

Focus on the Kingdom

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Anthony Buzzard, editor

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2009 Theological Conference

April 26-29, 2009

Simpsonwood Conference Center, Norcross, GA

Registration Deadline: March 30, 2009

Please make plans to be with us for this conference. There will be ample opportunity for you to offer the group a "faith story," and these are perennially interesting. In addition some 10 speakers will present encouraging and edifying material based on subjects close to their hearts. Our aim is to solidify our faith in the One God of Israel and His Kingdom plan through the virginally begotten Son. It is customary for us to have some baptisms at the conference and this can provide a welcome opportunity for those seeking that aspect of the obedience to the commands of Jesus (Heb. 5:9; Matt. 28:19-20, etc). I am thinking, too, of Hebrews 10:25 which encourages fellowship, "not forsaking," and the conference does offer such an opportunity. Your excitement over the faith is a tonic for the other participants! You will make new friends and hear how God has brought them through varied faith journeys to their present understanding.

To register call Atlanta Bible College at **800-347-4261** or **404-362-0052** or mail the form on the back page by **March 30**. The minimum deposit is \$50 per room.

Conference Cost

Includes 3 nights, all meals, snacks, conf. fee, and tax

Single	Double (per person)	Triple (per person)	Quad (per person)
\$275	\$227	\$222	\$195

Transportation

We will provide transportation between Atlanta airport and Simpsonwood for \$25 round-trip or \$15 one-way, at the following times:

Airport to Simpsonwood			
Sunday, April 26	1:00 pm	3:30 pm	
Simpsonwood to Airport			
Wed., April 29	1:00 pm		

Please arrange your arrival time on Sunday early enough to catch one of the two shuttle runs. On Wednesday, April 29, we will provide one (1) shuttle run. In order to allow you enough time to catch your return flight, we suggest you not book your return flight prior to 3:30 p.m.

The conference begins with registration at 4 pm on Sunday and ends with lunch on Wednesday. Driving directions to Simpsonwood Conference Center are at

www.simpsonwood.org

Post-conference Class

Anthony Buzzard will teach "From Abraham to the Kingdom, in Christ: God's Marvelous and Largely Unknown Story" from Wednesday afternoon, April 29 to Friday, May 1. The cost for the class is \$320 for credit and \$160 for continuing education. The total cost for room/meals at Simpsonwood for Wed. and Thurs. nights is \$170 single, \$138 double (per person). Please call Atlanta Bible College at 800-347-4261 or 404-362-0052 **before March 30** to register.

Fooled by Church Fathers?

I realize that this is a delicate subject, but, honestly, I am surprised that so many intelligent people reading the Bible do not seem to sense the yawning gap between what they are reading and some of what they may have learned in church. Please treat the title as a challenge to close examination of the all-important issues of confessing Jesus as the Christ, Son of God. John and all the writers of our New Testament make this the hallmark of Christian wisdom (Matt. 16:16-18; 1 John 4:2; 2 John 7-9).

Karen Armstrong's best-seller, *A History of God* (a must-read for anyone wanting to be informed about the human race's attempt to define and find God) reminds us of the agonizing disputes and conflict which produced the famous church councils and creeds of the fourth century. Everyone today seems to accept as beyond any question or criticism the decisions of those councils and creeds. We are supposed to take on board, without batting an eyelid, that Jesus is the second member of a Triune or Trinitarian God, that Jesus is 100% God and at the same time 100% man, and that this is logically possible (mathematicians and ordinary common-sense readers ought to be wincing by now!). We are asked by the Church to believe that the omniscient (i.e. all-knowing "God the Son") did not in fact *as God's Son* know the day of his future second coming (Mark 13:32). The efforts of "orthodox" commentators to explain to us how Jesus, being fully God, really *did* know, but that he somehow suppressed that information — these "explanations" are not that at all, but rather excuses for avoiding the obvious. Jesus, the Son of God, did not know. He was not omniscient. He was not the eternal God, and not a second "I am." Rather he was the Messiah, the sinless Son of God as defined by Luke 1:35. While he never said "I am God" (*ego eimi o theos*), he very definitely did say "I am the Messiah, the Son of God" (Mark 14:61-62; John 10:36).

Church members, though they do not often express this, are committed to believing that *both* the Father and the Son of God are Yahweh, making apparently, then, two Yahweh's. Are there then in the minds of those assembling in church two "I am's"? Moreover, the result of the teaching that God exists in three coequal Persons is that the personal center of the Son of God, Jesus, was fully conscious and existed from eternity. He, the Son, never had a beginning but is coeternal with God the Father. So the creeds say.

