

# How is God One?

## On the Nature of God and Jesus Christ

### Part Two\*

ANONYMOUS

#### **Who Was Jesus?**

The salient question as to who Jesus of Nazareth was sparked the Council of Nicea. Earlier in this study we saw that the Father and the Son are more than “distinctions”; they are separate beings.

We have seen many emphatic, explicit statements from both Testaments that establish these little-known truths: The Father is the only true God; the Father was the God of the Old Testament; the Father is God alone and there is no other God in heaven or on earth. How, then, does Jesus fit into the equation?

Throughout the ministry of Jesus people wondered who he was. Amid the resounding rumors disseminating throughout Judea, Jesus asked his disciples:

Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am? So they said, “Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ [Messiah], the Son of the living God.” Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are

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Peter, and on this rock [the truth of Jesus' Messiahship; Matt. 7:24] I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:13-18).

Jesus' Messiahship was the central building block of the New Testament church. No one could become a Christian without accepting this central truth. The apostle John wrote that his purpose in writing his Gospel was "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ [Messiah], the Son of God . . ." (John 20:31).

The next logical question, then, is, who was the Messiah prophesied to be?

A thorough analysis of all the Messianic texts reveals these basic facts:

- The Messiah would come from the Seed of Abraham (Gen. 3:15; 12:3; 18:18; Matt. 1:1).
- The Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2; Matt. 2:1).
- The Messiah would be miraculously conceived in a virgin (Isa. 7:14; 49:1-5; Matt. 1:18-23).
- The Messiah would be a prophet like Moses (Deut. 18:15-19; Matt. 13:57).
- The Spirit of the LORD would rest upon him (Isa. 11:2; John 3:34).

It is essential to note that no Messianic prophecy even remotely implies that the Messiah would be a distinction, hypostasis or person in the Godhead who would divest himself of his divinity to become a man. Furthermore, no subsequent apostolic interpretation of Messianic prophecies recorded in the Gospels supports such ideas.

### **Was the Word that Became Flesh Someone Other than the Father?**

John begins his Gospel with a unique discourse about "the Word." Because modern translators capitalize the "W" in "Word" (the Greek makes no such distinction), many readers assume that this is indicative of a second person with the Father from eternity. But the distinguished translator William Tyndale did not capitalize "word" in the text of his English Bible, and the result is a reading that looks and feels much different from what we're used to: "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God: and the word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by it, and without it was made nothing that was made. In it was life, and the life was the light of men, and the light shineth in the darkness but the darkness comprehended it not" (John 1:1-5). Tyndale's lowercasing of *word* depersonalizes it in the mind of the reader and is consistent with the way the

reader finds *word* used in the rest of Scripture: as simply the expression of God's mind. His use of the neuter pronoun *it* in reference to "the word" in verses 3 and 4 (Greek *autou, auto*: "him" or "it") is more defensible than "him" used by later translators who have no biblical precedent for referring to "the word" as a person.

When looking at John's correlate of this text in his first epistle, Tyndale's translation makes even more sense: "That which was from the beginning, concerning which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the word of life. For the life appeared, and we have seen, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and appeared unto us" (1 John 1:1-2). The phrases "with God" (John 1:1) and "with the Father" (1 John 1:2) (Greek *πρὸς τὸν Θεόν / πατέρα*) in reference to "the word" indicate to some a relationship of two persons. But the same Greek construct is found twice in the book of Hebrews, in reference to Jesus and God (Heb. 2:17) and in reference to the High Priest and God (Heb. 5:1), and is translated "in things pertaining to God" rather than "with God." If we understand John to be saying that "the word" and "that eternal life" simply "pertain" to God, then we would not be so quick to conclude that John is telling us about a distinction or person in or with God from the beginning.

Earlier in this article we looked at a compilation of statistics showing how often the word "spirit" appears in the possessive form in Scripture in relation to God and man. Let's now do the same with "the word":

My (God's) word: 9.

My (Jesus') word: 5.

My (man's) word: 1.

Your (God's) word: 53.

Your (man's) word: 5.

His (God's) word: 31.

His (Jesus') word: 3.

His (man's) word: 4.

