
The Unity of the Spirit

Vol. 2 Issue 4

"In the Bond of Peace"

Winter 1996

A Newsletter of the Foundation for Translation of Biblical Studies, Inc.



Dear Fellow-believers,

At this time of the year we often hear the joyous Christian message as set forth by Paul in Galatians:

But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons (Gal. 4:4-5).

How beautiful these words are, and yet, rather than understanding the message that "God sent his Son" in the light of post-biblical creeds it is important to remember its *original biblical meaning*. This meaning was set forth by Peter in the first Christian "sermon" on the day of Pentecost:

*"Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was **a man** accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This **man** was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. David said about him:*

'I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my

body also will live in hope, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.'

Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the Patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. For David did not ascend to heaven and yet he said,

The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."

*Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this: God has **made** this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:22-36).*

Several things are immediately obvious in this message which Peter proclaimed. First, the message and the language were simple and direct. Second, the message was rooted and grounded in Old Testament prophecies about the coming Messiah. Third, these prophecies were said to be fulfilled in what "Jesus of Nazareth, a **man** accredited by **God**"

had accomplished. Fourth, this fulfillment had taken place according to "the set purpose and foreknowledge of God." Fifth, the great culminating truth to be understood and believed was that "God has *made* this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

Luke had no trouble presenting this message in the simple language of every day use and without the complications of post biblical traditions. He presents a human Jesus, born by the power of the holy spirit, and who *for that reason* was "called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). For Luke, Jesus is the anointed Messiah - the fulfillment of OT prophecies and promises - not, "God, the Son." In the plainest of language he states:

How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him (Acts 10:38).

The distinction between God and Jesus in the above verses could not be more clearly stated. Nor could Jesus' mission as the Messiah of God.

The original Christian message as stated by Peter on Pentecost and as confirmed by him in his first epistle is that Jesus was "**foreknown** before the foundation of the world, but was manifested in these last days for you" (I Peter 1:20 KJV). As the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, Jesus was "a lamb without spot and blemish" (I Pet. 1:18-19) sent by God for the redemption of the world.

But does not the "sending/coming" language of the NT imply that Jesus was "pre-existent" in some form in heaven before God "sent him into the world?" Possibly, and most Christians have assumed that this was "obviously" the case for most of the last two thousand years of Christian history. However, the abridged version of the highly respected *Theological Dictionary of the NT* (p. 68) emphasizes that the popular idea that the word "send" in Gal. 4:4 "denotes a prior existence with the sender finds no support ... the term finds its christological flavor only from the context, and the emphasis is on God the sender."

What we must always ask is, "what did the original biblical writers mean by this language?" Does the fact that John the Baptist was "a man sent from God" (John 1:6) mean that he also pre-existed

with God in heaven before his "coming into the world?" And if other human beings are spoken of as being "born into the world" (John 16:21), "coming into the world" (John 1:9 KJV), or being "sent into the world" (John 17:18) should we conclude that all humans pre-existed? Surely, the biblical answer is "no"! Instead, as most scholars recognize today, biblical "sending" language is based on the Old Testament language of the commissioning of God's prophets. This can be seen with Moses, Aaron, Jeremiah and other OT prophets who were all "sent by God" (Ps. 105:26; Jer. 1:7; 7:21-26; etc.).

The biblical way of thinking and speaking is perfectly reflected in James 1:17:

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights ...

This does not mean that every gift from God literally pre-existed with God in heaven before he gave it. It is simply an emphatic way of saying that all good things come from God. Though all things can be said to pre-exist in God's foreknowledge, only the context of a verse can determine whether that which "comes down from above" or that which is "sent by God" literally existed with him in heaven before he sent it.

Simply put, the original biblical message that "God sent his Son" had nothing whatsoever to do with speculations about "pre-existence" nor about a mysterious God who "exists in three persons." Instead, the original biblical message had to do solely with the *purpose* for which God sent his Son - i.e. to bring salvation to the world (cp. John 3:16-17). Let us hear this in Jesus' own words:

Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent (John 17:1-3).

Richie Temple

The Father Alone is God

by Don Robertson

Rock Hill, South Carolina

[All verses are from the King James Version]

All students of the Bible agree that there is only one God (I Cor. 8:4). However, not all Bible students agree on precisely who the one God is. Most professing Christians believe that the one true God is the Trinity. According to Trinitarian doctrine, the one God is a union of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. These three persons are not three gods, but, in some mysterious way, are one God. The three persons are said to be "co-equal and co-eternal."

The words "Trinity" and "Triune God" are not found in any manuscript of the Bible or in any translation. The word "Trinity" was first used by Tertullian, a north African theologian who died about A.D. 230. The terms "First Person," "Second Person," "Third Person," "God the Son" and "God the Holy Spirit" are not found in the Bible. No biblical writer ever uses the expression "one God in Three Persons." Nowhere does the Bible say, "The one God is the Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

The King James Bible

I will admit that I John 5:7 in the King James Version comes close to teaching the Trinity. It says, "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost. And these three are one." But there are serious problems with this verse. Most commentaries and dictionaries of the Bible agree that verse seven is not found in any Greek manuscript of I John written earlier than the 15th century. No modern translation, Catholic or Protestant, has the words of verse 7.

In fact, many verses in the King James Version used to teach the Trinity are misleading and mistranslated. Most modern versions render these verses - including Romans 9:5, Philippians 2:6 and I Timothy 3:16 - in a way that give no aid and comfort to Trinitarians.

The Father is the One God

You might be thinking that several verses in the Bible mention the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit together (Matt. 3:16; 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14). But the mere mention of Father, Son and Holy Spirit together does not prove the Trinity. We believe in their existence; anyone who believes in the Bible believes this. What we don't believe is the relationship that the Trinity doctrine sets forth: "one God in Three Persons."

The Bible says that God the Father is the only true God. In John 17, we read:

These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son may also glorify thee ... this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent (John 17:1,3).

Paul expressed this same truth in his epistles. In I Corinthians 8:4-6, we read:

... we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many and lords many) but to us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.

When Paul said in verse 4 "there is none other God but one," he excluded all others. I believe the context clearly indicates that he is talking about God the Father. This harmonizes with what he said in the first chapter of this epistle. In I Corinthians 1:3, Paul says, "Grace be unto you and peace from *God our Father* and from the Lord Jesus Christ."

Notice what Paul said and what he didn't say in verse 6. "But to us," to us Christians, that is, "there is one God, the Father." Paul did not say, "But to us there is one God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." For Paul, the Father alone was the living and true God. In I Thessalonians, he wrote,

... ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for his Son from heaven whom he raised from the dead,

even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come (I Thess. 1:9-10).

In verse 10, we learn that the "living and true God" has a son named Jesus. Who has a son named Jesus? Obviously, the Father and the Father only.

At the beginning of this epistle, Paul tells us who "the living and true God" is. He wrote,

*Paul and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be unto you and peace from **God our Father**, and the Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks ... remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labor of love and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of **God and our Father** (I Thess. 1:1-3).*

Did you notice that Paul refers to the Father and only to the Father as "God"? Our Lord Jesus Christ is mentioned several times in these verses, but he is never identified as the "living and true God." He is "the **Son** of the living and true God."

One God, One Mediator

Another fact that is fatal to Trinitarian theory is this: Jesus Christ is the one mediator between God and men.

For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (I Tim. 2:5).

A mediator is a middle-man, one who goes between two parties to bring reconciliation. Sin has separated man from a holy God, but the Lord Jesus is the perfect mediator. As the Son of God, he can take hold of God's hand. As the Son of Man, he can take hold of our hand.