Then the creeds say: Without ceasing to be fully God, "God the Son" decided to come down to the earth and add to Himself a human nature, provided by Mary. Thus Mary, so the creeds have it, produced the human nature, or sometimes we read, the *body* of the Messiah, but the actual *person* of the Son of God *did not come into existence at that time* (some 2000 years ago). God the Son had been alive and well since eternity and was part of the triune Godhead of Christianity.

Very little is said in sermons in evangelical churches about how this picture of God and His Son is credible on any laws of logic or language, but woe betide the church member who raises questions or has doubts about it. Better keep them to him or herself, since the establishment has been warning its adherents in no uncertain terms that doubting that God is three in one could put you into an eternal hellfire. Doubting that Jesus is "fully God" could endanger your salvation. It has been widely propagated that this "no questions admitted" policy is binding on any who want to be real Christians. Reformer John Calvin even saw to it that the non-Trinitarian theologian and physician Michael Servetus was burned at the stake (in 1553). Does the public know or care why? For arguing from the Bible and writing two large tomes on the subject that the Jesus of history was not God, the ultimate God of creation, but *the Son of God* produced in the womb of Mary. After all, human beings qualify as such by coming from their mothers' wombs (Adam and Eve being obvious and necessary unrepeatable exceptions).

The heroic Servetus was in his forties when he was marched to a bonfire of green wood refusing to confess that "Jesus is the eternal Son of God" (the Trinitarian teaching). He was quite prepared to believe that Jesus is "the Son of the eternal God." This awful, yet instructive history of the tragic death of Michael Servetus has been beautifully documented for us in modern times by authors Goldstone in their *Out of the Flames*. It is a moving story of a brutal judicial murder in the name of the Bible and so totally unlike Jesus. Why do so many not even know that it happened?

There are a mass of tragic and frightening episodes from the time of the Reformation (16th century) which describe the heartless and savage killing of "heretics" by church members. The deaths are mostly hidden from the

public in dusty tomes. But just as the Holocaust museum recalls the sickening horrors of gas chambers, in the hope that such cruelty will never be repeated, so we must not forget how unspeakably harsh has been the treatment by "orthodoxy" of those who challenged the creedal "watch-dogs" of their time.

How many school children know that Sir Isaac Newton and John Milton were powerful advocates of a view of God which challenged standard Trinitarianism? These men are hailed as brilliant in their respective fields of science and literature, but in face of massive opposition they tried to alert their countrymen that all was not well with the second-century and onward misdevelopment of the original Christian faith.

How then did things go wrong? Quite simply: God's magnificent Messianic plan and story — His promise from the beginning to send a Savior who would be the *descendant* of Eve, the *descendant* of Abraham, and the *descendant* of the illustrious King David — that plan was overlaid, confused and complicated, put into a fog, by a rival metaphysical and philosophical invention of post-biblical church fathers.

The Son of God, Messiah, who was procreated by a biological miracle worked by the One God in Mary, was combined with a rival and contradictory "God the Son." This God the Son belonged to the uncreated Godhead and he put on ("assumed") human nature in Mary's womb. From the second century the right questions were not asked. How can a person preexist himself? How can a person exist as God the Son from eternity and yet have a beginning as God the Son in time? It is an impossibly illogical proposition to say, with Luke and Matthew, that the *genesis* (Matt. 1:18) of the Son was in history, some 2000 years ago, and yet in the same breath *maintain that the Son had no beginning in time!* You cannot exist and then come into existence. Theologian Pannenberg makes the point succinctly for us all: "**Sonship cannot at the same time consist in preexistence and still have its origin only in the divine procreation of Jesus in Mary.**"¹

But is anyone thinking about this? It is simply impossible to celebrate the origin of the Son of God in history and at the same time hold the incompatible idea that his origin antedated the miracle in Mary. To put it otherwise: If you are prepared to believe the Old Testament promises that the Son of God, Messiah is to be born to a Jewish lady you cannot *also* believe that that Son was alive and conscious before his mother was even born!

But that contradiction has been foisted on us by the creeds — and threateningly. At Nicea in 325 AD there was appended a curse on any who would dare to say that "there was a time when the Son did not exist."

¹ *Jesus, God and Man*, p. 143.