Looking at these statistics without any preconceived ideas, no one would conclude that there is any different relationship between God and His word than between man and his word. Yet theologians want us to believe just that, by embracing the extrabiblical teaching that God's word was another person in or with God from eternity!

We have seen that Scripture shows us that Jesus is someone other than the Father and that the Holy Spirit is not. An objective look at "the Word of

God” reveals that it should be viewed in the same way as “the Holy Spirit.” As we read about “the Word of God” in the Bible, we find none of the separateness of being that we find expressed between God and Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

Scripture records no conversation between God and “the word” like those in the Gospels that took place between God and Jesus. Nor do we find any expression of love or relationship between God and “the word” the way we do between God and Jesus. The Bible nowhere attributes “consciousness” or “will” to “the word” the way it does to Jesus. Neither does “the word” mediate or judge on behalf of God in the way that Scripture demonstrates that Jesus does.

Some have reasoned that “the word” was “the Angel [messenger] of Yahweh” who is found in many Old Testament texts as speaking and working on behalf of the God of Israel and who later became Jesus through the incarnation. But, if this were so, you would not expect any New Testament reference to “the Angel of Yahweh” continuing to work on God’s behalf; yet we do.<sup>2</sup> Nowhere in Scripture does any writer equate Jesus with this “angel of Yahweh.”

Others have argued that “the word” was Melchizedek, the “priest of the Most High God” (Gen. 14 and Heb. 7) before becoming Jesus at the virgin birth. This is because the writer of Hebrews seems to say that this Melchizedek was eternal: “For this Melchizedek [was] . . . without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life, but made like the Son of God . . .” (Heb. 7:1-3). It is wise for us to look at other translations of this “difficult” passage: “There is no record of his father, mother, ancestry, birth or death; rather like the Son of God, he continues as a cohen [priest] for all time” (*Jewish New Testament*).

The *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* supports this rendering: “The terms ‘without father’ and ‘without mother’ are used in Greek for waifs of unknown parentage, for illegitimate children, for people who came from unimportant families . . . . When nothing is recorded of the parentage of this man [Melchizedek], it is not necessary to be assumed that he had no parents, but simply that the absence of the record is significant.”

Note that the writer of Hebrews refers to Melchizedek as being “made like the Son of God,” not as “being the Son of God.” He is simply establishing Melchizedek as a type of Christ in that, just as there is no record of the beginning or ending of the priesthood of Melchizedek, there will be no parameters or conditions placed upon the Messiah’s priesthood.

<sup>1</sup> Revelation 19:13 is an exception — Ed.

<sup>2</sup> See Acts 5:19; 8:26; 12:7, 23; 27:23.

The Spirit of God and “the word of God” are not second and third persons within God any more than the Spirit of man and “the word of man” are second and third persons within man.

Some say that John borrowed his idea of *logos* (the word) from Philo of Alexandria. Philo was an avid student of the Septuagint. Philo saw in the Septuagint term *logos* the Greek connotation that had evolved with it in previous centuries: “Philo saw the cosmos as a great chain of being presided over by ‘The Logos,’ a term going back to pre-Socratic philosophy, which is the mediator between God and the world, though at one point he identifies the Logos as a second God. In anticipation of Christian doctrine he called the Logos the first-begotten son of God, the man of God, the image of God, and the second God.”<sup>3</sup>

Historians are divided over whether Philo influenced John’s concept of *logos*. That Philo’s ideas were accessible to John, however, does not prove that he developed his “logos texts” from Philo’s writings. A more likely source of John’s concept is the Old Testament. John begins his Gospel with the same three words we find in the opening of the book of Genesis: “In the beginning.” Exegetically speaking, this has to be a reference to the creation account for two reasons:

- The phrase “In the beginning” is used twice in the Old Testament in reference to creation (Gen. 1:1; Psalm 102:25).
- John makes reference to creation in verses 3, 4 and 10 of his Gospel introduction.

