

*Jesus:
Our Eternal Savior*

When Jesus Christ is mentioned, my mind sways and staggers. His measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea, higher than heaven and deeper than Sheol (see Job 11:8, 9). I cannot by searching find Him out, nor exhaust His perfections (see Job 11:7).

Nevertheless, in five areas, the immeasurable Christ can surely be described safely: (1) from Eternity to the Creation, (2) from the Creation to Bethlehem, (3) from Bethlehem to the Resurrection, (4) from the Resurrection to the Judgment, and (5) from the Judgment into Eternity.

FROM ETERNITY TO THE CREATION

Before the mountains were brought forth, before the earth and the inhabitants of the world had been born, even from eternity, Jesus Christ was living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword (Psalm 90:2; Hebrews 4:12). There was nothing which was not manifest in His sight; all things were open and laid bare before His eyes (Hebrews 4:13). His goings

forth had been from of old, even from the days of eternity (Micah 5:2). During His brief earthly sojourn, He remembered the glory He had enjoyed with His Father before the world was, at a time when He was rich (John 17:5; 2 Corinthians 8:9). Jesus Christ is timeless: the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). He is “the Eternal Father.”¹

Jesus Christ is Lord.² This being true, the assertion that He was a created being is no small error. The Gnostic notion of a Christ who had been made by the Father as an *aeon*, or “divine emanation,” does not harmonize with the fact that Jesus is Lord. That He was “the firstborn of all creation,” according to Colossians 1:15, must not be interpreted to mean that He was the first of created things. If this were so, it would mean that He created Himself, for “in Him all things were created” and He was and is “before all things” (Colossians 1:16, 17). Therefore, the word “firstborn” in Colossians 1:15 must be meant in a figurative way, referring to status or position,³

¹The words *'abbi'-adh* (Isaiah 9:6; verse 5 in the Hebrew), usually rendered “Eternal Father,” may as accurately—and in this context probably more accurately—be rendered “Father of Eternity.”

²The word “Jehovah” is not an accurate translation of the tetragrammaton YHWH, but it is the word used in the American Standard Version to represent the name of the one true and living God, as in Isaiah 44:6: “Thus saith Jehovah, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, Jehovah of Hosts: I am the first, and I am the last, and besides me there is no God.” This same Being is identified in the New Testament as Jesus. The NASB has “Lord.” (Compare Isaiah 40:3 with Matthew 3:3; Isaiah 44:6 with Revelation 1:17; 22:13; Joel 2:32 with Acts 2:21.)

³The word “firstborn” is associated with highest honor. The term in the Old Testament carried with it coveted prestige. It meant the honor of *priority*, since the firstborn son received double honor among the sons of the family. The word also indicated the honor of *position*, for it could refer to distinction given to one because of his superiority in character. Jesus is called the firstborn for both reasons: He is the firstborn because He preceded us in His resurrection from the dead

not to origin. Jesus is the Chief, the Sovereign, the One higher than all created things (see Psalm 89:27). Otherwise, Jesus Himself becomes a creature, and John's statement could not be true: "All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being" (John 1:3).

One religious group follows in the footsteps of the Gnostics in making Christ a created god.⁴ They misunderstand the word "beginning" in Colossians 1:18 to mean that Christ had a beginning. The context, however, shows not that Christ had a beginning, but that He was the beginner, the starter, the originator, the primary source, the efficient cause of all things.⁵

This religious group also misuses the word "beginning" in Revelation 3:14, attempting to deny Jesus' eternal nature. One who says that Jesus was the first thing begun in God's creation, instead of being its beginner, must also say that God the Father had a

(Colossians 1:18), and He is the firstborn because God has exalted Him by giving Him first place over all things (Hebrews 1:6).

⁴The New World Translation of the Scriptures is not a correct rendering of the Bible, but a biased translation which was developed to support the teachings of one religious group. It renders John 1:1 as follows: "In [the] beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god." The same supposed scholarship which produced such a translation would be compelled to render John 1:6 as follows: "There was a man sent from a god, whose name was John." The translation which makes Jesus simply a god among gods in the New World version would also make God one deity among many.

