

Lesson 1: The Preexistence of Christ

By the “preexistence” of Christ is meant that the second person of the Godhead existed prior to His incarnation (thus, Christ’s preexistence is sometimes referred to as His “preincarnate” state). The preexistence of Christ is seen both in His existence in eternity past and in His existence in the Old Testament.

Christ in Eternity Past

Because Christ is God (as the upcoming lesson on the deity of Christ will show), and because God is eternal (Deuteronomy 33:27, Psalm 90:2, Romans 16:26, 1 Timothy 1:17), Christ is eternal.

The eternity of Christ is directly asserted in such passages as Isaiah 9:6 (where Christ is called the “Eternal Father”), Micah 5:2 (where Christ’s “goings forth” are said to be “from long ago, From the days of eternity”¹), John 1:1 (“In the beginning was the Word”²), and John 8:58 (where Christ says of Himself: “Before Abraham was born, I am”).

Christ’s eternity can be clearly inferred from His creatorship of all things (John 1:3, 10, Colossians 1:16, Hebrews 1:2).³ The fourth century A.D. heretic, Arius erroneously taught that Christ was a created being and that, therefore, “There was a time when he was not” (the orthodox corollary is “there was never a time when He was not”).

¹Commenting on this verse, A. R. Fausset (quoted in Walvoord, p. 23) states that the terms used by Micah “convey the strongest assertion of infinite duration of which the Hebrew language is capable.”

²John’s point is that when time began (“in the beginning”; cf. Genesis 1:1), Christ already “was.” By using the Greek verb, *eimi* (instead of *ginomai*, as in John 1:3 and 1:6; the same phenomenon occurs in John 8:58, where Abraham is said to have come into being/*ginomai*, while Christ simply is/*eimi*), as well as by using it in the tense known as the “imperfect,” John is giving implicit testimony to the eternity of Christ. Thus, D. A. Carson, on page 114 of his commentary on the gospel of John, calls this a “theologically-loaded was.”

³If Christ was the creator of all things, He Himself could not have been a created being. If Christ was not a created being, He did not come into existence at a point in time (according to Genesis 1:1, all that was created was created within time), but had to exist apart from time, i.e., exist eternally.

Arianism was condemned as heretical at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. Modern-day proponents of Arianism are the Jehovah's Witnesses.

If Christ is eternally existent, then He is ipso facto preexistent. Christ's existence in eternity past is clearly affirmed by Christ Himself in John 17:5, where He asks God the Father to glorify Him with the glory which He had "before the world was," as well as in John 17:24, where Christ states that God the Father loved Him "before the foundation of the world."

Other passages that imply the preexistence of Christ include the following:

- John 1:14—"The Word [Christ] became flesh"
- John 1:15 and 1:30—"He [Christ] existed before me [John the Baptist]." This in spite of the fact that John was born approximately 6 months prior to Jesus (see Luke 1:36).
- John 3:13, 6:33, 38, 51, 62, and Ephesians 4:9⁴—Jesus descended to earth from heaven
- John 3:17, 4:34, 5:24, 36, 6:38, 13:20, 16:28, Galatians 4:4, and 1 John 4:14—God the Father sent Christ to earth

Christ in the Old Testament

Christ's preexistence is not only verified by the eternity of His existence, but also by His existence in Old Testament history. The existence of Christ in Old Testament history is periodically seen throughout the Old Testament in what are called "Christophanies"—temporary, preincarnate appearances of Christ in the Old Testament (from the Greek word for Christ, *Christos* + the Greek verb, *phaino*, meaning to appear).⁵

⁴This verse is, in my opinion, misinterpreted by some to mean that Christ descended into Hell during the time between His death and resurrection. However, "the lower parts of the earth" in this verse can be translated "the lower parts, the earth," "of the earth" being appositional to (i.e., renaming) "lower parts" (analogous to "city of Ypsilanti," where city and Ypsilanti are in apposition to each other). The NIV translates: "descended to the lower, earthly regions." Thus, this verse is speaking of Christ's incarnation. See Grudem for an excellent treatment of this issue in general (pp. 586-594) and of this verse in particular (p. 589).

⁵Theologians also speak of "theophanies" (*theos* is the Greek word for "God"). Theophanies and Christophanies are similar, if not synonymous. Since Christ seems to be the only person of the Godhead who materializes, it may be assumed that any bodily appearance of deity in the Old Testament is a Christophany (Walvoord, p. 54).

The primary Christophany in the Old Testament is “the⁶ angel of the LORD” (also called “the angel of God” or “the angel of His presence”). That the angel of the LORD is no ordinary angel, but deity is seen in the following passages:

- Genesis 16:7-14. In this passage, the angel of the LORD (so designated in vs. 7, 9, 10, and 11) appears to Hagar. Notice that in verse 10, the angel says, “I will ...,” as opposed to, “God will ...” Even more significantly, notice the words of verse 13: “Then she [Hagar] called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, ‘You are a God who sees’; for she said, ‘Have I even remained alive here after seeing Him?’”⁷
- Genesis 22:9-18. In this passage, the angel of the LORD (so designated in vs. 11 and 15) appears to Abraham when he is about to sacrifice his son, Isaac on Mt. Moriah. Notice that in verse 12 the angel says, “I know ...,” as opposed to, “God knows ...,” as well as, “from Me,” as opposed to, “from God.”
- Genesis 31:11-13. In this passage, the angel of God (so designated in v. 11) appears to Jacob in a dream. Notice especially that in verse 13, the angel says, “I am the God of Bethel”; furthermore, the angel says in verse 13, “you made a vow to Me,” as opposed to, “a vow to God.”
- Exodus 3:1-4:17 (cf. Acts 7:30-35). In this passage, the angel of the LORD (so designated in 3:2) appeared to Moses in the midst of a burning bush on Mt. Horeb. Notice the following:
 - “God called to him [Moses] from the midst of the bush” (3:4)
 - “He [the angel] said also, ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God” (3:6; cf. 4:11)
 - “The LORD said” (3:7; cf. 3:14, 15, 4:2, 4, 6, 11)
 - “Moses said to God” (3:11, 13; cf. 4:10)
 - “‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has appeared to me [Moses]’” (3:16; cf. 4:5)
 - Moses addresses the angel as “Lord” (4:13)

⁶Generally speaking, when the definite article is used (“the angel”), Christ is in view. When the indefinite article is used (“an angel”), an average, everyday, “garden-variety” angel is in view.

⁷Hagar’s comment about seeing God, yet surviving is based on God’s words to Moses in Exodus 33:20: “... [N]o man can see Me and live!” This was the rule; however, God mercifully made some exceptions (for Hagar; for Jacob in Genesis 32:30; for Gideon in Judges 6:22-23; for Samson’s parents in Judges 13:22-23; etc.)

- Judges 2:1-5. In this passage, the angel of the LORD (so designated in verses 1 and 4) appears to the Israelites at Bochim. Notice how the angel uses the first person (I, Me), as opposed to the third person (God, Him), throughout this passage.
- Judges 6:11-24. In this passage, the angel of the LORD (so designated in vs. 11, 12, 21, and 22)/angel of God (so designated in v. 20) appears to Gideon. Notice especially verse 14's "The LORD" and "I" (instead of "God"), verse 15's "O Lord," verse 16's "the LORD" and "I" (instead of "God"), and verse 23's "you shall not die" (cf. footnote 7 above).
- Judges 13:3-23. In this passage, the angel of the LORD (so designated in vs. 3, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, and 21)/angel of God (so designated in v. 9) appeared to Samson's parents. Notice especially the description of the angel by Samson's mother in verse 6, the angel's reference to Himself as "wonderful" in verse 18 (cf. Isaiah 9:6), and the words of Samson's father in verse 22 (cf. footnote 7 above)
- According to Exodus 14:19, "the angel of God" accompanied Israel during her wilderness wanderings (cf. Exodus 23:20-23, 32:34, and Isaiah 63:9). Exodus 13:21 identifies the angel as "The LORD." First Corinthians 10:4 further identifies the angel as "Christ."

Further evidence that the angel of the LORD is to be equated with Christ is the fact that once the Incarnation takes place, the angel of the LORD passes from the scene of biblical history. In the Old Testament, God sent (see Exodus 33:2, Numbers 20:16, Daniel 3:28 and 6:22) Christ to earth on several different occasions as the angel of the LORD, whereas in the New Testament, He sent (see John 3:17 and numerous other references in John's gospel, as well as Galatians 4:4) Christ to earth as the God-man, Jesus Christ.

Other appearances of the angel of the LORD in the Old Testament are found in Genesis 21:14-19 (a second appearance to Hagar), 2 Samuel 24:16//1 Chronicles 21:12f (slays 70,000 Israelites as judgment for David's sin of numbering the people), 1 Kings 19:1-8 (provides sustenance to Elijah as he flees from Jezebel), 2 Kings 19:35//Isaiah 37:36 (slays 185,000 Assyrian soldiers as they threaten Jerusalem), and Zechariah 3 (intercedes for Joshua in one of Zechariah's visions).⁸

Other possible (I say possible because angel of the LORD terminology is not explicitly used) appearances of the angel of the LORD in the Old Testament include the man who

⁸See page 52 of Walvoord for a much more exhaustive listing of Old Testament passages that make reference to the angel of the Lord.

wrestled with Jacob in Genesis 32:24-32 (notice especially v. 28's "with God" and v. 30's "I have seen God face to face"; Hosea 12:4 calls the man an angel and Hosea 12:5 calls him "the LORD, the God of hosts"); the fourth man in the fiery furnace with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego in Daniel 3:24-28 (notice especially Nebuchadnezzar's description of the fourth man in v. 25); and the angel who delivered Daniel from the lions in Daniel 6:22.

In studying the angel of the LORD in the Old Testament, we get a glimpse of what Christ is like, as He **shows compassion** to Hagar⁹ (in Genesis 16 & 21) and to Elijah (in 1 Kings 19); **protects** the Israelites (in Exodus 14:19-20 and Isaiah 37:36; cf. Exodus 23:20-23, Numbers 20:16, and Isaiah 63:9), the 3 Hebrew children (in Daniel 3), and Daniel (in Daniel 6); **executes judgment** (in 2 Samuel 24); **intercedes** for Joshua (in Zechariah 3); and, of course, does what angels are designed to do, namely, **delivers messages** from God.¹⁰

One other appearance of Christ in the Old Testament of note is that in Isaiah 6, where He is seen by Isaiah. We know that the One whom Isaiah saw was Christ because John 12:41 tells us so.

⁹Walvoord (p. 52) writes: "It is certainly a revelation of the gracious care of God that in the first two theophanies of Scripture in which the Angel appears, it is on behalf of a friendless and comfortless person who is not even included in major features of the Abrahamic covenant."

¹⁰Accordingly, the New Testament calls Christ "the Word" (John 1:1, et. al.) and declares Him to be the ultimate form of God's self-disclosure (see John 1:18 and Hebrews 1:2).

Lesson 2: Old Testament Prophecies Concerning Christ

In the second half of the last lesson (on the Preexistence of Christ), we considered the revelation of Christ in Old Testament history (primarily as the angel of the LORD). Our focus in this lesson is the revelation of Christ in Old Testament prophecy.¹¹

When Jesus walked on the road to Emmaus with two of His disciples on the day of His resurrection, “beginning with Moses [Genesis-Deuteronomy] and with all the prophets [Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea-Malachi], He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures [the Old Testament]” (Luke 24:27). Within an hour (Luke 24:33), the resurrected Christ reappeared to these two disciples, along with all the others, and told them, among other things, that “all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses [Genesis-Deuteronomy] and the Prophets [Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea-Malachi] and the Psalms¹² [Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, 1 & 2 Chronicles] must be fulfilled” (Luke 24:44).¹³ Most of what was written concerning Christ in the Old Testament is found in the realm of prophecy.

Since an in-depth and exhaustive analysis¹⁴ of every Old Testament prophecy concerning Christ is not possible in such a short space, this lesson will simply seek to

¹¹Besides history and prophecy, another avenue of revelation concerning Christ in the Old Testament is typology. One may consult chapter 4 of Walvoord and chapter 3 of Witmer for potential Christological typologies in the Old Testament.

