

# Focus on the Kingdom

Vol. 10 No. 5

Anthony Buzzard, editor

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## 2008 Theological Conference

Sunday-Wednesday, April 27-30, 2008

Simpsonwood Conference Center, Norcross, Georgia

April 27, 2008 marks the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> “Theological Conference.” It is important for us to point out right away that this is not some abstruse meeting for professional scholars only! On the contrary it provides a rare opportunity for believers in the God of Israel and in Jesus as Messiah and in the saving Gospel of the Kingdom to come together for mutual support, comfort and exhortation. Our speakers will once again be drawn from various parts of the world. They are in many cases full-time workers for the faith and they will bring us the best of their own research and meditation in matters directly related to the faith of Jesus. Most importantly they will help us to improve our own individual service of the Message of the Kingdom. The Church, Paul said, is to be equipped for ministry. Ministry is not the sole responsibility of a single “pastor”; it is the task assigned to each one of us as members of the body of Messiah.

We were very thrilled to hear of two of our lady participants of last year who, when they arrived home after the conference and the following three-day intensive class on the Kingdom of God, began to introduce the ladies of their Bible study to what they had been learning and confirming at the 16<sup>th</sup> annual conference. The ladies were thrilled with the refreshing new clarity brought to them and a united group of truth seekers and finders emerged. Above all the Bible students were taught to read the Bible in its proper first-century Jewish environment, uncluttered by the deadening and confusing traditions which have been added to it by mainstream theology.

Please do seriously consider making the trip to Atlanta and the excellent Simpsonwood Retreat Center. I feel you will be richly rewarded for your participation. We hope this year to allow extra time for fellowship and enjoyment of the beautiful setting in which the conference is held. But there will also be intense learning, as well as every opportunity for questions. A special feature of the conference is of course the celebrated “faith stories” of any who choose to give them. Many who come are finding fellowship for the first time, since it is difficult to meet with others of similar beliefs in many parts of the US and the world. The conference is only as good as its participants. Plan on being a blessing to others and on gaining a

corresponding inspiration. Jesus did say that we are all expected to share the gifts of truth we have received and at no time in history, I suppose, is the world more desperately in need of a sound, simple presentation of the Gospel of the Kingdom and the identity of the human Messiah and his One God.

### Registration

To register please call Atlanta Bible College at 800-347-4261 or 404-362-0052 or mail the form on the back page. The minimum deposit is \$50 per room. **The registration deadline is March 31, 2008.**

### Cost

	Single	Double (per person)	Quad (per person)
3 nights w/meals	\$223	\$175	\$159
Conf. fee	\$20	\$20	\$20
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$243</b>	<b>\$195</b>	<b>\$179</b>

### 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 27	1:00 pm	3:30 pm
Simpsonwood to Airport		
Wed., April 30	1:00 pm	

Please arrange your arrival time on Sunday early enough to catch one of the two shuttle runs. On Wednesday, April 30, 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](http://www.simpsonwood.org)

### Post-conference Class

Anthony Buzzard will teach “The Crisis over God: Helping Others Understand Who God and Jesus Are” from Wednesday afternoon, April 30 to Friday, May 2. The cost for the class is \$298 for credit and \$149 for continuing education. It will be held at Simpsonwood, with the same room/meal rates for Wed. and Thurs. nights — \$74 per night for single, \$58 per person per night for double. Please call Atlanta Bible College at 800-347-4261 or 404-362-0052 **before March 31** to register.

## The 70 “Sevens” and Antichrist’s End in Daniel

by Ray Faircloth

The famous “seventy sevens” prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27 has been a center of great interest for believers, although it has unfortunately given rise to sharply different opinions. The prophecy is clearly of the greatest value to all of us who treasure the prophetic words of Jesus in the Olivet discourse (Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). Daniel 12:9 assures us that the precious announcements about the final restoration of peace in Israel and the coming Kingdom on earth will be available to us living these many centuries after Daniel: “Go, Daniel, because the words are made secret [other translations speak of the preservation of the prophetic words] and sealed up until the time of the end.”

Since the first century the additional prophecy given to Jesus confirms and expands on what was earlier shown to Daniel. Revelation 22:10: “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this scroll because the appointed time is near.”

