



# Christology

The Teaching on Christ

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# **CHRISTOLOGY**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **HIS MARVELOUS PERSON.**

JOHN F. WALVOORD WRITES:

No other person is given more biographical attention than Jesus Christ, whose life is portrayed in the four Gospels with supplementary theological revelation in other books of the Bible. The four portraits afforded in the four Gospels give depth and perspective to the incomparable One who lived among men. Yet it is still true, as John states, "that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written" (John 21:25) concerning what He said and did.

The story of redemption, anticipated in the prophecy of Genesis 3:15, is foreshadowed in every sacrifice of the Old Testament as well as detailed in anticipatory prophecy. It had its supreme revelation in those dark hours when Jesus Christ hung upon a cross on Calvary. No other man lived as Christ lived and no other man died as Christ died. Here supremely revealed was the love and righteousness of God and His redemptive purpose for man. The power of His resurrection added a new dimension to the omnipotence of God and His ascension in glory was prophetic of His ultimate subjugation of the universe, when every knee would bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.<sup>i</sup>

### **HISTORICITY OF JESUS**

Did Jesus ever live in history? Some people today do not believe that Jesus ever lived, but that Christians invented the stories we read in the gospels. However F.F. Bruce, Rylands professor of biblical criticism and exegesis at the University of Manchester, writes:

"Some writers may toy with the fancy of a 'Christ-myth,' but they do not do so on the ground of historical evidence. The historicity of Christ is as axiomatic for an unbiased historian as the historicity of Julius Caesar. It is not historians who propagate the 'Christ-myth' theories".<sup>ii</sup>

Otto Bentz writes:

"No serious scholar has ventured to postulate the non-historicity of Jesus".<sup>iii</sup>

Josh McDowell cites Cornelius Tacitus (born A.D. 52-54) as a Roman historian, in 112 A.D., as a Governor of Asia, and as a son-in-law of Julius Agricola who was Governor of Britain A.D.80-84. Writing of the reign of Nero, Tacitus alludes to the death of Christ and to the existence of Christians at Rome:

"But not all the relief that could come from man, not all the bounties that the prince could bestow nor all the atonements which could be presented to the gods, availed to relieve Nero from the infamy of being believed to have ordered the conflagration, the fire of Rome. Hence to suppress the rumor, he falsely charged with the guilt, and punished with the most exquisite tortures, the persons commonly called Christians, who were hated for their enormities. Christus, the founder of the name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius: but the pernicious superstition, repressed for a time broke out again, not only through Judea, where the

mischievous originated, but through the city of Rome also". Annals XV.44.

Tacitus has a further reference to Christianity in a fragment of his Histories, dealing with the burning of the Jerusalem temple in A.D.70, preserved by Sulpicius Severus (Chron. ii 30:6).<sup>iv</sup>

Other non-biblical writers of the first and second century who mention Jesus were Suetonius (A.D.120), another Roman historian, and Thallus, a Samaritan-born historian (AD52).

### HIS NAME, JESUS CHRIST

#### JESUS

The name Jesus ("Iesous" Gk.) is a transliteration of the Hebrew, Joshua, a contracted form of Jehoshua which signifies "Yahweh is salvation". It stands therefore in the Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Old Testament) for Joshua. In Matthew 1:21 the name is commanded by the angel to be given to the son of Mary. It is the personal name of the Lord in the gospels and the Acts. Jesus (as well as Joshua) was a common name among the Jews. Ex 17:9; Zech 3:1; Acts 13:6; Col 4:11.

#### CHRIST

Christ (Christos" Gk) is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew "Messiah" ("Mashiah"), meaning anointed. Dan 9:26. It is an appellation of his personal name, Jesus. It signifies Jesus as the fulfiller of the Messianic hopes of the Old Testament and of the Jewish people.