¹²The Hebrew Old Testament is divided into 3 major sections: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The Writings are called “the Psalms” in Luke 24:44 because Psalms was the first book in the Writings.

¹³Similarly, Jesus said in John 5:39 that the Scriptures [the Old Testament] testified about Him and in John 5:46 that Moses [Genesis-Deuteronomy] wrote about Him. See also Luke 18:31.

¹⁴For a more in-depth and exhaustive analysis, one may consult chapter 5 of Walvoord, chapter 3 of Witmer, and pages 217-221 of Enns, as well as commentaries on the passages in which the prophecies are found and fulfilled. For a lengthy listing of such prophecies, one may consult pages 60-61 of *Charts of Christian Theology & Doctrine* by H. Wayne House (included at the end of this lesson) or pages 58-59 of the *Holman Book of Biblical Charts, Maps, and Reconstructions*.

“scratch the surface” of some of the Old Testament prophecies concerning Christ, first describing the content of the prophecy itself, then giving the occasion for its fulfillment.

Prophecy: **Genesis 3:15**

Content: In the midst of pronouncing a curse upon the serpent, God says that the seed of Eve will bruise the head of the serpent, while the serpent will bruise the heel of Eve’s seed.

Fulfillment: Implicit in this prophecy is both the Incarnation and the Virgin Birth. Jesus Christ would be the seed of Eve, a human being, thus implying the Incarnation. Furthermore, Jesus Christ would be the seed of Eve, not of Adam and Eve, thus implying the Virgin Birth (cf. Galatians 4:4). The more explicit point of this prophecy is that Satan would bruise Jesus Christ’s heel (heel indicating a relatively insignificant blow) at the Cross, but that Jesus Christ would bruise Satan’s head (head indicating a devastating blow)¹⁵, triumphing initially (and paradoxically) at the Cross (Colossians 2:15) and ultimately in the end times (Revelation 20:10).

Prophecy: **Deuteronomy 18:15 and 18**

Content: God, through Moses, promises the Israelites that He will one day raise up a prophet like Moses from among the Jews.

Fulfillment: Some of the Jews in Jesus’ day asked John the Baptist if he was “the Prophet” prophesied in Deuteronomy 18 (see John 1:21 and 25), which John denied. Some realized that Christ was the One of whom Moses spoke (see John 6:14 and 7:40).

Prophecy: **Psalms 16:10**

Content: David speaks of One who will neither be abandoned to Sheol, nor suffer decay.

Fulfillment: Both Peter (in Acts 2:24-32) and Paul (in Acts 13:33-37) appeal to this text, making it clear that the One of whom David was speaking was not himself, but Jesus Christ. Specifically, David is speaking of Christ’s resurrection (cf. Acts 17:2-3 and 26:22-23).

¹⁵The difference in severity of blow is seen in the NIV rendering of this verse: “ . . . [H]e will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”

Prophecy: Psalm 22

Content: The 22nd psalm, like many other psalms (such as psalms 2, 45, 72, and 110), is commonly categorized as “messianic,” owing to its many statements that, though immediately fulfilled by David, were ultimately fulfilled by the consummate Davidic king, Jesus Christ. Of particular interest are the following statements within the psalm: “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?” (v. 1); “All who see me sneer at me; They separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying, ‘Commit yourself to the LORD; let Him deliver him; Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him’” (vs. 7-8); “They pierced my hands and my feet” (end of v. 16); and “They divide my garments among them, And for my clothing they cast lots” (v. 18).

Fulfillment: All of the above prophecies pertain to Jesus’ death. “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?” was the 4th of Jesus’ 7 sayings on the Cross (see Matthew 27:46//Mark 15:34). The sneering and jeering of the onlookers took place in Matthew 27:39-43 (cf. Mark 15:29-32 and Luke 23:35-37). The piercing of the hands and feet was a common crucifixion procedure (see Luke 24:39-40). The dividing of Jesus’ outer garments (His sandals, turban, cloak, and sash) and the casting of lots for His undergarment, the tunic, took place in Matthew 27:35 (cf. Mark 15:24, Luke 23:34, and John 19:23-24).

Prophecy: Psalm 34:20

Content: In Psalm 34, David speaks of God’s protection of the righteous, stating in verse 20: “He [the LORD] keeps all his [the righteous] bones, Not one of them is broken.”

Fulfillment: In order to hasten the death of one being crucified, it was common for the crucified’s legs to be broken, preventing inhalation and causing asphyxiation.¹⁶ The soldiers broke the legs of the two men crucified with Jesus (John 19:32), but did not break Jesus’ legs (John 19:33), in fulfillment of Psalm 34:20 (John 19:36).

Prophecy: Psalm 69:21

Content: In Psalm 69, David seeks divine deliverance from his enemies. One of his points of contention is that his enemies “put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst” (v. 21, NIV).

¹⁶The soles of the feet of one crucified would rest on a peg, giving a leverage point for pushing the entire body upward to fill the lungs with air to inhale. Once the legs were broken, however, such pushing became impossible, thus causing death by asphyxiation.

Fulfillment: While on the Cross, Jesus was offered a wine-myrrh/gall mixture, a sedative designed to dull the pain of crucifixion, which Jesus refused (Matthew 27:34//Mark 15:23). Later, He was given “sour wine,” to quench His thirst (John 19:28), which He accepted (Matthew 27:48//Mark 15:36//John 19:29-30; cf. Luke 23:36).

Prophecy: **Isaiah 7:14**

Content: The content of this prophecy will be discussed in detail in the next lesson, on the Virgin Birth.

Fulfillment: Jesus was virgin conceived and virgin born (see Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 1:26-38).

Prophecy: **Isaiah 9:6-7**

Content: Through the prophet Isaiah, God promises Israel that He will one day give them a special King to rule over the Davidic kingdom, a King who would be both human (“child” and “son”; cf. Isaiah 7:14) and divine (“Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace”).

Fulfillment: The Incarnation produced the unique, theanthropic¹⁷ (God-man) King predicted by Isaiah. The predicted reign will take place during the millennial kingdom.

Prophecy: **Isaiah 53**

Content: God, through Isaiah, speaks of the “Suffering Servant.”

Fulfillment: Isaiah’s “Suffering Servant” is Jesus Christ. The suffering Isaiah describes is the suffering Jesus experienced in connection with His crucifixion (cf. Isaiah 50:6, Acts 3:18, 17:2-3, 26:22-23, and 1 Peter 1:10-11). Notice especially the following: “Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?” (v. 1; fulfilled in John 12:37-38); “Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried” (v. 4; fulfilled in a physical sense in Matthew 8:14-17); “He did not open His mouth” (v. 7; fulfilled in Matthew 26:62-63//Mark 14:60-61, in Matthew 27:12-14//Mark 15:3-5, in Luke 23:8-9, and in John 19:8-10)¹⁸; “He was with a rich man in His death” (v. 9; fulfilled when Jesus was laid in

¹⁷ “Theanthropic” comes from the Greek word for God, *theos* and the Greek word for man, *anthropos*.

¹⁸ Though Jesus remained silent at several critical junctures during His various trials, He did not remain completely silent, as an examination of His trials clearly reveals.

a tomb belonging to a rich disciple named Joseph of Arimathea in Matthew 27:57-60); “was numbered with the transgressors” (v. 12; fulfilled when Jesus was crucified between two thieves in Mark 15:27-28; cf. Luke 22:37). It was from verses 7 and 8 of Isaiah 53 that Philip was able to lead the Ethiopian eunuch to the Lord (see Acts 8:26-35).

Prophecy: **Daniel 9:25-26**

Content: The angel Gabriel reveals to Daniel that 483 years (69 x 7) would pass from the time of “a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince” (v. 25) and that after the 483 years, “the Messiah will be cut off” (v. 26).

Fulfillment: It is generally agreed that the “cutting off” of the Messiah is a reference to Jesus’ crucifixion. The debate is over the precise decree being spoken of and the reckoning of the chronology so as to arrive at the exact year in which Christ was crucified.

Prophecy: **Micah 5:2**

Content: God, through the prophet Micah, says that from Bethlehem “One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.”

Fulfillment: This is a prophecy regarding Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem. When Herod asked the chief priests and scribes about the birthplace of the Messiah (in Matthew 2:4), they quickly replied by quoting this prophecy: “In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet: AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH, ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH; FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL” (Matthew 2:5-6).

Prophecy: **Zechariah 12:10**

Content: God, through the prophet Zechariah, speaks of a future day when the Israelites will “look on Me whom they have pierced.”

Fulfillment: The ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy awaits the end times (see Revelation 1:7). When a soldier pierced Christ’s side while He was hanging on the Cross (John 19:34), John says he did so in partial fulfillment of Zechariah’s prophecy (John 19:36a, 37).

Some of the Other Christological Prophecies in the Old Testament

Old Testament Prophecy	Prophesied Event	New Testament Fulfillment
Psalm 35:19 and 69:4	Jesus hated without a cause	John 15:24-25
Psalm 41:9	Jesus betrayed by close friend	John 13:18
Psalm 78:2	Jesus speaks in parables	Matthew 13:34-35
Isaiah 6:10	Faithless response to Jesus' teaching	John 12:37, 39-40
Isaiah 9:1-2	Jesus' Galilean ministry	Matthew 4:12-16
Hosea 11:1	The Flight to Egypt	Matthew 2:13-15
Zechariah 9:9	The Triumphal Entry	Matthew 21:1-5
Zechariah 13:7	Jesus abandoned at His crucifixion	Matthew 26:31

Lesson 3: The Virgin Birth of Christ

“When Larry King, the renowned CNN television talk-host, was asked who in all of history he would most like to interview he replied, ‘Jesus Christ.’ When asked, ‘And what would you like to ask him?’, King replied, ‘I would like to ask him if he was indeed virgin-born. The answer to that question would define history for me.’”
(John Blanchard, *Why On Earth Did Jesus Come?*, p. 6)

One of the crucial doctrines in Christology is the doctrine of the virgin birth¹⁹ of Christ. This doctrine has been challenged from the days of Jesus (see John 8:41). In the second century A.D., a man named Celsus postulated that Jesus was the illegitimate son of Mary and a Roman soldier (Erickson, p. 746). Today, it is denied by such groups as the “Jesus Seminar.” In the last century, it was denied by theological liberals²⁰, such as Martin Luther King, Jr., who once said: “The early Christians had noticed the moral uniqueness of Jesus; to make this uniqueness appear plausible, they devised a mythological story of Jesus’ biological uniqueness.”²¹ Far from being a myth, the virgin birth of Christ is an historical reality with great theological significance.

The Virgin Birth Foretold

The virgin birth of Christ was foretold in Isaiah 7. In Isaiah 7, God, through Isaiah,

¹⁹Since Jesus was virgin born, He was obviously also virgin conceived. The virgin conception is actually the more significant factor.

²⁰Theological liberals (also called “modernists”) deny all or some of the cardinal doctrines of Christianity, the Virgin Birth being one of them. In the early part of the 20th century, it was the liberals’ denial of such doctrines that gave rise to fundamentalism as a movement. In regards to all this, Erickson’s (p. 748) comment is significant: “It is significant that we do not find denial of the virgin birth by anyone [in the early church] who is otherwise orthodox.”

²¹Quoted by John E. Ashbrook in “A Holiday for a Non-Hero” in the January 2002 edition of *The Ohio Bible Fellowship Visitor*. According to Ashbrook, King made this statement in the December 30, 1963 issue of the *National Observer*.

promised Ahaz, king of Judah, “a virtually unlimited miracle” (Rolland McCune, “Systematic Theology II” class notes, p. 87) as confirmation that He could and would deliver Judah from those threatening her at that time, Israel and Syria. Ahaz refused God’s offer. In response to Ahaz’s refusal, God promised to one day give Judah (the “you” in Isaiah 7:14 is plural) a sign of unprecedented proportions that would confirm His ability to deliver her: “Therefore, the LORD Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14²²).

To this writer, a “double fulfillment” (i.e., a virgin conception and birth in Isaiah’s day and a second such conception and birth in the far future) of this prophecy was highly unlikely (for one, assuming that the sin nature is transmitted through the normal human procreative process, this would result in a sinless human born in Isaiah’s day); if so, the only referent is Christ.²³ The New Testament explicitly states that the virgin birth of Christ fulfilled this prophecy (see Matthew 1:22-23).²⁴ The crucial term in Isaiah 7:14 is the Hebrew noun translated “virgin.” Though “young woman” and “virgin” are legitimate translations of the Hebrew word, Matthew 1:23’s use of the unambiguous Greek word for virgin decisively tilts the scales of Isaiah 7:14 in favor of “virgin.”