For anyone from the first century on who accepted Jesus as the Messiah and searched for truth, the book of Daniel became an unsealed book. Jesus shows this with his words in Matthew 24:15: “When you see the Abomination of Desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand)...”

Our suggestion is that some church systems for dealing with prophecy have clouded understanding with allegorical and other faulty interpretive methods, such as Preterism and Historicism.

Daniel 9:24-27, NLT: **24.** “A period of 70 sets of seven has been decreed for *your people* and your holy city: to finish their rebellion, to put an end to their sin, to atone for their guilt, to bring in everlasting righteousness [the Kingdom], to confirm the prophetic vision, and to anoint the most holy place.”

**25.** “Now listen and understand! 7 sets of seven plus 62 sets of seven will pass from the time the command is given to rebuild Jerusalem [444 BC] until a ruler — the Anointed One [*mashiach nagid*] — comes. Jerusalem will be rebuilt with streets and strong defenses, despite the perilous times.”

**26.** “After this period of 62 sets of seven, the Anointed One [*mashiach nagid*] will be killed, appearing to have accomplished nothing, and a ruler will arise [a prince who is to come] whose armies will destroy the city and the Temple. The (**his**) end will come with a flood, and war and its miseries are decreed from that time to the very end.”

**27.** “**The ruler** [‘he’] will make a treaty [‘firm covenant’] with the people for a period of *one set of seven*, but after half this time, **he** will put an end to the

sacrifices and offerings. And as a climax to all his terrible deeds, **he** will set up a sacrilegious object that causes desecration, until the fate decreed for this **defiler** is finally poured out on **him**.”

### Note on “His End” in Verse 26b

The Hebrew interlinear translates “end of him.” The RV of 1881 corrected the KJV giving us also “his end.” Rotherham and JB have “his end” in the main text. NJB has “the end of that prince.” The phrase “**his** end” is in many footnotes (NASB, ESV, NWT. For a fuller discussion of this point, see “A Close Look at Dan. 9:26, 27” at [www.restorationfellowship.org](http://www.restorationfellowship.org)). Keil demonstrates that grammatically “**his** end” is correct. Contextually “his end” refers to the singular subject “**the prince who is to come**” and not “the city and the sanctuary,” in which case we would expect “*their* end.”

### Messiah Is Not the One Who “Causes Sacrifice and Gift Offering to Cease”

“The prince who is to come whose end comes in the flood” in verse 26 is the *nearest antecedent* of the later statements: “**he** must make a firm covenant” and “**he** will cause gift offering and sacrifice to cease.” Therefore this prince must be someone other than the Messiah.

“A firm covenant” cannot be the New Covenant, as taught in Historicism, because this was not a covenant made for one “seven,” i.e. seven years, but forever. There was never any covenant made by the Messiah for only seven years.

If Messiah were to be identified as this “prince” it would require us to identify him as the one who sets up the Abomination, i.e. the desolator/defiler.

If Messiah were to be identified as the one who will cause “sacrifice and gift offering to cease” he must also be the “desolator,” i.e. the unholy leader, not the Messiah. Yet the parallel prophecy in Daniel 11:31 says: “His [King of the North’s, v. 25] armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress, and will abolish *the daily sacrifice*. Then they will **set up the abomination that causes desolation**.” *Rather than Messiah it is the armies of the King of the North that remove the daily sacrifice.*

### Preterism (describing a completed action or condition)

This system of interpreting prophecy presents Jesus in Matthew 24 as foretelling his bringing of judgment on Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70 and his own *invisible* return at that time. On this theory, all prophecy was fulfilled at that time. The Preterist system is based on a mistaken idea concerning the book of Revelation: that the theme of Revelation is the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 rather than Jesus’ yet future second coming. Preterism depends on an early date for Revelation, about 65 AD, rather than the generally accepted date of the early-mid 90s AD.

## The Biblical Description Does Not Correspond to the AD 70 Event

According to Daniel 9:27 the prophesied desolator of Jerusalem is to “make a covenant with the many for one unit of seven,” i.e. seven years. Yet no such covenant was ever made by the Roman General Titus.