Jesus is his name in humiliation. From this it is clear why the gospels speak mostly of "Jesus" while throughout the epistles the title "Christ" stands in the foreground. For the gospels deal with the time of his humiliation, while the epistles testify of him as the One exalted and glorified. In the name Jesus, the thought of salvation preponderates, but in the title Christ, the Glory. In the epistles "Jesus" stands alone only where his former lowliness is to be stressed. 2 Cor 4:10, Phil 2: 10, 1 Thes 4:14, Heb 2:9, 12:2, 13:12 (contrasted with verse 8). As Peter said on the day of Pentecost, only by resurrection and ascension did Jesus become properly Christ, in the full sense of the word. Acts 2:36

### THE PREINCARNATE SON OF GOD

#### A THE ETERNITY OF THE SON

1. Jesus claimed to be eternal.

One of the most crucial problems in approaching the study of the person and work of Christ is the question of His existence from all eternity past as the second Person of the Trinity. It was this issue that aroused the immediate antagonism of the Jews when Christ said, "Before Abraham was, I am", Jn 8:58. His listeners immediately understood that Christ was claiming to be eternal and thereby asserting Himself to be God. The Jews took up stones to stone Him, which was the prescribed penalty for blasphemy.

2. The prophecy of Micah 5:2 states that Christ is eternal.

The prophet Micah predicted in his day that Jerusalem would be besieged and her king be stuck down (5:1). Jerusalem was later besieged in 586 BC and her last king, Zedekiah, was blinded and taken to Babylon. In this way the succession of Davidic kings of Judah was cut off. But in verse 2 Micah predicted, in a positive note, that another king would reign over Israel. This king would be born in Bethlehem, but His origin would not be then but in eternity. "Out of you (Bethlehem) will come for me one who will be ruler over

Israel, whose origins are from old, from ancient times." (margin "from days of eternity") NIV. A.R. Faussett has said, "The terms convey the strongest assertion of infinite duration of which the Hebrew language is capable." <sup>v</sup> Micah gave his prophecies between 735 and 700 BC.

3. Other Old Testament prophecies that affirm He is eternal.

All of the Old Testament predictions of the coming of Christ which assert His deity are also evidence for His eternity. For instance, in Isaiah 9:6, Christ is declared to be not only "mighty God" but also "everlasting Father", or better translated "Father of eternity". W.E. Vine comments on this part of the prophecy: "There is a twofold revelation in this: (1) He inhabits and possesses eternity (57:15); (2) He is loving, tender, compassionate, an all wise Instructor, Trainer and provider". <sup>vi</sup>

4. The New Testament also claims it.

Colossians 1:16-17 affirms both Christ's eternity and work as Creator. These verses declare not only that Christ was before all creation, but that all creation stemmed from His creative activity. If Christ was before all creation, it is obvious that He himself could not have been created.

#### B. HIS APPEARANCE TO MEN IN THE TIME OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

1. At various times through the Old Testament God appears to men in both the form of a man and "the Angel of the LORD (Yahweh)". John F Walvoord proves that "the Angel of the LORD" is none other than the second person of the Trinity.

"There are at least four lines of evidence which identify the Angel of the LORD as the second Person:

- a. The second Person is the visible God of the New Testament. Neither the Father nor the Spirit is characteristically revealed in bodily and visible form. While the Father's voice is heard from heaven, and the Holy Spirit is seen descending in the form of a dove, Christ, the second Person, is the full manifestation of God in visible form. It is logical that the same Person of the Trinity should appear in bodily form in both Testaments.
- b. Confirming this induction is the fact that the Angel of the LORD of the Old Testament no longer appears after the incarnation. References to angels in the New Testament seem to refer to either angelic or human messengers. It is a natural inference that the Angel of the LORD is now their incarnate Christ.
- c. The similarity of function between the Angel of the LORD and Christ can be observed in the fact that both are sent by the Father. In the Old Testament, the Angel of the LORD is sent by Yahweh to reveal truth, to lead Israel and to defend and judge them. In the New Testament, Christ is sent by God the Father to reveal God in the flesh, to reveal truth and to become the Saviour. It is characteristic for the Father to send and the Son to be the sent One. These facts again point to the identification of the Angel of Jehovah with Christ.
- d. By the process of elimination, it can be demonstrated that the Angel of the LORD could not be either the first Person or the third Person. According to John 1:18 (RSV): "No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known." This passage seems to imply that only Christ could be visible to man and that the first Person and the third Person did not reveal themselves in visible fashion. As the Angel of Jehovah is the sent One, He could not be the Father for the Father is the Sender. As the Angel of the LORD characteristically appears in bodily, usually human form, He could not be the Holy Spirit who does not appear bodily, except in the rare instance of appearing in

