

Jesus Son of God from Matthew and Luke A Definitive Christology for Beginners

Or “If Only We Had Listened to Gabriel”

“Judaism has never known anything of a preexistence peculiar to the Messiah *antecedent to his birth as a human being*” (Dalman, *Words of Jesus*, pp. 129-132, 248, 252)

Here is a lexical entry for the Greek word *prouparchein*, to preexist.

προϋπάρχω, pro-uparcho

προϋπάρχω impf. προϋπήρχον intr. *exist before* προϋπήρχεν μαγεύων *he had been practicing magic* Ac 8:9 (Jos., Ant. 4, 125 ἄ τε καὶ προϋπήρξεν ἐν τοῖς ἔμπροσθεν χρόνοις γενόμενα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις). προϋπήρχον ἐν ἔχθρα ὄντες Lk 23:12 (cp. Diod. S. 19, 7, 2 διὰ τὰς προϋπαρχούσας ἔχθρας;

Please note that this New Testament word is never used of any preexistence for the Son of God. It *first* comes into use for Jesus only in 150 AD with Justin Martyr. By that time the New Testament doctrine of Jesus as Messiah has undergone a major shift leading to centuries of dispute and finally the formation of the Nicene and Chalcedonian Creeds.

With great respect to other schools of thought, there is in the Bible no “being who *became* Jesus Christ” in the NT. There is of course the true Son of God who is and must be the *descendant* of David, so presented in the very first verse of the NT and confirmed in almost the last verse of the NT as “the offspring of David” (Rev. 22:16). But this Jesus, the only Jesus, was not a being before being a being. You cannot in fact begin to be if you already are. If you are the uniquely *begotten* Son of God, you are by definition one who *begins* to be. In the case of Jesus this marvelous event, the begetting, i.e. coming into being/existence, beginning to be, of Jesus occurred in Mary. As Matthew says so decisively, this was the *genesis* (Matt. 1:18) of the person Jesus, Son of God, because as the angel said, “what is *begotten* [*gennethen*] *in her* is due to the power of holy spirit” (Matt. 1:20).¹ Before that event the Son was the object of a promise. He had not yet begun to be. You cannot begin to be if you already exist. You cannot in fact be a being before you come into being. This is logically impossible, unless ordinary words are emptied of their meaning.

It was with the entrance of the alien idea of a literal preexistent person that serious mischief was perpetrated on the Christian faith. The results in confusion are all around us.

All theories of a literal preexistence for the Son of God involve one in a deconstruction of the synoptic birth accounts. While Matthew and Luke describe in as crisp a way as language will permit the beginning of the Son in Mary and his begetting in (*en*) Mary and birth originating from Mary (*ek*), all rival systems, however shrouded in vague terminology, lead to a different story: the transformation or transmutation of an existing person into a new form. Begetting and transformation rule each other out. As Harnack said so well, “The miraculous genesis of Christ in the Virgin by the holy spirit and the real Preexistence are automatically mutually exclusive [*Sie schliessen sich aus*]. At a later time period it is true it became necessary to unite them in thought.”² The Son of God did not enter a new stage or phase of his existence. He began to exist in his mother, as all human beings must. He was not twice begotten, as the Greek Orthodox Church holds.³

¹Note the reluctance of many translations to face the word “begotten” here. They translate as if the word were “conceive,” which it is not. Thayer had it right on p. 113 of his lexicon: “properly of men begetting children.” The RV stated in its margin that “the Greek reads ‘begotten.’” It is the Son of the Father whom we see procreated in Mary, the one of whom Matthew says that God “called My Son out of Egypt” (Matt. 2:15).

²*History of Dogma*, Vol. 1, p. 105 (Eng. trans).

³Gregory of Nyssa describes the unending theological arguments in Constantinople at the time of the second General Council: “The whole city is full of it, the squares, the market places, the crossroads, the alleyways; old clothes men, money changers, food sellers: they are all busy arguing. If you ask someone to give you change, he philosophizes about the Begotten and the Unbegotten; if you enquire about the price of a loaf, you are told by way of reply that the

Alas, words have been so manipulated and obscured as to leave the elementary facts about the origin of Jesus the Messiah in a state of grand confusion. The NT suffered a terrible assault when its lucidly clear language about the origin of the Son of God was contorted to produce a so-called preexistence, or “pre-human existence.”⁴ With that fatal move the identity of the Son of God was obscured; he was removed from the human race, and *another*, preexistent person was substituted for the historical Son of God whose *genesis* was in Mary and who came into being *from* Mary — who *conceived* a Son, as the angel promised. The story is that Mary had a baby — as simple as that. She had no husband, so her son is also “God’s own Son” (Rom 8:3, 32). The Son is no less the son of Mary than he is also the Son of God, and of course the son of David because he is biologically descended from David. If he is not, he is not the Messiah.

Mary did not conceive “impersonal human nature” (so orthodoxy) adding it to a preexisting God or other spirit-being. Mary had a son who is biologically the product of David’s line. Matthew 40 times chain-links the Son of God to his pre-history with a series of no less than 40 “begats.” We are supposed to be rooted in history, and not any history, much less in timelessness, but in the recorded history of Israel. The synoptic accounts of the *genesis* of Jesus (Matt. 1:18), based on the Hebrew Bible’s promise of the Savior as descendant of Eve, of Abraham, Judah and of David, conscientiously and thoroughly exclude the Gnostic idea that the Son of God was a being existing before his birth. The latter concept is affiliated with the post-biblical notion of Gnostic “Aions,” who mediate between the distant One God and the world which He deals with through intermediating “second gods.”

You cannot begin to be if you already are. You cannot begin to eat if you are already eating. We confront a very simple idea here. Matthew and Luke pack all of their resources into the proposition that Mary conceived a baby. There is never the slightest question about this, until the complicating intrusion of post-biblical theologians destroyed the matchless simplicity of the synoptic accounts.

Bart Ehrman shows that Matthew 1:18, the *genesis* of Jesus, was embarrassing to later scribes, who tried to tame the text and soften the obvious contradiction between Matthew and later orthodoxy by doubling the “n” in *genesis*, making it a little less stark.⁵ They hoped that “birth” would be less startling than the original “*genesis*,” or origin. Ehrman affirms “that there is nothing here or elsewhere throughout the Gospel to suggest that he knew or subscribed to the notion that Christ had existed before his birth.”

Matthew had already opened with his headline title: The book of the *origin* of Jesus, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Behind that opening salvo of precious information identifying the savior lies the whole OT background about the promised descendant of Eve (Gen. 3:15), the promised descendant of Abraham, and the promised descendant of David, of whom God Himself gave this oath-bound promise: “I will be his Father and he will be my Son” (2 Sam. 7:16).

We should also not forget the other Messianic promise made to the tribe of Judah. The Messiah was to come from “between his feet,” LXX, “from his thighs,” NLT “from his descendants” (Gen. 49:10). The Messiah’s person is to be directly related to Judah. He is part of the human race because he is David’s promised son.