Now, is the Trinity the one God of I Timothy 2:5? If the Trinity is the one God of the Bible, then the Trinity should be the "one God" in this verse. But anyone can plainly see that the Trinity will not fit here. Jesus is supposedly the Second Person of the Trinity. However, in this verse, Jesus is not the one God or a part of the one God. He is the mediator between the one God and sinful humanity. Jesus could not be our mediator if he were God. Neither could he be our mediator if he were a part of

sinful humanity. A mediator goes between two parties to bring a reconciliation. If the Trinity is not the "one God" of I Timothy 2:5, who is? Paul tells us in verse 2 of chapter 1: "Grace, mercy and peace from **God our Father**."

Christ our High Priest

In his role as mediator, the Lord Jesus is our High Priest. In the epistle to the Hebrews, we read:

Seeing then that we have a great high priest that is passed into the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession" (Heb. 4:14).

A priest represents man to God. A priest makes intercession for man. I think its obvious that a priest, even a high priest, is not the same person as God. Notice how Paul makes the distinction by saying that Jesus is "at the right hand of God" (Rom. 8:34).

Christ Distinct from God

There is an obvious distinction between the one God and Jesus Christ. Notice how Peter identified the Lord Jesus in Matthew 16:16. He said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." He did not say, "Thou *art* the living God." He did not say, "Thou art the Second Person of the living God." If Jesus is the Son of the living God, who is the living God? It certainly isn't *the Trinity*. The living God must be God the Father. In Acts 3:13, Peter said,

The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our Fathers, hath glorified his Son, Jesus.

Again, who has a Son named Jesus? Obviously, God the Father is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The Father must, therefore, be Yahweh.

Son, Spirit, God are Distinct

In Acts 5, Peter said,

The God of our Fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior ... And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the

Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.

In this passage, the word "God" is found four times. He is identified as "the God of our fathers." Since Yahweh is the one God of the Jewish fathers, this God must be Yahweh. But the God of this passage is not a union of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus is identified as the person whom God raised up. The Holy Ghost, or Spirit, is God's gift to "them that obey him." We see a clear distinction between God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

The distinction is even more plain in Ephesians 4:4-6, where Paul speaks of "one body ... one Spirit ... one Lord ... **one God and Father** of all who is above all and through all and in all." Most people would agree that the "one Spirit" of verse 4 is the Holy Spirit and the "one Lord" of verse 5 is our Lord Jesus Christ. But who is the "one God" of verse 6? Paul calls Him "Father." All three members of the "Trinity" are mentioned in this passage, but only one, the Father, is said to be the one God.

Subordination of the Son

There is no Bible verse correctly understood, that teaches co-equality of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There are several that teach explicitly that the Son is in subordination to the Father. In John 14:28, Jesus said, "My Father is greater than I." Jesus did not say, "My Father and I are co-equal." You might reply that Jesus said this when he was on earth as a man. But since his ascension, he now would be co-equal with God the Father. Paul had a different view. He wrote that "the head of Christ is God" (I Cor. 11:3). Notice that he used the present tense in the verb. Even now, in heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ is subordinate to God.

Clearly, the Father alone is God.

[Don Robertson has a tape on this subject which is available from this newsletter]

**

Does "Jesus is Lord" = "Jesus is Yahweh"?

It is sometimes stated that the confession "Jesus is Lord" is an acknowledgment of the deity of Christ

and, therefore, equivalent to a confession "Jesus is God." Salvation is even said to be dependent on this. This idea is usually based on the fact that in the OT the personal name for the God of Israel, Yahweh, was translated into the Greek OT (the Septuagint) by the word "kurios", which means "lord." Since Jesus is called Lord in the NT and since some OT verses speaking of Yahweh are attributed to him, some would say Jesus is equated with Yahweh of the OT.

This reasoning, however, is clearly fallacious as most Bible scholars recognize. It was Yahweh, the God of our fathers, who raised up Jesus his Son (Acts 5:30). The Hebrew text of Psalm 110 reads, "Yahweh said to adoni, sit at my right hand." On this basis "God has **made** this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). It was God himself who **gave** Jesus "the name that is above every name" (Phil. 2:9). Obviously, these truths do not mean that Jesus is God; instead, the confession that "Jesus Christ is Lord" is "to the glory of **God, the Father**" (Phil. 2:11). As NT scholar I.H. Marshall states in the *Tyndale NT Commentaries, Acts* (p. 80) "it is simply the attribute of lordship which is given to Jesus; he is not equated with Yahweh."

The application of OT verses about Yahweh to Jesus the Messiah in the NT are based on the Jewish *shaliach* principle where "one who is sent is as he who sends him" so that the agent, or representative, acts fully in the name of the sender. As the noted NT scholar G.B. Caird states in his *New Testament Theology* (p. 340), "Jesus is termed 'Lord' by the New Testament writers ... not because they are offering any ontological statements involving an inherent deity. It is because, like the other titles, it is an essentially functional idea of agency and function." In short, Jesus the Messiah is God's supreme representative to the world. As such he shares in God's titles and acts and speaks fully in God's name.

**

Jesus: Lord of My Life

by Tracy Savage

St. Petersburg, Russia

Does Jesus want to make your life miserable? That is what many Christians must think. Either that or we would give Jesus total Lordship of our lives.

Can you say that Jesus, the Messiah, has free and complete reign in your life? Is He alone Lord? Does He sit on the throne of your heart alone ... or does He share this place with you? Who lives in you? This is a question we must all consider honestly. Many say, as I did, "Yes, of course Jesus lives in me. I asked Him into my heart when I heard Him knocking at the door. He is even first on the throne. He lives in me." Paul says,

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20).

"I" have been crucified with Christ and "I" no longer live, but "Christ" lives in me. When we can understand this, say this, and live this, we will experience unimaginable freedom.

So what does this mean? We can compare it to the parable when Jesus was sleeping in the boat with His disciples and the terrible storm came and they all began to panic, worry and cry out. If Jesus can sleep through the storms without worrying, we certainly can. Or do we think God would have allowed Jesus to drown?! Jesus is in our boat! "Christ lives in me". If He truly lives in me, do I honestly think God would allow some storm to capsize Jesus' boat? We then have two choices as to what we can do in the midst of a storm in our life that we cannot control. We can panic and worry as the disciples did, not making matters better. Or we can sit back and take a nap as Jesus did, trusting the Father to look out for our best interests. Which option offers us peace? (Matt. 6:27).

Back to the question of does Jesus live in you alone, or does He share the house with you? Jesus stands at the door and knocks, option one: don't let Him in; option two: let him in, but I am still the owner of the house; option three: let Him in and give Him first place; option four: let Him in and give Him complete ownership. Which option have you chosen? Which option will you choose today?

It is obvious due to much strife in churches, seeing few people walking in peace and seeing few Christians committed to living in obedience of His Word, that we can say that few Christians have chosen option four: let Him come in and have complete ownership. There are not many who have chosen the complete freedom God offers us in Christ. Only God's spirit can teach us and reveal this freedom to us in a way that we can really understand the all encompassing nature of it. But for God to reveal it to us, we must desire it and seek it.

Why do few people choose option number four? Why are we afraid of giving Jesus total ownership of our lives? Why do we hesitate to say, "Lord, it is not I who live but YOU in me."? Why do we fail to say, "Lord, I am yours. How do you want me to serve you?" *Do we honestly think that Jesus wants to make our lives miserable???* Not only does He want to what is best for us, but He knows what is best for us. Do we think that once we give Jesus total reign God will give us all the dirty work that He doesn't like to do? God *already* gave Jesus the dirty work - so we don't have to worry!