the form of a dove at the baptism of Christ. It may, therefore, be concluded that the Angel of the LORD is the second Person of the Trinity. The other theophanies of the Old Testament tend to confirm this judgement".<sup>vii</sup>

2. The appearances of God or Christ in the Old Testament are often called "Theophanies". The word, "theophany", comes from the Greek words for God ("theos") and "to appear" ("phaino").

- i) The Angel of the LORD appeared to Hagar. Gen. 16:7-14. "Angel" means "messenger". So he is distinguished from the LORD (Yahweh). Yet He is identified as God. Hagar saw only the Angel of the Lord, yet she said that she had seen God. v13. Also she said that it was the LORD (Yahweh) who had spoken to her. v13. In this appearance we see the Lord as a person concerned for the welfare of a rejected woman cf. Jesus' concern for the woman of Samaria (John chapter 4).
- ii) Three men appeared to Abraham near Mamre. Gen 18:1-19:1. Two of them were angels. (see 19:1). The third was undoubtedly Yahweh. v13, 17-30, 33. Later he rained down judgment from Yahweh in heaven. Gen 19:24.
- iii) It was the Angel of the LORD who stopped Abraham from slaying his son. Gen 22:10-12.
- iv) He Wrestled with Jacob. Gen 32:22-32. Hosea reveals that the man who wrestled with Jacob was an angel. Hos 12:4, but Moses, the author of Genesis, identifies Him as God. Gen 32:30.
- v) The Angel of the LORD appeared to Moses in the burning bush. Ex 3:2. The Scripture is quite clear that this was a manifestation of God (the second person of the Trinity) v4,6. This Angel of the LORD remained with the Israelites throughout the wilderness journey. Ex23:20. It was Yahweh who had sent the Angel. v20,21 (and so the Angel is distinct from Yahweh). But then it goes on to state that God's name (person) is with Him and that the Angel has the uniquely divine power to forgive sins (cf Luke 7:49; Mk 2:7).
- vi) The Angel of the LORD barred Balaam's way. In Numbers 22:31 Yahweh opened the eyes of Balaam to see the Angel of Yahweh (distinct), but what the Angel says (v35) is what god says. (v38).
- vii) The Angel of the Lord was the Commander of Israel's armies. Josh 5:13-15. As Joshua succeeded Moses as the leader of Israel, the same mysterious personage appeared. Joshua had to learn that he was subordinate to another leader worthy of adoration and worship. Here the Angel called himself the Commander of the army of the LORD'. v14. He accepted worship as no mere angel may. (viz. Rev 19:10).
- viii) He appeared to Gideon. Judges 6:11-25. Gideon was told by the Angel of the LORD that Yahweh was with him. v12. In v14 the Angel is identified as Yahweh Himself. He accepted sacrifice from Gideon. v21. Gideon feared for his life because of his proximity to deity. v22. Also it was Yahweh who finished the conversation. v23.
- ix) He showed himself to Manoah. Judg 13:15-23. Manoah and his wife declared that they had seen God. v22. The Angel described His name as "beyond understanding". v18. In Isa 9:6 the Hebrew for this phrase (translated "Wonderful") applies to One who would come as "Mighty God".
- x) When David sinned in numbering the people, God sent the angel with pestilence.