The Simplicity of Jesus as Lord Messiah

Christians may take their Bibles and simply consult the marvelous revelation granted to King David in 2 Samuel 7. The prophet Nathan came to him as a result of David's desire to build a temple for God. That was not to be David's task. So God decreed through the message of the prophet Nathan. Rather God was going to build a royal dynasty for David. This backbone of theological history is laid out in these fascinating words of God to David, and via the New Testament to you and me:

2 Samuel 7:12-14: "When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I *will raise up* your descendant after you [Acts 13:33], who *will come forth* from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I *will be* a father to him and *he will be* a son to Me [Heb. 1:5]." The New English Translation is particularly clear: "I will become his father and he will become my son."

These matchlessly simple predictions of the Messiah as the one who was to be Son of God and son of David have suffered a monstrous confusion at the hands of creeds. The tense of the verbs is future. God is going to have a Son: "I will be his father and he will be my son." That predicted son will be both son of David and Son of God Himself. That miracle was realized when Mary conceived her firstborn son.

Luke was privileged to go on record and preserve these wonderful words for us — for these past 2000 years: To Mary, Gabriel said, "Holy Spirit will overshadow you...and that is precisely why the one to be begotten [fathered] will be the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). Pause and reflect on this transparently simple revelation of who the Son of God is — and how and why he is the Son of God. He is the Son of God based on the miracle in Mary. Precisely for that reason (*διο kai*), Mary's baby, who is also God's Son, is entitled to be called "the Son of God." Luke 1:35 ought long ago to have settled all disputes. It is an explicit definition of "Son of God." It provides an identity for Jesus. It is a fixed point marking the origin of the Son of God.

Orthodox commentators are flummoxed by Luke's inspired assertion. Luke preaches a Son of God originating in Mary — not a Son of God coming from an eternal existence and entering the womb from outside. Mary did not *receive* into herself a personality from outside herself, a Son older than herself! Mary *conceived* a baby. She did not receive one from elsewhere. The imposition on Luke's wonderful account of an alien theory of Incarnation is the ruin of one of the finest and clearest passages of divine revelation. You cannot both exist and yet still come into existence! Again, Pannenberg: "Sonship cannot at the same time consist in preexistence and still have its origin only in the divine procreation in Mary." Would that the Bible-

reading public would initiate a fervent search for truth and take these accounts to heart.

Many Have Suspected That Something Went Wrong

It would be exciting if something of a public stir would repeat itself, taking us back to the passionate argumentation which occurred in the days of Arius and Athanasius in the 4th century. Karen Armstrong, author of the best-seller *A History of God*, reminds us of the public interest in matters of ultimate significance:

"In about 320 AD a fierce theological passion had seized the churches of Egypt, Syria and Asia Minor. Sailors and travelers were singing versions of popular ditties that proclaimed that the Father alone was truly God...but that the Son was neither coeternal nor uncreated, since he received life and being from the Father. We hear of a bath attendant who harangued the bathers, insisting that the Son came from nothingness, of a money changer, who when asked for the exchange rate, prefaced his reply with a long disquisition on the distinction between the created order and the uncreated God, and of a baker who informed his customer that the Father was greater than the Son. People were discussing these abstruse questions with the same enthusiasm as they discuss football today" (p. 107).

The dispute which led to centuries of discord amongst those claiming the name of Christ was over the right definition of God and of the Son. Arius maintained (his view being represented by the Jehovah's Witnesses today) that the Son could not be a second uncreated being, coequal with the Father. Athanasius championed the idea which later became "orthodox" to this day, that the Son was indeed fully equal to the Father. Armstrong reports that very few of the bishops convening at Nicea in 325 AD would have shared Athanasius' view of Christ. "Nevertheless Athanasius managed to impose his theology on the delegates."

There are signs here that all was not well. It is this history which alerted the keen, inquiring mind of Sir Isaac Newton.