As the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* emphasizes: “Thus in its fundamental thought the prologue of the Fourth Gospel comes nearer to the Old Testament (and especially to Genesis 1) than to Philo.” John’s choice of the words “In the beginning” was a deliberate attempt to show his readers a connection between Jesus and the utterance or spoken word of God. Notice again Tyndale’s version of John’s introduction: “All things were made by *it*, and without *it* was made nothing that was made” (John 1:3). Compare this with the Genesis introduction: “And God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light” (Gen. 1:3). In verse 3 of both passages God the Father creates through His word. Add to this the words of David as he describes creation: “By the word of the LORD, the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. For he spoke, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast” (Ps. 33:6, 9).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edition, “Philo.”

<sup>4</sup> Similar statements linking God and His word can be found in Jeremiah 10:12-13; 51:15-16; and 2 Peter 3:5.

The 11<sup>th</sup> edition of *Britannica* offers this comparison: “As speech goes out from a man and reveals his character and thought, so Christ is sent out from the Father.” We’ve all heard the sayings “A man is only as good as his word,” “You can’t separate a man from his word” and “The measure of a man is his word.” These sayings apply to God as well. Jesus said: “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:34). “The word” that comes out of the mouth of God or man reveals the inner character, thought and nature of each. But “the word” of God is not another distinction or personality within God any more than “the word” of man is within man. On the contrary, “the word” is the man, and “the word” is God. Theologians made the same mistake in trying to separate or distinguish God’s Spirit from God.

*Logos* is a literary device used throughout the Old Testament as “the creative principle (Gen. 1:3; Ps. 33:6), as the executor of the divine judgments (Hosea 6:5), as healing (Ps. 107:20), as possessed of almost personal qualities (Isa. 55:11; Ps. 147:15).”<sup>5</sup> The personal nature of *logos*, however, should not lead us to assume that it was a distinct personality within God.

Wisdom is personified as a literary device in the book of Proverbs, yet no one sees it as a distinct personality within God. Wisdom is also said to be with God “in the beginning” (Prov. 8:22) and, like “the word,” is the means by which the *only true God* created the world (Jer. 10:12).

The introduction to the book of Genesis includes the creation of the “first Adam,” who was made flesh and dwelled in the garden of Eden. The introduction to the Gospel of John describes the creation of the “second Adam” (as Paul calls Christ; 1 Cor. 15:45), who also “was made flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Adam and Jesus are each referred to in Scripture as “the Son of God” (Luke 3:38; John 1:34). This is because neither had a human Father; God Himself was the Father of each! The difference is that in Jesus dwelt “all the fullness of the divine nature bodily” (Col. 2:9).

### **The Incarnation**

The word *incarnation* literally means “enfleshment.” It was not, however, the enfleshment of God Himself leaving His throne to become a man, nor the enfleshment of someone with or within God doing the same. Nowhere in Scripture are such ideas conveyed.

Philippians 2 is often used as a proof text by those who support the traditional view of the incarnation: “Let this mind be in you which was also

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<sup>5</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edition.

in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:5-8).

Theologians are divided about how best to translate this text. Concerning these verses, one source states that “no universally satisfying translation has as yet been provided or ever indeed can be.”<sup>6</sup> This is because some of the key words within the text are found nowhere else in the New Testament. A careful look at the context of these verses, however, shows that the subject matter of this discourse is not the Incarnation but humility. Of this discourse the same commentary states:

Although it may have been originally composed for christological or soteriological reasons, Paul’s motive in using it here is not theological, but ethical. His object is not to give instruction in doctrine, but to reinforce instruction in Christian living. And he does this by appealing to the conduct of Christ. The hymn, therefore, presents Christ as the ultimate model for moral action. This is the most obvious and natural explanation for its appearance at this point in the letter.

In the cultural setting of the New Testament, a servant was at the bottom of the social scale. Jesus as the promised Messiah could have used his position to be served and exalted in Israel. Paul is explaining to the Philippians that Jesus did not exploit his status as Son of God to his own glory and benefit. Instead, he took upon himself the role of servant, which he was prophesied to do (Isa. 42:1; 49:3-6; 52:13; 53:11).