The Virgin Birth Fulfilled

The virgin birth foretold by Isaiah in Isaiah 7:14 became an historical reality with the virgin conception and birth of Jesus Christ. Both Matthew (in 1:18-25 of his gospel) and Luke (in 1:26-38 of his gospel) give testimony to it.

²²For an overview of this text, one may consult “The Interpretation of Old Testament Prophecy” by J. Randolph Jaeggli on pages 3-17 of the Fall 1997 issue of the *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal*.

²³McCune (p. 116, emphasis his) concurs, also pointing out: “The noun ‘virgin’ ... has the definite article. Therefore, ‘the virgin’ designates that God and Isaiah have one virgin in mind as the fulfillment of this promise. (Thus, the article precludes their being both a near and far fulfillment of this text).”

²⁴Jaeggli (p. 16) ties the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 to its fulfillment in the virgin birth of Christ with this thread: just as God was seeking to save His people physically when the prophecy was given (Isaiah 7), so He was seeking to save them spiritually when the prophecy was fulfilled (Matthew 1:21).

Matthew 1:18-25

- Though Mary is called Jesus' mother, Joseph is not called His father²⁵ (v. 18; cf. Genesis 3:15, Matthew 1:16²⁶, Luke 2:48-49, 3:23, and Galatians 4:4)
- Joseph and Mary had yet to "come together," i.e., have sexual relations, yet Mary was pregnant (v. 18)
- Jesus' conception is attributed to the Holy Spirit, not to the normal human procreative process (vs. 18 and 20; cf. Luke 1:35)
- Mary remained a virgin until Jesus was born²⁷ (v. 25)

Luke 1:26-38

- Mary is called a virgin (twice in v. 27)
- Mary calls herself a virgin (v. 34)
- Jesus' conception is attributed to the Holy Spirit, not to the normal human procreative process (v. 35; cf. Matthew 1:18 and 20)

Theological Significance of the Virgin Birth

Since the sin nature is transmitted from generation to generation through procreation (Psalm 51:5 and John 3:6), in order for Jesus to be sinless (2 Corinthians 5:21, Hebrews 4:15, 1 Peter 2:22, and 1 John 3:5), God had to bypass the normal procreative process. This He did through the virgin conception and birth. Thus, Jesus was a "holy"

²⁵There are times when Jesus is referred to as Joseph's son. This may be because Joseph had legally adopted Jesus. Or, it may be, as Thiessen (p. 219) says: "... [I]n each case this is done by those who were not his friends or who were as yet imperfectly acquainted with him (Luke 4:22; John 1:45; 6:42; cf. Matt. 13:55). When there is danger that the reader may regard such designations as the true intent of the writer, some explanatory statement is added to show that that is not the case. Thus we read in Luke 3:23 that he was 'supposedly' the son of Joseph"

²⁶The Greek pronoun translated "whom" in this verse is feminine in gender and singular in number, thus identifying its referent as Mary alone. Enns (p. 223) also points out the fact that after the father-begat-son formula of the preceding verses (vs. 2-16a), the formula changes in verse 16b.

²⁷Roman Catholicism erroneously teaches the "perpetual virginity of Mary" (per a "papal bull" issued in 649 A.D.). That Mary did not remain a virgin is seen by the fact that Jesus had brothers and sisters (Matthew 12:46-47//Mark 3:31-32; Matthew 13:55-56//Mark 6:3; John 2:12 and 7:3-5; Acts 1:14; and Galatians 1:19). It is also seen by the word, "until" in Matthew 1:25. Roman Catholics try to get around this fact by postulating either 1) that these children were Joseph's from a previous marriage or 2) that these were actually Jesus' cousins.

Child (Luke 1:35).

Another factor that necessitated the Virgin Birth was the curse of Coniah found in Jeremiah 22:30. As a result of this curse, the legal right to rule on David's throne was denied to any of Coniah's biological descendants. Joseph was in Coniah's line (Matthew 1:11 and 16). If Jesus had been Joseph's biological son, then He would not have had the right to rule on David's throne. The Virgin Birth bypassed this conundrum. It is assumed that Joseph legally adopted Jesus, thus giving Jesus the legal right to the Davidic throne, Joseph being a descendant of David through David's son, Solomon (the purpose of Matthew's genealogy in Matthew 1). Jesus' biological right to the Davidic throne came through Mary, a descendant of David through David's son, Nathan (the purpose of Luke's genealogy in Luke 3).

Another significance of the Virgin Birth is that it helps us to more easily understand how Jesus Christ can be both God and man at the same time. As Grudem (p. 530) states: “. . . God, in his wisdom, ordained a combination of human and divine influence in the birth of Christ, so that his full humanity would be evident to us from the fact of his ordinary human birth from a human mother, and his full deity would be evident from the fact of his conception in Mary's womb by the powerful work of the Holy Spirit.”

The bottom line significance of the Virgin Birth is our soul's salvation. As Reymond (p. 549) puts it: “[I]f Jesus was conceived like all other men, then he stood under the Adamic curse like the rest of us who descend from Adam by natural generation, and he would not have been an acceptable Savior of men before God. But this would mean in turn the end of Christianity” In this respect, McCune (p. 115) calls the Virgin birth a “load-bearing” doctrine of the Christian faith.²⁸

A Note Concerning the So-Called “Immaculate Conception”

In 1854, Pope Pius IX issued a “papal bull” on the immaculate conception. Though it is often assumed that this Catholic dogma concerns the immaculate conception of Christ, it actually alleges that Mary was immaculately conceived and, thus, sinless. However, Mary was not sinless, as seen by the simple fact that she spoke of her need of a Savior (Luke 1:47), as well as brought a sin offering in Luke 2:24 (cf. Leviticus 12:6-8).

²⁸Does one have to believe in the Virgin Birth in order to be saved? Ultimately, yes, though one may not know about it or everything about it at the moment of conversion. As McCune (pp. 120-121) writes: “. . . [W]hile it is true [that] a person may become a Christian without fully understanding all that Scriptures teach, a true Christian, when presented with Scriptural truth, will embrace it.”

Lesson 4: The Incarnation of Christ

In the prologue to his gospel (verses 1-18 of chapter 1), the apostle John writes: “And the Word [Christ] became flesh . . .” (John 1:14; cf. Colossians 2:9, 1 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 2:14 and 10:5). The fact²⁹ that God the Son added humanity to His deity, becoming theanthropic³⁰/the God-man, is the doctrine known as the Incarnation³¹.

In the Incarnation, humanity was added to deity, not (to any degree) exchanged for it.³² The result was a unique person, one who was (and still is³³) both fully/100% God (Colossians 2:9) and fully/100% man. Walvoord (p. 96) calls the Incarnation “the central fact of Christianity. Upon it the whole superstructure of Christian theology depends.” Grudem (p. 563) exclaims regarding the Incarnation: “It is by far the most amazing miracle of the entire Bible—far more amazing than the resurrection and more amazing even than the creation of the universe. The fact that the infinite, omnipotent, eternal Son of God could become man and join himself to a human nature forever, so that infinite God became one person with finite man, will remain for eternity the most profound miracle and the most profound mystery in all the universe.” It is the incarnation of Christ that is the turning point of history (B.C., A.D.). The doctrine of the

²⁹The Incarnation is a fact. As with many cardinal doctrines in Christology, theological liberals (cf. footnote 20) deny the historicity of the Incarnation (cf. the denial of the historicity of the Virgin Birth by Martin Luther King, Jr. in Lesson 3). A prime example is a 1977 book published by a group of theological liberals in England, the very title of which should raise the ire of every Bible believer, entitled *The Myth of God Incarnate*. This book was answered by *The Truth of God Incarnate*, published later that same year. To deny the Incarnation is proof positive that one is unsaved (see 1 John 4:1-3 and 2 John 7).

³⁰“Theanthropic” is a combination of two Greek words: *theos*, meaning “God” and *anthropos*, meaning “man.”

³¹Simplistically speaking, the word, “incarnation” means “in flesh.” It is derived from a Latin word meaning “to make flesh.” The Latin word is *incarnare*, a compound consisting of the Latin prefix, *in*, “to cause something to be something” and the stem, *caro, carnis-*, “flesh” (Grudem, p. 543).

³²“Remaining what he was [deity], he became what he was not [humanity]” (Grudem, p. 563).

³³Christ incarnate was not a temporary reality, but is a never-ending reality (cf. 1 Timothy 2:5, et. al.).

incarnation of Christ begets several related doctrines, including the doctrine of the “hypostatic union,” the doctrine of the “kenosis”, and the doctrine of the “impeccability” of Christ. In this lesson, we will deal with the first two, saving the doctrine of the impeccability of Christ for our lesson on the humanity of Christ.

The Hypostatic Union

“Hypostatic³⁴ union” is the terminology used by theologians for the uniting of the human and the divine in the person of Jesus Christ.

This doctrine is a challenging one. Walvoord (p. 106) calls it “one of the most complicated and intricate studies that can be undertaken by a biblical theologian.” Ryrle (p. 250) calls it “one of the most difficult concepts to comprehend in theology.” Erickson (p. 723) calls it “one of the most difficult of all theological problems.” “Wherever deity and humanity meet there is—there must be—mystery, and we cannot therefore be surprised that since they meet in Jesus Christ as they do nowhere else, the element of mystery has always been realized” (W. H. Griffith Thomas, *Christianity is Christ*, p. 137). This doctrine (like so many others in theology) cannot ultimately be satisfactorily reconciled by finite (limited) human rationality (it is “suprarational”, i.e., above and beyond the ability of the human³⁵ intellect to fully comprehend, though it can be truly comprehended). Attempts to reconcile it have inevitably led to theological error.³⁶ Several faulty formulations of the doctrine have appeared throughout church history.³⁷

³⁴The English word, “hypostatic” comes from the Greek word, *hupostasis*, which means “substantial nature, essence, actual being, reality” (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, p. 847).

³⁵Though it is beyond the human intellect’s ability to fully comprehend, it is certainly not beyond God’s. In this vein, Grudem (pgs. 559-560) states: “Those who reject [the orthodox position on the hypostatic union] as impossible simply have a different definition of what is ‘possible’ than God has To say that we cannot understand this is appropriate humility. But to say that it is not possible seems more like intellectual arrogance.”

³⁶When Millard Erickson once asked his students on an exam to explain the orthodox position on the hypostatic union, one student somewhat facetiously wrote: “There is no orthodox doctrine of [the hypostatic union]. Every attempt that has ever been made to [explain it] has been declared heretical” (Erickson, p. 730).

³⁷For a survey of these various errors, one may consult pages 554-556 of Grudem, pages 726-734 of Erickson (especially his summation in the last paragraph on p. 738), pages 251-253 of Ryrle (especially his chart on p. 253), pages 83-86 of Witmer, pages 206-208 of Thiessen, pages 597-608 of Reymond, and pages 53-55 of House (charts 27 & 28).

It was not until 451 A.D. at the Council of Chalcedon, however, that the orthodox position on the hypostatic union was clearly delineated. The Chalcedon formulation declared that when Christ became incarnate, the unique person that resulted was one person with two natures³⁸. In other words, Jesus Christ was fully God (possessing a complete divine nature) and fully man (possessing a complete human nature), yet was one person³⁹. In terms of His natures, Jesus is God and man, but in terms of His person, He is the God-man. One must not divide the person of Jesus Christ, nor confound (mix) the natures. “The attributes of both natures belong to the one Person without mixing the natures or dividing the Person” (Ryrie, p. 250).

The hypostatic union helps us to understand, for example, how Jesus Christ could at the same time be both unlimited in knowledge/omniscient (Matthew 9:4, 12:25//Luke 11:17, and Luke 6:8) and limited in knowledge (Matthew 24:36//Mark 13:32).