If your child came to you and said, "Dad, I trust you and know you love me. I entrust my life completely to you. What do you want me to do? I'll do whatever you say." How many of you would send him out in the rain without an umbrella? Or how many would send him off amidst the cruelty of the world without proper protection? How many would say, "Finally? Go scrub the toilet, wash the car, shine my shoes, etc.!"? A truly loving and trustworthy parent would not throw all the dirty work on their child, nor would they not consider where their child's heart is when sending him to do a task. We can trust and obey because God is a Father of love. He not only loves us, but He loves His Son who now lives in us.

When we give Jesus our "house", it is no longer ours. It is *His* responsibility. We can sit back and nap through the storms. We can trust Him that the house will not be destroyed. He most certainly is a better master than we could ever hope to be. Or do we think otherwise?

Experience the true freedom we have in Christ. Get out of the house!

[Tracy Savage, who is from Maple Grove, Minnesota is now a missionary in St. Petersburg, Russia]

**

"Doulos" of Jesus Christ

A Slave Bound by Love

According to the New Testament those who have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord stand in relationship to him as a servant, or slave. Though once a "slave to sin" the believer in Christ has been "bought with a price" - the price of the life of Jesus Christ - and becomes the free-will "slave" of his new lord, Jesus Christ. Biblically, the servant, or slave, is bound to serve while the master, or lord, is responsible for the care of his servant. The Greek word that expresses most specifically this relationship of a servant, or slave, to our Lord Jesus Christ is the Greek word "doulos". E.W. Bullinger explains its meaning:

doulos, a slave, one bound to serve ... one whose will and capacities are wholly at the service of another ... *doulos* is used of the lowest scale of servitude, but when transferred to Christian service it expresses the highest devotion of one who is bound by love.

[*A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament*, p. 683].

A thorough study of this Greek word "doulos" in the NT will bear much fruit for anyone who desires to be "great in the kingdom of God" (Matt. 20:20-28). For as Jesus himself stated, "whoever wants to be first must be slave (doulos) of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve (douleo), and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk10:44-45).

**

Books in Review

Christ Our Life; Our Awesome God; and Essential Matters

by Chuck LaMattina

Regular readers of this newsletter have often had the opportunity to read some of Chuck LaMattina's inspiring, practical and edifying articles from his

books. These books have recently been updated and printed in an attractive format. If you're looking for something to help you or someone you know to become rooted and grounded in the fundamental truths of the Christian faith these books are a good place to start. They are available for \$6 each from: Grace Ministry USA, 7359 N. Hoyne, Chicago, IL. 60645.

**

The Messiah

"... whose origin is from ..."

"everlasting" (KJV) or "ancient days" (NRSV)?

One of the most beautiful verses in the Old Testament concerns a prophecy in Micah 5:1-2 about the "coming forth" of the "Messiah." This prophecy is referred to in Matt. 2:1-6 as regards his place of birth - i.e. Bethlehem. Though Matthew gives no hint of a pre-existence of the Messiah, the KJV translation of Micah 5:2 "from .. everlasting" has had an enormous, and, unfortunately, erroneous influence on the thinking of millions of Christians in this regard. But as J.D. Dunn states, there is nothing in the Hebrew text of this verse "to suggest the idea of pre-existence" (*Christology in the Making* p. 71). Most modern versions translate similar to the NRSV:

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.

The Hebrew words translated "from of old, from ancient days" are, according to most OT scholars,

referring to the times of Jesse ... The addition of "days" shows this to be a historical reference [*New Bible Commentary*, p. 828].

The appearing of this ruler is to be validated by hereditary right ... He is to come ... of kingly lineage and this constitutes the guarantee of his coming ... allusion is being made to a finite time in history ... This time can only be the days of David ... [*NICOT, Micah*, p. 343].

In short, the reference in Micah 5:2 is to the fact that the Messiah would be a descendant of David.

**

One God - Two Men

by Wanda Shirk

Ulysses, Pennsylvania

[All verses are from the NASB]

Which has the ring of scripture to the well-trained ear: "the man Christ Jesus" or "the God Christ Jesus"? While the ear that has listened to man-made liturgies might want to grasp the latter, it is "the man Christ Jesus" that rings through the pages of scripture. Paul wrote, "There is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (I Tim. 2:5).

John the Baptist, introducing the Messiah to the world, presented not God, but a **man**, saying, "After me comes a **Man** who has a higher rank than I" (John 1:30). Peter's Pentecost sermon did not introduce a God-man, but revealed "Jesus the Nazarene, a **man** attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through him" (Acts 2:22). Paul taught that God would one day judge the world through the Messiah Jesus, "a **Man** whom He has appointed" (Acts 17:31). Did John the Baptist, Peter or Paul ever teach or preach elsewhere that Jesus was God? We will search the gospels, Acts and Paul's letters to the churches in vain for such a statement.

When the disciples wondered, after their master had calmed a storm before their eyes, "what kind of a **man**" this was (Mt. 8:27), the gospel writer neither there nor elsewhere told his readers that Jesus was in fact God. Nor did Matthew indicate that the multitudes were mistaken when, after they witnessed a miracle, they "glorified God, who had given such authority to **men**" (Mt. 9:8). The Jews expected their Messiah to be a prophet raised up from their midst like Moses, for God had said, "I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you [Moses], and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak all that I command him" (Deut. 18:18). It was a man that the Jews expected as their Messiah, not God himself; it was a man who came, whom they heard and saw and touched (I John 1:1). "Behold the **Man**!" cried Pilate (John 19:5). The apostles and gospel writers never corrected such notions or tried to teach such a metaphysical

impossibility as being fully man and fully God, fully finite and fully infinite. Such oxymoronic thinking never flowed through their brains nor their pens.

A God-man? No, the scriptures neither use the term nor teach the concept. A mere man then? No, for Jesus was one of two men who were unique in history. Interestingly, the great theologian of scripture, Paul the apostle, is triply clear that there is but One God, the Father (I Cor. 8:6, Eph. 4:6, I Tim. 2:5) and doubly clear about Two Men (Rom. 5:12-15, I Cor. 15:21-22).

The two unique men are Adam (the son of God - Luke 3:38) and Christ (the son of God - Mark 1:1). These two men stood apart from all other men in history in their capacity to choose good or evil, right or wrong, life or death. They differed in their choices, and thus one brought death and the other brought life to the rest of humanity.

In Romans 5 Paul explains that "through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men." However, he continued, "if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one **Man**, Jesus Christ, abound to the many." "The Man Jesus Christ" brought the answer to the problem of death which had reigned from the time of the first man, Adam.

In I Corinthians 15 Paul teaches the same "two men" concept, writing, "For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." Paul goes on to talk of these two as "the first man Adam" and "the last Adam" (v. 45), "the first man" and "the second man" (v. 47). Neither had a human father; both were unique in the history of humanity, but both were truly men in spite of their distinction from other men, and the second was no more a "God-man" than the first, except that while the first disobeyed his God and Father, the second fully obeyed his God and Father and was given a new name and exalted as Savior and Lord, worthy of our homage, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:10-11).

Some have argued that Jesus had to be God himself because an infinite amount of sin requires the sacrifice of a being that is Himself infinite. However, the scripture never says this, and in fact,

such reasoning poses the logical impossibility of having God die. "'Tis mystery all, the immortal dies," a famous hymn-writer penned, and yet the self-contradiction of an immortal being dying is not at all what scripture teaches. The high priest Caiaphas had prophesied, "it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish," and John the apostle goes on to note that "this he did not say on his own initiative, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but that he might gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (John 11:50-52). As the first man had sinned, so the second man would pay for sin. As it was a man who had disobeyed, it was necessary that a man obey and be found worthy to be the perfect and spotless Lamb who would take away the sin of the world. Jesus was the man, the righteous son of God.