Zechariah 12 and 14 both show that it is not just a single nation’s army, as with Rome, that attacks Jerusalem, but those of many nations. Also Jesus speaks of armies in Luke 21:20.

The Romans breached the wall of the city and Titus entered the shambles of a temple 29 days after it had been gutted by fire. So the Romans only desecrated the ruins of the temple. This does not correspond with Daniel’s description of the Abomination of Desolation to which Jesus alluded. According to the parallel prophecy of 2 Thessalonians 2 this Abomination will sit in the temple of God and proclaim himself to be God.

Jesus spoke of the Abomination of Desolation “standing where **he** ought not to” (see the original Greek and various translations and many commentaries).

Both Daniel 9:26 and 2 Thessalonians 2:8 show that “the prince who is to come” (“the man of lawlessness”) comes to “his end” at that time, i.e. he dies soon after his invasion of Jerusalem. Yet General Titus did not die then, but went on to become emperor at Rome.

The destruction of the temple sacrificial system in AD 70 does not correspond to the abolition of the daily sacrifices in Daniel’s prophecies (Dan. 8:9-14) because this event is linked with a special period of 1290 days plus an additional 45 days (Dan. 12:11-12), after which Daniel “will rise again for [his] allotted portion at the end of the age.” If Preterism were correct, the resurrection should have occurred soon after the AD 70 destruction. It is perfectly obvious that the resurrection of the dead did not occur in the first century AD!

### The Disciples’ Question

Matthew 24:3: “Tell us, when will these things happen [destruction of the temple], and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”

These three events are locked together in the same time-frame and so must occur in the same period with Jesus returning at the end of the age when the temple is destroyed. Thus, either the end of the age and the second coming were in AD 70, or Jesus is yet to return immediately following the destruction of a future temple. The words of Jesus absolutely forbid a period of (so far) two millennia between trouble in the temple and his second coming.

### Jesus Returns Visibly

The Preterist system is unpersuasive because, according to Scripture, Jesus must return visibly. This has never happened.

## The Reality of Kingdom Conditions on Earth

If the Preterist view is right the world would be very different — a veritable paradise instead of a place of poverty, with starvation affecting millions and continuing serious wars.

### Not a “Mystical” First Resurrection

The Preterist system denies the biblical description of the first resurrection. Roman Catholicism first wrongly described the first resurrection as figurative, but this leads to several problems:

The future first resurrection of the saints is based on the resurrection of Jesus which was that of his own actual body, changed to be imperishable and immortal.

In the Preterist system Christians since AD 70 have clearly missed out on the rewards promised at the resurrection. They are left with no biblical hope.

### Historicism

This approach to prophecy stretches the Great Tribulation over the past 2000 years, and looks back to events in history since Jesus’ time in an attempt to find fulfillments for the prophecies of the book of Revelation. For some Historicists *the last days* began in 1799 (there are many contradictory systems) when Napoleon captured the pope of the time. What has already been said about the AD 70 Jerusalem event as not fulfilling Bible prophecy applies also to Historicism. The time scheme of Historicism is based on the following theory:

### The “Day for a Year” Theory

The principle on which the day/year theory is based comes from only two Scriptures:

Numbers 14:34: “By the number of the days that you spied out the land, 40 days, *a day for a year*, you will answer for your error *40 years*.”

Ezekiel 4:5-6: “390 days, equal to the number of years of their [Israel’s] punishment...and you must carry the error of the house of Judah 40 days. *A day for a year*...”

However, this concept applied only on these two occasions and is, therefore, not a general principle to be applied to other time-based prophecies. The theory fails because both these events were literally fulfilled. In Numbers 14:34 forty years was the period of the prophecy and forty years was the period of the wandering. In Ezekiel 4:5, 390 years and 40 years were the periods of the prophecies and their fulfillments. Nothing in the Bible indicates that these texts should be used as a controlling rule for the interpretation of biblical time periods. So the day/year theory is generally rejected by modern scholars. *If Daniel or John in Revelation had wanted to indicate 1260 years there is no reason for them to have written 1260 days.*

So 1260 days in Daniel and Revelation should not be turned into 1260 years in order to arrive at the conclusions given by Historicists regarding the return of

Jesus. Too many failed dates for Jesus' coming have resulted from the mistaken theory that prophetic days must be read as years. The classic failed date of 1844 was based on a misuse of the Bible. The day/year theory was the cause of the problem and failure.