Paul uses Christ’s example to exhort the Philippians to be “likeminded.” In simplest terms, the incarnation was the “enfleshment of God’s nature.” This is exactly what was predicted through Moses:

The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear, according to all you desired of the Lord your God in Horeb in the day of assembly, saying, “Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die.” And the LORD said to

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<sup>6</sup> Hawthorne, *Word Biblical Commentary*.

me: “What they have spoken is good. I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and *will put my words in his mouth*, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear *my words which he speaks in my name*, I will require it of him” (Deut. 18:15-19).

John’s Gospel shows us this prophecy was fulfilled in the life of Jesus: “For I have not spoken on my own authority; but the Father who sent me gave me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that his command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told me, so I speak” (John 12:49-50).

References in the book of Isaiah to the Messiah are more cryptic, but they certainly reinforce Moses’ words:

“Listen, O coastlands to me, and take heed, you peoples from afar! The LORD has called me from the womb; from the matrix of my mother he has made mention of my name. And he has made *my mouth* like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand he has hidden me [John 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:20] and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver he has hidden me.” And he said to me, “You are my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.” Then I said, “I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and in vain; yet surely my just reward is with the LORD, and my work with my God.” And now the LORD says, who *formed me from the womb* to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, so that Israel is gathered to him (for I shall be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, and my God shall be my strength), indeed he says, “It is too small a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be my salvation to the ends of the earth” (Isa. 49:1-6).

The introduction to the book of Hebrews summarizes what God accomplished in Jesus:

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by his Son, whom he has appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory and the



express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much higher than the angels, as he has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they (Heb. 1:1-4).

Jesus was “the word” (the nature of God) made flesh. Paul said of Jesus: “For in Him [Christ] dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 2:9). Here’s the same verse in an amplified translation: “For in Him the whole fullness of Deity [the Godhead] continues to dwell in bodily form — giving complete expression of the Divine Nature” (Amplified Version). Paul declared his desire that this also be true of each of us when he prayed “that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:19). Peter stated it similarly when he spoke of “precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4).

Our discussion of *logos* is well summarized by the following:

In John 1:1-14, John’s assertion that in Jesus of Nazareth the Word became flesh (i.e., an actual human being) was an attempt to put into language intelligible and acceptable to his contemporaries, pagan as well as Jewish and Christian, the basic Christian conviction that through the life, teaching, actions, and death of the man Jesus, a new revelation of God had been given, different in kind from that made through the prophets.<sup>7</sup>

The incarnation was not about revealing another person, distinction or hypostasis in God; it was about the only true God (John 17:3) starting a family (Eph. 3:15) by supernaturally enfleshing His nature in a descendant of Abraham, as prophesied (Deut. 18:15), who would become His firstborn Son (Rom. 1:4) and through whom we were given a glimpse into what God’s nature is like and the opportunity also to become partakers of the divine nature and the children of God (Rom. 8:14-17).

### **What’s in a Name? Coequality?**

One of the reasons the Council of Nicea came to the conclusion that Jesus was “Very God of Very God” and coequal with the Father was that a few references in Scripture seem to confer upon Jesus the names of God. In this

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<sup>7</sup> *The Interpreter’s Bible Dictionary.*

vein consider these words of Jesus himself as he prayed to God on behalf of his disciples: “Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name — the name you gave me — so that they may be one as we are one” (John 17:11, NIV).

With this in mind, if we find in Scripture that Jesus is referred to as God, I Am, the First and Last, the King of Kings or any other name of God, we should not automatically conclude that this is indicative of Jesus being coequal with the Father.

Scripture is clear that Jesus will be the God of the world during the Millennium (Rev. 11:15), having supplanted the current god of this world, Satan, the devil (2 Cor. 4:4). But that does not make Jesus “Very God of Very God”; otherwise Satan must also be declared such.

In the Old Testament many of those whom God sent on His own behalf also had His name conferred upon them: Moses (Exod. 4:16), the messenger of Yahweh (Exod. 23:20-21), judges (Ps. 82:6), the king (Ps. 45:6). Yet none of these individuals was looked upon as coequal with God. All in God’s Kingdom will “bear His name” (Eph. 3:14-15; Rev. 3:12), but that does not make us coequal with God, either!

