of the liberal attack on the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Due to the onslaught of liberalism against this doctrine, a great deal more ink has been spilt defending it against the rationalist nay-sayers, and seeking to prove the historical veracity of the resurrection accounts on an unassailable factual basis. However, most evidence produced in support of the resurrection is circumstantial and tendential. For instance, it is argued that no group of men such as the first apostles would have been able to 'hold it together' against persecution and martyrdom, if they were knowingly advocating a lie. This argument is tendentious, in that it arises not from hard, historical fact, but rather from the need to support the very conclusion the argument is developed to defend. Additionally, arguments in 'evidence' of an empty tomb are circumstantial, as an empty tomb itself does not prove a resurrection. Indeed, counter theories abounded even in the first century, to explain the 'empty tomb.' As with *The Fundamentals*, evidences in support of the resurrection of Jesus Christ tend mostly to strengthen the faith of those who already believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and rarely have a tangible apologetical impact on the unbeliever.

But as with *The Fundamentals*, this fact does not negate the value of arguments in support of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The strengthening of one's faith is an important exercise, and supplying rational arguments in support of the historical reality of the resurrection of Jesus from the grave can have tangible benefits within the congregation of faith, so long as it is acknowledged and accepted that belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the grave is fundamentally that – *belief*. But it is not *irrational* belief, and this is perhaps the greatest benefit of apologetical arguments in its defense. While a resurrection from the grave is certainly contrary to normal human observation, and appears to run counter to 'the nature of things,' it is far from irrational to the one who realizes that 'the nature of things' has been terminally corrupted through human sin. No one who believes that death is solely *the wages of sin* can have any difficulty believing – rationally – in the proposition that Death and the grave were not able to hold One who was sinless.

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<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*; 378.

The difficulty faced by anyone who wishes to eradicate the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from Christian teaching, is that the phenomenon is *prophesied* in the Old Testament, *predicted* by Jesus Himself during His earthly ministry, *proclaimed* as a rational, historical fact by the earliest disciples, and finally became the tenet upon which the fullness of all Christian hope was *predicated*.<sup>333</sup> From the perspective of Old Testament Messianic prophecy, it is impossible to deny that *bodily* deliverance from the grave was foretold with regard to the Promised One. The Davidic Psalm 16, widely regarded as Messianic, speaks of divine intervention with regard to death,

*I have set the LORD continually before me;  
Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.  
Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices;  
My flesh also will dwell securely.  
For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol;  
Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.* (Psalm 16:8-10)

The Apostle Peter considered this passage to apply to the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and incorporated it into his first sermon as recorded in Acts 2.

*Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. And so, because he was a prophet and knew that GOD HAD SWORN TO HIM WITH AN OATH TO SEAT one OF HIS DESCENDANTS ON HIS THRONE, he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that HE WAS NEITHER ABANDONED TO HADES, NOR DID His flesh SUFFER DECAY. This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses.* (Acts 2:29-32)

Of course it can be argued – and *has* been argued – that Peter misinterpreted the Psalm, which was referring merely to God’s deliverance of David from a particularly trying situation, perhaps the future king David fleeing for his life from the current King Saul. This is, to be sure, a very unnatural reading of the psalm, which seems to place the Holy One of God in a position subject to decay, which in turn would strongly imply actual death. But be this as it may, Psalm 16 is not the only prophecy that promises the resurrection of the Lord’s Anointed. The ‘Gospel’ of Isaiah 53 leaves no room for doubt that the Servant of Jehovah does die and is buried.

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<sup>333</sup> Please be assured that this paragraph does not portend a paradigm shift toward alliteration.

*By oppression and judgment He was taken away;  
And as for His generation, who considered that He was **cut off out of the land of the living**  
For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due?  
**His grave** was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man **in His death**,  
Because He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth.*

(Isaiah 53:8-9)

But as in Psalm 16, death was not to be the end of the story for the Servant of Jehovah of Isaiah 53.

*But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief;  
If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring,  
**He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.**  
As a result of the anguish of His soul, **He will see it and be satisfied**;  
By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many,  
As He will bear their iniquities.*

(Isaiah 53:10-11)

And as a foretaste of where we will be going toward the end of this lesson, we also find the exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ in this very same prophecy, including the plundering of the strongman's house already spoken of in previous lessons.

*Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great,  
**and He will divide the booty with the strong;**  
Because He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors;  
Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors.*

(Isaiah 53:12)

Thus Paul considered the doctrine of the death, burial, and resurrection not only to be "of first importance," but also "according to the Scriptures," something he mentions twice in the verses previously quoted from I Corinthians 15. But Jesus also considered His own death – and His resurrection – to be matters of first importance. We trust that the disproportionate space given to Jesus' prediction of His own death, and to the narrative history of His passion, by the gospel writers, reflects the same priority given to this theme by the Lord Himself. Unlike the skeptical liberal critic, the evangelical has no reason to suspect that the writers of the gospels had any other desire at heart and mind than to faithfully record their mutual Lord's life and works, in proportion to the importance that

He placed upon the events. Thus there is so very little about Jesus' life prior to His baptism and anointing for ministry, and so very much regarding His suffering and death.

We have already seen how Jesus turns immediately to the theme of His impending suffering and death after the confession of the disciples, through their mouthpiece Peter, recorded in Matthew 16. Certainly Jesus does not view the events that are before Him as being either avoidable or accidental, but part and parcel with His messianic calling. Furthermore, His death will not be the end of the matter.

*From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, **and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.***  
(Matthew 16:21)

In a harmonious passage in John's gospel, Jesus also disabuses any notion that what was about to befall Him was in accordance with anyone else's will but His own (except, of course, that of His Father in heaven, whose will was essentially Jesus' own). In other words, the suffering and death of Jesus was not beyond His control, nor beyond His purpose. Furthermore, the promise from Matthew 16 that He would rise again on the third day – placed there in a passive voice – is in John 10 made the *active work* of Jesus Himself.

*For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but **I lay it down on My own initiative.** I have authority to lay it down, and **I have authority to take it up again.** This commandment I received from My Father.*  
(John 10:17-18)

Jesus' self-awareness of both His death and His resurrection as integral and crucial aspects of His obedience to His calling is also contained in His enigmatic statement to Martha on the occasion of the bringing back to life of her brother, Lazarus. We call it a 'bringing back to life,' and not a 'resurrection,' only for the reason that Lazarus was to die again, in the 'normal' course of his fallen life. Still, the narrative of John 11 makes it very clear that Lazarus had been dead for so long that decomposition must have set in, so that the reader may understand both the power and authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the power of the resurrection to life which is in Him. Martha, for her part, shows herself to be an orthodox Jew of the Pharisaic view; in other words, she believes that there will be a

Resurrection at the end of the age. *“Martha said to Him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.’”*<sup>334</sup> To this Jesus answers with the words that reflect the entire divine purpose for this episode of redemptive history,

*Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?’ She said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world.’* (John 11:25-27)

This exchange between Jesus and Martha is very important to our understanding of the biblical teaching concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ, as Martha’s response ties two things together than, on the surface, would not necessarily coalesce. Jesus claims to be *“the Resurrection and the Life”* and asks if Martha believes this. Her answer is not that she believes that He is *“the Resurrection and the Life,”* though she definitely answers that she does believe. Instead of merely repeating what the Lord just said, she manifests a deeper belief and a deeper understanding – one that reflects faithful Israel’s expectation concerning the Promised One. *“Yes, Lord, I have believed that **You are the Christ, the Son of God...**”* Martha makes an equivalence statement, and Jesus does not ‘correct’ her, because she is absolutely right to see that Jesus’ being the Christ *means* that He is the Resurrection and the Life. Martha – it would seem, unlike the disciples – had a grasp on the deeper meaning of Christ’s advent, the meaning that went back beyond Abraham, to Adam.

Paul would later pick up this theme in Romans 8, to which we will turn in a moment. But the bottom line is that the Promised One – the Seed of Abraham who is also the Seed of Woman – was first and foremost sent to reverse the damage done to Creation by the Fall of the first Adam. Certainly this has immediate application to the curse that was placed on Man in consequence of his rebellion: *“In the day that you eat thereof, dying you shall die.”* The curse on Adam and his posterity was life of toil and vanity, ending in death. Jesus’ life was also one of toil and at least apparent vanity; and it was to end in death. But the curse was also pronounced upon the whole of Creation, as summarized by the apostle in that classic passage from Romans 8,

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<sup>334</sup> John 11:24

*For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.* (Romans 8:19-22)

Contrary to the prevailing view of Greek dualistic philosophy in the time of Christ – a view held by the Sadducees in Second Temple Judaism, for which reason they denied a bodily resurrection – the *physical world* was as important as the spiritual world, and it was the mission of the Promised One to overturn the ill effects of sin throughout Creation, even those parts that did not sin, but were subjected to the same curse of decay on account of Adam’s sin. This whole process of the restoration of Creation begins, as it were, with the very conception of Jesus within Mary’s womb, in a manner very reminiscent of the creation of Adam from the dust of the earth. The culmination of this redemptive process was the death of the Seed of Woman, succumbing voluntarily to the curse that was brought upon Creation due to the sin of the first Adam. The bodily resurrection of Jesus is, therefore, the inauguration of the redemption of the physical Creation, followed progressively by the psychical renewal of the human soul through regeneration and sanctification, leading ultimately to the full spiritual renewal of Creation in the New Heaven and the New Earth. “The concept of resurrection was a strong bulwark against all enterprises that sought to open heaven by despising the earth and to strengthen the spirit by trampling down the natural life, seeking to honor God by demeaning humanity.”<sup>335</sup> The process of decay introduced by Adam’s rebellion is reversed through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the purpose of whose ministry was to restore all things. This concept is powerfully summarized by Paul in I Corinthians 15, where the Adam-Christ line predominates.