The Kenosis

According to Philippians 2:7, when Christ became incarnate, He (literal rendering) “emptied Himself.” The Greek verb translated “emptied” is *kenoo*. It is from this word that we get our English word, “kenosis,” the word used by theologians to describe what Christ gave up when He became incarnate.

Of what did Christ empty Himself when He became a man? Some theological liberals say that He emptied Himself of all or some of His attributes. However, since Christ is God (as our upcoming lesson on the deity of Christ will show), and since part of being God is possessing all of the attributes inherent to being divine, it would be impossible for Christ to give up even one attribute, even for a time. If He could do so, He would cease to be God. A more conservative suggestion is that Jesus gave up the

³⁸A “nature” is a set of attributes that constitute something as a distinct entity. To remove any one attribute would result in a different entity.

³⁹That Jesus Christ is one person is inferred by the fact that, though at times He acted in accordance with His human nature and at other times in accordance with His divine nature, the Bible always says that it is the one person, Jesus Christ, who acted (not one of His natures that acted). As Walvoord (p. 112) states: “Though Christ sometimes operated in the sphere of His humanity and in other cases in the sphere of His deity, in all cases what He did and what He was could be attributed to His one person.” McCune (2:142, emphasis his) states: “It is not correct to divide the activities of Jesus and to ascribe some purely to His human nature and some to His divine nature. In the actions of Jesus He may have *manifested* one nature over the other, yet all His actions were still those of the one person. All that Jesus did and said was done theanthropically, by the one indivisible God-man with the two natures.”

independent exercise of His attributes. However, since God the Son has always been functionally subservient to God the Father (a function of the “economic trinity”), in what sense could it be said that Christ has ever exercised His attributes independently of the Father (see Lewis & Demarest, 2:284)? In the opinion of this writer, the best option is to view “emptied Himself” idiomatically to mean “gave up all his rights” (D. A. Carson, *Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians*, p. 45; “made no account of Himself,” Warfield, p. 569). This is how the NIV takes it (“made himself nothing”). Philippians 2:7 says that Christ emptied Himself, not that He emptied Himself of x, y, or z. This interpretation corresponds to the context of the passage, in which Paul exhorts the Philippians to be selfless (2:3-4) and uses Christ as the epitome such selflessness (2:5-8). If Christ gave up/emptied Himself of anything when He became incarnate, it was the full display of His glory⁴⁰ and the adoration that accompanied it, both of which He regained upon His ascension (John 17:5). Thus, Paul says in 2 Corinthians 8:9 that Jesus was “rich,” then become “poor.” Christ emptied Himself of His preincarnate position without diminishing His Person (Ryrie, p. 261); He was “willing to give up some of the privilege and status that was his as God” (Grudem, p. 551).

Practical Values of the Incarnation

- *The Incarnation made our salvation possible.* Christ had to become a man in order to live the substitutionary, sinless life and die the substitutionary, sacrificial death God required for man’s redemption (Hebrews 2:17). Jesus’ humanity made His life and death possible; His deity made both effectual for our salvation. “Only a truly human person could suffer and die, and only a truly Divine person could give that suffering infinite value” (Lorraine Boettner, quoted in McCune, 2:101).
- *The Incarnation provided a mediator between God and man.* Only one who is both God and man can mediate between God and man. Jesus was God’s solution to the problem articulated by Job in Job 9:32-33 (cf. 1 Timothy 2:5).
- *The Incarnation dignifies the human body.* The fact that God was willing to unite Himself to a human body shows that the human body is not in and of itself sinful

⁴⁰As Charles Wesley put it in “Hark, the Herald Angels Sing,” “mild He lays His glory by.” This glory was veiled (as Wesley puts it in “Hark, the Herald Angels Sing,” “veiled in flesh the Godhead see”) during most of Jesus’ earthly life. I say “most” because it was unveiled at times (miracles—John 2:11 and 11:40; the Transfiguration—Matthew 17:1-2//Mark 9:2-3//Luke 9:28-29, 2 Peter 1:16-18; see also John 1:14). However, it is doubtful that it was displayed to the same extent or degree as it was either before or after His time on earth.

(contrary to the teaching of “Platonic dualism” with its mantra that “the body is the prison house of the soul”).

- *The Incarnation helps us to know God better.* Jesus Christ is the ultimate form of God’s self-disclosure (John 1:18, 14:9, and Hebrews 1:2-3). If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus (what McCune calls the “Christlikeness of God”).
- *The Incarnation gives us in Jesus an example to follow.* See, for example, Philippians 2:5-8 and 1 Peter 2:21. Warfield (p. 563) writes: “... He came as an infant, a child, a boy, a youth, and a man. And there is no age that cannot find its example in Him.”

Lesson 5: The Deity⁴¹ of Christ

As was pointed out in the previous lesson, Jesus Christ is one person with two natures. One of those two natures is His divine nature. This means that Jesus Christ is fully/100% God. He is “undiminished deity” (Enns, p. 224).

The importance of the doctrine of the deity of Jesus Christ cannot be overestimated.⁴² As Sir Robert Anderson, in his book defending the deity of Christ, *The Lord from Heaven*, states (p. 87): “To deny the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ is to bring Him down to the level of mere humanity; and the foundations of Christianity being thus destroyed, the whole superstructure falls to pieces.” Indeed, “an attack on the deity of Jesus Christ is an attack on the bedrock of Christianity” (Enns, p. 225). In a similar vein, Wayne Grudem (p. 554) states: “It is no accident that throughout history those groups that have given up belief in the full deity of Christ have not remained long within the Christian faith.” John Walvoord (p. 109) adds: “Without question the crucial issue in biblical theology is the deity of Christ, and disregard or question of this central doctrine of the Bible leads to inevitable chaos in theology as a whole.” Athanasius, who championed the doctrine of the deity of Christ against Arius, famously stated in the 4th century A.D. that when contending for this doctrine “we are contending for our all.”

The doctrine of the deity of Christ is so crucial because to deny it is to condemn one’s soul to eternal damnation (see John 8:24, Romans 10:9, 13, and 2 John 9).

⁴¹“Deity means being of the essence or substance of God. The deity of Christ means, therefore, that Jesus of Nazareth was and is God” (McCune, 2:125).

⁴²The only other doctrines that might be as important or more important than the doctrine of the deity of Christ are the core doctrines of bibliology, the doctrine of the Bible (inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility). In this regard, John Walvoord (p. 27) states: “Since the Council of Nicaea in 325 there has been no denial of the deity and eternity of Christ which did not also deny the infallibility of Scripture” and (p. 108) “The evidence of Scripture is so complete that one who denies the deity of Christ must necessarily reject the accuracy of the Scriptures.” Sir Robert Anderson (*The Lord From Heaven*, p. 21) concurs: “That the New Testament teaches the Deity of Christ is so indisputable that the infidel accepts the fact, and the task he sets himself is to disparage the testimony of the writers.”

Scriptural Testimony to the Deity of Christ

1. The Bible explicitly declares Christ to be God.

- John 1:1c (more will be said on this verse below)
- John 1:18
- Romans 9:5
- Philippians 2:6⁴³
- Colossians 1:15 (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:4)
- Colossians 2:9 (cf. Colossians 1:19)
- Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1 (more will be said on these verses below)
- Hebrews 1:3
- Hebrews 1:8⁴⁴
- 1 John 5:20 (NIV)

2. The Bible implicitly declares Christ to be God.

- Matthew 26:63-66//Mark 14:61-64, John 5:17-18, 8:58-59, 10:30-33, 38-39, and 19:7. In all of these passages, the Jews sought to execute Jesus for blasphemy in accordance with Leviticus 24:16.
- John 12:41 (cf. Isaiah 6:1f)
- John 8:19, 12:45, 14:7 and 9
- John 20:28

⁴³The Greek noun translated “form” in this verse refers to “the whole set of characteristics which makes something what it is” (Erickson, p. 689). Warfield (p. 39) writes: “‘Form’ is a term which expresses the sum of those characterizing qualities which make a thing the precise thing that it is ... [T]he form of God’ is the sum of the characteristics which make the being we call ‘God,’ specifically God, rather than some other being When our Lord is said to be in ‘the form of God,’ therefore, He is declared, in the most express manner possible, to be all that God is, to possess the whole fulness of attributes which make God God.” Accordingly, the NIV translates: “in very nature God.” This understanding of the term is verified by the parallel statement made immediately following: “did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.”

⁴⁴Commenting on this verse, John MacArthur states on page 33 of his commentary on Hebrews: “I believe this verse gives the clearest, most powerful, emphatic, and irrefutable proof of the deity of Christ in the Bible—from the Father Himself.” See also God the Father’s testimony at Christ’s baptism in Matthew 3:17//Mark 1:11/Luke 3:22 and at the Transfiguration in Matthew 17:5//Mark 9:7//Luke 9:35.

3. Christ is given divine names.

- “Mighty God” (Isaiah 9:6)
- “Son of God.” In Hebrew, the phrase, “son of x” expresses the character or essence of someone or something. An Old Testament example is the Hebrew phrase, “son of x number of years” to indicate a person’s age. New Testament examples include James & John, the “Sons of Thunder” (Mark 3:17) and Barnabas, the “Son of Encouragement” (Acts 4:36). For the New Testament writers to say that Jesus Christ was the Son of God was tantamount to saying He was God. “The designation ‘Son of God’ when used of our Lord means of the order of God and is a strong and clear claim to full deity” (Ryrie, p. 248). See John 10:36 and 19:7 (cf. John 5:18).
- “Immanuel” (Matthew 1:23)
- “Lord” (Luke 2:11, Acts 16:31, Romans 10:9, Philippians 2:11)
- “I am” (John 8:58; cf. Exodus 3:14)

4. Christ possesses divine attributes. “There is not an attribute of Deity which is not directly or indirectly ascribed to Christ” (Walvoord, p. 31).

- Eternality (Isaiah 9:6, Micah 5:2, John 1:1, 8:58, 17:5, Revelation 1:8)
- Omniscience (John 16:30, 21:17, and Acts 1:24; cf. Matthew 9:4, 12:25//Luke 11:17, Luke 6:8, 9:47, John 4:17-19, and 29)
- Omnipotence (John 20:30-31, Philippians 3:21; cf. Revelation 1:8)
- Immutability (Hebrews 13:8)
- Omnipresence (John 1:48-50a)
- Sovereignty (Daniel 7:13-14, Matthew 8:26-27, Romans 9:5, Philippians 3:20-21, Revelation 17:14, 19:16)
- Holiness (Luke 1:35, Acts 3:14, 4:27, Hebrews 7:26, and 1 Peter 1:19; cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21, Hebrews 4:15, 1 Peter 2:22, 1 John 3:5)
- Incomprehensibility (Judges 13:18; cf. Isaiah 9:6)
- Love (Ephesians 3:19)
- Self-existence/aseity (John 5:26)

5. Christ accepted divine worship. Worship of men and angels in Scripture is consistently rejected (see Acts 10:25-26, 14:11-15, Revelation 19:10, and 22:8-9). Christ, however, accepted it (see Matthew 14:33, 28:9, 17, John 9:38, and 20:26-29). See also Matthew 2:11, John 5:23, Hebrews 1:6, and Revelation 5:6-14.**6. Christ exercised divine prerogatives.** For example, in Matthew 9//Mark 2//Luke 5, Jesus exercised the divine prerogative to forgive sin, prompting the religious leaders of His day to charge Him with blasphemy. See especially Matthew 9:2-3, and 6//Mark 2:5-7, and 10//Luke 5:20-21, and 24 (see also Luke

7:47-49). Another divine prerogative that Jesus exercised was the giving of life (see John 5:21).

7. **Christ did things that only God can do.** This includes such things as creating (John 1:3, 10, Colossians 1:16, and Hebrews 1:2) and sustaining (Colossians 1:17 and Hebrews 1:3).

A Modern-Day Denial of the Deity of Christ

Throughout church history, the deity of Christ has been a favorite target of various heretics and heretical groups.⁴⁵ Over the past century, one of the most notorious deniers of Christ's deity have been the Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs). On page 47 of their book, *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, they state: "The true Scriptures speak of God's Son, the Word, as 'a god.' He is a 'mighty god,' but not the Almighty God, who is Jehovah." Following is a biblical, orthodox response to the JW denial of the deity of Christ.