That promise is repeated in the NT as the basis for its Christology. It is to be noted that the tense of the promise in 2 Samuel 7 is *future*. God has no Messianic Son as of 1000 BC. He is expected in the future. Matthew and Luke record his arrival and *genesis* in the womb of his mother. Indeed “that which is

Father is greater and the Son inferior; if you ask ‘Is my bath ready?’ the attendant answers that the Son was made out of nothing” (*On the Deity of the Son*, p. xlvi, 557B). “The [Eastern Orthodox] church believes that Christ underwent two births, the one eternal, the other at a particular point in time: he was born of the Father before all ages and born of the Virgin Mary in the day of Herod” (Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 222).

⁴This is the phrase used by Jehovah’s Witnesses who claim that the Son Jesus is in fact Michael the archangel. But Hebrews 1 expressly argues that the Son was never an angel, however exalted. After all as the same writer maintains, “All high priests are chosen from among men and ordained on behalf of men in relation to things pertaining to God” (Heb. 1:5).

⁵See his very informative *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, pp. 75-76. He restores the clear meaning of Matt. 1:18: “The beginning of Jesus happened in this way.” He points out that *genesis* can mean “creation, beginning or origination.” The RV in 1881 noted in the margin of 1:18 the meaning of *genesis* as “generation, as in Matt. 1:1.” Language has no clearer way of telling us that this event was the *coming into existence* of the Son.

begotten” (Matt. 1:18), brought into being, that which has its origin from the Father is the product of God’s personal power and presence effecting a miracle in Mary.

Paul did not disagree with Matthew and Luke. In Romans 1:3, 4 he defines Jesus as “God’s Son who came into existence [*ginomai*] from the seed of David.” He was, note, by that process the Son of God, and later declared to be so “with power” from his resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1:4). Jesus’ human descent is never in question.

But the Son is also the son of Mary. It would be preposterous to introduce here the notion of Mary as a surrogate, taking into herself from outside an already existing personality. If that were true Jesus could not be the promised Messiah. The whole point of the Messiah is not only that he must originate within the human biological chain, but that he must be a blood relative of David. This is made quite clear in Psalm 132:11. “Of the fruit of your body,” I will raise up, bring onto the human scene, a person to sit on your throne. Mary’s son is the product of David’s loins. The loins (*halatzayim*) is the euphemism for the reproductive organs of the male. Solomon was equally a blood descendant of David (1 Kings 8:19). Just as a denial of the virginal conception of the Son makes Messiahship impossible, because God would not be his father (as promised in 2 Sam. 7:16), so the denial that Mary truly *conceived* the son of God in her womb thus giving birth to one who is the blood descendant of David, equally wipes out the Messiahship of Jesus. One who is older than David cannot be his descendant.

2 Chron. 6:9 predicts that “your [David’s] son who will come forth from your loins [*halatzayim*] will build God’s house.” The reference is both to Solomon and finally to Jesus.

^{KJV} **2 Samuel 16:11** And David said to Abishai and to all his servants: Behold, my son, which came forth of my bowels, internal organs,⁶ seeks my life.

^{LXT} **2 Samuel 16:11** καὶ εἶπεν Δαυιδ πρὸς Ἀβεσσα καὶ πρὸς πάντας τοὺς παῖδας αὐτοῦ ἰδοὺ ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἐξεληθὼν ἐκ τῆς κοιλίας μου ζητεῖ τὴν ψυχὴν μου

וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֶל-אַבִּישי וְאֶל-כָּל-עַבְדָּיו הִנֵּה

בְּנִי אֲשֶׁר-יָצָא מִמֶּעִי מִבֶּקֶשׁ אֶת-נַפְשִׁי

2 Sam. 7:12-14 (“your seed, from your body”) was confirmed when Peter said “God swore with an oath that from the fruit of his [David’s] loins he would set one upon his throne” (Acts 2:30).

“Son of God” is the Messianic title which makes Jesus the parallel to Adam, who was also Son of God (Luke 3:38). The physical precedes the spiritual, as Paul insisted in 1 Corinthians 15:45-47. Other systems reverse this order and create an imaginary spirit person who precedes Adam. Hebrews 1:1-2 is quite clear that God did *not* speak through His Son in the Old Testament period, but in different ways and times. He spoke only “at the end of these days” in a Son. It is hard to see how this writer could have believed the opposite, that the Son of God was God’s mouthpiece in the Old Testament times. Well did R.P.C. Hanson remark of Hebrews 1:1-2: “The words ‘reflection’ and ‘facsimile’ (*charakter*) can hardly be names for a preexistent being. It is not even certain that the name ‘son’ is unhesitatingly applied to him in his preexistent state. Heb. 1:2 could be rendered, ‘he has in these last days spoken to us in the mode of a Son,’ which would imply that the Sonship began only at the incarnation.”⁷ Hanson is one of many who see no *Son* before the birth of Jesus. He argues elsewhere that in some form Jesus was active in the OT times. But he also confesses that a personal preexistence is a “feature which it seems so difficult to make sense of.”⁸

Jesus as Firstborn Son

Here is the biblical usage of this term “firstborn.” “Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” (Mic. 6:7). “Mary brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him up in swaddling clothes and laid him in the manger, because there was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 2:7). Christians are to be “conformed to the image of His Son, so that he should be the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom. 8:29). Revelation 1:5 sends greetings from “Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.” Psalm 89:27 defines what is meant by

⁶Heb. *me’eh*.

⁷*The Image of the Invisible God*, p. 83.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 90.

firstborn in the case of Jesus: “And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.” As firstborn Jesus is to be the chief king. Thus Paul describes him in Colossians 1:15 as Messiah “who is the image of the invisible God, the *firstborn* of every creature.” Context is everything, and Paul is talking here about our transference into the Kingdom of His beloved Son (Col. 1:13), who is the visible image of the invisible God. He is not talking about an invisible non-human person, but the image, as was the *visible* Adam. “Image” and “firstborn” tell us about the historical Jesus “*in whom all things were made.*” “Image” is the word to describe a human being, not an angel!

The translation “by him” misleads the reader to think of the Genesis creation. But the *Expositors Greek New Testament* well states of Colossians 1:16, “This does not mean ‘by him.’ The preposition is *en*, ‘within the sphere of.’”⁹ Christians indeed according to Ephesians 1:4 were all “in Christ,” “before the foundation of the world.” In the same verse (Col. 1:16) Paul says all things, in this case, various ranks of angels, have been created through (*dia*) him. Jesus is certainly co-creator under God in the New Creation.

Finally in Hebrews 1:6 we have: “And again, when he brings the *firstborn* into the world, he says, ‘Let all God’s angels worship him.’” This is one of a trio of three quotations making the same Christological point, defining the beginning of the Son. “I will be his father and he will be my son” (quoting 2 Sam. 7:16). “Today I have begotten him,” i.e. “become his Father” (quoting the oracle of Ps. 2:7). And thirdly, pointing to his birth: “When He brings the firstborn into the world...” To come into the world means to be born.