In the book of John is a statement by Thomas that has led many to think of Jesus as coequal with God: “And Thomas answered and said to him [Jesus], ‘My Lord and my God’” (John 20:28). On the surface, Thomas’ statement seems to declare his recognition of Jesus as “Very God of Very God.” But a look at this text from a Hebrew perspective allows for a different interpretation:

This exclamation was not a statement saying that he [Thomas] believed Jesus to be God. Rather it was a declaration of awe and reverence, characteristic of the Eastern culture when speaking of one who represented God. There are many Biblical examples where a person is called god because he represents God to the people. A man who had servants would be called “lord” meaning “master.” In the East a woman would at times call her husband “lord” . . . Thomas was by no means trying to document a triune God. He knew Jesus was the Son of God, not God Himself. His exclamation was a reverential expression characteristic of his Semitic culture.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> V.P. Wierwille, *Jesus Christ Our Passover*.

With all this in mind, one should reject the idea that bearing the name of God automatically makes one coequal with God.

### **Father and Son Co-Creators**

One widely recognized rule of biblical interpretation is that the obscure or implicit texts of Scripture should be interpreted in light of clear and explicit texts. For instance, four texts in the New Testament seem to imply that the Father used the Son as His agent in creating “all things”: John 1:2-3; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Colossians 1:15-17; and Hebrews 1:2. Yet God the Father is recorded in the Old Testament as explicitly stating: “I am the LORD, who has made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by Myself” (Isa. 44:24, NIV). Job recognized this foundational Old Testament tenet, which clearly establishes that creation was a solo act: “He alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea. He is the Maker of the Bear and Orion, the Pleiades and the constellations of the south” (Job 9:8-9).

Why, then, do the apostles John and Paul seem to contradict this clearly established truth of the Old Testament in the aforementioned texts? A more careful look at the text shows that the contradiction stems from translators, not the apostles! Notice the different feel of these two translations of Colossians 1:16-17: “For by him [Jesus] were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers. All things were created by him, and for him. And he is before all things, and by him all things consist” (King James Version). “For in him [Jesus] all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers — all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (New Revised Standard Version).

Greek has a preposition, *hupo* (usually translated “by”), that often implies an agent. But that is not the word in these texts. Instead, we find the words *en* (“in”) and *dia* (“through”). Since Paul and John both understood the Old Testament tenet that God the Father acted alone in creation, the point they are making in these texts is simply that the Father created all things “in,” “through” and “for” Jesus, which is to say that Jesus was the purpose for creation.

### **Father and Son Co-Eternal?**

In the book of Romans lies a significant statement that is almost hidden in a text about faith, yet it is fundamental to Hebrew thought. Paul says that God “calls those things which do not exist, as though they did” (Rom. 4:17). This statement certainly applied to Isaac (the object of the context), who was a reality in God’s mind and purpose long before he was actually begotten.

One of the first Messianic prophecies can also be viewed through this lens: “I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near: a Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel” (Num. 24:17). Jesus was a reality in God’s mind and purpose long before he was actually begotten through the virgin birth. Jesus was a reality the moment Adam and Eve sinned, which is why he is called “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8).

In none of the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament does one get a sense that the Messiah already existed, that he was currently a member of the Godhead. Opponents of this view like to quote the Psalms to show that Father and Son were already a recognized tandem during Old Testament times: “The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies Your footstool.’ The LORD shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies!” (Psalm 110:1-2). But this is clearly a prophetic text because the entire Psalm is rendered in the future tense. The apostle Peter confirmed this in the first sermon of the New Testament era on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:29-35). To David and Israel in general, the Messiah was a reality, even though his actuality was yet to be revealed.

In the entire Old Testament era, no one ever raised a prayer to the Messiah the way Stephen did to Jesus (Acts 7:54-60) in the New Testament era. The Father made it clear to Israel that He is God alone, yet He made it just as clear that He would raise up the Messiah from the Israelites’ own progeny.