Arius, the First JW

Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 1:9 that "there is nothing new under the sun." In the 4th century A.D., a man by the name of Arius denied the deity of Christ by claiming that Christ was a created being.⁴⁶ In 325 A.D., the Council of Nicea condemned Arianism as heretical. In spite of this, Arianism still lives on in the teachings of the Jehovah's Witnesses, who also teach that Christ was a created being.⁴⁷

Scriptures that the JWs cite in support of their position include John 1:14, 1:18, 3:16, and 1 John 4:9 ("only begotten" in the KJV and NASB), Colossians 1:15 ("firstborn" in the KJV, NASB, and NIV), and Revelation 3:14 ("beginning" in the KJV and NASB).

In regards to the first series of texts, the Greek adjective translated "only begotten" is *monogenes*, from *monos*, "only" + *genos*, "kind." The idea is that Jesus is God's special, unique, one-of-a-kind Son.⁴⁸ Hence, the NIV's translation "one and only" (in

⁴⁵"The Deity of Jesus Christ is one of the cornerstones of Christianity, and as such has been attacked more vigorously throughout the ages than any other single doctrine of the Christian faith" (Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, p. 83).

⁴⁶Arius's infamous statement was: "There was a time when he [Christ] was not." The orthodox corrective is: "There was never a time when He [Christ] was not."

⁴⁷On page 46 of their book, *The Kingdom is at Hand*, they state: "In other words, he was the first creation of God the Father."

⁴⁸Jesus is not God's only "son." Angels, Adam, and believers are also called sons of God in Scripture. Jesus, however, is God's special Son (the only one being divine, like Himself).

John 1:14, 18, 3:16, and 1 John 4:9. Some have (in the opinion of this writer) incorrectly identified the derivative of *genes* in *monogenes* as the Greek verb *gennaō*, “to bear, beget, give birth to,” hence the rendering “only begotten.” Even if “only begotten” is the correct rendering, the doctrine being implied would be what theologians call the “eternal generation of the Son⁴⁹,” not the erroneous doctrine that Christ was a created being.

In regards to Colossians 1:15, the term, “firstborn” has the idea of first in *rank*, not first in *time* (Erickson, p. 697). The only time in the New Testament that the Greek adjective translated “firstborn” in Colossians 1:15 means first in time, rather than first in rank, is in Luke 2:7. In other words, Colossians 1:15 is asserting that Christ is preeminent over all creation.⁵⁰ The succeeding context verifies this: verse 16 gives the reason why (“for”) Christ is preeminent over all created things—He is the One who created them; verse 17 states that Christ is “before all things,” a Greek prepositional phrase that can indicate first in rank (cf. James 5:12 and 1 Peter 4:8, where the same Greek prepositional phrase is used to indicate first in rank, being translated “above all”); verse 18 speaks of Christ’s preeminence over the church, once again calling Him “firstborn” and asserting that “He Himself will come to have first place in everything.”⁵¹

Similarly, Isaac was not Abraham’s only son (Ishmael was also his son, born to Hagar), but was his special son (being the son of promise, born to Sarah). See Genesis 22:2 and 12, as well as Hebrews 11:17-18. I am indebted to p. 230 of Homer Kent’s commentary on Hebrews for the bulk of the information contained in this footnote.

⁴⁹According to Rolland McCune (1:290, emphasis his), the eternal generation of the Son is “that eternal act whereby the Father *communicates* or *makes common* the divine essence to the Son—the eternal *sonning* of the Son.”

⁵⁰“ . . . [F]irst-born speaks of pre-eminence or supremacy (i.e., priority of position...)” (McCune, 2:129).

⁵¹The following excerpt is from a 1995 paper I wrote on Colossians 1:15-20, commenting on the phrase “firstborn of all creation” in Colossians 1:15: “At first glance, one might conclude, albeit erroneously, that Paul is suggesting that Christ is the first created being. However, two factors mitigate against such an understanding. First, it does not fit the context, as Paul goes on to say in verse sixteen that Christ created all things. How can He be created if He is the Creator? Second, the word *prototokos* [the Greek adjective translated ‘firstborn’] usually signifies something altogether different. Rather than denoting primogeniture in the literal sense of the term, it often indicates the right of pre-eminence bestowed upon the first male child born into a family (Deut 21:17). Furthermore, the term is often used independent of the idea of birth (Job 18:13, Isa 14:30). Speaking of David, Psalm 89:27 clearly brings out this pre-eminent sense: ‘I will appoint him my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth’ [NIV]. Thus, rather than indicating first in time, *prototokos* indicates first in priority or rank. Christ is the One to

In regards to Revelation 3:14, notice how the NIV translates this verse: "... the ruler of God's creation."

The JWs and John 1:1c

In 1950, the Jehovah's Witnesses came out with a sectarian, to say the least, translation of the Bible, called the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (the *NWT* for short). In it, they brazenly deny the deity of Christ by mistranslating the last phrase in John 1:1, translating "and the Word was a god" (cf. the *NWT* rendering of John 1:18). In defense of their translation, they point to the fact that the Greek noun translated "God" (*theos*) is anarthrous (doesn't have an article) and should, thus, be translated as an indefinite ("a").⁵² However, since *theos* in John 1:1c is an "anarthrous precopulative predicate nominative"⁵³, translating *theos* as an indefinite is indefensible. The reason for this is twofold: 1) According to the Greek scholar, Colwell, a definite predicate nominative never takes a definite article when it precedes a copulative verb (Colwell's rule); thus, the fact that *theos* does not have a definite article preceding it does not ipso facto rule out the possibility that *theos* is a definite ("the God"). However, since the preceding phrase (John 1:1b) states (literally) that "the Word was with the God," *theos* could not be a definite, else John would be contradicting himself by stating in 1:1b that the Word was with the God and in 1:1c that the Word was the God; 2) According to William Combs, an anarthrous precopulative predicate nominative never indicates an indefinite noun; thus the indefinite option ("a god") is ruled out. This leaves us with only one more option, translating *theos* neither as definite ("the God") or indefinite ("a god"), but as qualitative ("God"). According to Combs, 94% of the anarthrous precopulative predicate nominatives in the gospel of John are qualitative (the other 6% definite). A final note on John 1:1c: *theos* is first in the sentence, for

whom belongs the right and dignity of the firstborn [William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Colossians and Philemon*, New Testament Commentary, p. 72]. Paul goes on to indicate the realm in which Christ is the firstborn, namely, creation. The ablative *ktiseos* [the Greek noun translated "of creation"] should be considered an ablative of comparison, not a partitive ablative; Christ is pre-eminent in comparison to every created thing, not part of the created order."

⁵²The *NWT*, however, fails to be consistent in this regard, even within the very chapter under consideration, John 1. In verses 6, 12, 13, and 18, *theos* lacks an article, yet each time the *NWT* translates *theos* as a definite, rather than as an indefinite.

⁵³By "anarthrous precopulative predicate nominative" is meant that *theos* is anarthrous (doesn't have an article preceding it), precopulative (precedes the Greek copulative verb/linking verb, *eimi*, translated "was"), and a predicate nominative (renames the subject of the sentence, *logos*, meaning "Word"; we know that *logos* is the subject of the sentence because it has a definite article preceding it, translated "the," whereas *theos* does not).

emphasis.⁵⁴

The JW's and Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1

The *NWT* translates the end of Titus 2:13: “. . . of the great God and of [the] Savior of us, Christ Jesus” and the end of 2 Peter 1:1: “. . . by the righteousness of our God and [the] Savior Jesus Christ,” implying in both passages that God and Jesus Christ are to be viewed separately (unfortunately, the KJV rendering of these two passages is just ambiguous enough to potentially leave the same impression; the NASB and the NIV more clearly affirm the deity of Christ in these passages⁵⁵).

In both of these passages, the “Granville Sharp rule” applies. According to Sharp, a Greek scholar of the past, whenever two or more singular, non-proper, personal nouns are joined by the Greek conjunction *kai* (“and”) and the definite article precedes the first noun, but not the second, both nouns refer to the same person. Thus, both of these passages are unequivocally declaring Christ to be God.⁵⁶

The JW's and Colossians 1:16-17

Notice what the *NWT* does with Colossians 1:16-17 in order to make it fit their erroneous belief that Christ was a created being: “because by means of him all [other] things were created in the heavens and upon the earth, the things visible and the things invisible, no matter whether they are thrones or lordships or governments or authorities. All [other] things have been created through him and for him. Also, he is before all [other] things and by means of him all [other] things were made to exist.” As you might suspect, the Greek word for “other” appears nowhere in this passage; the *NWT* translators have illegitimately supplied it.

⁵⁴For further study on this topic, see footnotes 12 and 13 on page 234 of Grudem.

⁵⁵“Anyone who has spent a great deal of time sharing the gospel with people who deny the deity of Christ, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, knows that using a modern translation such as the NIV makes one’s work much easier” (James White, *The King James Only Controversy*, p. 196).

⁵⁶For further study on this topic, see footnote 15 on page 236 of Grudem. See also the article by William Combs in the Spring 1997 issue of the Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary’s *The Sentinel*, entitled “Granville Sharp and the Deity of Christ,” included at the end of this lesson. One may also consult pages 267-270 of *The King James Only Controversy* by James White.

Lesson 6: The Humanity of Christ

Jesus Christ is theanthropic/the God-man, one person with two natures, fully (100%) divine and fully (100%) human. His deity and humanity must be defended with equal vigor. To deny, deprecate, or downplay Jesus' humanity is just as egregious an error as to deny, deprecate, or downplay His deity.⁵⁷ This lesson will present the biblical case for the full humanity of Christ, point out several denials of the full humanity of Christ in church history, and discuss the doctrine of the impeccability of Christ.

Scriptural Testimony to the Humanity of Christ

1. The Bible explicitly declares Christ to be a man.

- Christ Himself in John 8:40
- Christ's contemporaries in Matthew 13:54-56, John 7:27, and 10:33⁵⁸
- John in John 1:30
- Peter in Acts 2:22
- Paul in Acts 13:38, Romans 5:15 17, 19, 1 Corinthians 15:21, 47, Philipians 2:8, and 1 Timothy 2:5

2. The Bible implicitly declares Christ to be a man.

- Christ is called the "Son of Man" (over 80 times in the New Testament). As mentioned in the previous lesson on the deity of Christ, "son of x" is a Hebraism, expressing the character or essence of someone or something. Thus, to say that Christ is the Son of Man, is to say, at least in part⁵⁹, that He is human (see also Job 25:6 and Psalm 8:4).
- Hebrews 2:14 ("flesh and blood"= humanity)

⁵⁷“Those who deny the true humanity of Christ . . . are just as effective at destroying the Christian faith as those who deny the deity of Christ” (Walvoord, p. 109).

⁵⁸“Was Jesus fully human? He was so fully human that even those who lived and worked with him for thirty years, even those brothers who grew up in his own household, did not realize that he was anything more than another very good human being” (Grudem, p. 535).

⁵⁹I say, “in part” because the title, Son of Man implies more than just the fact that Christ is human. See, for example, Daniel 7:13-14.

3. Christ experienced a human birth, human growth and development, and a human death.

- Though Jesus' conception was superhuman (see the previous lesson on the Virgin Birth of Christ), His prenatal development and birth were no different than that of any other human being.
- Jesus grew/developed in typical human fashion: physically (Luke 2:40 and 52), mentally (Luke 2:40 and 52), socially (Luke 2:52), and spiritually (Luke 2:52).⁶⁰
- Jesus died. God cannot die (1 Timothy 1:17 and 6:16). Jesus' humanity made His death possible (Hebrews 2:14).

4. Christ experienced human limitations.

- Hunger (Matthew 4:2//Luke 4:2, Matthew 21:18)
- Thirst (John 19:28; cf. John 4:7)
- Fatigue (John 4:6; cf. Matthew 8:24)
- Ignorance (Matthew 24:36//Mark 13:32)

5. Christ experienced human emotions.⁶¹

- Joy (Luke 10:21)
- Compassion (Matthew 9:36, 14:14//Mark 6:34, Matthew 15:32//Mark 8:2, Matthew 20:34, Mark 1:41, and Luke 7:13)
- Anger⁶² (Mark 3:5, 10:14, John 11:33, and 38⁶³; cf. Matthew 21:12-13//Mark 11:15-17//Luke 19:45-46)
- Sorrow/Grief (Matthew 26:38//Mark 14:34; cf. Isaiah 53:3, Luke 19:41, and John 11:35)
- Distress (John 11:33, 12:27, and 13:21⁶⁴)

⁶⁰“Growth and development do not suggest imperfection. At every stage [Christ] was as perfect as a perfect man ought to be at that stage. He was a perfect baby, etc.” (Rolland McCune, “Systematic Theology 2” class notes, p. 113).