Paul in Acts 13:33 pinpoints the begetting of the Son as established by Psalm 2:7. Verse 34 by comparison uses another verse to prove the resurrection. F.F. Bruce points this out in a most significant statement: Acts 13:33: “Raising him up in the sense in which he raised David (v. 22) where the verb is *egeiro*, but for *anistemi* in this [same] sense, cp. Acts 3:22, 7:37; cp. 3:26; 5:30. The promise of Acts 13:23, the fulfillment of which is here described in verse 33 has to do with the sending of the Messiah and not his resurrection, for which see verse 34.”¹⁰ Psalm 2:7 applies, naturally enough, to the begetting of the Son, i.e. his coming into existence.

The Basic Bible in English captures the sense of Psalm 2:7 clearly for modern readers: “You are my Son. This day I have *given you being.*” That “day” was neither a timeless “today” of eternity, as orthodoxy maintained, nor a pre-Genesis event. Matthew and Luke labored hard to tell us *when* the Son was begotten, given being.

A very interesting possibility exists that the current Hebrew text of Psalm 110:3 has been altered (i.e., repointed, the consonants remaining the same) from an original reading. The LXX reads, “Before the morning star from the womb I begat you.” This reading remains in some Hebrew manuscripts and in the Hebrew as read by Origen. The Hebrew manuscript we are accustomed to may have changed the pointing of the word YeLiDiTiCHa (“I have begotten you,” found in Ps. 2:7, “Today I have begotten you”) to YaLDuTeCHa, “your youth” (Ps. 110:3) producing a text which has made commentators scratch their heads. No wonder then that the wise men were looking for a Messiah born in connection with the womb and the star.

Suffering Servant Christology

The suffering servant songs of Isaiah had laid the ground work for the creation and formation of the servant in the womb. Isaiah 49:5 reads, “I formed you in the womb.” Not “I *transformed* you from a spirit person into a human being.” Not I caused you to “assume flesh when you were formerly spirit.” This OT background is confirmed in the DSS which speak of the future moment “when God begets the Messiah.” It has been well pointed out by scholars of Judaism that Jews knew nothing of a personal existence of the Messiah antecedent to his birth in Bethlehem. They knew that God had *named* the Messiah from creation, along with the temple and repentance, but not that the Messiah was already alive. That same view is reflected by the Jew Trypho in conversation with Justin Martyr around 150 AD:

⁹Moulton Milligan suggest a causal meaning for *en* here (*A Grammar of Greek NT*, Vol. 3, p. 253). Note the careful analysis of Nigel Turner in his *Grammatical Insights into the NT* (p. 124): “all things *have been created* and now exist by (*dia*) his continual support.” Paul said in I Cor. 8:6 that “all things are through Jesus Christ and we [Christians of the New Creation] are through him,” “have our being through him” (BBE).

¹⁰*Commentary on the Greek Text of Acts*, ad loc.

Those who suppose Messiah to have been a man and affirm that he was anointed and became Christ by election appear to me to hold an opinion more probable than what you have expressed; we [Jews] all believe that Christ will be a man of human parents and that when he comes he will be anointed by Elias...When you say that this Christ existed as God before the ages, then that he submitted to be born and became man, yet that he is not man of man, this assertion appears to be not merely paradoxical but also foolish.¹¹

Evil Sons of God in Genesis 6

The dreadful event by which gross evil was committed by some angels taking as wives selected human females was condemned strongly by Jude in verse 6, where he describes these illicit unions as gross fornication. Fornication is used often of any form of sexual misconduct.

Phinehas stabbed a guilty Israelite for an illegal marriage (Num. 25:7, 8). You can indeed have illegal marriage arrangements which are nothing but illegal sex. “*Porneia* comes to mean sexual intercourse in general without more precise definition...Bigamy is also branded as fornication. Jer. 3:9 brands the sin of Israel as both fornication and adultery against God.”

Jude 6, 7 condemns in the fiercest terms the illegitimate extreme fornication (*ekporneuo*) of the fallen angels who took wives from the human race. Jude says that the angels abandoned their position of heavenly power or sphere of dominion. This fact is reflected in I Enoch and the DSS. These angels “abandoned their proper home.” I Enoch confirms that awful story (12:4; 15:3): “You left the high, holy and eternal heaven,” and 15:7 speaks of “the angels, the spirits of heaven, whose dwelling is in heaven.” Both Jude and I Enoch describe the fate of these wicked sons of God whom God “has kept in eternal chains, until the judgment of the great day.” I Enoch 10:4-6: “Bind Asel hand and foot and cast him into darkness...and place upon him rough and jagged rocks, and cover him with darkness and let him abide there forever and cover his face that he may not see the light, and on the day of the great judgment he will be cast into the fire.” The story is affirmed in Jubilees 5:6 and the apocalypse of Baruch, 56:13 (cp. Josephus BJ 6:434 where eternal chains refers to life imprisonment). Sodom and Gomorrah, says Jude, practiced immorality in the same way as these angels and hankered after strange flesh. As the angels fell through their lust for foreign women (although the women are blamed too for seducing the angels, Testament of Reuben, 5:5), so the Sodomites desired relations with the angels. The Sodomites and the angels are examples of going after “strange flesh” (cp. also Testament of Naphtali, 3:4-5: “the watchers [angels] changed the order of their nature”). I Enoch repeatedly refers to the sin of the fallen watchers as “defiling themselves with women.”

The Miraculous Origin of the Human Son of God

Luke 1:35 provides an unshakeable testimony to the origin of the Son of God, Messiah Jesus. It is a text which is glossed over in much commentary (as is Isa. 49:5, above), since it is embarrassing to what later became orthodoxy in the doctrine of the Incarnation of a preexisting Son. *Dio kai* in Greek is a strong causal connector between two related concepts. The one is based on the other. Thus in Luke 1:35 “For this reason precisely [*dio kai*], the holy one to be begotten will be called Son of God.” Or perhaps “the one to be begotten will be called holy, Son of God.” Note that “calling brings to expression what one is, so that it means no less than ‘he will be.’ Interchangeability of the two phrases is seen by comparing Matthew 5:9, ‘they will be *called* sons of God’ and Luke 6:35, ‘you will *be* sons of the Most High.’”¹²

Back in 1881 the distinguished commentator F. Godet, doctor and professor of theology at Neuchatel in Switzerland, noted of Luke 1:35:

The expression “he will be called” means universally recognized as such and that because he is such in fact...The notion of the pre-existence of Jesus Christ is quite foreign to the context...In this birth the miracle of first creation is repeated on a scale of greater power...We might paraphrase, “And it is precisely for this reason that I said to you...” We have then here from the mouth of the angel himself an authentic explanation of the term “Son of God”...After this

¹¹ *Dialogue with Trypho*. chs. 48, 49.