"In the early 1670s Newton began serious theological study, which came to focus almost at once on the doctrine of the Trinity. As he read on, with his eye riveted on the allied problems of the nature of Christ and the nature of God, the conviction took hold of him that a monstrous fraud had perverted the nature of Christianity in the fourth and fifth centuries. The fraud had altered the Bible. Newton began to collect evidence that the passages on which Trinitarianism relied had been inserted into the Bible in the fourth and fifth centuries. The material thus collected later became the foundation of his letters on *Notable Corruptions of Scripture*. The corruption of Scripture stemmed from a corruption of doctrine, primarily the work of Athanasius (a theologian of the fourth century and the principal architect of the doctrine of the Trinity)...In the end,

every aspect of Christianity was involved in the lapse from truth, from the ecclesiastical structure on the one hand to the moral tone of society on the other. Although he did not say so directly, Newton clearly believed that the Protestant Reformation had only scarcely scratched the surface. It had left the source of infection, Trinitarianism, untouched.”²

What if Newton was on to something big? In fact his criticism did not go far enough. Arius had at least maintained that the Son was derived from the Father in time. But at what time? He did not restore Luke’s and Matthew’s lucid definition of Son of God/son of David. His “Jesus” was still not recovered as the human being he really was. Arius added a fictional “preexistence” for the Son, contradicting the full-fledged and detailed accounts of the origin of the Son provided as Lesson 1 in our New Testaments (Matthew’s and Luke’s birth narratives). These Bible writers magnificently united their stories with the prediction of the Son of God/son of David given to David. The unity of the Bible was preserved. God’s promise that He would beget a Son (2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 2:7) was fulfilled when God worked a miracle of new creation in Mary.

Preexistence is, I fear, one of those “mystery phrases” which does not bear careful scrutiny, if only because 2 Samuel 7:14 is contradicted along with Matthew, Luke, Acts, and of course John. If John is read in his true Messianic light (“In the beginning was the word [not Word]”) and “all things were made through it [the word].”³ The Son Jesus is what the word, the divine Plan *became*. There is no Son of God before the Son of God began to exist! And he *began to exist* in Mary according to Luke 1:35, Matthew 1:18 (“origin,” *genesis*) and Matthew 1:20 (“what is **brought into existence [begotten]** in her is from holy spirit”).

A 17th-century theologian described the perplexity produced by making the Son coequally God: “If you don’t understand the Trinity you will lose your soul, but if you do understand it you may lose your mind” (Robert South).

Dr. Shirley Guthrie wrote in 1994 as Professor of Systematic Theology, Columbia Theological Seminary, GA: “Many of us have heard a conversation in the church school class or study group that goes something like this: ‘Do we have to believe all this business about three-in-one and one-in-three to be Christians?’ ‘Yes, the Church has always held that the doctrine of the Trinity is essential.’ ‘Well, what does it mean? How can

you put three persons together and get one or divide one into three and still have one?’

“The defender of the faith then blunders through a fuzzy explanation and concludes hopelessly: ‘It is a mystery no one can understand. You have to accept it by faith.’ Then some people say: ‘Well, if you are supposed to believe it, I guess I do — whatever it is.’ And more honest people think to themselves, ‘If no one knows what it means and no one can explain it, it can’t really be all that important.’”

He goes on: “It is true that ‘three persons in One Godhead’ is a mystery no one can understand. But this mystery is far too central to the Christian faith to be either unthinkingly accepted because we are supposed to accept it or casually shrugged off because no one can explain it. If it were only a mathematical puzzle or a numbers game, we might take someone’s word for the solution or simply say that we are not interested. But the doctrine of the Trinity is far more than that. It is the church’s admittedly inadequate way of trying to understand and guard against false interpretation of the uniquely biblical-Christian understanding of who God is, what God is like, how and where God is at work in the world, what God thinks about us human beings, does for us, requires of us, promises us.

“Christians do not ‘believe in’ the doctrine of the Trinity (or any other doctrine). We believe in a living God. But the God we believe in is the God this doctrine confesses, the one living and true God who is the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Faith in this God — and lives shaped by this God — is what distinguishes Christians from people who do not believe in God at all and from other religious people whose faith and life are shaped by other views of God. Moreover, within the Christian circle itself it is faithfulness to the will and word and work of the one ‘triune’ God that distinguishes authentic Christian faith and life from misunderstandings and distortions of it.”⁴

But Jesus did not believe in the Trinity (Mark 12:28-34) so why should Christians?

Support from a Leading Evangelical Scholar

By way of relief from inscrutable mystery, let us finish with a fine statement from a European giant of evangelical commentators. This was Professor Godet writing in 1871. He had been tutor to the Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm of Prussia, and he was founder of the Free Church of Neuchâtel in Switzerland. He seems to read Luke, undogged by dogma, as he reports what Mary and Luke believed about the origin of the Son of God. Mary would have been horrified at the Council of Nicea!