⁶¹ For more on the emotions of Christ, see chapter 4 of B. B. Warfield's *The Person and Work of Christ*.

⁶² When Christ was angry, it was never a sinful anger, but a righteous indignation (see Ephesians 4:26a). Warfield (p. 122) calls it “the righteous reaction of his moral sense in the presence of evil.”

⁶³In John 11:33 and 38, “deeply moved” is the translation of a Greek verb which means to be angered, outraged, or indignant.

⁶⁴The Greek verb translated “troubled” in these verses means to be stirred or agitated (the

6. **Christ was tempted (Matthew 4//Luke 4; Hebrews 2:18 and 4:15).** God cannot be tempted (James 1:13). Jesus' humanity made His temptation possible.

"If Jesus was not human, then surely no one ever has been" (Erickson, p. 712). In fact, Jesus was more human than even we are. "Our understanding of human nature has been formed by an inductive investigation of both ourselves and other humans as we find them about us. But . . . we are not true human beings, but impaired, broken-down vestiges of essential humanity The question is not whether Jesus was fully human, but whether we are. He was not merely as human as we are; he was more human than we are" (Erickson, p. 736). "We must not measure Jesus' manhood by ours, but ours by His" (Leonard Hodgson, quoted in Erickson, p. 711).

Denials of the Full Humanity of Christ in Church History

1. **Docetism.** This earliest of heresies regarding the humanity of Christ derives its name from the Greek verb, *dokeo*, which means "to appear or seem to be." Docetism denied the real humanity of Christ by teaching that He only appeared to be human. It is likely that John was combatting this heresy in his epistles (see especially 1 John 1:1's "touched with our hands"⁶⁵, as well as 1 John 4:1-3 and 2 John 7). See also Luke 24:39. "Modern evangelicals who neglect to teach on the full humanity of Christ can unwittingly support docetic tendencies in their hearers" (Grudem, p. 540). The underlying assumption that drove Docetism is the faulty belief that anything material is inherently evil.
2. **Apollinarianism.** Named after Apollinarius, its chief proponent, this early heresy regarding the humanity of Christ taught that Christ's humanity extended only to the material/physiological part of His being (i.e., His body), not to the immaterial/psychological part (i.e., His soul/spirit). Erickson (p. 714), in

same verb is used to describe the stirring of the water in the pool of Bethesda in John 5:7). D. A. Carson, on page 440 of his commentary on John, defines the verb with such words as anxiety, agitation, revulsion, and horror. The same verb is used in John 14:1 and 27 ("let not your heart be troubled," KJV). For some of the other times the verb is used in the New Testament, see footnote 6 on page 533 of Grudem.

⁶⁵Erickson (pp. 707-708) makes this interesting observation: "Touch was thought by the Greeks to be the most basic and most reliable of the senses, for it is a direct perception—no medium intervenes between the perceiver and the object perceived. Thus, when John speaks of having 'touched with our hands,' he is emphasizing just how thoroughly physical was the manifestation of Jesus."

describing Apollinarianism, states: “Jesus was a man physically, but not psychologically. He had a human body, but not a human soul. His soul was divine.” Apollinarianism denied that Jesus had a human soul/spirit, thus denying the full humanity of Christ. The orthodox belief is that Jesus had/has a human nature that was/is both material and immaterial and a divine nature that was/is immaterial. Apollinarianism was condemned as heretical by the Council of Constantinople in 381 A.D.

3. **The Blood Controversy.** In recent years, a dangerous teaching has crept into some segments within fundamentalism which, at best, deprecates the full humanity of Christ. Based on a misunderstanding of the word, “blood” when used in reference to Christ in Scripture, proponents of this error (a leading evangelical proponent was M.R. DeHaan⁶⁶ of Radio Bible Class fame; a leading fundamental proponent was Rod Bell, one-time head of the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship; the leading evangelical opponent of this view has been John MacArthur; the leading fundamental opponent has been Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary) teach that the blood of Christ was divine blood, not human blood (based on such passages as 1 Peter 1:19). However, the word, “blood,” when used in reference to Christ in Scripture, *primarily* and *ultimately* refers to His death, not to His literal, physical blood. “Blood” is metaphorical for a violent, bloody death (see Genesis 9:5-6, 37:18-22, 26, Leviticus 17:11, Luke 11:47-51, and Romans 5:8-10). When Peter calls Christ’s blood “precious” in 1 Peter 1:19, He is not talking about Christ’s literal, physical blood, but His death. Christ’s “blood” is “precious,” not because it is divine blood (it is not), but because His death, being that of One who was divine, had infinite value and was, thus, the only thing valuable enough to pay the infinite sin debt caused by our sin against an infinite God. Jesus’ death had to be a violent, bloody death, but it is His death, not His literal, physical blood, that is the more theologically-significant factor. Those who believe that Jesus’ blood was not human blood, but divine blood are ultimately guilty of mixing or confounding the natures of Jesus.

The Impeccability of Christ

The Bible clearly teaches that Christ *did* not sin (John 8:46, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Hebrews 4:15, 1 Peter 1:19, 2:22, and 1 John 3:5). There is little or no question about this. However, there is some question as to whether or not Christ *could* have sinned. The answer, according to most theologians, is no. The belief that Christ could not have sinned is the doctrine called the “impeccability” of Christ. This doctrine (and its corollary, the “peccability” of Christ) gets its name from the Latin verb, *peccare*,

⁶⁶ DeHaan made his case based on the mistaken belief that sin is in the human blood and transmitted by it from one generation to the next.

meaning “to sin.”

In trying to answer the question as to whether or not Christ could have sinned, several biblical truths must be reconciled, most significantly:

- Christ was tempted (Matthew 4//Luke 4, Hebrews 2:18 and 4:15). Temptability does seem to imply peccability; if not, the reality of Christ’s temptation is suspect.⁶⁷
- Christ is God (see the previous lesson on the deity of Christ), and God cannot be tempted (James 1:13); therefore, how can Christ be tempted⁶⁸?

Ultimately, this is another “suprarational” issue in theology, i.e., one that is above and beyond the capacity of our finite, human intellects to fully reconcile. While affirming that Christ was tempted and that His temptations were real⁶⁹, we must also affirm that Christ

⁶⁷“Temptation implies the possibility of sin. If from the constitution of His person it was impossible for Christ to sin, then His temptation was unreal . . . “ (Charles Hodge, quoted in Ryrie, p. 264).

⁶⁸“There was no sin nature in Jesus with which temptation could connect or to which it could appeal” (McCune, 2:152).

⁶⁹Many theologians believe that, if anything, Christ’s temptations were even more real than ours: “. . . [O]nly he has felt the full force of temptation who has never yielded to it. Against Him who stood firm the whole conceivable power of temptation was exerted. He experienced it at all points” (W. H. Griffith Thomas, quoted in McCune, 2:153); “The man who yields to a particular temptation has not felt its full power. He has given in while the temptation has yet something in reserve. Only the man who does not yield to a temptation, who, as regards that particular temptation, is sinless, knows the full extent of that temptation” (Leon Morris, quoted in Erickson, p. 720); “. . . [O]nly he who successfully resists a temptation to the end most fully feels the force of that temptation. Just as a champion weightlifter who successfully lifts and holds over head the heaviest weight in the contest feels the force of it more fully than one who attempts to lift it and drops it, so any Christian who has successfully faced a temptation to the end knows that that is far more difficult than giving in to it at once. So it was with Jesus: every temptation he faced, he faced to the end The temptations were real, even though he did not give in to them. In fact, they were most real *because* he did not give in to them” (Grudem, p. 539, emphasis his). “Imagine a strong man who performs at a state fair by bending bars of steel. The first bar he picks up is a half inch in diameter. He bends it to a ninety degree angle and it breaks. The he picks up an inch-thick bar and bends it until the ends of the bar touch, but still it does not break. Which bar endured the most pressure? The obvious answer is the second bar. It absorbed the full force of the man’s strength and did not break. On earth, Christ was like that second bar. Because he never gave in, because he did not run away, because he never went where temptation would lead, but stood strong until that moment of temptation was over, he endured the full power of temptation. Christ endured stress, pain, suffering, and

was incapable of succumbing to such temptations, because He is God. “The possibility of being tempted does not carry a logical or theological possibility of sinning [i.e., temptability does not necessarily imply or require peccability], and vice versa, the incapability of committing sin does not preclude one from being genuinely tempted” (McCune, 2:150). In conjunction with the latter point, McCune makes the analogy that an invincible army⁷⁰ or an unsinkable ship⁷¹ can still be attacked.

Because Christ is man, He is temptable; because He is God, He is impeccable.

sacrifice of an intensity that we will never face because he did not break” (Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*, p. 167).

⁷⁰“It is objected to the doctrine of Christ’s impeccability that it is inconsistent with His temptability. A person who cannot sin, it is said, cannot be tempted to sin. This is not correct; any more than it would be correct to say that because an army cannot be conquered, it cannot be attacked” (William G. T. Shedd, quoted in Ryrie, p. 264; see also Lewis & Demarest, 2:345).

⁷¹“A small tugboat attacking a huge ocean liner is unable to sink it; nonetheless it is still a real attack” (Witmer, p. 87).

Lesson 7: The Atonement of Christ

“The atonement is the crucial doctrine of the faith. Unless we are right here it matters little, or so it seems to me, what we are like elsewhere” (Leon Morris, quoted in Erickson, p. 782). “The Cross of Christ is the moral and spiritual center of the universe. An eternity past knew no other future, and an eternity to come will know no other past” (Sir Robert Anderson, quoted in Rolland McCune, “Systematic Theology 2” class notes, p. 124). “By using B.C. and A.D. our calendars count the years from the incarnation of the eternal Word as Jesus Christ, but in a very significant sense His death, not His birth, is the fulcrum of cosmic history” (Witmer, p. 104). “Christ’s death on the cross ... is the central, indeed crucial doctrine of the faith. From the Latin word for cross (*crux*) comes our English word ‘crucial.’ The cross is crucial to the Christian faith” (Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, p. 166).

The Definition of the Atonement

By “atonement” is meant what Christ did to provide for man’s salvation from sin. Ultimately, this includes both Christ’s sinless life (what theologians refer to as His “active obedience”) and His sacrificial death (what theologians refer to as His “passive obedience”).⁷² However, since the second has traditionally been the primary focus of this topic⁷³, this will be our primary focus, as well.

The Basis of the Atonement

The ultimate basis for the Atonement is Christ’s sacrificial death on the Cross. A key verse in this regard is Leviticus 17:11, which states: “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.” Christ’s violent, bloody death on the cross is what makes atonement possible. Any alleviation of sin and its effects

⁷²This is reflected in Grudem’s (p. 568, emphasis his) definition: “*The atonement is the work Christ did in his life and death to earn our salvation.*” This definition indicates that we are using the word *atonement* in a broader sense than it is sometimes used. Sometimes it is used to refer only to Jesus’ dying and paying for our sins on the cross. But . . . since saving benefits also come to us from Christ’s life, we have included that in our definition as well.”

⁷³This is reflected in Walvoord’s (p. 154) definition: “The word ‘atonement’ is used to include all that Christ accomplished by His death.”

(including such things as common grace⁷⁴, the cosmic redemption spoken of in Romans 8:19-22, etc.) is ultimately due to the Atonement.