⁵*Arche* in Colossians 1:18 is "the person or thing that commences, the first person or thing in a series, the leader" (C. G. Wilke and Wilibald Grimm, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, trans. and rev. Joseph H. Thayer [Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark, 1901; reprint ed., Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973], 76-77). It means "beginning" in the sense of "origin" (Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed., rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000], 138).

beginning, for the same word is used of Him in Revelation 21:6.⁶ Furthermore, claiming that Jesus had a beginning would not only give the Father a beginning, but in context it would give both of them an ending.⁷ Harmony is achieved with all Bible passages when one correctly views the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit as eternal.⁸

If Jesus was not only with God in the beginning, but He *was* God, then His eternity is unquestionable (John 1:1). To explain how Jesus could be with God and at the same time be God is impossible. Not by mathematics, but by faith, a person says that one is three, and three are one (Deuteronomy 6:4; Hebrews 1:8; Acts 5:3, 4). All three are one Deity, of one nature, yet each has His own mind (Romans 8:27; Philippians 2:5). Though Jesus is subordinate to His Father in authority (“the Father is greater than I”; John 14:28), He is not subordinate in nature and being (“I and the Father are one”; John 10:30). In substance He is equal to the Father and is Himself called “God” and “Mighty God” (Philippians 2:6; Isaiah 9:6).

Because Jesus is subordinate to the Father, some have not only denied His eternity, but also denied that He is “the exact representation of [God’s] nature” (Hebrews 1:3). Arius of Alexandria in the fourth

⁶*Arche* in Revelation 3:14 is “that by which anything begins to be, the origin, active cause” (Thayer, 77); it means “the first cause” (Bauer, 138). Bauer asserted that the meaning “first created” is linguistically possible. However, linguistically, the meaning “first created” is also possible for *arche* in Revelation 21:6, where it is used of the Father. Two meanings may fit linguistically, but scripturally and logically only one can be true: “the first cause.”

⁷The words “the beginning and the end” refer to Christ in Revelation 22:13 and refer to the Father in Revelation 21:6.

⁸Eternal are the Father (Psalm 90:1, 2), the Son (Micah 5:2; Hebrews 13:8), and the Spirit (Hebrews 9:14).

century refused to accept the fact that Jesus' being (Gk.: *ousios*) was of the same (Gk.: *homo*) nature as that of the Father, asserting that He was of like (Gk.: *homoi*) being. Consequently, he held that Jesus was not eternal—that He was a creature higher than man but lower than God. Athanasius opposed Arius, emphasizing the word “essence” or “substance” (Gk.: *hupostasis*) in Hebrews 1:3 and affirming that Jesus was of the same being (Gk.: *homoousios*) as God, not merely of like being (Gk.: *homoiousios*). The distinction was thus reduced in spelling to the insertion or omission of one letter, “i”; but in doctrine it was the difference between creature and Creator, between humanity and Deity.

The phrase “the Son of God” must be carefully studied, because if Deity actually sired a Son, then that Son of necessity is younger than His Father, and so is not eternal. A begotten Christ cannot be an everlasting Christ. This difficulty is not removed by speaking of His being “begotten before all ages” or of His “eternal generation,” implying an eternal, continuous process without beginning or end. Bible writers did not have to solve this logical difficulty, for they did not state that Jesus in His pre-creation existence was begotten.⁹

Bible writers did speak of Jesus as being begotten when He was born at Bethlehem. Because of this fact, He was called “the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). Also, in a

⁹The word “begotten” in John 1:18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9 in the KJV and American Standard Version is a mistranslation, because the Greek word for “begotten” does not appear in those verses. Instead, a form of the Greek word for “kind” and a form of the Greek word for “only” appear. See correct translations of those two Greek words in the same versions in Luke 7:12; 8:42; 9:38 (“only”) and Mark 9:29 (“kind”).