One God, the Father. Two men, Adam and Jesus. Even a child can learn these simple foundations of scripture. Those who learn this much well will avoid much error and confusion and go on from there to build a sound and accurate Biblical theology.

[Wanda Shirk, is an English teacher in Ulysses, Pennsylvania. She majored in Bible at Wheaton College, Illinois, one of the leading Evangelical Bible colleges in America. In the next few pages we present some more of her excellent articles on the oneness of God. But first I share some excerpts from a letter she sent to me in which she describes her own spiritual growth in coming to understand that there is only one God - the Father.]

**

Dear Richie,

Thanks for your note, which I received today. I am glad if my studies can be helpful to others. Learning the truth of the scriptures has been the joy of my life. I have always loved studying the Bible, even as a teenager, and I majored in Bible at Wheaton College, Illinois, which included two years of Greek for which I've been ever thankful. I guess it's been about five years now since I started my personal study of who God is. Prior to that I had been a typical evangelical trinitarian.

Since I began this study of God I've learned a little more each year, and as I look back now, I see it's been a long, slow road, but I think I've finally gotten to the end of it. This is not to say that I won't continue to clarify what I've learned, and be able to define and express it better, but I've at last traveled the last mile so that I can say who Jesus was. I can say that Jesus was a man, fully man. That conclusion is remarkable to me, even after 5 years of study. From 1991 until this summer, if I was asked who Jesus was, I would say, "the Son of God," and I still had this "special category" for Jesus somewhere between God and man, a category of a unique being who existed not eternally, but before the creation of the time-space universe, and not first as a man, but first as a spiritual entity of some sort.

It was not hard for me to see that the "trinity model" of God, if I may use that expression, was not scriptural. The whole concept of "three persons in one being" is counter to ordinary intelligence, and anyone who can think for himself, who can see when "the emperor has no clothes on!" should be able to see that "eternally begotten," "the immortal dies," "fully-God, fully-man," and other trinitarian phrases are self-contradictory and not revelations from God! However, it's taken me a long time to fully understand Jesus as the second Adam, as the scriptures teach, the second of the two unique men of the Bible.

Realizing how long it has taken me, I am concerned now about how to communicate this to others. I don't know if most people can jump right from saying "Jesus is God" to "Jesus was a man" without working through that intermediate territory of understanding that Jesus was the unique "Son of God" or accepting "pre-existent begottenness" for a time. I think we have to be patient with that stage and I think it's a shame that some feel they can't fellowship with those who believe in "pre-existent begettleness." When I go teach people now, I want to be careful to let them move gracefully from one stage of learning to another until they see that in the scriptures "Son of God" is a Messianic title given to the "second Adam," the **man** who would fulfill God's plan of redemption and salvation for his people.

Your friend in Christ,
Wanda Shirk

The Oneness of God: Twenty Biblical Reasons for Believing in One God, the Father

by Wanda Shirk, Ulysses, Pennsylvania

1. The Jewish Concept of God as One.

Key text: Deut. 6:4 - "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is One Lord!"

Mark 12:28-34 - Jesus quotes the Shema as the first (Gr. protos) commandment in importance.

This basis of historic, first century and modern Judaism was never challenged by Jesus or the apostles. Jews and Moslems today find the trinity antithetical to monotheism. The doctrine of the trinity is more harmful to the spread of Christianity than any other doctrine.

2. The Jewish Concept of the Messiah: Not to be God himself, but one sent by God.

Deut. 18:15-18 - "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me (Moses) ..."

"The Lord said ... 'I will raise up a prophet ... like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him ...' " (cf. Acts 3:22-26).

A. Caiaphas did not expect the Messiah to be God Himself but "the Christ, the Son of God." It was this that Caiaphas called blasphemy (Mt. 26:63-65, Mk. 14:61, Lk. 22:70, Jn. 19:7).

B. Peter did not preach that Jesus was God but was "Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through him" (Acts 2:22).

3. "Only One God, the Father." Paul wrote that "there is no God but one ... There is but one God, the

Father ..." (I Cor. 8:4, 6). If the trinitarian view is correct, why didn't Paul write, "There is but one God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?"

4. "The Only True God" was identified by Jesus and Paul as the Father.

John 17:3 - Jesus prayed, "That they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." He did not say, "That they may know US, the only true God."

I Thess. 1:9-10 - "You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven." If the "true God" is a trinity, the trinity has a Son!

5. The Mediatorship. I Timothy 2:5 - "There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." The mediator cannot be God, but must be between God and men. If Jesus is God, he cannot be our mediator. Only a sinless man could be the mediator between God and sinful humanity.

6. "God and Jesus." Scripture often talks of God and Jesus in the same sentence.

If we say "the Smith family and Hezekiah" or "the boys and Susie," it is obvious that the second is added because it is not included in the first. Is Jesus not included in "God"?

A. I Cor. 13:14 - "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all." Three persons mentioned. God is the Father only.

B. In all his letters, Paul speaks of "**God our Father** and the Lord Jesus Christ" - Rom. 1:7-9; I Cor. 1:3, 4,9; 2 Cor. 1:2,3,21; Gal. 1:1,3; Eph. 1:2,3,17,22; 5:20; 6:23; Phil. 1:2; 2:11; Col. 1:2,3,15; 3:17;

I Thess. 1:1,3,9,10; 3:11, 12; 2 Thess 1:1,2,12; 2:16; I Tim. 1:1,2; 5:21; 2 Tim. 1:2, 4:1; Titus 1:4; Ph. 3.

C. General epistles, same: James 1:1, I Pet. 1:2,3; 2 Pet. 1:2; 2 Jn. 3; Jude 1.

7. Two Wills. Jesus said, "I have come down from heaven not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent

Me" (John 6:38), and "not my will, but thine be done" (Luke 22:42, Mt. 26:39). Two wills speaks of two persons, two personalities. Does God have a split personality? Is it not nonsense to say we have two persons but only one being?

8. Jesus is the Image/form/representation of God. Scripture does not say he is God himself.
 - A. Col. 1:15 - "He is the image of the invisible God." (Cp. also 2 Cor. 4:4).
 - B. Phil. 2:6 - "He existed in the form of God."
 - C. Heb. 1:3 - "He is the exact representation of His nature."
 Observation: An image/form/representation can only exist after an original exists.

9. Jesus sits at the right hand of God. Does God sit beside Himself?

A place at the king's right hand is the highest honor a king can bestow, but the one who sits there is not the king himself. Mt. 26:64; Mk. 14:62; 16:19; Lk. 22:69; Acts 2:33; 7:55; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3; 10:12; 12:2.

 Fittingly, Jesus is sometimes given the title "Prince." Acts 3:15; 5:31.

10. Begotteness. Jesus is uniquely begotten of God. Implies a time before being begotten. God, by definition, is unbegotten. How can the begotten and the unbegotten be the same? (monogenes - John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; I Jn. 4:9; Today - Ps. 2:7, Acts 13:33, Heb. 1:5, 5:5).

11. Sonship. The metaphor of sonship implies the priority of a father. Jesus is consistently identified in scripture not as God or "God the Son" (a term which never occurs in scripture) but as "Son of God." Peter's confession was that "You are the Christ, the SON OF the living God," not that Jesus was the living God Himself (Matt. 16:16). See also the testimony of John the Baptist (John 1:34), Nathaniel (John 1:49), Martha (John 11:27), Mark (Mark 1:1), the Ethiopian (Acts 8:37), the enemies at the cross (Mt. 27:40, 43), the centurion at the cross (Mt. 27:54, Mark 15:39), the angel (Luke 1:32, 35), demons (Mark 3:11, 5:7), Satan (Mt. 4:3, 6), and God (Mt. 17:5).