The Nature of the Atonement

The Atonement was both “penal” and “substitutionary” (or “vicarious”) in nature. It was penal in that Jesus suffered sin’s penalty when He died.⁷⁵ It was substitutionary/vicarious⁷⁶ in that Jesus died in the place of sinners. Notice the following Scriptures in this regard:

- “But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities” (Isaiah 53:5a)
- “. . . the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him” (Isaiah 53:6b)
- “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8; cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:10)
- “. . . Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3b)
- “For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf” (2 Corinthians 5:14-15)
- “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, ‘CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE’” (Galatians 3:13)
- “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma” (Ephesians 5:1-2; cf. Titus 2:14)
- “so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many . . . (Hebrews 9:28a)
- “and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross” (1 Peter 2:24a)

⁷⁴John Murray (quoted by C. Samuel Storms on pp. 119-120 of *The Grandeur of God*) defines common grace as “every favour of whatever kind or degree, falling short of salvation, which this undeserving and sin-cursed world enjoys at the hand of God.”

⁷⁵This penalty included both physical (separation of the psychological/immaterial and physiological/material components of humanity) and spiritual death (separation from God). Jesus died physically (Matthew 27:50//Mark 15:37//Luke 23:46//John 19:30) and spiritually (Matthew 27:46//Mark 15:34; cf. Habakkuk 1:13, KJV).

⁷⁶“A ‘vicar’ is someone who stands in the place of another or who represents another [according to Roman Catholicism, the pope is the “vicar of Christ”]. Christ’s death was therefore ‘vicarious’ because he stood in our place and represented us” (Grudem, p. 579).

- “For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18a)

The Extent of the Atonement

The extent of the Atonement has been a vigorously-debated topic throughout church history. At issue is whether the Atonement extends only to the saved or to all mankind (or to put it another way, did Christ die only for the saved or for the unsaved, as well?). The following Scriptures seem to support the position of a “limited” or “particular”⁷⁷ atonement:

- “I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep” (John 10:11; cf. John 10:15)
- “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28)
- “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her” (Ephesians 5:25)

On the other hand, the following Scriptures seem to support the position of an “unlimited” or “universal” atonement:

- “. . . Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29b)
- “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son” (John 3:16a)
- “. . . this One is indeed the Savior of the world” (John 4:42; cf. 1 John 4:14)
- “. . . and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh” (John 6:51b)
- “For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf” (2 Corinthians 5:14-15)
- “. . . God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them” (2 Corinthians 5:19)
- “[Christ Jesus] gave Himself as a ransom for all” (1 Timothy 2:6a)
- “. . . we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers” (1 Timothy 4:10b)
- “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men” (Titus 2:11)

⁷⁷Grudem (p. 596) is among those who prefer to use the terminology, “particular redemption,” rather than “limited atonement,” because the second expression is so easily misunderstood.

- “. . . so that by the grace of God He [Jesus] might taste death for everyone” (Hebrews 2:9)
- “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves” (2 Peter 2:1)
- “and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world” (1 John 2:2)

Overall, the unlimited/universal atonement position seems to have more biblical merit. The unlimited atonement position can more easily account for the “limited atonement” passages than the limited atonement position can account for the “unlimited atonement” passages.⁷⁸ The unlimited atonement position does not imply, however, that all will be saved (universalism), for notice the “limitation” implied in “unlimited atonement” passages⁷⁹ such as John 3:16 and 2 Corinthians 5:14-15.

Perhaps the key verse in this entire debate is 1 Timothy 4:10, where Timothy says that “we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers.” This verse indicates that there is both an unlimited/universal aspect to the Atonement, as well as a limited/particular aspect. Thus, it has often been said that the Atonement was *sufficient* for the sins of all mankind (being infinite in value)⁸⁰, but *efficient* only for the saved; it was unlimited in its *accomplishment*, but limited in its *application* (McCune, 2:207); its provision is universal, while its application is particular (Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, p. 193).⁸¹ Much of the heat generated by

⁷⁸ Such particularistic texts “do not exclude other biblical teachings to the effect that the Savior atoned for the sins of the world at large. What is true for the universal set is also true of a sub-set thereof” (Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, p. 191).

⁷⁹By labeling these passages “unlimited atonement passages,” I don’t mean to “beg the question.” Those who hold to the limited atonement position would argue that these passages, properly interpreted, do not teach an unlimited atonement (see, for example, Grudem’s interpretation of several of these passages on pages 598-600 of his systematic theology, as well as Reymond’s interpretation of several of them on pages 683-701 of his systematic theology).

⁸⁰ “This death of God’s Son is the only and entirely complete sacrifice and satisfaction for sins; it is of infinite value and worth, more than sufficient to atone for the sins of the whole world” (Canons of Dort, II, 3).

⁸¹“The *atonement* is unlimited, the whole human race might be saved through it; the *application* of the atonement is limited, only those who repent and believe are actually saved by it” (A. H. Strong, quoted in McCune, 2:207, emphasis McCune’s).

this debate may very well be due to a failure to make these distinctions.⁸²

Corollaries of the Atonement

The Scriptures identify at least 4 “corollaries” of the Atonement:

1. **Reconciliation** (Romans 5:9-11, 2 Corinthians 5:18-20, and Colossians 1:20-22). As a result of the Atonement, sinners can be reconciled to the Savior.⁸³ When such reconciliation takes place, the enmity/hostility between God and the sinner (Romans 5:10 and Colossians 1:21) is ended and peaceful relations ensue (Romans 5:1 and Colossians 1:20). The Atonement can result in an “at-one-ment” between a sinner and the Savior.
2. **Propitiation** (Romans 3:25, Hebrews 2:17, 1 John 2:2, and 4:10). As a result of the Atonement, God’s wrath towards sinners (John 3:36, Romans 1:18, 5:9, and Ephesians 5:6) can be satisfied/appeased.
3. **Expiation** (John 1:29, Hebrews 9:26b, 1 John 1:7b, Revelation 1:5b, and 7:14). As a result of the Atonement, the sinner’s sin and its penalties—spiritual death (separation from God, Isaiah 59:2) and eternal death (permanent separation from God in Hell, 2 Thessalonians 1:9)—can be taken away.
4. **Redemption** (Romans 3:24, Galatians 3:13, Ephesians 1:7, and 1 Peter 1:18-19). As a result of the Atonement, sinners can be purchased out of the slave market of sin/released from their bondage to sin (John 8:34, Romans 6:16-22, and Titus 3:3), the death of Christ being the ransom (Matthew 20:28//Mark 10:45 and 1 Timothy 2:6; cf. Acts 20:28, 1 Corinthians 6:20, and Revelation 5:9).

⁸²“In answering the question as to the ‘extent’ of Christ’s atonement, it must first be settled whether ‘extent’ means its intended application, or its intrinsic value If the word means value, then the atonement is unlimited; if it means extending, that is, applying, then the atonement is limited” (William G. T. Shedd, quoted in Walvoord, p. 186).

⁸³ “The thought is something like this. At first God and man stood face to face with each other in perfect harmony. In sinning, Adam turned his back upon God. Then God turned his back upon Adam. Christ’s death has satisfied the demands of God and now God has again turned his face toward man. It remains for man to turn around and face God. Since God has been reconciled by the death of his Son [Romans 5:10], man is now entreated to be reconciled to God [2 Corinthians 5:20]” (Thiessen, p. 239).

Lesson 8: The Exaltation of Christ

One of the greatest Christological passages in all of Scripture is Philippians 2:6-11, which Paul concludes with these words: "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 2:9-11). These verses speak of what has been called the exaltation of Christ. In the immediately preceding verses, Paul spoke of Christ's humiliation (Philippians 2:7-8), which consisted of Christ's incarnation (vs. 7-8a), submission (v. 8b), and crucifixion (v. 8c). Just as Christ's humiliation consisted of three steps downward, so His exaltation consisted of three⁸⁴ steps upward: His resurrection (Acts 2:36, Romans 1:4, 1 Peter 1:21), His ascension, and His session (see Ephesians 1:20-22).⁸⁵ Witmer describes the transition from humiliation to exaltation as one from the tomb to the throne (p. 110) or as one from the cross to the crown⁸⁶ (p. 116).

The Resurrection⁸⁷ of Christ

"The fact of the resurrection of Christ remains a pillar of the Christian faith without which the edifice soon totters and falls" (Walvoord, p. 218). No Resurrection, no salvation (Romans 4:25, 5:10, 1 Corinthians 15:14, and 17).⁸⁸ Belief in the Resurrection is essential to salvation (see Romans 10:9 and 1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

⁸⁴Some (such as Leon Morris, in his commentary on John) see the crucifixion as, paradoxically, being both the final step in Christ's humiliation and the first step in his exaltation ("lifted up" in John 3:14, 8:28, 12:32, and 12:34 having both a literal and metaphorical sense). Grudem (p. 620) includes the Second Coming as part of Christ's exaltation. Walvoord (p. 192) includes not only the Second Coming, but also Christ's millennial reign, His role as judge at the Great White Throne Judgment, and His exaltation in the eternal state.

⁸⁵"The Resurrection of Jesus is everywhere viewed as the commencement of His Exaltation. Resurrection, Ascension, Exaltation to the throne in universal dominion go together as parts of the same transaction" (James Orr, quoted in Walvoord, p. 211).

⁸⁶See Hebrews 12:2.

⁸⁷According to Lewis and Demarest (2:464), the word, resurrection comes from the Latin, *re* ("again") and *surgere* ("to rise").

⁸⁸"If He remained Himself a prey to death, how could He redeem others?" (James Orr, quoted in Walvoord, p. 211).

The Event

Christ's resurrection was predicted in the Old Testament (see especially Psalm 16:10; cf. Job 19:25, Isaiah 53:10, Luke 24:44-46, Acts 2:24-32, 13:33-37, 26:22-23, and 1 Corinthians 15:4) and by Christ Himself (Matthew 16:21, 17:9, 22-23, 20:17-19, 26:32, and John 2:19-22), recorded in all four gospels (Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, and John 20-21), proclaimed by the early church (Acts 2:24-32, 3:15, 26, 4:10, 5:30, 10:40, 13:30, and 17:31) and referred to throughout the New Testament epistles (see especially 1 Corinthians 15; cf. Romans 7:4, 8:11, 1 Corinthians 6:14, 2 Corinthians 4:14, 5:15, 13:4, Ephesians 1:20, 1 Thessalonians 1:10, 2 Timothy 2:8, Hebrews 13:20, 1 Peter 1:3, and 3:21). It was also inferred by Christ in Revelation 1:18. The Resurrection occurred on the Sunday ("Easter") following the Friday ("Good Friday") on which Jesus was crucified.

When we say that Jesus was in the tomb for 3 days, we must not think in terms of 72 hours. The Jews used what is called "inclusive reckoning." Thus, the 3 days were part of Friday (day one), all of Saturday (day two), and part of Sunday (day three). In fact, it may be that Jesus was in the tomb for not much longer than 24 hours. The Jewish day was sunset to sunset (see Leviticus 23:32; cf. Genesis 1:5). Since the Sabbath day (Saturday) was quickly approaching (beginning at sunset on that Friday), Joseph and Nicodemus hastened to place Jesus' body in the tomb (Luke 23:54). Thus, Jesus was in the tomb very briefly on Friday. Walvoord thinks (and I am inclined to think the same) that Jesus rose very early on Sunday, perhaps just after sunset on Saturday. If so, Jesus was in the tomb very briefly on Sunday.⁸⁹

The Evidence⁹⁰

In Acts 1:3, Luke says that Jesus "presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days . . ." Christ's post-resurrection appearances were just one of the many "convincing proofs" for the reality of the Resurrection. Ultimately, the only truly convincing proof is the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit called illumination convincing one of the truth and significance of the passages in Scripture that testify of the Resurrection. "Christ has indeed been raised from the dead" (1 Corinthians 15:20, NIV).

1. The empty tomb

"He is not here" (Matthew 28:6//Mark 16:6//Luke 24:6; cf. Luke 24:3). All Jesus' enemies (whether the Romans or the Jews) had to do was produce His body.

⁸⁹“The probability is that Christ was raised from the tomb shortly after sundown the night before, and the opening of the tomb was not to allow Christ to come out but was a means of permitting others to enter and see the empty tomb” (Walvoord, p. 193).

⁹⁰ Lewis and Demarest (2:482-484) give 11 lines of evidence for the resurrection of Christ.

They could not. Therefore, they resorted to the ruse that His disciples had stolen His body (Matthew 28:11-15). The presence and positioning of the grave clothes in the tomb (Luke 24:12 and John 20:5-7) further points to the Resurrection.