figurative way, when Jesus was raised from the dead and glorified in heaven, He is said to have been begotten (Acts 13:30–35; Hebrews 1:3–5; 5:5). Physically and figuratively, then, Jesus was accurately called “the Son of God”; but in His pre-creation existence, He was not called by that title. If there were a pre-creation Father/Son relationship, the Son could not be as old as the Father. Moreover, if there was a pre-creation family situation, one wonders who the mother was and what family relationship was filled by the Holy Spirit. These difficult questions are eliminated if Jesus was not “the Son of God” before creation.

Jesus is now called the Son of God, and sinners need to know and believe that fact with all their hearts (Romans 10:9, 10). When or in what sense Jesus became heir to that title, a sinner does not need to know. However, every sinner can learn and appreciate that the title expresses a precious and meaningful relationship in the Godhead.

That the Son of God is no less than God Himself is to many a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense (Romans 9:33). Most Jews and liberalists will allow that “He is a good man,” but will stop short of His deification (John 7:12).

Whereas many make Jesus less than Deity, some have gone to the opposite extreme and refuse to distinguish between God the Father and God the Son. In the third century the Monarchians affirmed that the Son was the Father (misusing John 10:30; 14:9). They called Jesus “the God and Father of the universe.”¹⁰ One group called “Patripassians” taught that the

¹⁰Arthur Cushman McGiffert, *A History of Christian Thought* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1954), 1:233.

Father suffered and died on the cross. Part of this idea has been transported from the third century to this century by a religious group in their belief that there is only one person in the Godhead. Misusing many Scriptures, they hold that the Son is in no way separate from the Father.¹¹

FROM THE CREATION TO BETHLEHEM

In the statement "Let Us make man" (Genesis 1:26) is an indication of at least one divine Helper in the creation. One Helper was the Spirit, as is quite clear from other Old Testament citations (Genesis 1:2; 33:4; Psalm 104:30; see also Job 26:13; KJV). Another Helper, the One most emphasized, was Jesus Christ, identified as the Word:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being (John 1:1-3; see Hebrews 1:1-3).

Thousands of minds have struggled to grasp the content of John's declaration that the One who came in flesh was the Word, the *Logos*. In one verse He is identified as God and at the same time is distinguished from God. Without the *Logos* (a Greek word that has become an English word) nothing was made. What does the term mean? As a common noun, it may signify an articulate sound communicating an idea. No audible sound need be assumed, but perhaps

¹¹In particular, they misuse Isaiah 9:6; John 3:13; 10:30; 14:9; 2 Corinthians 5:19; Colossians 2:9. The idea of "one person in one God" was debated by G. K. Wallace and Ray Vaughn (*Wallace-Vaughn Debate*, 3d ed. [Oklahoma City: Telegram Book Co., 1972]).

(in terms of human activities) it is implied in these statements:

For He spoke, and it was done;
He commanded, and it stood fast
(Psalm 33:9).

By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,
And by the breath of His mouth all their host
(Psalm 33:6).¹²

On John's authority, therefore, one may accurately read David's exclamation in Psalm 33:6:

By the *Logos* of the LORD the heavens were made,
And by the breath of His mouth all their host.

However, the *Logos* so described was more than an articulate sound: He was Deity Himself.

Perhaps Jesus is titled *Logos* because that term is so comprehensive. As an oral sound transmits an idea to represent thought, so the word *logos* denotes thought and reason. In philosophy, *logos* is defined as the rational principle of the universe. When applied to Jesus, it denotes the thought, the reason, the wisdom of God. Jesus as the *Logos* is the personification of reason and wisdom.

Not only did *Logos* display wisdom and reason and thought in creation, but His work continued after the Creation as the inspirer and actual author of the Old Testament books. The Spirit of Christ was in the prophets (1 Peter 1:10, 11). It was Christ who inspired David, though David expressed it this way:

¹²The Septuagint (LXX) in Psalm 33:6 has *to logo tou kuriou*, "by the word of the Lord."