¹² Raymond Brown, *Birth Narratives*, p. 289.

explanation Mary could only understand the title in this sense: A human being of whose existence God Himself is the immediate author. It does not convey the idea of preexistence.

The later notion, developed only when Justin Martyr read his middle-Platonic cosmology into the New Testament, was that the Son engineered his own conception. Justin tells us that the holy spirit and the power of God coming over Mary is the *preexisting Son* producing his own conception. I think this teaching ought to be avoided as nonsense.

Luke is a clear and credible witness to the actual facts about the Son of God. Joseph Fitzmeyer in the *Anchor Bible Commentary on Luke*:

Luke presents Jesus as a Palestinian Jew, born in Bethlehem of Davidic lineage and raised in Nazareth. He speaks of him as “a man attested to you by God with mighty deeds, wonders, and signs, which God did through him in your midst.” With many a deft stroke of the artist’s brush he has painted a portrait of Jesus as a human being with great concern for others...In Lukan Christology there are four phases of Christ’s existence. The first begins with his virginal conception...In Lukan Christology there is no question of Jesus’ preexistence or incarnation...Neither of these aspects of his existence emerge in the Lukan portrait of him...In the time of Jesus the title “Messiah” would have denoted an expected anointed agent sent by God either in the Davidic, kingly or political tradition for the restoration of Israel and the triumph of God’s power and dominion, or in the priestly tradition...We have no certain way of assessing what form that relationship would have taken in his own consciousness...Luke’s [concept of Son] does not yet carry the later connotations of physical or metaphysical sonship or identity of substance associated with the later Nicene or Constantinopolitan creeds. Nor adoptive sonship. Luke’s explicit relation of the title Son to the conception of Jesus connotes much more.

Holy spirit is understood in the OT sense of God’s creative and active power present to human beings. **Later church tradition made something quite other out of this verse.** Justin wrote: “It is not right therefore to understand the Spirit and power of God as anything else than the Word, who is also the first begotten of God” (*Apology* 1:33). In this interpretation the two expressions, spirit and power, are being understood of the Second Member of the Trinity. It was scarcely however before the 4th century that the Holy Spirit was understood as the third person...There is no evidence here in the Lukan infancy narrative of Jesus’ preexistence or Incarnation. Luke’s sole concern is to assert that the origin of God’s Messiah is the effect of His creative spirit on Mary.¹³

(He says the elements of the Trinity but not the doctrine itself are found in Luke.)

Gospel of the Hebrews made the holy spirit the mother of Jesus. “My mother the holy spirit,” Jesus is made to say. For the NT writers Jesus was a man, but a man born miraculously. No thought either of preexistence or of Incarnation was associated in their minds with the doctrine of the Virgin Birth. The fact is that the two ideas cannot be reconciled.

Professor of church history Albert Reville explained, “A preexistent being who becomes man, reduces himself, if you will, to the state of a human embryo; but he is not *conceived* by action exterior to himself in the womb of a woman. Conception is the point at which an individual is formed, who did not exist before, at least as an individual.”¹⁴

Isaiah 49:5 gives the biblical view of the Messiah’s beginning. God formed him in the womb.

The whole concept of preexistence in fact veils a more sinister notion, that two persons are involved — one who preexists, and another, the biological descendant of David begotten in Mary. Most people have not given much thought to the whole question about what “preexistent” can mean for a single individual. Can a single straight line drawn from left to right begin at two different points? Some theologians have thought this through. Professor Mackey wrote:

It is best to begin with the problem of preexistence, not only because there are linguistic difficulties here, but because it leads directly into the main difficulties encountered in all Incarnational and Trinitarian theology. As soon as we recoil from the suggestion that something can preexist itself, we must wonder what exactly preexists what else, and in what sense it does so.

¹³ pp. 350, 351.

¹⁴*History of the Dogma of the Deity of Jesus Christ*, Philip Green, 1905, p. 43.

It does not take a systematician of any extraordinary degree of perspicacity to notice how exegetes themselves are the unconscious victims in the course of their most professional work of quite dogmatic (that is, uncritical) systematic assumptions.¹⁵

In John 10:36 Jesus spoke of his own history: “God made him holy and sent him into the world.” With this simple account our other gospels agree perfectly. The supernatural coming into existence of the Son of God constituted him a uniquely holy human being and thus Son of God in a matchless way. As Son of God, God’s final agent, he was sent by his Father on the mission of preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom (Luke 4:43).

Hebrew prophecy had announced the birth of Messiah in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2). God had raised him up, that is, put him on the scene of history *and then sent him* to deliver the Gospel to Israel (Acts 3:26). This verse should put to rest any suggestion that if God “sent” Jesus it must mean that Jesus was alive and conscious before his conception. John the Baptist was also “a man sent from God” (John 1:6). Peter says that God first produced the Messiah *and then sent him* as His commissioned agent. The detail of just how Jesus, God’s Son, came to be is the subject also of the united and detailed testimony of Matthew and Luke, who provide by far the longest accounts of the origin of the Son of God. Both writers intend to anchor the origin of the Son of God firmly in history. The Son of God is firmly attached to history. But other speculative theories left him free-floating and liable to all sorts of long-term theological dispute.

Neither Matthew nor Luke presents us with a theological problem of vast proportions needing armies of theologians to provide an explanation. The biblical accounts describe the Son of God as the object of age-old Jewish promises — that a biological descendant of the royal house of David would appear as God’s instrument for the salvation of Israel and the world. Commentators are so accustomed to thinking of the Son as eternal God Himself that they instinctively imagine that Luke and Matthew agree with them. A writer of a tract on “Who Is Jesus?” tells us that “Luke teaches that the origins of Jesus’ *human life* were supernatural.” He does not observe that Luke describes the origin of the *Son of God* himself, the single person who is Jesus, Son of God and Messiah. There is not the slightest hint that he is other than human originating *from* his mother. The writer thinks that “Mary’s son was called the Son of the Highest by the angel because *that is who he was from eternity.*” But Luke and Gabriel say nothing of the sort. Quite to the contrary Gabriel links the miracle in Mary expressly to Jesus being the Son of God. The Son of God is entitled to that designation because God was his father by biological miracle (Luke 1:35). No other reason is supplied, and it is misleading to imagine any other origin for the Son of God.¹⁶

When leading theologians struggle to maintain their traditions against the simple facts presented by Matthew and Luke, here is what happens! “Christ’s birth, we are to remember, is not the origin of his personality, but only its entrance into the conditions of human life.”

Because Christ was an eternal divine Person he could not be quite passive in the moment of his conception as we are: He was sent by his Father into the world, but he came also with full consciousness and will...He could not be conceived, as we are, quite passively, and could not come in this way into existence, but because he previously existed, his conception was his own deed. He assumed consciously and freely our human nature.¹⁷

It is a relief to turn to the far more scientific and factual accounts of Luke’s view of Jesus found in the excellent article on “Power” in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. The author approaches his subject from the Old Testament background: “There can be no disputing the link with the Old Testament and Jewish picture of the Messiah. Of the Old Testament Messiah Isaiah says that the spirit of counsel and strength rest on him (Isa. 11:2). Isaiah calls him ‘a mighty hero’ (9:6).” The dictionary happily corrects the misleading mistranslation of versions which attempt to read Trinitarian theology into

¹⁵*The Christian Experience of God as Trinity*, p. 51.