2. The post-resurrection appearances of Christ

According to Charles Ryrie (cited in Witmer, p. 114), at least 538 different people saw Christ after His resurrection. These witnesses (see Luke 24:48, Acts 3:15, 10:40-41, and 13:30-31) included:

- Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18)
- The other women (Matthew 28:8-10)
- Peter (1 Corinthians 15:5a; cf. Luke 24:34)
- The two on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-32)
- Ten of the Eleven (John 20:19-25)
- All Eleven (John 20:26-29)
- 500 at one time (1 Corinthians 15:6)
- James (1 Corinthians 15:7a)
- Paul (1 Corinthians 15:8; cf. Acts 9)

Walvoord (pp. 192-195) lists 17 separate post-resurrection appearances of Christ, the last 6 of which were post-ascension.

3. The change in the day of worship

The day of worship, which for well over a millennium had been Saturday, was suddenly moved to Sunday (see Acts 20:7). Only an event as extraordinary as the Resurrection could account for such a change.⁹¹

4. The change in the disciples

Following Jesus' death, His followers were defeated and downcast (see, for example, Luke 24:17, John 20:11, and 19). However, something happened to cause them to risk their lives for His cause (see the book of Acts). The reason for this reversal was the reality of the Resurrection.

The great historian, Thomas Arnold (former history professor at Oxford) once said: "I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better, fuller evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair enquirer, than the great sign which God hath given us that Christ died, and rose again from the dead" (quoted on p. 19 of the pamphlet entitled, "The Resurrection of Christ: The Best-Proved Fact in History" by

⁹¹The early church practice of meeting on Sunday night (see Acts 20:7-12) is believed by some to have been due to the fact that Jesus appeared to His disciples on the night of His resurrection (see John 20:19).

Henry Morris).

A “Bodily” Resurrection

When speaking of the resurrection of Christ, it is wise to add the qualifier, “bodily,” as there are those (such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses) who teach that Jesus rose spiritually, not physically. Proof that Jesus rose physically or bodily include such Scriptures as Matthew 28:9 (Jesus could be taken hold of), Luke 24:39-43 (explicit statement by Jesus; Jesus eats), and John 20:17 (Jesus could be clung to).

The Ascension of Christ

The Ascension was predicted in the Old Testament (Psalm 68:18) and by Christ Himself (John 6:62 and 20:17), recorded by Luke (Luke 24:50-51 and Acts 1:9-11; cf. Luke 9:51, Acts 1:2, and 22), and referred to in the New Testament epistles (Ephesians 2:6a, 4:8-10, 1 Timothy 3:16, and Hebrews 4:14). The Ascension took place 40 days after the Resurrection (Acts 1:3). Christ ascended from the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:12), the Bethany side (Luke 24:50).⁹²

The Session of Christ

Sometimes referred to as the enthronement of Christ, the session⁹³ of Christ took place in conjunction with His ascension. Christ ascended into heaven and, as soon as arriving there, took His seat at the right hand (a place of great distinction, power, authority, and honor) of God the Father. The session of Christ was predicted in the Old Testament (Psalm 110:1) and by Christ Himself (Matthew 26:64), proclaimed by the early church (Acts 2:33-36 and 5:31; cf. Acts 7:56), and referred to throughout the New Testament epistles (Romans 8:34, Ephesians 1:20, 2:6b, Colossians 3:1, Hebrews 1:3, 8:1, 10:11-12⁹⁴, 12:2, and 1 Peter 3:22). It was also mentioned by Christ in Revelation

⁹²Ryrie, p. 270.

⁹³The reason why this event is sometimes called the “session” of Christ is because the word, “session” at one time meant “the act of sitting down” (Grudem, p. 618).

⁹⁴Significantly, there were no seats upon which the priests could sit, either in the Tabernacle or in the Temple. The priests, therefore, had to stand (Hebrews 10:11). When Jesus, however, entered the heavenly tabernacle (Hebrews 8:2, 9:11, and 24), He sat down, signifying that the work of redemption was complete (Hebrews 10:12). As Grudem (p. 618) states: “. . . [S]itting at God’s right hand is a dramatic indication of the completion of Christ’s work of

3:21. At His session, the glory that Christ enjoyed prior to His incarnation was restored (John 17:5), but to an even greater degree than before (Acts 2:36, Romans 1:4, Philippians 2:9, and Revelation 1:12-16).⁹⁵

redemption. Just as a human being will sit down at the completion of a large task to enjoy the satisfaction of having accomplished it, so Jesus sat at the right hand of God, visibly demonstrating that his work of redemption was complete.”

⁹⁵Erickson (p. 778) states: “Yet the song of praise now goes beyond that which was sung before his incarnation. For a new stanza has been added. Jesus has done something which he had not done previous to his incarnation: personally experienced and overcome death.”

Lesson 9: The Present and Future Activities of Christ

What is Christ doing today? What will He be doing in the future? This lesson will seek to answer these questions.

The Present Activity of Christ

1. Sustaining the Universe

As He has been doing since Day One, Christ continues to uphold/sustain/hold together the universe He created.

“ . . . in Him [Christ] all things hold together” (Colossians 1:17b)

“And He [Christ] is the radiance of His [the Father’s] glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. . . .” (Hebrews 1:3a)

2. Interceding for Believers

“Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us” (Romans 8:34)

“For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5)

“Therefore He [Christ] is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25)

“For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Hebrews 9:24)

“And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate⁹⁶ with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1b)

In the Gospels, we see Christ interceding for believers in prayer (for Peter in Luke 22:32; for the disciples in John 17:6-19 and for the church in John 17:20-26). According to Romans 8:26-27, the Holy Spirit is the One who currently performs this ministry (cf. footnote 96).

In what sense does Christ intercede for believers today? That Christ intercedes for believers is undeniable (see the passages cited above); how He does so is a matter of debate. Is His intercession a plea or prayer, or is it His presence, or is it both? Does He intercede in a vocal sense, i.e., does He actually plead our case before the Father on an ongoing basis? Or, is His mere presence in heaven at the right hand of the Father ongoing testimony to the fact that His atoning work has reconciled the Father and the believer? Wayne Grudem (pp. 627-628) argues for the first view. Henry Swete (quoted in Walvoord, p. 247) takes the second view: “For the intercession of the Ascended Christ is not a prayer, but a life. The New Testament does not represent Him as . . . standing ever before the Father, and with outstretched arms . . . and with strong crying and tears pleading our cause . . .” Lewis and Demarest, while taking the first view, remind us that Christ’s intercessory prayers on our behalf are based on His presence: “He serves as the attorney for believers, pleading our causes before the Father. He has never lost a case and will not lose your case, for the grounds on which he pleads for sinners are the gracious provisions of his atonement and resurrection (2:493). They also speak of the complementary ideas of presentation and representation, writing: “Presentation connotes Christ’s perpetual presence before the Father in the vigor of his completed sacrifice (cf. Exod. 12:13). So Hebrews 9:24 declares that Christ ‘entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God’s presence . . .’ Representation means that Christ mediates the prayers of believers and pleads their cause with the Father” (2:463). In the final analysis, perhaps we should confess with Ryrie (p. 272): “As to the exact form this ministry may take in communicating or mentioning our needs we cannot fully know.”

⁹⁶The Greek noun translated “Advocate” is *parakletos*, from the Greek verb, *parakaleo*, which literally means “to call beside” (from *para*, “beside” + *kaleo*, “to call”). The Holy Spirit is sometimes called the “Paraclete,” *parakletos* being used of Him in John 14:16, 26, 15:26, and 16:7 (rendered “Helper” by the NASB; “Comforter,” “Advocate,” and “Intercessor” in the marginal note). Two ideas are present: strengthener/encourager/helper/comforter and advocate/legal counselor/intercessor.

We do know, however, that Christ died for sin “once for all” (Hebrews 7:27, 9:12, and 10:10; cf. Hebrews 1:3, 9:25-26, 28, 10:11-12, and 14), the Roman Catholic Mass notwithstanding.

“I go to prepare a place for you”

In John 14:2-3, Jesus told His disciples that He was going to prepare a place for them. It is popularly thought that Jesus meant that when He got to Heaven, He was going to start building a mansion for each believer (after all, Jesus was a carpenter by trade). It is more likely Jesus meant that He was going to the Cross, and that His death on the Cross would be the means whereby a place in heaven would be secured for every believer (this is the position of both Homer Kent and D. A. Carson, as explained in their respective commentaries on the Gospel of John).

The Future Activity of Christ

1. The Rapture

The Rapture is imminent (i.e., it can occur at any moment). At the Rapture, Christ will descend from Heaven, resurrect deceased church-age believers, rapture⁹⁷ living church-age believers, and return to Heaven with them.

“Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

“For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17; cf. John 14:3, Philipians 3:20-21, 1 Thessalonians 1:10, and 2 Thessalonians 2:1)

⁹⁷“Rapture” is an English transliteration of the Latin verb, *rapto*, meaning “to seize, to snatch” (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:17's “caught up”).

“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming quickly.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20; cf. 1 Corinthians 16:22's “Maranatha,” which is Aramaic for “Come, O Lord”—so NIV)

2. The Judgment Seat of Christ

According to John 5:22 and 27, God the Father has given Christ the responsibility to judge (cf. Matthew 16:27, 25:31-46, Acts 10:42, 17:31, Romans 2:16, 1 Corinthians 4:5, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8, 2 Timothy 4:1, and Revelation 22:12). Immediately following the Rapture⁹⁸, all church age believers will stand before Christ's *bema*⁹⁹ to be judged in regards to their post-conversion works. The issue of this judgment is not the believer's *sins* (judged on the Cross), but the believer's *service*. Only those works done with the right motive (to glorify Christ) will withstand the test and be rewarded. The “loss” spoken of in 1 Corinthians 3:15 is a loss of reward, which McCune (3:416) takes as “diminished capacity for service and blessing in the Kingdom of God.”

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10; cf. Romans 14:10-12)

“According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire” (1 Corinthians 3:10-15)

3. Tribulation Judgment

According to Revelation chapters 5 and 6 and Revelation 8:1, it is the Lamb [Christ] who will open the seven seal judgments, setting in motion all the judgments of the Tribulation period. The sixth seal judgment in particular is identified as “the wrath of the Lamb” (Revelation 6:16).

⁹⁸ “... [I]t is not altogether correct to say of a believer when he dies, that he has gone to his reward” (Thiessen, p. 353).

⁹⁹“Judgment seat” in 2 Corinthians 5:10 is the Greek noun, *bema*. In the Greco-Roman world, the *bema* was the seat from which judges rendered decisions; it was also the place from which awards for various Grecian races and games were distributed (Witmer, p. 141).

4. The Second Coming¹⁰⁰

At the conclusion of the seven-year Tribulation period, while the Battle of Armageddon is taking place, Christ will return on a white horse¹⁰¹ (Revelation 19:11-21), accompanied by “the armies which are in heaven” (Revelation 19:14; cf. Matthew 25:31 and 2 Thessalonians 1:7) and will set foot on the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4).

“But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:29-30)

“And after He [Jesus] had said these things, He was lifted up while they [the apostles] were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven’” (Acts 1:9-11)

5. Millennial Reign

The Second Coming will inaugurate the 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth (Revelation 20:1-6) as a “benevolent dictator” (Ryrie, p. 273), ruling with a rod of iron (Psalm 2:9 and Revelation 19:15) on David’s throne (Isaiah 9:7 and Luke 1:32; cf. Matthew 19:28 and 25:31).

6. The Great White Throne Judgment

At the end of the Millennium, all unbelievers of all ages will face Christ, their Creator, who will cast them into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15).

¹⁰⁰ When speaking of the second coming of Christ, it must be remembered that it can be viewed as either His coming *for* the saints *in the air* (the Rapture) or, more properly, as His coming *with* the saints *to the earth*.

¹⁰¹“The white horse is a symbol of victory. Roman generals after a victory in battle would ride a white horse in triumph with their captives following” (John Walvoord, quoted in Witmer, p. 150).

7. Transfer of the Kingdom to the Father

According to 1 Corinthians 15:24-28, at “the end” (i.e., at the end of time, when the current heavens and earth are dissolved and the new heavens and earth are created—see 2 Peter 3:10-13 and Revelation 21:1), Christ will hand over the Kingdom to God the Father.