The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me,
And His word [*logos*] was on my tongue
(2 Samuel 23:2).¹³

Jesus, from creation to Bethlehem, was not only the *Logos* who created the Universe and the *Logos* who inspired the prophets, but also the “spiritual rock which followed” the Israelites. Through Him their thirst was quenched (1 Corinthians 10:4).

Finally, He was described by a phrase that became very special, arousing the expectations of the hopeful: “one who comes” (Psalm 118:26; see Matthew 11:3; 21:9).

FROM BETHLEHEM TO THE RESURRECTION

In the fullness of time, the promised Coming One descended “down out of heaven” (John 6:51; Galatians 4:4). The previously spiritual *Logos* in heaven became flesh among human beings (John 1:14). God had planned that physically He must be the seed of woman, the seed of Abraham, and the seed of David (Genesis 3:15; 22:18; see 2 Samuel 7:12–14). Also, God had planned that He must be virgin-born, which is no unimportant matter.

Some believers have weakened under attacks by naturalists at the impossibility of a birth of a child without a father (*parthenogenesis*). However, in point of fact, a naturalist cannot truly explain how a child can be born of two parents (Ecclesiastes 11:5), any more than he can explain a birth by one parent. If Jesus had been born of two parents, then He would have been no more divine than the rest of us. If one

¹³The Septuagint has *logos*.

says he believes in Jesus but not in His virgin birth, he is saying that he believes in a wholly human Jesus. If He had been wholly human, there would be no reason to think that His blood would have any more saving power than the blood of other good men. In addition, if He had been wholly human, He could not have risen from the grave Himself, nor could He raise anybody else. It appears, then, that the deity of Jesus is unavoidably connected with His virgin birth. Christianity without the virgin birth becomes a religion without salvation by the blood and without a resurrection. It is reduced simply to a social gospel for this life only.

Since Jesus' deity is dependent on His having a divine (not human) father, the importance of His being called "the Son of God" (Luke 1:35) becomes manifest. At the same time, Jesus thought it important that He be called "the Son of Man," a title recorded as being on His lips eighty-two times—more than any other. Being the Son of Man, He was human and had blood to shed for the sins of the whole world (Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 2:9; 9:22; 1 John 2:2). As the Son of Man, He could sympathize with human weaknesses (Hebrews 2:17, 18; 4:15). Because He was the divine Son of Man, He was mortal but in dying could conquer death (John 11:25–27; 14:19; 2 Timothy 1:10).

Certain people have supposed that for God to become flesh would be too great a degradation. To the Gnostics, for example, flesh was necessarily evil. According to them, God did not become flesh, but descended on the real man Jesus at His baptism and left Him after His crucifixion. Docetic Gnostics denied the humanity of Jesus, making Him a mere phantom, with His birth and death being appearances

only, not reality.¹⁴ Some unbelievers have attempted to make Jesus wholly a myth; but in doing so, they have to admit that it is easier to make myths of George Washington, Julius Caesar, and Alexander the Great. Consequently, most unbelievers do not question the fact of an actual physical Jesus of Nazareth in the first century A.D.

Beyond all controversy, great is the mystery of godliness (1 Timothy 3:16). No mind can explain how God could become flesh or how He could again be received up into glory, but the fact is simple to believe: "For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). He came down from God, and He alone knows the way back to His dwelling place: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6).

FROM THE RESURRECTION TO THE JUDGMENT

Jesus looked beyond His fleshly death to a state of glory again in heaven with His Father (John 17:5). "For the joy set before Him" He endured the cross, despising shame (Hebrews 12:2). He entered into the strong man's house of death and stayed three days—long enough to prove actual death. Then He wrested away the keys of Hades, that He "might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives" (Hebrews 2:14, 15; see also Revelation 1:17). In this way He "abolished death and brought life and immor-

¹⁴McGiffert, 1:52.

tality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:10).