It should be noted that the two Lords of David’s opening statement come from different forms of the same Hebrew word. The first “Lord” is derived from the Hebrew word *Adonai*, meaning the Supreme God. The second “Lord” is derived from a slightly different form of the word — *Adoni* — meaning “my Master.” This second form is found 195 times in the Old Testament — in reference to men and angels but never to God. David’s use of the second form in reference to his Lord shows that he recognized that the Messiah would be his human descendant as well as his superior, but not God.

Another text that is cited by some to prove that Jesus preexisted alongside the Father is in the book of Daniel:

I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed (Dan. 7:13-14).

It is stated by some that the presence of both the Son of Man and the Ancient of Days in this vision of Daniel is indicative of Christ's preexistence. But this, too, is clearly a vision of the future. The phrase "coming with the clouds of heaven" clearly places the time of this vision at the *parousia* (Matt. 24:30 and Acts 1:9-11). That is when the Son of Man receives his "dominion," "glory" and "kingdom" (Rev. 11:15).

In the book of Micah we find yet another obscure text that some have used as a proof text for the preexistence of Christ: "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to me the one to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Mic. 5:2). The New International Version renders "from everlasting" as "from ancient times." The same phrase is in Micah 7:14, 20 and is rendered "from days of old." The phrase "goings forth" comes from the word *mowtsa 'ah*, which *Strong's* refers to as "a family descent." Therefore the text could be simply saying that Bethlehem would be the birthplace of the Messiah, whose family descent was from ancient times (that is, Adam, Abraham, and David).

Another proof text that proponents of Jesus' eternality commonly quote to support their position is found in the book of John, where Jesus says: "And now, O Father, glorify me together with yourself, with the glory which I had with you before the world was" (John 17:5). Pulled out of context, this verse would seem to imply that Jesus wanted the Father to give him back the glory he had possessed in a preexistent state. But a thorough look at this ongoing prayer of Jesus to the Father reminds us again of that divine anticipative perspective in which God "calls those things which do not exist, as though they did" (Rom. 4:17).

Jesus and his glory were a promised reality from the foundation of the world, even though they did not yet exist. God's promise of Messiah (Gen. 3:15) was a reality in waiting as soon as it was spoken: "Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it" (Isa. 46:11).

In verses 20-22 of John 17, the same glory that Jesus asks the Father for, Jesus attributes to future converts as already possessing! ("I have given them"; verse 22). Are any of these converts already in possession of this glory? Obviously not! As Paul says, this glory awaits them at the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:35-43). Future converts and their glory were a promised reality, even though neither yet existed. If Jesus can speak of future converts as already in possession of God's glory (a promised reality), then Jesus can speak of being in possession of his own glory from the foundation of the world (as a promised reality).

Concerning John 17:5, the Anchor Bible recognizes a possible different original reading: "Among the Latin fathers and some Ethiopic Mss. there is support for the reading 'that glory which was with you,' reading 'een' = 'was,' instead of 'I had.'"<sup>9</sup> This reading allows for the glory Christ desired from the Father to be what preexisted rather than Jesus himself, which is more consistent with the rest of Scripture.

The divine anticipative perspective must not be ignored, especially in difficult texts that might seem to imply something contrary to the rest of Scripture.

## Conclusion

In "contending earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3), it is essential to try to determine how the authors and readers understood the original New Testament text. The authors and the initial recipients of the Gospels and epistles were primarily Jewish Christians who were staunch monotheists. There is no biblical or extrabiblical evidence that the writers or original readers of the New Testament evolved in their thinking on the nature of God to a ditheist or Trinitarian paradigm. Such formulas don't appear in history until later centuries and would have sounded foreign to Jesus' disciples.

Scripture is consistent in its insistence that God is unipersonal (that is, God is referred to more than 10,000 times with singular pronouns — I, me, myself, he, him, himself — and God is said to be "one" hundreds of times but never more than one). The Bible clearly identifies the one God of the Bible

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<sup>9</sup> Vol. II, 743.

as the Father.<sup>10</sup> The only way the First Commandment rings true is to acknowledge that it refers to the Father alone. The inescapable conclusion: God is the Father.

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<sup>10</sup> Deut. 32:3-8; Mal. 2:10; John 17:3; 1 Cor. 8:4-6; Eph. 4:6.