*So also it is written, ‘The first Man, Adam, became a living soul.’ The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.* (I Corinthians 15:45)

All of this points inexorably to the *necessity* of both the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ – prophetically through the Old Testament, predicted by the Lord Himself as

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<sup>335</sup> Schlatter; 383.

a central aspect of His earthly purpose, and upon which not only the hope of believers, but also of the whole of Creation, is predicated. “It would be unworthy of God to take into the fellowship of His own perfect life a being which He did not intend to raise to the full fruition of communion with Himself of which its nature is capable.”<sup>336</sup> Thus was the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ proclaimed in the very first recorded sermon, and thus it remained *the* central feature of the Gospel proclamation through the world.<sup>337</sup> Even in the midst of those Greek philosophers who so devalued the material world, Paul did not alter the message one bit, but we find him proclaiming the resurrection rather than attempting to prove it to the skeptics. Indeed, to Paul the resurrection of Jesus from the grave was itself *proof* of the judgment of God that was to come upon the world.

*Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, **having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.*** (Acts 17:30-31)

Therefore, following Paul, we do not seek to prove the historical reality of the empty tomb, but rather view it as proof itself of the veracity of the eternal purposes of God both to redeem and to judge. It is sufficient for faith to know that the bodily resurrection of the Messiah was necessary, it was prophesied in the Old Testament and predicted by Jesus, and was proclaimed by His closest witnesses. Indeed, rather than attempt to prove the bodily resurrection of Jesus as a historical fact, the authors of the New Testament universally treat it as a fact associated with a specific event, and not as some *beatific vision* to be sought repeatedly within the life of the Church. In other words, the apostles firmly presented the Resurrection as something that happened once in history, and as something then followed by Jesus’ departure from the earth. The vision of the Risen Lord was for them a solidifying agent to their faith; it did not become a spiritual and mystical experience to be sought after or repeated. Adolf Schlatter notes that “When there were no more appearances of the Risen One, they were no longer claimed or invented. There

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<sup>336</sup> Vos, *Redemptive History*; 320.

<sup>337</sup> It is interesting to note that one of the criteria stipulated for the man who would replace Judas Iscariot among the twelve was that “*he must become with us a witness of the resurrection.*” (Acts 1:22)

emphatically did not arise a legend that construed appearance for the purpose of proving his messiahship.”<sup>338</sup>

There was, of course, a time when there were no more appearances of the Risen Lord; after forty days Jesus ascended from the earth in the sight of His disciples, and was seen no more among them. It is often asked by skeptics, and undoubtedly often pondered by believers, why it was that Jesus did not set up His kingdom at that time, as the disciples had once asked Him. The answer is probably rooted in the ‘process’ of renewal that Jesus’ resurrection has instigated within Creation, beginning with humanity and culminating with the restoration of the whole. Jesus Himself held out no false expectations to His disciples prior to His final suffering, that He would immediately return and establish His kingdom on earth according to the prevailing desire among the covenant nation. Rather he taught them not only that He would be going away, and that where He was going they could not come right away, but also that it was a good thing that He should go away, that He might send the Comforter to be with them and to guide them into all truth.<sup>339</sup> And the believer is left in no doubt as to where it is that Jesus has gone, as the universal testimony of the writers of the New Testament speaks to His exaltation to the right hand of the Father in heaven.

*Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, **whom heaven must receive** until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.* (Acts 3:19-21)

*Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him. But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and **Jesus standing at the right hand of God**; and he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”* (Acts 7:54-56)

*And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.* (Hebrews 1:3-4)

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<sup>338</sup> Schlatter; 376

<sup>339</sup> John 14:1-3; 16-18; 16:5-7

*Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*  
(Hebrews 12:1-2)

*He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*  
(Revelation 3:21-22)

The concept of being ‘seated at the right hand’ of majesty was traditionally viewed in the ancient world as the assignment of princely authority to the one so honored. In Judah’s history there were several times when a king elevated his son to the position of co-regent – two kings reigning beside each other – and it was said that the son ‘sat at the right hand’ of the father. It is the same with the heavenly Father and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. This was the return of Christ to the glory that He possessed with the Father from eternity past (*cp.* John 17), but with a very important adjustment: Jesus entered into His exaltation not merely as the preexistent *Logos*, but as the Son of Man. Jesus sat down at the right hand of majesty as Man, and remains there in exalted glory as the Representative of Man before God and over Creation. Van Oosterzee writes,