By His rising from the grave, Jesus was declared to be the Son of God with power (Romans 1:4). Resurrection Sunday finally fulfilled God's happy exclamation recorded in Psalm 2:7: "You are My Son, today I have begotten You." Jesus Christ was not the Son of God from eternity to the creation, nor from the creation to Bethlehem. He was the Son of God from Bethlehem, the child of Mary and of the Father's Spirit (Luke 1:35). Even then, He was not the Son of God in the meaning of Psalm 2:7. Thirty-three years after Jesus had become the Son of God physically, through the virgin, God raised Him up (Acts 13:33). Only then came the fulfillment of that which "is also written in the second psalm, 'You are My Son; this day I have begotten You.'"

How could this be so? How could a resurrection qualify as the fulfillment of a birth announcement? Literally, the prophet's word does not make sense. Figuratively, it is beautiful. No happier announcement can be issued from a home than that of a baby's arrival. In parallel, likening Himself to a father, God could make no happier announcement than the news of Jesus' conquering death. Death having no more dominion over Him, Jesus became our forerunner. Then He could enter into "His glory," for which He had prayed (Romans 6:9; Hebrews 6:20; Luke 24:26).

Between Mount Olivet (from which He ascended) and heaven, Jesus rid Himself of the fleshly body with nail holes. He again became what He had been before leaving heaven thirty-three years earlier (1 Corinthians 15:50). Though He had spent a third of a century in human form, never again would He be so degraded (2 Corinthians 5:16). Thus Psalm 2:7

was fulfilled on Resurrection Day.

The Scriptures have more to say. Ten days after the Ascension on the Day of Pentecost, Jesus was made both Lord and Christ. On that day He became head of the church, a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. He sat on David's spiritual throne and was crowned King of kings and Lord of lords. God's voice spoke in heaven: "You are My Son; today I have begotten You" (Acts 13:33; Hebrews 1:1-5; 5:5, 6; see also Ephesians 1:20-23). As on the day of His resurrection, so it was on Ascension Day: The sonship was not physical and literal, but figurative and deeply meaningful. The world's destiny depends on the great truth that Jesus is God's Son.

From the Day of Pentecost till the end of the world, all authority both in heaven and on earth has been placed in the Son. Angels, principalities, and powers have been made subject to Him (Matthew 28:18; 1 Peter 3:22). He has been given a name above every name, in heaven, on earth, and under the earth (Philippians 2:10). In the timespan from Pentecost till Judgment Day, even the Father takes a lesser position of honor, in favor of His Son. "He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him" (John 5:23). It is the good pleasure of the Father "for all the fullness to dwell in Him" (Colossians 1:19). In everything Christ must have the preeminence (Colossians 1:18). Men of good will, with honest hearts, freely and lovingly bring every thought into obedience to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). God the Father has given Jesus to be an ensign to the peoples, the leader and commander of the nations (Isaiah 11:10; 55:4).

During the time of the supreme lordship of Jesus, sinners must approach God through Him as a media-

tor. Further, Christians can obtain forgiveness of their sins only through Him as their advocate (1 Timothy 2:5; 1 John 2:2). He is represented as now preparing abiding places for His own (John 14:1–3). Finally, all men will stand before Him in judgment—not before the Father as such, nor before the Holy Spirit, but before Christ—on a day set in the counsels of God (Acts 17:30; John 5:22; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

FROM THE JUDGMENT INTO ETERNITY

Jesus' position as commander-in-chief will be willingly returned to His Father after the Judgment. Then the Son Himself, along with all people, will be subject to Him who had relinquished power from Pentecost to the Judgment, that God may be all and in all (1 Corinthians 15:24). This transfer of authority will be so smooth that it will not be felt, for throughout eternity the Son (Luke 1:33; Hebrews 1:8) and the saints (Revelation 3:21; 22:3–5) will be coregents with God the Father. "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! . . . To Him be the glory forever. Amen" (Romans 11:33, 36).