¹⁶It was the Valentinian Gnostics who said that Jesus came through (*dia*) Mary. Coming *through* rather than from Mary is inevitable once a literal preexistence of the Son is proposed. Gnosticism in its blatant and obvious form divides Jesus from the Christ, but “orthodoxy,” Trinitarian or Arian, creates a similar though less conspicuous division of the Son, as between a preexisting and postexisting person. Luke 1:35 could have prevented any such theories.

¹⁷James Orr, M.A. D.D, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, Scribner, 1912, pp. 215, 277, 278. The second statement is cited by Orr from Professor Bavinck of Amsterdam.

Isaiah and describe the Messiah as “the Mighty God,”¹⁸ thus presenting readers with the amazing concept of a second Almighty God!¹⁹

Isaiah was speaking of a descendant of David who was to be *el gibbor*, “mighty or divine hero.”²⁰ The dictionary points also to Micah’s prediction of the human Messiah: “Micah compares him with a shepherd and says that he will tend his flock in the strength of the Lord his God.” The Messiah will operate “in the strength of Yahweh, in the majesty of the name of Yahweh his God” (Mic. 5:4). Such a portrait prevents any idea that the Messiah will be God or an angelic being coming to earth from another sphere. He works in the power of one who is his God. The same Messianic agent of God is described in the royal Psalm 110:2: “The Lord [Yahweh] will send the rod of your royal strength out of Zion.” Corroboration of this regal picture of the supernaturally endowed Messiah is found in writings half a century before the birth of Jesus. Psalms of Solomon 17:24, 42-47 read: “And may God gird him to defeat unrighteous rulers, to purify Jerusalem of the heathen who trample it to destruction...God has made him strong in the holy spirit and wise in counsel with power and righteousness. And the good pleasure of the Lord is with him in strength and he will not be weak. Strong is he in his works and mighty in the fear of God.”

The dictionary observes that:

in all these passages the picture is that of the King. The power granted to him is victorious power to defeat his enemies. It is the power confessed by the King of Israel: “For who is strong save the Lord...the mighty one who makes me strong with strength and makes me mighty with strength to battle” (2 Sam. 22:32, 33, 40; cp. Ps. 18:32, 39). The king attributes his success in battle to the power which Yahweh has given him. Messiah is thought of as a king like this endowed with the strength of Yahweh.

Luke is excited by the picture of the Messiah and he reports the prophetic power of Jesus demonstrated in his ministry. The two disciples who walked with the risen Jesus on the way to Emmaus know Jesus to be “*a human prophet* [note the original Greek] powerful in deed and in word” (Luke 24:19). The picture is that of a wonderful “new Moses.” Moses was likewise “mighty in his words and deeds” (Acts 7:22). What more does Luke tell us?

Jesus is unique in his existence. His existence is peculiarly determined by the power of God...This is an important feature in the Lukan infancy story...Luke describes the conception of Jesus as the miracle of the Virgin Birth...A divine miracle causes pregnancy...In the background stands the biblical conception of God who begets His Son by a verbal act which cannot be rationalized...*For this reason* the Son has a special name not borne by other men, namely “Son of God”...At the beginning of his existence a special and unique act of divine power gives him the title “Son of God”...The Messianic title Son of God is linked with the miracle of conception and birth.²¹

God has not left Himself without powerful witness both in the text of Scripture and in expert commentary. It must be obvious to any unprejudiced reader how far these sublime accounts are removed from the later paganized view of Jesus as an eternal or pre-Genesis Son of God, begotten long before he was actually begotten, and entering the womb of his mother from a fully conscious existence as God, second member of the Trinity. Of Moses Jews wrote: “And God foresaw me before the foundation of the world to be the mediator of his covenant.” So with the new Moses, who gave his new Torah in five blocks of teaching as recorded by Matthew, Jesus was “foreknown [as are Christians, v. 2] before the foundation of the world” (1 Pet. 1:20).

There is a vast difference between being foreknown and actually existing as an intelligent conscious being before one is reduced to an embryo in order to enter the womb of one’s mother from outside.

¹⁸Webster English Bible, 1833.

¹⁹Note the title for the One God in Jer. 32:18: “the great and mighty God.”

²⁰*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 2, p. 299.

²¹*Ibid.*, pp. 299, 300.

The Justification of Later Developments

Theological writings frequently tell us that the right definition of Jesus and his relationship to God was discovered only after centuries of painful intellectual struggle. The Bible however seems much more straightforward. It says nothing about a “mystery of the Trinity.” This came much later. *Post-biblical* writings invite us into a very different world of thought. J.S. Whale asks:

How did the doctrine of the Trinity [and preexistence] come to be formulated and why? What did it mean? As soon as the Church addressed itself to systematic doctrine it found itself wrestling with its fundamental axioms. I use the word “wrestling” deliberately, because those axioms were on the face of them mutually incompatible...The first axiom was monotheism, the deep religious conviction that there is but one God, holy and transcendent, and that to worship anyone else is idolatry. To Israel, and to the New Israel of the Christian church, idolatry in all its forms was sin at its worst. “Hear O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord” (Deut. 6:4). “I am the Lord and there is none else, there is no God beside me” (Isa. 45:5). Monotheism was the living heart of the religion of the Old Testament. It was and is the very marrow of Christian divinity...The systematic thought inevitably involved *a further definition of monotheism*, an elaboration of the unitary conception of the Godhead, not in terms of tritheism, but of Triunity...Christian thought, working with the data of the New Testament and *using Greek philosophy as its instrument*, constructed the doctrine of the Trinity in Unity...The popular view of the Trinity has often been a veiled tritheism.²²

This account is typical of the voluminous material published to inform us how the Trinity came into being. Unable to face the awful possibility that the Church distorted the New Testament rather than explaining it accurately, our writer speaks in low-key words of “a further definition of monotheism,” an “elaboration of the unitary conception of the Godhead.” At least he recognizes that the creed of Jesus was non-Trinitarian, but rather “unitary monotheism.” But does he deal fairly with the disaster which occurred when Jesus’ own creed was tampered with? Why is it admissible to redefine the simple creed of the Bible? God is one. He is not three. One will not become three without a major restructuring of God and thus of the universe. The New Testament contains not a word about any “wrestling” with how many Persons in the universe can be called the supreme God. There are indeed struggles over issues of the Mosaic law and its application in the New Testament. But no one amongst our apostolic writers ever broached the subject of a brand new definition of God, of monotheism. The God of the Old Testament is the God of the New. No more needs to be said.