The visible Exaltation of the Lord to heaven is the necessary sequel to his Resurrection from the dead; and, as a link in the chain of the facts of Salvation, can be estimated at its true value only in connection with the Humiliation by which it was preceded, and the Glory by which it was followed. In consequence of this event He is now, as regards the body, removed from the earth, but as regards His whole Divine-human nature, invested with a power and dominion in heave and earth, which is figuratively indicated in the words, ‘seated at the right hand of God.’<sup>340</sup>

The time between Jesus Christ’s ascension to the right hand of the Father, and His coming again at the Parousia, or ‘Appearance,’ is often referred to as the Session of Christ in Heaven. “Its meaning consist in the fact that he has been exalted by the Father and received in heaven until the time of the restitution of all things.”<sup>341</sup> It represents the proper understanding of Jesus’ continuing authority *as King*, rather than the insidious

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<sup>340</sup> Van Oosterzee, J. J. *Christian Dogmatics*; 571-572.

<sup>341</sup> Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation*; 445.

notion that Christ's Kingdom has been delayed and Christ's earthly authority retracted. The term 'session' refers to a governing council; it is particularly used within ecclesiastical settings to denote the assembly of Presbyterian elders who 'govern' the various churches that are associated in the 'session.' Used with reference to the Ascended Lord, it indicates His continuing act of governing, both in the Church and in the world.

The first part of that statement is not so hard for believers to accept, except when it comes to actually obeying the Head of the Church in matters of doctrine and practice specified in His Word. But the concept of Christ as Head of the Church is rooted in most Protestant Churches, and even forms a remote backdrop for the authority of the Roman Catholic Pope as the 'vicar' of Christ upon earth. The second part – Christ's authority over the whole earth – is harder for believers to comprehend, and some theological systems have rejected it outright, delaying this part of Christ's monarchy until the Millennial Reign. However, Jesus Himself made no distinction with regard to the range and scope of His authority after the resurrection, but told His disciples that *"all authority has been given unto Me in heaven and on earth."*<sup>342</sup> This authority, however, was not intended to be exercised in a worldly and political manner, but rather evangelistically through the preaching of the Gospel. On the basis of this pronouncement of authority, Jesus then tells His disciples to *"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all the I have commanded you."*<sup>343</sup>

This kingly authority is real and powerful, though invisible to all but the eyes of faith. The apostolic perspective on the authority of Christ Jesus was not merely the foundation of their ministry (from Matthew 28), but also the power of their warfare against the forces of evil and falsehood. This power is mediated from the Risen Lord through the Holy Spirit, and is manifested through the *kerygma* – the 'proclamation' – of the Church's ministers. Paul writes,

*...for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of*

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<sup>342</sup> Matthew 28:18

<sup>343</sup> Matthew 28:19-20

*God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.* (II Corinthians 10:4-6)

The full outworking of this kingly authority takes us into the theological studies of Pneumatology – the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit, and of Ecclesiology and Missiology – the Church and its Mission. The culmination of Christ’s Session is, of course, the topic of Eschatology. This study of the Lord Jesus Christ has focused primarily on His Person, and has really only touched upon His Work as it was manifested during His earthly life. This is a non-standard treatment of the subject, but hopefully reflects the biblical reality that the Work of Jesus Christ did not end at the Cross, nor even at the Empty Tomb, but continues in the world through the Church, and through the preaching of salvation in His Name. Thus in the opening verses of the Book of Acts, the author refers to the earlier work (the Gospel of Luke) as the *beginning of what Jesus did and taught*, implying that what was to follow was the *continuation* of that work.

Too often believers consider the relative works of the Lord Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit in terms of a relay race, with Jesus handing off the baton to the Holy Spirit upon His ascension to heaven. But in a relay race only one runner runs at a time; the others either rest or wait, depending on their relative positions in the race. This is a false metaphor if applied to what Jesus Christ is now doing in heaven – for He is not ‘resting’ from His labors, and equally false when applied to the Holy Spirit – who does not ‘run’ on His own. No, the truth is that just as the Risen Lord ever lives to make intercession for His people, so the Risen King reigns from His throne in heaven in the hearts of His children, in the assemblies of His Church, and truly over all the earth and heaven. “His work...far indeed from suffering by His departure, is by His exaltation advanced and extended.”<sup>344</sup> Believers in every generation eagerly await the full, visible manifestation of that Life and Rule, but do not doubt its reality or power while it remains invisible.

*Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith; to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen.* (Romans 16:25-27)

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<sup>344</sup> Van Oosterzee; 575.