In a brief conversation, a little over a hundred words, between the angel Gabriel and Mary, the whole

² *God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter Between Christianity and Science*, eds. Lindberg, Numbers, California Press, 1986, p. 229.

³As all eight English translations from the Greek worded it, before the King James made the alteration to “him” in 1611.

⁴ *Christian Doctrine*, p. 31.

basis of the Christian faith is laid out. God procreates a Son, who is six months younger than his relative John the Baptist. That Son will obtain the promised throne of David and rule in God's Kingdom in a restored earth. Far from doubting these superb promises, Mary inquires how this is going to happen in view of her not yet consummated relationship with Joseph. Gabriel replies: "Holy spirit will come over you and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; that is precisely why the holy one to be begotten will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35).

Unshackled by later dogmatic creedal additions, Professor Godet notes correctly: "The expression 'Son of the Highest' signifies what Jesus 'is in fact.' The Trinitarian sense should not here be applied to the term 'Son of God.' The notion of the preexistence of Jesus Christ as the eternal Son of God is *quite foreign to the context*...The angel explains Son of God more fully in v. 35. He is to fulfill the office of Messiah. The expressions are borrowed from 2 Samuel 7:12, 13 and Isa. 9:5-7...The term 'House of Jacob' and throne of David in the mouth of the angel keep their natural sense...Mary could have understood these expressions in no other way...At the present day the fulfillment of these promises [the Messiah to sit on the throne of David] is still postponed to the future...In the birth [of the Son] the miracle of the first creation is repeated on a scale of greater power...We might paraphrase the words of Gabriel in Luke 1:35: 'He shall be called the Son of the Highest. And it is precisely for this reason that I said to you...' **We have then here, from the mouth of the angel himself, an authentic explanation of the term 'Son of God'**...After this explanation, Mary could only understand the title in this sense: a human being of whose existence God Himself is the immediate author. It does not convey the idea of preexistence."⁵

The Son of God is here defined at the beginning of our New Testament. The sense is quite clear. It is the miraculous begetting in Mary which constitutes Jesus as Son of God. This is the Bible's official and original definition of what it means to confess Jesus as the Son of God. Tragically later creeds, dogged by dogmatic additions making him "God the Son," confused and complicated one of the most fundamental of all teachings, that the Son of God is the product of a miracle, a second Adam who heroically overcame sin, ministered to a suffering human race, offered himself as the ultimate sacrifice approved by God, his Father (Heb. 9:14). He continues to minister as High Priest at the right hand of God (Ps. 110:1).✧

The Church as the Body and Bride of Christ

by Greg Deuble, Australia

Unnecessary polarization and division has arisen amongst some Bible students over the future destiny of Christians. The Bible, happily, presents one hope for us all. Christ is the head of one body and he offers his bride one hope. There are not two Christian hopes. I would like to make a few comments about the so-called "Heavenly Hope." To me, the whole confusion Bullinger & Co have introduced in their two-hope scheme is based on a serious misunderstanding of a very clearly-stated scriptural principle as it relates to "the mystery" of the body of Christ. The mistake centers around the idea that God got so upset with the Jews when they rejected His Son, that He decided to start over with a new entity called the Church. And the Church is presumed to be the new entity that Paul talks about when he mentions the mystery now revealed.

That Paul describes the Church as a mystery is only half a truth, or probably less than half a truth, as I shall soon explain. But worse, it conceals an anti-Semitic tendency as witnessed through our sad post-apostolic history. This anti-Semitism has robbed the Church of an awareness of the incredible riches of her inheritance through Messiah Jesus, which heritage reaches all the way back to Abraham. And of course, at the back of Abraham is Abraham's God!

What relevance is this to our question at hand? And how does it relate to the Church, which is now Paul's newly revealed mystery? Ephesians 3:6 reads: "This mystery is that through the Gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Messiah Jesus."

"Heirs together with Israel" means nothing else than *joint ownership*. "Sharers together in the promise" means *sharers together in the promise*! We are told that Messiah Jesus bonded the two groups together, Jew and Gentile, into "one body"... "members together." Through his death and resurrection he broke down the barrier separating them, thus creating "one new man out of the two" (Eph. 2:14-16).