### Historicism's 70<sup>th</sup> "Seven"

To make the 70<sup>th</sup> "seven" terminate in the first century, Historicism is dependent on the idea that Jesus' ministry lasted for exactly 3½ years as the first half of the 70<sup>th</sup> "seven." However, the scriptural record does not provide sufficient information for certainty on this point.

For the second half of the 70<sup>th</sup> "seven," Historicism requires that a further 3½ years passed from the time of Jesus' death until either Stephen's murder or the conversion of Cornelius as the first of the Gentiles. However, there is no time-line given for these events in the Scriptures. An end for the 70<sup>th</sup> "seven" in AD 33 is pure speculation.

To make their version of the last half of the 70<sup>th</sup> "seven" a special time, Historicists say that the Gentiles were intentionally shut out of the new covenant arrangement for a period of 3½ years. Yet when Jesus after his resurrection gave the great preaching commission, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations [Gk. *ethnos*, elsewhere translated 'Gentiles'], baptizing them..." (Matt. 28:18), he gave no indication of any such exclusion of Gentiles.

Daniel 9 describes the desolation of Jerusalem as occurring before the close of the 70 "sevens." Yet Historicism presents a scenario of the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem which is some 37 years *after* the AD 33/34 supposed (according to Historicism) close of the 70 "sevens."

In Daniel 9:24 the description of the six blessings at the end of the 70 "sevens" is one of restoration — not one of destruction for Jerusalem, as in AD 70.

The description of what should result at the end of the 70 "sevens" is one of desolation *for the desolator* (Dan. 9:27). This did not happen to Titus in AD 70.

### Futurism

This approach to prophecy views all end-time prophecy as yet to be fulfilled, so that large sections of the book of Daniel, most sections of the book of Revelation, the Olivet discourse and 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 are yet to be fulfilled.

### The Evidence

The 70<sup>th</sup> "seven" describes a *future* period of time marked by the significant events connected with the end of the age and Jesus' return. This view maintains that the 70<sup>th</sup> "seven" was not completed in the 30s/40s AD. The placing of the last "seven" in the future is justified because the events prophesied for the "seventy sevens" belong to specific periods of history *cut out* of history as a whole, and needing special attention in God's plan. The prophecy of Daniel 9 is not a prophecy of one

uninterrupted period of time, but of different and separate periods containing critical events in God's salvation program.

Jesus links "the end of the age" (Matt. 24:3, 13-15) with the appearance of "the Abomination of Desolation." "The end of the age" is defined in Matthew as always the future time of Jesus' arrival (Matt. 13:39, 40, 49; 24:3; 28:20; cp. Dan. 12:13). Because the "end of the age" has *not yet occurred* and "the Abomination of Desolation" is placed by Daniel 9:27 in the last half of Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> "seven," that final "seven" must be yet future.

The rapid-fire eschatological events described by Jesus in the Olivet discourse show that Jesus' return will follow "*immediately after*" the Great Tribulation which will be triggered by the setting up of "the Abomination of Desolation" (Matt. 24:15, 21, 29). Hence both events must lie in the future, unless one believes that Jesus returned invisibly in AD 70.

Luke 21:22 speaks of the "final days of vengeance when all these things [including the Second Coming] which are written will be fulfilled." Therefore the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem could not be part of the scheme that Jesus presented in the Olivet Discourse.

There is no recognizable 7-year period in the Bible or history which has fulfilled this last 7-year unit of Daniel's prophecy. So it must be still awaiting fulfillment in the future.

The writings of the apostolic fathers show that they took the Futurist view. Irenaeus wrote, "But when this antichrist shall have devastated all things in this world, he will reign for *three years and six months and sit in the temple at Jerusalem*. And then the Lord will come from heaven in the clouds, in the glory of the Father, sending this man and those who follow him into the lake of fire but bringing in for the righteous the times of the kingdom" (*Against Heresies*, XXX).