But the Gentile pagan mind did not want to submit itself to the Jewish creed of the Jewish founder of the Christian faith. The simplicity found in Jesus needed elaboration in terms of the philosophies of Greek culture. Hence arose all the conflict over the identity of Jesus in relation to God.

Hence the Church “wrestled,” wrestled itself in fact most unwisely out of the perceived straitjacket of biblical monotheism, the very doctrine which would have spared it so much subsequent agony and division.

Other authorities who comment on our topic are forthright about the facts, particularly if they are historians with less of a theological axe to grind. The 15th edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* in its article on “Trinity” says: “Neither the word Trinity, nor the explicit doctrine as such, appears in the New Testament, *nor did Jesus and his followers intend to contradict the Shema of the Old Testament*: ‘The Lord our God is one Lord’ (Deut. 6:4).”²³

Dr. Marvin Wilson comments well on Jesus’ unmistakable confirmation of the creed of Israel:

Of the 5,845 verses in the Pentateuch, “Hear O Israel” sounds the historic keynote of all Judaism. This fundamental truth and leitmotif of God’s uniqueness prompts one to respond by fulfilling the fundamental obligation to love God. Accordingly when Jesus was asked about the most important commandment his reply did not contradict this central theme of Judaism (Mark 12:28-34; Matt. 22:34-40). With 613 individual statutes of the Torah from which to choose, Jesus cited the *shema*, including the command to love God, but also extended the definition of the first and great

²² *Christian Doctrine*, 1952, p. 112.

²³ p. 126.

command to include love for one's neighbor (Lev. 19:18)...Yahweh is the Supreme Being, wholly unlike all other things in the universe which have been created by him.

Wilson then mentions that "Some have seen complex unity." He wisely makes no attempt to justify this attempt to read later theology back into the simple words of the Hebrew Bible. But he strangely seems unalarmed that the Church he belongs to does not subscribe to the creed affirmed by Jesus himself.

Dr. Wilson provides excellent historical comment on the creed recited by Jesus. In *Our Father Abraham*, Marvin Wilson states: The *Shema* "is one of the most crucial Old Testament texts for the foundational teachings of *both Jesus and Judaism*."²⁴ But that foundational creed of Jesus is nowhere to be found on the books of mainline churches. For all of his good history and presentation of the facts, Professor Wilson seems unable to protest the Church's — his own church's — failure to uphold the creed of Jesus.

Unless, then, it can be shown that belief in three Persons who are God can be reconciled with the *Shema* affirmed by Jesus, Christians have the wrong creed. They have been mistaken for centuries. They have abandoned Jesus at a fundamental level (as well as keeping Jews and Muslims away from considering the claims of Jesus).

Let us do some further comparing. We have seen what creed Jesus established as the foundation of true religion: "the Lord our God is one Lord." Now let us hear what Christians were supposed to recite as creed some 500 years after the time of Jesus.

From the Jew Jesus to a New Gentile Creed

Below is the so-called Athanasian creed. I will not quote it in full, but give you enough to show how it unpacks the summary statement that "God exists in three Persons."

Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic [universal] faith; which faith except everyone do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance...The Father eternal, the Son eternal and the Holy Spirit eternal. And yet they are not three eternal but one eternal...So likewise the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, and the Holy Spirit almighty. And yet they are not three almighties, but one almighty. So the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God; and yet they are not three Gods, but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord and the Holy Spirit Lord; and yet they are not three Lords but one Lord. For just as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord; so we are forbidden by the catholic religion to say there are three Gods or three Lords...and in this Trinity none is before or after another; none is greater or less than another. But the whole three Persons are coeternal and coequal. So that in all things, as aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshiped. He who wants to be saved must so think of the Trinity.

Note the heavy threats leveled at any who might question this amazing dogma. But could Jesus have possibly subscribed to that creed? Or would Jesus himself have fallen under the cruel anathemas of this "Christian" creed? The appalling possibility is that Jesus would have fled from association with this bizarre document, which presents the ordinary reader with rather obvious non-sense.

Jesus, Matthew and Luke patently knew nothing about the creeds of Nicea or the so-called Athanasian creed. Jesus perfectly taught and carried out the will of his Father. Jesus' own affirmation of the creed of Israel is testimony to the greatest fact of the universe: That there is a God, and that He is one divine Person. Could even the God of Jesus possibly believe in the Trinity or "Binity"?

Finally, John's Gospel and two passages in Paul were later used to overthrow the primary testimony of Matthew and Luke. This could only happen when the word "word" in John was given a non-Hebraic meaning and its connection with wisdom as a personified attribute of the One God was overlooked.

The point is so well detailed in Paul Van Buren's *A Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality*. I offer this as a deterrent to what I think is the widespread contradiction of the NT synoptic accounts of the

²⁴ p. 122.

origin of the Son of God based on the Hebrew Bible. John's gospel has always been the happy hunting ground of Gnostics and I think this ought not to be. Van Buren wrote:

The term "preexistent" occurs nowhere in the Scriptures, but there is no reason why the concept, properly qualified, could not be used to refer to the opening words of the prologue of John and the verses found in the 8th chapter of Proverbs. The idea certainly appears in the opening of *Genesis Rabbah*, where commenting on Prov. 8 the rabbis argued in their own inimitable way that Torah was with God when he began to create the world...Torah has a higher value even than the creation...We could put it in our own words by saying that Torah produced history...John claims that the word made all flesh (v. 3) [all things were made, came into being through the logos]. The term "preexistent," however, leads one to think primarily and misleadingly in temporal terms...We may conclude that for the earliest church Jesus was accorded the priority and reality that the Rabbis assigned to Torah...The word that began to be [*egeneto*, began, not "took on"] flesh at a definite time, the word that is God's own, the divine purpose and intention that is God's very own, this word is eternal as God is eternal. The word is God's own eternal activity [thus the saving Gospel is called the word in NT and is thus creative and active]. The issue is the personal identity of personal agency. This word was God in the beginning and with God in the beginning, according to the prologue. This is the word that has now moved on to the stage of history. The word *became*, or *was made* or *happened* as flesh, just as the world and all that is became, was made, happened as creation. As in creation, and as at Sinai, so in the life of this Jew Jesus the creative word spoke and as a result, behold: creation, Israel, Jesus of Nazareth.

The subject of the Prologue of the Gospel of John is the miracle of God's involvement with His creation in order to bring it nearer to its completion. What is preexistent, utterly one with God before the creation of the world, is the divine resolve not simply to begin the creation but to bring it to its completion in a fully personal way. This eternal personal resolve of God which is *with* God [as God's purposes are in Wisdom literature] is that which was enacted in the personal existence of the man Jesus of Nazareth.