If we review the entire Old Testament background this development was no after-thought. God repeated to Abraham often (at least 6 times!) that he and his descendants would be the channel of the Almighty's blessing upon all peoples of the earth. There are at least 7 related texts that speak of this new "one Body" (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 10:17; 12:13, 27; Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18; 3:15). Putting it quite bluntly, God programmed from the beginning for faithful Jew and believing Gentile to be divinely drawn together into one body, elsewhere called "the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16), the true "Jews" or

⁵ *Commentary on Luke*, pp. 56-58.

circumcision (Phil. 3:3), as contrasted with the “Israel of the flesh” (1 Cor. 10:18).

Ephesians 2:11-13 says this brilliantly: “Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth...remember that at the time you were separate from Christ, excluded from **citizenship in Israel** and **foreigners to the covenants of the promise**, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.”

This verse cannot be twisted, surely. Once Gentiles were out in the cold, but now through Messiah Jesus we have been *included as citizens of the nation and inherit the national promises*. The Church has *not* replaced the promised family of Abraham; rather we have entered it. Thus Paul’s teaching is this: I have a mystery, a secret tucked away in God’s plan for the ages not told till now. You lost-and-with-no-hope Gentiles through Messiah Jesus are now entitled to *full citizenship in faithful/believing Israel!* Which is to say, you Gentiles now get full participation in all the rights and promises of the family of Abraham. You are the new Israel in Christ.

The unfortunate “Dispensational” teaching which tries to present a hope and a body outside of this is badly mistaken. It proposes in the future that a remnant confined to Jews will be saved and will be the Bride of Christ, or that the members of the Church gathered in this present day will be away off and apart in the heavenlies. This divides that which God has forever now joined together.

There are only four possible relevant references to the Bride of Christ in the New Testament. The last major text is in Revelation 21 which symbolizes the Bride of Christ as the New Jerusalem prepared “as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev. 21:9-14). In the metaphor this exotic celestial city just happens to have 12 gates, each inscribed with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. But on the foundations of these gates, the allegory depicts the names of the 12 apostles, which are exclusively associated with *the Church* — those international believers in Messiah Jesus. Let us not miss this. It is parallel with that “members together” and that “sharing together” principle taught in Ephesians. It is “the one new Body” enjoying the “one Hope.” For here both groups are inseparably in Christ, joined together equally as the Bride of Christ! It is a dangerous mistake to teach that the Bride and the Body are anything but one and the same concept.

I like the true story that Victor Schlatter in *Where Is the Body: Discovering the Church in the Heart of Israel* shares from his own time in Papua New Guinea. There was a diminutive little man named Ibisub whom Schlatter first met in 1963 in the Highlands. In the Waola tribe in those days when the Stone Age was very

near most men had more than one wife. But little Ibisub did not. In fact, he did not even have one wife. He had been a poor fellow all his life and had never accumulated enough pigs and pearl shells to pick up a fair bride in his youth. As he got older, he ultimately found another hapless have-not in much the same predicament. The two unfortunates eventually pooled their pigs and their shells to jointly bargain for an older widow to dutifully tend to their domestic requirements. Now by the time Victor Schlatter arrived on the scene, the luckless lady had long died, as had also Ibisub’s co-husband. But little Ibisub’s notoriety stemmed from his unique distinction among the Waolo tribesmen of having had only half a wife!

This story illustrates the scriptural principle superbly. How can Messiah possibly return for half a bride? Or how can Messiah share in the heavenlies with only half a body? Surely it dishonors our glorious Lord Jesus Messiah to say that he has only half a wife (that part gathered in this Church age). That would indeed be an unfathomable mystery. No. The principle laid out unequivocally is that “apart from us they [the OT saints] should not be made perfect” (Heb. 11:40). “There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:4-6). ✧

The Israel of God

Unnecessary conflict can arise among believers when Paul’s context is not taken into account. In Galatians his one object is to unite the international church as one body, without distinction as to race or sex.

The climax of the letter finds Paul praying a blessing on the Israel of God, all those who walk by the canon of love which Paul has been advocating (Gal. 6:16). It would be bizarre for Paul to switch subjects unaccountably and bless either only Jewish Christians, or even less likely *unconverted Israel*. Paul’s sole object is to break down national barriers in the body of Christ whom he here calls “the Israel of God,” the true “Jews” (cp. Phil. 3:3) contrasted with the unconverted nation of Israel whom Paul designates “Israel according to the flesh” (1 Cor. 10:18).