1 Chron 21:1-27.

- xi) When Elijah fled before Jezebel, the Angel of the LORD refreshed him under the juniper tree. 1 Kings 19:5-7. No doubt it was the same person who spoke to him at Mount Horeb v 9-18.
- xii) In the days when Sennacherib invaded Judah, the Angel of the LORD came to the rescue of the Jews and killed 185,000 Assyrians in one night. 2 King 19-35.

The combined testimony of these passages portrays the Son of God as exceedingly active in the Old Testament, dealing with sin, providing for those in need, guiding in the path of the will of God, protecting His people from their enemies and, in general, executing the providence of God. The references make plain that this ministry is not occasional or exceptional but rather the common and continual ministry of God to his people. The revelation of the person of the Son of God thus afforded is in complete harmony with the New Testament revelation.<sup>viii</sup>

### C. CHRIST IN OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY

1. The Old Testament is full of predictions of the coming Messiah. They speak of His birth, life, death, resurrection, and future glory. Although it is treated here only in outline form, there is no prophetic theme in the Old Testament greater than that of the coming Messiah. When the risen Lord conversed with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, Luke states that Christ, "beginning with Moses and all the prophets...explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself". Luke 24:27. "Moses and all the prophets" is a way of designating the whole of the Old Testament Scriptures. We understand from this statement that in this discourse of several hours, the life, death and resurrection of Christ were major themes of prophecy in the Old Testament.
2. The lineage of the Messiah.
  - i) "The seed of the woman". Gen 3:15. Here is God's first prediction of Satan's downfall. These words proclaim that victory shall be with man. As it was man who was overcome, so it shall be man who affects the triumph. But this victory for mankind will be achieved by one particular "Man" (Jesus Christ) as the prophecy specifies that one man ("he") for the benefit of all mankind will crush the serpent's head. cf Rom 16:20; 1 Cor:15:57.

It is noteworthy how precisely true was the promise in relation to its fulfilment. The word is spoken specifically of the woman, and when the Redeemer came, he was "made of a woman" (Gal 4/4) in a miraculously exclusive manner. It is not right to infer the virgin birth from this promise of Gen 3:15, but it is certainly quite legitimate to look back from the point of view of the virgin birth and see how marvellously close were the words of promise to the mode of performance.

Erich Sauer writes:

"The Judgement upon the Serpent. The dawn of salvation displays itself most clearly of all in the sentence upon the serpent (Gen 3:15). In this passage the first promise of the gospel shows how grace, streaming through the gloom of wrath, has turned the curse upon the serpent into the promise for man. At the moment when the sinner (Adam) stands before God, as the accused awaiting sentence of condemnation, no direct promise can, of course, be given. Nevertheless to him, listening and trembling, the sentence of destruction upon his destroyer must be a ray of hope for himself. Thus indeed was "the front aspect of the original gospel, judgment, but the reverse signified promise for mankind".

At first the meaning of the prophecy is still obscure; for if Satan is represented by the serpent, then the serpent's "seed" can be nothing else than the totality of all demonic and human beings who, as the God-resisting "brood of vipers" (Matt 3:7; 12:34; 23:33), would stand on the side of the Devil - thus not an individual but a plurality of beings. But then the harmony of the parallel and opposed clause demands that the seed of the woman also shall not be a single person but likewise a plurality of descendants, namely, the totality of all those who, believing, would stand on the ground of the promise given to the woman.

Only indirectly could the earliest of mankind gain the idea that the posterity of the woman would some day head up in a single individual. For the final sentence of the prophecy said that the seed of the woman would crush not only the seeds of the serpent but its very head, the serpent itself, which perhaps allowed it to be discerned that the woman's seed itself would also at some time culminate in a head, an individual.