12. The Temptation Question. Jesus was "tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin," (Heb. 4:15), but "God cannot be tempted by evil" (James 1:13). How then could Jesus have been "God 'in the flesh' "?

13. The "Sin-Potential" Dilemma. COULD Jesus have sinned?

If we say no, then the so-called "temptation of Jesus" by the devil was not temptation at all, and Jesus did not really know what it is like to be human. If he did not know what it was really like to be human then "incarnation" is meaningless. To acknowledge that Jesus could have sinned, to answer yes to our question, is to acknowledge that Jesus was not Almighty God Himself, for God by His nature is holy and could never, possibly, sin.

14. Jesus died. God is immortal (I Tim. 6:16) and cannot die. Did part of God die?

15. Jesus bore our sins. Could sin be laid on God Himself?

"The Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him" (Isa. 53:6).

16. Jesus was forsaken by God on the cross (Mt. 27:46, Mark 15:34).

"Did God forsake a third of himself, or what? Was Jesus God, or not God at that time?"

17. Jesus descended to Hades. Hades by definition is the place of separation from God. Was God in Hades when Jesus was there? Then it was not Hades.

18. Jesus had a God, and that God raised him from the dead.

- A. Jesus called the Father his God - Mt. 27:26, Mark 15:34, John 20:17.
 - B. Peter talks of "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" - I Pet. 1:3.
 - C. Paul uses that expression 5 times - Rom. 16:6; 2 Cor. 1:3; 11:31; Eph. 1:3, 17.
 - D. Hebrews 1:9 speaks of the God of the Son.
 - E. This relationship continues in the eternal kingdom - Rev. 1:6; 3:12.
 - F. God raised Jesus from the dead and glorified him - Acts 3:13; 5:30.
- Questions: If Jesus is God, is he his own father? Did he raise himself from the dead?

19. Subordination. The Scriptures consistently teach the subordination of the Son.

John 14:28 - "The Father is greater than I."

I Cor. 11:3 - "The head of Christ is God."

I Cor. 15:24-28 - The Son is subject to the Father in the eternal kingdom.

Matt. 28:18 - Jesus' authority was given to him (not inherent in him).

Jesus was sent/commissioned by the Father and did nothing on his own

John 5:26, 27, 30, 36, 38, 43; 6:29, 39, 44, 46, 57; 7:16-18, 28, 29, 33, etc.

20. Argument from Silence. Put yourself in the context of the first century Jews. If Jesus had been GOD HIMSELF, that would have been the big announcement the disciples and Paul would have had to make to the world - and to DEFEND (assuming they taught a trinity) against the arguments of the Jewish paradigm of monotheism. Did they ever make claims that Christ was deity, or God was a trinity? No. Did the Jews understand them to hint at such claims, and therefore argue this case with them? NO! WHY THIS SILENCE?

**

Where Jesus is Called "God"

by Wanda Shirk

The Greek scriptures use the term *theos*, God, over 1300 times in reference to the Father. The term is used only twice with certainty in reference to Jesus. In a handful of debatable texts *theos* may apply to Jesus. Even if we grant (the highly unlikely possibility) that every one of the debatable texts is an actual application of *theos* to Christ, still fewer than one percent of uses of *theos* in the New Testament refer to Jesus. The doctrines of the trinity and the deity of Christ are actually based on about one-half of one percent (.005) of uses of the word *theos*.

1. Where Jesus is called God - John 20:28 and Hebrews 1:8.

John 20:28 - "Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!'"

Hebrews 1:8 - "But of the son He says, 'Thy throne, O God is forever and ever ...'"

These are the only two texts in which *theos* is applied with certainty to Jesus. We make the following observations:

A. Levels of Meaning: The word god, like the word president, has levels of meaning. "I went to the bank and met the president" does not mean that I met the President of the United States. There are many presidents (of clubs, companies, banks, universities, etc.), but at a given time there is only one President of the U.S.

B. Variety of application: The English god, the Latin deus, the Greek theos, and the Hebrew elohim are all broad terms, not necessarily referent to the one God Almighty. As Paul said, "there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is one God, the Father ... (I Cor. 5:5-6)
Like lord, god can be a title that is given to national heroes, sports idols, etc. or others held in high regard.

C. Scripture uses: Scripture uses the term god in other than the absolute sense.

It is applied to judges of Israel (Ex. 22:8,9,28), to angels (Ps. 8:5, Heb. 2:7), to Moses ("See, I make you

elohim to Pharaoh" - Ex. 7:1), to God's chosen people (Ps. 82:6, John 10:34), and even to Satan ("the god of this age" - 2 Cor. 4:4). Only the most immature of interpreters would understand the meaning to be "Absolute God," whose name is Yahweh, every time he saw the word god.

- D. Messianic application: The title God is applied to the Messiah in Ps. 45:6,7.

This passage is quoted in Heb. 1:8. Thomas, like the writer of Hebrews, was recognizing that Jesus was truly the promised Messiah. His exclamation does not mean that he suddenly believed his master to be

the

supreme deity but that he recognized Jesus as truly God's anointed one. It was the highest compliment he could pay his master. He had finally recognized the truth in the resurrection, that God had raised Jesus from the dead and made Him, in a unique sense, God, now immortal.

2. The Logos verses - John 1:1ff.

Three interpretations are commonly proposed for these verses.

- A. Logos = Jesus. "The Word/Logos was God" is most commonly understood today as Jesus = God. We need

to keep in mind that this is an interpretation, that the text does not say "Jesus is/was God." This interpretation is Greek/gnostic in origin.

- B. "The God/"God". John wrote that the logos was with ho theos, "the God," and the logos was theos, God. Without getting deeply into the Greek here, we could roughly say that "the logos was with 'the God' and the logos was [a] God.' "

- C. Logos = Wisdom, God's creative purpose. This interpretation is Jewish in origin, following the wisdom personification of Proverbs 8. This view of John's poem reads "In the beginning was God's wisdom/plan, and the wisdom/plan was with God, and it was fully expressive of God." In this view, Jesus appears

when

"the wisdom/plan became flesh and dwelt among us" (v. 14). Jesus, thus, is the "fleshing out" of God's ultimate design.

- Conclusion: In light of the distinctions made between God and Jesus throughout the gospel written by John, it

seems highly unlikely that John opened his book by stating that Jesus was the supreme God. The rest of the

book does not support this thesis, and in fact John's closing statement argues against it. He had set out to demonstrate that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of God," (John 20:31), whom he distinguished from "the only true God" (John 17:3).

3. The Only Begotten God" - John 1:18.

The KJV, following the majority manuscripts at this point, speaks of "the only begotten Son" in this verse, but better manuscripts, such as those used in the translation of the NASB and NIV, give us "only begotten God." This is an interesting concept, because while it applies the title "God" to Jesus, it places him in a unique category as "begotten God" as opposed to the unbegotten Father. The NIV rendering "One and Only" also places Jesus in a unique category distinct from the Father.

- [Editor's note: It seems highly unlikely that the writer of the Gospel of John would have written the words "monogenes theos" ("the unique" or "one and only, God"). As G.B. Caird states, "the evidence of Clement [2nd century A.D.] and Irenaeus [2nd century A.D.] makes it clear that *monogenes theos* arose *after* the Fourth Gospel had already gone into circulation. *Huios* [son], incidentally, conforms to John's usage elsewhere (John 1:14; 3:16, 18; cf. 1 John 4:9), and is therefore to be preferred" (*NT Theology*, p. 321, n. 79)].