Now his caution which needs to be heard worldwide (or we might say "needs to be heard, Worldwide!"):

If one were to make the claim of priority in a temporal sense, one would be claiming that Jesus of Nazareth, born of Mary [coming *into existence* in Mary] *had existed* with God before the creation of the world. That claim would be worse than unintelligible; it would destroy all coherence in the essential Christian claim that Jesus was truly a human being, that the word [not yet the Son] became flesh. The humanity could hardly be eternal in that sense and still "be like us in all things, excepting sin" (Heb. 2:17). Jesus of Nazareth began his life, began to exist, at a definite time in history: the word became flesh.²⁵

The words of Pannenburg in his *Jesus, God and Man* deserve a wide hearing:

In Luke the divine sonship is established by the almighty activity of the divine spirit on Mary (Luke 1:35). It explains the divine Sonship literally in such a way that Jesus was creatively begotten by the spirit of God...In its content the Virgin Birth stands in irreconcilable contradiction to the Christology of the Incarnation [of a preexistent being]...According to the [Virgin Birth] Jesus first became Son through Mary's conception...preexistence is irreconcilable with this: that the divine Sonship was first established in time. *Sonship cannot at the same time consist of preexistence and still have its origin only in the divine procreation of Jesus in Mary...*[The Bible] seeks to express that from his birth onwards Jesus has been God's Son because through his birth he is God's Son.²⁶

Well did John Knox say, "We can have the humanity [of Jesus] without the preexistence or we can have the preexistence without the humanity [the human Jesus]. There is absolutely no way of having both."²⁷ I opt for belief in Jesus as the son of David and Son of God by miraculous origin.

²⁵Harper and Row, 1983, pp. 80-83.

²⁶pp. 141-144, emphasis mine.

²⁷*The Humanity and Divinity of Christ: A Study of Pattern in Christology*, Cambridge, 1967, p. 106.

Appendix: Hebrews 1:10

Hebrews 1:10 says of the Son of God that he laid the foundation of the heaven and the earth

There are three “proof texts” addressed to the Son in Hebrews 1:8-12. There is no hint in the text that they refer to someone other than the Son. Verse 8 begins, “But of the Son He [God] says...” Then follow three different quotes. The subject changes to the angels only in verse 13: “But to which of the angels did He [God] ever say...”

Much of chapter 1 of Hebrews compares the Son of God with angels, showing that the Son was never an angel and is superior to them. This proves a) that the Son cannot be God! It is not necessary to prove God superior to the angels. It is obvious. b) that the Son cannot be an angel or archangel as maintained by Jehovah’s Witnesses. Both angels and archangels are angels!

What then of Hebrews 1:10? In what sense is Jesus the Son the founder of the heavens and earth? How can this be since Jesus nowhere claimed to be the creator and it was not Jesus, but God who rested on the 7th day (Heb. 4:4)? And “God [not Jesus] made them male and female” (Mark 10:6) and “the Lord God [not Jesus] formed man from the dust of the ground” (Gen. 2:7). 50 texts say that **God** created the heavens and the earth. Luke 1:35, Matt. 1:18, 20 and 1 John 5:18 (not KJV) say that the Son **did not exist** until he was created/**begotten** in Mary. Was Jesus both six months younger than John and billions of years older than John? Was Jesus 30 years old when he began his public ministry and yet really billions+30 years old? What part of Jesus was 30 and what part was billions of years old? Jesus cannot be so divided up, split in two. Mary bore a human being. She did not bear an angel. She did not bear GOD. She did not bear “impersonal human nature” as Trinitarian theory says. God cannot be begotten, and the Son of God was begotten. **God cannot die** (1 Tim. 6:16). The Son of God died. Not to observe these category differences is to throw away precious biblical instruction.

Hebrews 1:1-2 says that God did *not* speak through a Son in the OT times. Hebrews 1:5 speaks of the *coming into existence* of Jesus, the Son: “Today I have **begotten** you.” The same verse speaks of 2 Samuel 7:14’s promise that God “*will be* a Father and he *will be* a Son.” That promise was given to David and it referred to the Messiah who was to come. The beginning of Messiah’s existence — “today I have **begotten** [brought you into existence]” — is the moment when God becomes the Father of the Messiah. This is exactly what we find in Luke 1:32-35 and Matt. 1:18-20 (“that which is begotten in her is from the holy spirit”).

Isaiah 44:24 says that God, unaccompanied, unaided, created the Genesis heavens and earth. He was entirely alone. “There was no one with Me.” There was no Son with Him (cp. Heb 1:1-2).

God did not speak in a Son until the NT. So then, who said, “Let there be light”? It would be a flat contradiction of Heb. 1:1-2 to say it was the Son. The God of the Old Testament is quite distinct from His unique Son. The latter had his **genesis** in Matt. 1:20 (“the **genesis** of Jesus was as follows”). The Bible becomes a book of incomprehensible riddles if God can have a Son before He brought him into existence! Luke 1:35 describes how the Son of God *came to exist*. He was begotten. To beget in the Bible and in English is a word which of all words denotes a before and after. Therefore the Son had a beginning. There was a time before he was begotten, before “he was.” If he already existed, these testimonies in Matt. 1 and Luke 1 are nonsense. Mary anyway bore a human being, not God or an angel. That is what all mothers do. The notion that the Son of God was in fact God would make a charade out of his whole struggle in obedience to God and on our behalf as Savior and model. The whole point of a High Priest is that he must be selected “from among men” (Heb. 5:1). He is the “man Messiah Jesus” in contrast to his Father (1 Tim. 2:5). The Father in John 17:3 is “the only one who is God.” If God is the only one who is God, no one else is God except the Father which is exactly what Paul declared when rehearsing the creed in 1 Cor. 8:4-6: “There is no God except the one God the Father” (combining vv. 4 and 6).

If the Son were God, it would produce the notion that there are two Gods. To call Jesus God and the Father God amounts of course to two Gods and this is not monotheism, however much the label may be applied.

In Hebrews 1:10, there is a complication *due to the fact that the writer quotes Ps. 102 from the Greek version (LXX) and not the Hebrew version. The LXX has a different sense entirely in verses 23-25.* The LXX says, “He [God] answered him [the suppliant]...Tell me [God speaking to the suppliant]...Thou,

lord...[God addressing someone else called 'lord'].” But the Hebrew (English) text has “He [God] *weakened* me...I [the suppliant] say, ‘O my God...’”

Thus the LXX introduces a **second lord** who is addressed by God and told that he (the second lord) is “at the beginning to found the earth and the heavens.” The writer to the Hebrews had open before him the LXX reading and not the Hebrew reading (rather like today someone might quote the NIV and not the KJV).

F.F. Bruce in the *New International Commentary on Hebrews* explains:

“In the LXX, Septuagint text, the person to whom these words (‘of old you laid the foundation of the earth’) are spoken is addressed explicitly as ‘lord.’ **God bids him** acknowledge the shortness of God’s set time for the restoration of Jerusalem (v. 13) and not summon him [God] to act when that set time has only half expired, while He [God] assures him [the suppliant] that he and his servants’ children will be preserved forever. [There is a footnote to B.W. Bacon’s discussion in 1902: ‘Bacon suggested that the Hebrew as well as the Greek text of this psalm formed a basis for messianic eschatology, especially its reference to the shortness of God’s days, i.e. the period destined to elapse before the completion of His purpose. He found here the OT background to Mark 13:20 and Matt. 24:22 and Ep. Barnabus. As Enoch says, “For to this end the Master [God] has cut short the times and the days, that His beloved [Jesus] should make haste and come to his inheritance.”’]