Only today, looking backwards, and instructed through the interpretation of later prophecies and fulfilments (especially Isa 7:14; Matt 1:21-23; Mic 5:2; Gal 4:4), do we see that God here, for the first time - although not exclusively, yet inclusively, indeed chiefly - spake of Christ His Son (Rom 16:20; 1 John 3:8). He, as the centre of humanity, is at the same time the centre of the woman's seed. Only from this do we understand why God did not speak of man's seed but of woman's seed (comp. Matt 1:18): and at the same time by this prophetic word concerning the stinging of the heel and the crushing of the head, commenced that wonderful series of Divine utterances which declared beforehand "the sufferings appointed for Messiah (comp. the 'stinging of the heel') and His glories to follow thereupon" (comp. the "crushing of the head") (1 Pet 1:11). Therefore there is already present here the double character of all later prophetic perspective - namely, the first and the second comings of Christ seen together in one picture (e.g. Isa 61:1-3, comp. with Luke 4:17-20); and in this sense the original gospel is not only the original root but also the original type of all Messianic prophecy".<sup>ix</sup>

ii) The seed of Abraham. Gen 12:1-3. Many years later the Scriptures narrowed down the Messianic line to Abraham's descendants. v3. "All peoples on the earth will be blessed through you (Abraham)". This finds its ultimate fulfilment in Christ. Gal 3:16. God's original blessing on all mankind (Gen 1:28) would be restored and fulfilled through Abraham and his offspring. In various ways and degrees, God's promises to Abraham were reaffirmed to Abraham (15:5-21; 17:4-8; 18:18-19; 22:17-18), to Isaac (26:2-4), and to Jacob (28:13-15; 35: 11-12). Christ's descent from Abraham is found in Matt 1:1-17.

iii) The tribe of Judah. Gen 49:10. His lineage is to be limited to one particular tribe of Israel. cf Heb 7:14; Rev 5:5; Matt 2:5,6.

iv) The house of David. 11 Sam 7:12,13. Then our Lord is to spring from one family in that tribe. cf Matt 1:1; Rom 1:3.

v) The genealogies in Matthew and Luke. It is interesting to compare these prophecies with the genealogies of Christ in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. (Matt 1; Lk 3). But, at first glance, there appears to be some disagreement between these genealogies.

The genealogy in Matthew apparently gives that of Joseph; while that in Luke gives Mary's. In Luke 3:23 A.V. we read: "Jesus himself ... being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli". Wherever in the Authorised Version words occur in italics they are not in the original. The Greek here simply reads, "Joseph of Heli". In such a case as this, a Greek would supply whatever word the context demanded; it might be son, son-in-law, father, sister, aunt, mother, grandparent. In this case it would be "son-in-law." Heli was Mary's father, and Joseph his son-in-law.

Matthew 1:1-16 gives the genealogy of Jesus through Joseph, who was himself a descendant

of King David. As Joseph's adopted Son, Jesus became his legal heir, so far as his inheritance was concerned. Notice carefully the wording of v16. "And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ". NASB. This stands in contrast to the format followed in the preceding verses of the succession of Joseph's ancestors, "Abraham begat (egennesen) Isaac, and Isaac begat Jacob, etc". Joseph is not said to have begotten Jesus; rather he is referred to as "the husband of Mary, of whom (feminine genitive) Jesus was born".

Luke 3:23-38, on the other hand, seems to record the genealogical line of Mary herself, carried all the way back beyond the time of Abraham to Adam and the commencement of the human race. This seems to be implied by the wording of v23, "Jesus....being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph". This "as was supposed" indicates that Jesus was not really the biological son of Joseph even though this was commonly assumed by the public. It further calls attention to the mother, Mary, who must of necessity have been the sole human parent through whom Jesus could have descended from a line of ancestors. Her genealogy is thereupon listed, starting with Heli, who was actually Joseph's father-in-law, in contradistinction to Joseph's own father, Jacob. Matt 1:16. Mary's line of descent came from Nathan, a son of Bathsheba (or "Bathshua", according to 1 Chron 3:5), the wife of David. Therefore, Jesus was descended from David naturally through Nathan and legally through Solomon. The records of Scripture provide, then, an accurate and indisputable record of the qualifications of Christ as the inheritor of the promises of David. It is interesting to know that the genealogical records of the Jews were destroyed in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70. The New Testament records are the only ones extant which provide authentic genealogies to identify the Messiah.