We reach the same conclusion as Ben Witherington in his *Jesus, Paul and the End of the World*. After a detailed discussion he concludes: “That Israel of God probably does not refer solely to non-Judaizing Jewish Christians follows from the fact that Paul in his letter has been trying to unify the Christian community in Galatia, not bless or endorse distinctions within it. This is, after all, the letter in which Paul chastises Peter for acting on the basis of such distinctions (2:11) and also comments: ‘There is neither Jew nor Greek for you are all one in Christ’ (3:28). It follows then that by ‘the

Israel of God' Paul means the larger Christian community, both Jew and Gentile, as he extends the blessing beyond the local congregation of those who are following his rule. The blessing rests on all those who are a part of the new creation God has brought about in Christ Jesus" (p. 108). None of this of course disturbs in any way Paul's hope for a future national conversion of presently hostile Jews (see Rom. 11) who are currently enemies of the gospel (Rom. 11:28). ✧

More on the Origin of Jesus

We replied to an objector who tries to avoid what we think is the obvious sense of Luke 1:35:

Sirs, thank you for posting a nice article on the subject of eternal generation of the Son. But please permit a question. In 2 Samuel 7:14 you suggest that God was *already* the eternal father of the eternal Son promised to David. You say Nathan did not say "I will become his father," but "I will be his father." This does not convince. There is no difference at all. The NET actually translates the Hebrew as "I will become his father."

There is no clear difference in sense — exactly as the Barnes notes you refer to points out — "to be or to become." No Jews imagined that God was going to be the father of a descendant of David *who already existed*. The seed of David must by definition be a descendant of David, not older than he. The text does not give us what you suggest. The promise is of a son of David who is also the Son of God. This is exactly the basis for the long accounts of Luke and Matthew about how and when the Son of God began to exist.

That son of David and of God is beautifully described by Luke who says that "precisely because of" (*dio kai*) the virginal begetting in her womb the child will be called Son of God (1:35). It is hopeless to try and quibble over "will be called" because as Raymond Brown points out in his massive *Birth of the Messiah*: Luke 1:32: "will be called." In this instance "calling brings to expression what one is, so that it means no less than 'he will be.' Interchangeability of the two phrases is seen by comparing Matt. 5:9, 'they will **be called** sons of God' with Luke 6:35, 'You will **be** sons of the Most High'" (p. 289).

On both counts I suggest, with respect, that your argument does not work. The emphasis in 2 Samuel 7 and in Luke and precisely also in Romans 1:3-4 is on the supernatural sonship of the son of David. He is Son of God and of David at the same time. The two are bracketed together as one event. The miracle of divine Sonship is the miracle in Mary. Jesus came into existence as Son of God and on the human lineage side, son of David and Mary. With this theology the Trinity is quite unnecessary and all the very complicated talk of two "natures" in Jesus becomes superfluous.

As Paul (Rom. 1:3-4) and Luke (1:35) agree, God's Son was brought into existence as the descendant of David. That son was later declared to be "son in power" by the resurrection (Rom. 1:4). But he certainly did not begin to be the Son of God only at the resurrection. The idea that Jesus became Son first at the resurrection contradicts 2 Samuel 7:14, Luke 1:35, Matthew 1:18, 20 and Romans 1:3-4. The key here is to recognize the prediction given us in Psalm 2:7: "Today I have begotten you [brought you into existence]." That moment in time, "today," became history when God worked a miracle of new creation in Mary. Paul also mentioned this event. It was the point in time when God "raises up," brings on to the human scene, His promised Son. Paul stated this fact most clearly in Acts 13:33 when he instructed the people that God had raised up His Son in fulfillment of the promise to David in 2 Samuel 7. Unfortunately the King James Version obscured this precious truth by adding the word "again" to the words "raised up." But Paul was not speaking of the resurrection in verse 33. He was speaking of the moment when Christ came into the world at his birth. In Acts 13:34, by contrast, Paul speaks of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. ✧

Comments

"It has been wonderful to have known you over these 20 years, to have been encouraged in our common faith in these glorious truths of our One and only God and His only begotten and unique Son! For this knowledge is Life for the Age, Life for the Kingdom (John 17:3). How thankful we are to have been introduced to you through Sid Hatch. In 1985 he left your little booklet, *Who is Jesus? A plea for a return to belief in Jesus the Messiah* in our home, and that began our wonderful journey into this magnificent study and understanding of who is God. And then giving Him all the glory and praise due to Him, of His purposes and His Coming Kingdom, all to be brought about through His Son the Lord Jesus, the sinless man that God brought into the world by the virgin birth.

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