Bruce continues: “It is God who addresses this ‘lord’ thus. Whereas in the Hebrew text the suppliant is the speaker from beginning to end of the psalm, in the **Greek text** [which your Bible does not show] the suppliant’s prayer comes to an end in verse 22. And the next words read as follows: ‘He [God] answered him [the suppliant] in the way of His strength.’²⁸ “Declare to Me the shortness of My days. Bring me not up in the midst of My days. Your [the suppliant’s] years are throughout all generations. You, lord [the suppliant, viewed here as the Messiah by Hebrews], in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth...”

“This is God’s answer to the suppliant (v. 23ff in the LXX)...But to whom a Christian reader of the LXX might well ask could God speak in words like these? And whom would God Himself address as ‘lord’ as the maker [or founder] of heaven and earth?”

Reading the LXX the Hebrews writer sees an obvious reference to the new heavens and earth of the *future* Kingdom and he sees God addressing the messianic Lord in connection with the prophecies of the rest of Ps. 102 which speak of “the generation to come” and of the set time for Yahweh to build up Zion and appear in his glory.

There is an important article in the *Zeitschrift fur Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* of 1902 (B.W. Bacon, Yale University, alluded to by Bruce above) where the author makes the point which is *fundamental*: “The word ‘lord’ is wholly absent from the Hebrew (and English) text of Ps. 102:25.”

“With the translation in the LXX ‘He answered him’ the whole passage down to the end of the psalm becomes the **answer** of Yahweh to the suppliant who accordingly appears to be addressed as *Kurie* and creator of heaven and earth...Instead of understanding the verse as a complaint of the psalmist at the shortness of his days which are cut off in the midst, **the LXX [quoted in Hebrews, of course] and the Vulgate understand the utterance to be Yahweh’s answer to the psalmist’s plea that He will intervene to save Zion, because ‘it is time to have pity on her, yes, the set time has come’ (v. 13). He is bidden to**

²⁸The reason for the completely different translations, as between Greek and Hebrew of Ps. 102 in these verses, is the Hebrew vowel points. The sense can be altered if the vowel points are changed, and sometimes it is not clear which of the possible senses is the right one. Hence the difference between the Hebrew and the Greek here. Thus the Hebrew (Ps. 102:23) takes *innah* to mean “He [God] afflicted...” but the LXX repoints the same Hebrew consonants as *anah* which means “He [God] answered [him]...” So then in the LXX God is answering the one praying and addressing that person as “lord” (the LXX adds a “lord” in v. 25). Then the Hebrew has *omar eli* (“I say, O my God”). But the LXX reads these consonants as *emor elai* (“say to me,” i.e. “you,” the person praying, is commanded by God to tell God). The idea is that God is asked to cut short the days which have to elapse before the Kingdom comes (cp. Matt. 24:22 and Enoch, quoted by *Ep. Barnabus* 4:3: “For to this end the Master [God] has cut short the times and the days, that His beloved [Messiah] should make haste and come to his inheritance”). Ps. 102 is largely about the age to come and the restoration of Israel in the future Kingdom and so was entirely appropriate as a proof text for Hebrews 1 in regard to what the Son is destined to do in the future. This sense is reversed when it is made to support the unbiblical idea that Jesus was the creator in Genesis!

prescribe (or acknowledge?) the shortness of Yahweh's set time, and not to summon Him when it is but half expired. On the other hand he [the Messianic lord] is promised that his own endurance will be perpetual with the children of his servants."

This is exactly the point, and it can only be made clear when we see that 1) the Hebrews writer is reading the LXX and finding there a wonderful prophecy of the age to come (Kingdom, restoration of Israel) which fits his context exactly and that 2) there is a **Messianic Lord** addressed **BY** Yahweh and invited to initiate a founding of the heaven and earth, the new political order in Palestine, exactly as said in Isa. 51:16. This is exactly the point the Hebrews writer wants to make about the superiority of Jesus over angels. Jesus is the founder of that coming new Kingdom-order. **The Hebrews writer in 2:5 says that it is about "the inhabited earth of the future that we are speaking."**

This is really not so difficult when this difference in the LXX is explained. Both Ps. 102 and Heb. 2:5 and indeed the whole of Heb. 1 refer **to the new order of things initiated by Jesus** and it would not matter whether we think of the new order as initiated at the ascension — "all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me" — or at the second coming.

Note: Ps. 102 is all about the coming age of the Kingdom and the restoration of Jerusalem in the millennium (see vv. 13-22). The writer looks forward to the restoration of the city when God appears in His glory (v. 16). The Psalm is written for the "**generation to come**" and a newly created people.

Isa. 51:16 also speaks of an agent of God in whom God puts His words and uses him to "**plant the heavens and earth.**" *Word Bible Comm.* says: "This makes no sense if it refers to the *original* (Genesis) creation...In other instances God acts alone using no agent (Isa. 44:24). Here the one whom He has hidden in His hand is His agent. **Heavens and land** here refers metaphorically to the totality of order in Palestine. Heaven means the broader overarching structure of the empire, while 'land' is the political order in Palestine itself."

Thus Heb. 1:1-2 speaks, as he says in Heb. 2:5, of the "economy or world order to come." That is his concern in Heb. 1:10. Jesus is the "father or parent of the age to come" (Isa. 9:6, LXX).

Finally in **Heb. 9:11**, the writer speaks of the "good things to come" as the things "not of *this* creation."²⁹

By this he means that the things to come are of the new, **future creation (see Heb. 2:5)**. That creation is under way since Jesus was exalted to the right hand of God where he is now co-creator, under the Father, of the new creation and has "all authority in heaven and earth."

Once again, eschatology is the great factor in revealing the truth. God has a new creation in Jesus and we are to be new creatures in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). We must resist the temptation to be looking backwards to Genesis when the whole book of Hebrews bids us look forward to the "inhabited earth of the future" (Heb. 2:5). Note that in several places Hebrews speaks of the redemption, inheritance, covenant, judgment, salvation and spirit "of the age [to come]" (*aionios*).

Anthony Buzzard, March, 2004. *Difficult Texts*, Atlanta Bible College.

²⁹The new creation in Christ initiated in the current age and to be perfected in the age to come will itself give way to a further renewal in the post-millennial times. Even there the nations are being healed by the leaves of the trees (Rev. 22:2). God's renewal program is extensive (not that this leads to universal salvation, however). But scope must be allowed for the Gentiles who never had the law but who did (some of them) things of the law (Rom. 2:14-16).