4. The Punctuation Problem - Romans 9:5.

Seven different ways of punctuating this verse have been proposed. The basic choice is between an ending of "... Christ, who is over all. God be blessed forever" or "Christ, who is God over all, forever blessed."

Interestingly, this text was never used by trinitarians in the Nicene era debate. Its form is similar to the doxologies to the Father in Rom. 1:25 and Gal. 1:4,5. That interpretation seems truer to Paul.

5. The Granville Sharp verses - Titus 2:13 and 2 Peter 1:1.

Titus 2:13 - "Looking for the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ" (KJV).

2 Peter 1:1 - "...through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ" (KJV).

The KJV renderings of each of these verses indicate that God and Jesus are two distinct persons, as we always find otherwise in the writings of Paul (e.g. Titus 1:1) and Peter (e.g. 2 Pet. 1:2). In the 1790's a trinitarian by the name of Granville Sharp put forth the proposition, now known in Greek grammars as the Granville Sharp Rule, that when "the" appears before the first of two nouns joined by kai ("and"), but not before the second noun, the two nouns refer to the same thing, and the second is a description of the first. Thus, modern translations such as the NASB and NIV have translated these two verses as "Our God and Savior Jesus Christ."

This translation makes theos applicable to Jesus. We would note the following:

- A. The decisiveness of the rule's applicability to the koine Greek of the time of the writing of the New Testament is acknowledged even by some trinitarians to be uncertain (Question: Are the NASB and NIV the same since I didn't use the before NIV?).
- B. Exceptions to the rule have been established in other, similar constructions.
- C. Even if the title God is given to Jesus here, contrary to all other uses of Paul and Peter, we have to establish the level of meaning and the specific type of application, remembering the scriptural use of the term as a Messianic title.

6. "Church of God" or "Church of the Lord" - Acts 20:28.

The textual apparatus gives theos a "C" rating here [Editor's note: this means that the compilers of the United Bible Society's textual apparatus had "great difficulty in deciding which variant [i.e. "God" or "Lord"] to place in the text.]. If we were to grant that theos is the authentic reading, we would translate not "church of God which he purchased with his own blood" but "church of God which He purchased with the blood of His own [Son]."

7. "He is the true God" - I John 5:20.

The pronoun "He" in the last line of this verse can be applied to Jesus (the nearest antecedent) or to the Father.

Twice previously in the verse the phrase "Him who is true" clearly refers to the Father, because it refers first to the One whom the Son of God came to show us, and second to the one who has a Son Jesus Christ. Few interpreters apply "He" to Jesus in this verse.

8. "Immanuel" - "God with us" - Matthew 1:23, Isaiah 7:14.

These are simply names. Though significant in denoting God's presence via Christ (Matt. 1:23) it is obvious that the name itself doesn't mean that Jesus is God any more than the original Immanuel of Isaiah 7:14 was God. The name "Ithiel", for example, in Proverbs 30:1 means "God is with me," but Ithiel wasn't God!

Conclusion: There are no other verses in the Greek Scriptures in which theos (God) refers to Jesus. This gives us a minimum of two, a likelihood of three (John 20:28, Hebrews 1:8 and John 1:18 [but see editor's note above on this

verse]), and a very maximum of ten verses in which theos applies to Jesus - out of 1,300 uses of the word.

Exegetically, theos applies to God the Father only in more than 99% of its uses. It is almost always impossible to substitute the words "the trinity" or "Jesus" for the Greek word theos and have the scriptures make sense.

Who Is Jesus?

by Wanda Shirk

Answers to the question "Who is Jesus?" fall into four main categories among those who profess to be believers:

1. Eternal God the Son - the traditional Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Protestant view.
2. A created being, an angel, possibly Michael the Archangel - Jehovah's Witnesses view.
3. Son of God, Begotten before time - "Preexistent Begottenness" view.
4. Christ/Messiah, Begotten in time - "Conception Christology" view.

Arguments for "Conception Christology"

1. The Hebrew scriptures (Old Testament) give no clue that the Messiah pre-existed with God in eternity past.
2. Think Jewish! As a corollary of the above, the Jews did not believe that their Messiah dwelt in eternity past with God. They expected one like Moses (Deut. 18:15-18), a prophet, to rise up from the line of David. It is from history that they accepted other human beings as potential Messiahs. If, therefore, the Messiah was a pre-existent spiritual being, the Gospel writers and apostles should clearly have corrected Jewish thinking on this. They did not.
3. The synoptic Gospels and Acts give not the faintest hint that anyone thought Jesus to have pre-existed his birth.
There is no hint of incarnation. Conception, for Matthew and Luke, is the begetting or beginning of Jesus.
4. Luke 1:35 - "The angel answered and said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God.'" There is a causal clause here; Jesus is "Son of God" because, or the reason that, he was uniquely conceived in history by the Holy Spirit, not because he had preexisted as somehow begotten in the heavenlies in eternity past.
5. The point of John's prologue (John 1:1-18) and "the Word became flesh" is that the impersonal became personal
in the birth of Christ, that is, "an impersonal personification became embodied as a human being." Logos was not understood by the Jews as a person but as a plan, as the wisdom of God (cf. Prov. 8:1-36), His counsel, His self-expressive activity. The meaning of John 1:1-3 is thus as follows:
"In the beginning was the creative purpose of God. It was with God and was fully expressive of God. All things came into being through it ..."
Like a building constructed from an architect's idea, Jesus is the plan of God "fleshed out."
6. The pre-existence of Christ is only in the foreknowledge of God.
I Pet. 1:20 - "He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you who through Him are believers in God who raised Him from the dead ..." The few references in scripture that indicate previous existence or glory of Christ (e.g. John 17:5, 24) are "prophetic pasts" (i.e. future
at the time spoken, but past in the sense that they are determined in the counsels of God) much like God's words
to Abraham "To your descendants I have given this land," (Gen. 15:18) when Abraham at that time had neither descendants nor a square inch of soil).
7. John's statements about Jesus having "descended from heaven" (3:13) or "coming down from heaven" (6:38) are
no more literal than the idea that the manna from heaven which the Israelites ate fell down through the skies.
Cf. James 1:17 "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of ... lights" (NIV).
8. The "sending" or commissioning of Jesus to do what was required of the Messiah does not require pre-existence.
The prophets and John the Baptist were also "sent from God" (cp. John 1:6).
9. Jesus being "before" John the Baptist (John 1:15) or Abraham (8:58) reflects his superiority in the plan of God,

not his chronological place in human history.

10. Allusions to the role of Christ in creation mean that Jesus was the central purpose for all creation, even though he did not yet exist. In some passages, the spiritual creation (God's people) rather than physical creation is in view. The Old Testament teaches that the Father alone created the world (Is. 44:24).

Notes & Quotes on the Bible

The Birth of the Messiah

Does the biblical message about the birth of the Messiah have anything at all to do with an eternally pre-existent 2nd person of the Trinity who comes down from heaven so as to become flesh and save the world? If so, the New Testament scriptures are strangely silent about any such concepts. The only two accounts of the announcement of Jesus' birth recorded in the Bible are set forth in Matthew and Luke. Let's let them speak for themselves:

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:18-21).

In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her. "Do

not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:26-35).

These records are beloved by "all who call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, their Lord and ours" (I Cor. 1:2). They speak of the miraculous conception of God's unique Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. They also point to the significance of who God's Son is: the one who is named "Jesus" because he will "save his people from their sins", and the one who will be given "the throne of his father David" and whose "kingdom will never end." All of this is set forth by Matthew and Luke as being the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy about the coming human Messiah.