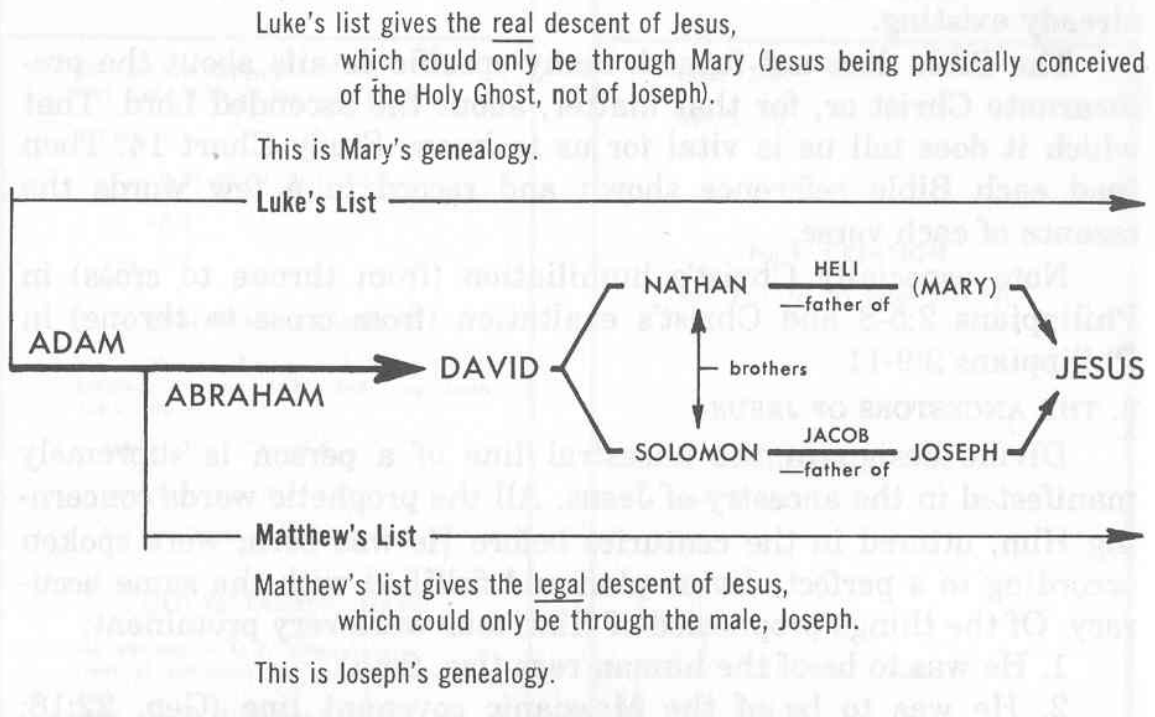
A diagram showing the main differences between the two genealogies is shown below (derived from "Jensen's Survey of the New Testament").

#### GENEALOGIES OF CHRIST

Luke's list gives the real descent of Jesus, which could only be through Mary (Jesus being physically conceived of the Holy Ghost, not of Joseph). This is Mary's genealogy.



## GENEALOGIES OF CHRIST



Matthew's list gives the legal descent of Jesus, which could only be through the male, Joseph. This is Joseph's genealogy. <sup>x</sup>

### 3. The birth of the Messiah.

Between 735 and 700 BC Micah predicted the place of Christ's birth in Micah 5:2. It was very clear from this passage that it was commonly known that Bethlehem was destined to be the birthplace of the Messiah. The scribes and the chief priests quickly informed Herod of this fact when the Magi came for direction in finding the King of the Jews.