Speaking from the perspective of almost two thousand years of Christian history gone by it is also important to point out what these passages of scripture clearly do *not* teach. Raymond Brown, in his widely acclaimed book *The Birth of the Messiah*, confirms what is plainly obvious to many when he says in regards to these accounts,

Matthew and Luke show no knowledge of preexistence; seemingly for them the conception was the becoming (begetting) of God's Son ... there is no suggestion of an incarnation whereby a figure who was previously with God takes on flesh [p. 33,141].

It is certainly not unreasonable to ask that if neither Luke nor Matthew ever once mentions the pre-existence of Christ and never once hint at a mysterious doctrine of one God in three persons,

how it could have come to be held by so many Christians today that the doctrine of the Trinity is the foundational truth of Christianity? Does it make sense that the writer of Luke and Acts, who recorded all of Christ's life, death, resurrection and ascension, as well as the foundational years of the Christian church, would have failed to mention this "truth" if it was really so important? Or should we simply say that by the standards of today Luke was simply "unorthodox" or, at best, had a "low" christology!! Certainly, he, as well as all the NT churches about which he writes, would have failed to pass the one critical test that is set down today for becoming a member of the World Council of Churches: the belief that Jesus is both Savior and God!

The Humanity of Jesus the Messiah

G.B. Caird states, in his book *NT Theology*, a simple fact that should be obvious to us all:

New Testament Christology should start from where the first disciples of Jesus started. They knew him first as a man, and whatever other staggering affirmations they may have later come to make about him, they never ceased to think of him as a man ... Perhaps the most arresting piece of evidence is to be found in Luke ... Luke's interest from start to finish is the human Jesus, 'a man singled out for you by God' (Acts 2:22), and 'anointed with the Holy Spirit and power' (Acts 10:38 [p. 280, 282]).

One thing that is agreed upon by most serious NT scholars today is that at the time of Jesus, in the early 1st century A.D., there was no inkling among the Jewish people that the expected Messiah already "pre-existed" as a personal divine being in heaven before his "coming into the world" (John 6:14). Phrases in the Bible that are often thought to indicate pre-existence such as "sent from God", "sent into the world" or "come into the world" are used in the Gospel of John to describe *not only Jesus* but also *other human beings* as well (e.g. John 1:6; 1:9 KJV; 17:18; 16:21, etc.). As has been well documented by many NT scholars, the "sending" language of the Bible is the language of the commissioning of prophets and has nothing at all to do with the *place of origin* of the one who is "sent." Instead, such language emphasizes *God*, the sender, and the *purpose* for which the messenger is sent.

Two NT passages (Phil. 2:5-8, II Cor. 8:9) that are often pointed to to prove Christ's pre-existence

are thought by many, including many trinitarian scholars, to be instead a portrayal of the human self-giving Jesus in contrast with Adam who "grasped for equality with God". They are also presented in the light of the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. Luke Timothy Johnson speaks for many, when he states in his book, *The Real Jesus*, in regards to Phil. 2:5-11:

Some scholars argue that the passage describes the incarnation of a preexistent one. But with other scholars, I hold that the entire passage describes the "messianic outlook" of Jesus in his *human* life ... the "way Jesus thought" is explicitly recommended to the Philippians as the measure of how they should "think" in community: they are to follow the pattern of a Messiah whose servantlike obedience to God is the paradigm for mutual service within the community (2:1-4) ... [p. 162].

Here is a section of scripture that more than any other that is often presented as "proof" of Christ's deity or pre-existence is dependent for our understanding on translation. Some versions (e.g. NIV in contrast to the better NAB, REB, NJB) have bent over backwards to translate in a way that makes Christ's so-called deity or pre-existence "self-evident" to the reader. However, as the notes of the *New Jerusalem Bible* state, instead of speaking of a pre-existent being,

More probably Jesus is here contrasted as the second with the first Adam (Rm. 5:12f; I Co. 15:22f). The first Adam, being in the form or image of God attempted to grasp equality with God and, by his pride, fell. By contrast, Jesus, through his humility, was raised up by God to the divine glory ... [p. 1941 note d. Cp. notes d-h].

It then adds that the "traditional" understanding regarding pre-existence,

is not only less scriptural but also anachronistic for the development of christology at this moment of Paul's thinking [*ibid.*, note g.]

Most scholars agree that these passages *do* contrast Christ with Adam. The only question is do they speak of a pre-existent Christ as well. In this regard James Dunn points out the crucial factor that Paul "explicitly denies" that "the second man, from heaven" (I Cor. 15:47) is "the spiritual, *pre-existent* prototype of Adam." Instead,

the spiritual comes *after* the natural; it is the risen Christ who is the prototype of resurrected humankind [*Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 3, p. 402].

In regards to Philippians 2:5-11 Dunn emphasizes the fact that nowhere else in the NT is Adam christology ever used in relationship to a pre-existent being:

Adam Christology elsewhere in Paul focuses on Christ's death and resurrection, not on his birth, as the decisive moments of epochal significance (Rom. 5:15-19; I Cor. 15:20-22, 45-50). And the distinctiveness of Adam christology from the gnostic redeemer myth lies precisely in the fact that the life, and death, of a historic individual (Jesus) is perceived as imbued with suprahistorical significance for humankind as a whole, rather than that a pre-existent divine being entered the alien territory of the human form. Moreover, the regular link between Psalm 110:1 and Ps. 8:6 elsewhere in earliest christology (I Cor. 15:25-27; Eph. 1:20-22; Heb. 1:13-2:8; I Pet. 3:22; cf. Phil. 3:21) suggests that Christ's exaltation to lordship following his Adamic death was also seen in Adamic terms; that is, not as a restoration to a heavenly status previously enjoyed, but as the fulfillment of God's purpose in creating man in the first place ("to put all things under his feet") "to the glory of God the Father" [*ibid.*].

To "read into" verses like Phil. 2:5-11 and II Cor. 8:9 the idea of pre-existence is to say something that the text itself does not say. In each case, these verses are presented by Paul as a pattern for believers to imitate. Surely, the portrayal of a self giving human Messiah is much more consistent with the rest of scripture and, without any doubt, more capable of being imitated than a pre-existent divine being about which the scriptures speak nothing.

"Jesus" is what God's Word/Wisdom "Became"

Nowhere does the NT ever say that "Jesus became flesh." Nor does it ever say "the Son of God became flesh." For the first readers of the Greek New Testament it was the "logos" i.e. God's wise, creative and self-revealing "Word" - through which God created the world and through which he revealed his purposes to OT believers - which "became flesh" -in the person of Jesus the Messiah. Paul specifically states that Christ is "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (I Cor. 1:24) and that Christ Jesus "has *become* for us wisdom from God" (I Cor. 1:30). In a similar way John states in the prologue of his Gospel that "the Word *became* flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). In each case the

point that is being dramatically made is this: Jesus, the Messiah, is what God's wise, creative and self-revealing Word "became."

This is simply the language and thinking of the OT and early Judaism. Nowhere in the writings of the Old Testament or in the writings of the Judaism until the time of Jesus is the Word or Wisdom of God ever portrayed as a pre-existent divine "person." Instead, both the Word and Wisdom of God are always attributes of the one true living God which can at times be *personified* and given a capital "W" so as to emphasize the Word or Wisdom of *God himself* in creating or in relating to his creation. Prime examples of this personification are Proverbs 8, Isa. 55 and the writings of early Judaism.

It is within this OT and Jewish background of the wise, creative and personified power of God's Word or Wisdom that John 1:1-18 is set forth. And, it is in the light of this prologue that the entire Gospel of John is meant to be read and understood. The opening statement of John 1:1:

"In the beginning was the logos and the logos was with God and the logos was God"

does *not* say that "Jesus" was in the beginning with God *nor* does it say that either Jesus or "the logos" can be *identified* with God. As many scholars have pointed out, this is the language of *personification* not of a pre-existent divine *person*. The *person* of Jesus comes into existence, as consistent with both Matthew and Luke, in John 1:14 when "the logos *became* flesh".

We may translate "logos" as "Word" with a capital "W" if we wish, so as to emphasize the aspect of personification that is being presented, but this is by no means inherent in the text itself. And we could, with Caird, just as easily translate,

In the beginning was the purpose, the purpose in the mind of God, the purpose which was God's own being (*NT Theology*, p. 332).

This translation would also be in line with Jewish thinking and usage of the word "logos". As James Dunn states in his book *Christology in the Making*,

Initially at least Christ was not thought of as a divine being who had preexisted with God but as the climatic embodiment of God's power and purpose ... God's clearest self-expression, God's last word [p. 205].

Whichever of these translations we choose - i.e. "Word" or "purpose" - the thought is pretty much the same and the emphasis is, as Dunn describes, the transition from "impersonal personification to actual person." In Jesus, the *logos* is "identified with a particular person" (*ibid.*, p. 243). G.B. Caird in his book *NT Theology* emphasizes the importance of understanding this concept:

John never uses "Son" of the pre-existent *logos*, only of the incarnate *logos*, the human Jesus ... neither the Fourth Gospel nor Hebrews ever speaks of the eternal *logos* or Wisdom in terms which compel us to regard it as a person ... acute problems arise if "Son" is seen as interchangeable with John's *logos*. Throughout the body of the Gospel Jesus is never called *logos*, nor is the pre-incarnate *logos* ever spoken of as "Son." For John the Son is what the *logos becomes* by virtue of incarnation ... Indeed, if without support from the Gospel, we were to ascribe sonship to the pre-cosmic or pre-incarnate *logos*, we would blunt the very point John is attempting to make: that it is the humanity of Jesus which is the perfect expression of what God intended when his *logos* created the universe. Jesus is the only one who could express and disclose the ultimate end which God has for men and women: that they should become his children [p. 296, 342-343, 322].

In the same way, Colossians 1:15-20 is speaking of *God's* purpose in creation. It is not Paul's intent to tell us of a pre-existent divine being through whom God created the world. This would clearly contradict the Old and New Testament records that state that God the Father alone created the world (e.g. Isa. 44:24). It was through his own Word or Wisdom that God himself created the world (Gen. 1:3; Ps. 33:6, 9; 148:5; Prov. 8; John 1:3; Heb. 11:3). Since this Word or Wisdom of God "became" flesh in the person of God's Son, all that was said of the Word or Wisdom of God can now be said of Christ because Jesus is the *embodiment* of God's Word or Wisdom. As Col. 1:19 states, "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him ..."

Note that *God* was the one who was "pleased" to do this - it was not a decision which *Jesus* made. This also occurred at a certain point *in time* - not in an "eternal generation". To be consistent with other NT passages this must have been when "the *logos* became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).

Once again Caird puts his finger on the point that is being made by Paul in these verses,

In Colossians we are told of "the secret design hidden for long ages and through many generations but now disclosed to God's people", because "the secret is Christ himself, *in whom* lie all God's treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 1:26; 2:2). The ground for those assertions has been given in an earlier paragraph, in which Paul declares that Christ "is the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15), and by the one word "image" he combines two of the most important themes of Old Testament theology. On the one hand, God created the human race to be His image, with supremacy over the rest of creation (Gen. 1:27-28; Ps. 8:6), so that in fulfilling the human destiny Christ has achieved pre-eminence over the universe. On the other hand ... Paul's hymn to the cosmic Christ is full of echoes of Wisdom's function as the plan and artificer of creation. These two themes are held together by the fact that wisdom which shone forth in Creation was also a divine attribute which God always intended to impart to the human race (Ecclus. 24:7-10), so that the perfect human being is one in whom Wisdom resides, or as Paul puts it, "God in all his fullness has chosen to dwell" (Col. 1:19; 2:9) [p. 46].

William Barclay, the beloved NT commentator, explains the significance for his own life of God's Word/Wisdom becoming flesh in the person of Jesus:

For me the most important single text in the Bible is John 1:14: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."... for me the supreme truth of Christianity is that in Jesus I see God ... It is not that Jesus *is* God. Time and time again the Fourth Gospel speaks of God sending Jesus into the world. Time and time again we see Jesus praying to God. Time and time again we see Jesus unhesitatingly and unquestioningly and unconditionally accepting the will of God for himself. Nowhere does the New Testament *identify* Jesus and God ... There are attributes of God I do not see in Jesus. I do not see God's omniscience in Jesus, for there are things which Jesus did not know. I do not see God's omnipotence in Jesus for there are things which Jesus could not do. I do not see God's omnipresence in Jesus, for in his days on earth Jesus could only be in one place at any given time. But in Jesus I see perfectly and completely and finally, and once for all revealed and demonstrated, the attitude of God to men, the attitude of God to me. In Jesus there is the full revelation of the mind and heart of God. And what a difference it means to know that God is like that. [*William Barclay: A Spiritual Autobiography*, Eerdmans, p. 55-57].

James Dunn, in his article "Incarnation" in the new multi-volume *Anchor Bible Dictionary* sums up the importance of understanding this NT concept that Jesus is what the Word or Wisdom of God "became":

The recognition that Wisdom christology is the most obvious root of incarnation Christology also has an important corollary, particularly when it is recalled that in Jewish thought Wisdom is not a being independent of God but is God's self-manifestation. The point is that Christ is the *incarnation* of the Wisdom/Word. To speak of Christ as himself preexistent, coming down from heaven, and so forth has to be seen as metaphorical, otherwise it leads inevitably to some kind of polytheism ... Whereas what a Wisdom/Word christology claims is that Jesus is the person /individual whom God's word *became* ... The incarnation doctrine which comes to expression in the NT is properly understood only if it is understood as the incarnation of God's self-revelation, and *in that sense*, as the incarnation of God himself. [*Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 3, p. 404].

[For detailed studies on "christology" the place to start is with J.D.G. Dunn's groundbreaking book, *Christology in the Making*, 2nd edition, SCM Press.

Available through CBD ph. 1-508-977-5050. Also, Dunn's important articles on "Christology" and "Incarnation" in the new *Anchor Bible Dictionary* which "correct" his earlier thinking on John. J.A.T. Robinson's chapter "The Person of Christ" in his book *The Priority of John* is the best study that I know of on Jesus in the Gospel of John. Though out of print, it can be checked out through the inter-library loan system. G.B. Caird's works, including his *NT Theology* (available from CBD), are also helpful. Two recommended books are: the very biblically based *The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity's Self-inflicted Wound* by Anthony Buzzard and Charles Hunting (Atlanta Bible College, P.O. Box 100,000 Morrow, GA. 30260) and the very theological *Born Before All Time: The Dispute Over Christ's Origin*, by Karl-Joseph Kuschel (English translation from SCM Press and available through bookstores from Crossroad Press.)].

Note: all articles in *The Unity of the Spirit* may be copied or translated. To republish in other forms write the foundation at address below or by E-mail.

E-Mail address: richie.temple@internetmci.com

Foundation for Translation of Biblical Studies, Inc.
P.O. Box 473
Cary, NC 27511