### 4. His death.

The Old Testament preview of the death of Christ is given principally in Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53, though many other passages contribute to the doctrine. Psalm 22 prophesies of the piercing of hands and feet. (verse 16). It was written by David about 1000 BC. However at this time crucifixion was unknown in Jewish criminal law. Crucifixion was a Roman mode of execution and was not used in Israel until 63 B.C. when Pompey's legions made their way into Jerusalem, and Palestine became a Roman province. The Jewish mode of execution was by stoning, Isaiah 53 presenting the sufferings of the Servant of Yahweh, and reveals most of the major details of the death of Christ. Here we have an accurate and detailed account of the sufferings and death of Christ, together with a theological reason for His death - He was dying for the sins of others, as a satisfaction to God. While on the cross, Christ Himself quoted from Psalm 22, thereby calling attention to the predictions afforded in this Psalm. Many other scattered references to the death of Christ complete the picture of prophecy. He was to be betrayed by a friend Ps 41:9, falsely accused Ps 35:11, and spit upon, Isa 50:6. Also His bones were not to be broken. Ps 34:20.

5. His resurrection.

While many passages in the Old Testament anticipate the resurrection of Christ, only a few are specific in this; the most important being Ps 16:10 cf Acts 2:25-31: 13:34-37.

6. His glory.

The Old Testament abounds with references to the glory of God. Many of them are applicable to the "trinity" (Father, Son, Holy Spirit), but others are predictions related to the Messiah. One of the central purposes of the millennial kingdom is the manifestation of the glory of God and the glory of the Son of God. Psalm 24, for instance, anticipates the coming of the King of glory, and the context indicates that it refers specifically to the Son of God cf Ps 72; Isa 4:2; 63:1; Dan 7:14. These numerous references to the glory of the Messiah are in contrast to His sufferings. The Old Testament prophets did not understand this. 1 Pet 1:10,11.

## THE HUMANITY OF JESUS

### A. HIS INCARNATION.

1. The meaning of the incarnation.

Leon Morris writes:

"Greek mythology abounds in stories of gods who walked the earth like men. They looked like men. They acted like men. But at the critical point they would throw aside their disguise and by using their divine power show themselves for what they were. They were never really men, but gods in disguise. To this day some Christians think of Jesus in much the same way. They picture Him as God, walking among men. He looked like a man. He spoke like a man. He lived like a man. But they do not think of Him as really being a man. They shrink from taking seriously those parts of Scripture which speak of His limitations. In effect they understand Him as God, not man".<sup>xi</sup>

By the "incarnation" we mean that the eternal Son of God took to Himself a genuine human nature and lived a genuine human life on earth without for a moment ceasing to be deity. The term "incarnation" (from the Latin, "in flesh") is not a biblical word. The idea, though, is thoroughly biblical. John put it simply when he wrote, "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh". 1 Jn 4:2 cf. 2 John 7. Again in Jn 1:14 he writes, "The word became flesh, and made His dwelling among us". The words, "made His dwelling", in the original, means to pitch a temporary tent or tabernacle. At His incarnation, the Son "tabernacled" in the tent of our humanity, much as God dwelt with His people of old in the early Tabernacles of Moses and David. 11 Sam 7:6.

2. Early Gnostic heresies regarding the humanity of Christ.

The Gnostics thought of themselves as "the knowing ones", which is what the Greek word "gnostic" means, believing that salvation is primarily by knowledge, a mystical and allegedly superior knowledge which they possessed.

The Gnostics believed in a great gulf between spirit and matter, because matter is inherently evil and spirit alone is good. Obviously Gnosticism came into conflict with the Christian belief of the incarnation, as Gnostics believed that any real incarnation of the Son of God is impossible. There were basically two groups of Gnostics that held the same heretical views of Christ's humanity.

a) The Docetics