### The Interval Between the 69<sup>th</sup> and the 70<sup>th</sup> "Seven"

The Bible provides a number of precedents for intervals within prophetic passages. Examples are Isaiah 9:6-7, Isaiah 61:1-2, and Zechariah 9:9-10, all references to the first and second comings of Christ. The periods of history prophesied by Daniel 9:24-27 are of special interest in God's plan and are thus picked out from the stream of historical time as periods of crucial significance for believers. The final few years of this age are the subject of God's revelation.

### Proofs of Distinct Time Periods

The firmly locked together 7+62 period of the prediction and the separated final "seven" of these 70 "sevens" indicates that there is a gap.

In Daniel 9:26 Messiah is cut off "*after* the [7+] 62 'sevens.'" This statement would be strange if the 70<sup>th</sup> "seven" were to follow immediately after the 69 "sevens." More naturally the text would say "during the

70<sup>th</sup> seven” or “in the middle of the 70<sup>th</sup> seven.” So this, too, suggests that there is a gap.

The one separated “seven” is not described in detail until verse 27 is reached. The beginning of the 70<sup>th</sup> “seven” in verse 27 is subsequent to Messiah’s being cut off in verse 26. Hence the prophecy has skipped to a subsequent section of history.

Daniel had asked, When will the city and the sanctuary be restored? “Let your face shine on your desolate sanctuary” (Dan. 9:17) and “do not delay, because Your city and Your people are called by Your name” (9:19). Daniel is given an answer listing 6 blessings of restoration (9:24). A total destruction in AD 70 would represent a ghastly anti-climax, if it were the end-point of Daniel’s prophecy.

Although the basis for these blessings has been laid in Christ’s sacrifice, the 6 blessings have not yet been fully accomplished and will only be completely realized at the arrival of the Kingdom. This indicates that the 490 years have not been concluded.

NOTE: The city, the sanctuary and the people were not restored at any time between AD 30-36 or AD 70 and are not yet restored. It would also be a colossal disappointment for such a grand prophecy to terminate simply with the acceptance of Gentiles into the congregation in about AD 33.

Jesus’ statement in Matthew 24:15 that the appearance of the Abomination of Desolation (Dan. 9:27) is connected with his Second Coming tells us that the Abomination is an event very close in time to the Second Coming of Jesus, not millennia before.

General Titus did not fulfill the role of “the prince who is to come” (9:26) because he did not die in AD 70. Yet this prince “comes to his end” as indicated in 11:45 and 9:26: “even to the end there shall be war; desolations are determined.” Once the destruction of Jerusalem has begun there will be no respite until Antichrist is destroyed. This was not the case in AD 70, and there were no wars from AD 30-40. So “the prince who is to come” has not yet come.

The fact is that there has been a long period of Gentile supremacy beyond AD 70. Jerusalem is still not restored. The restoration awaits the completion of the final “seven.” This shows that the 70 “sevens” are not meant to describe a single continuous period of time, but different times selected from different points in God’s unfolding story.

The prophecy of Daniel 2, 7, 8 and 10/12 all terminate with the end of the age. This unity would be disturbed if the prophecy in chapter 9 did not also terminate at the same point. This of necessity pushes the 70<sup>th</sup> seven into the future. The terminating comments in each of the five prophecies are given below:

Daniel 2:44: “In the days of those kings the God of heaven will **set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed**...It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms.”

Daniel 7:25, 27: “He [little horn] shall wear down the saints for 3½ years...**His [God’s] kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom** and all the dominions will serve and obey him.”

Daniel 8:13, 17: “How long will the vision about regular sacrifice apply, while the transgression causes horror?...The vision pertains to **the time of the end**.”

Daniel 9:26, 27: 70<sup>th</sup> week: “to **the end** there shall be war...**Abomination** [shown by Jesus to be future]...he makes desolate...**until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator**.”

Daniel 10:14: “...what will happen to your people **in the latter days**, for the vision pertains to the days yet future.” This relates to what is described in chapters 11 and 12 where the King of the North comes to his end after the great tribulation.

Logically vision 4 (the 70 “sevens”) maintains the same pattern and is also completed at the time of the end and not in the first century.

### Conclusion

For these reasons the Preterist and Historicist approaches to prophecy do not match the biblical data. The Futurist approach was held by the early Christians and has the great advantage of recognizing that:

The Great Tribulation, the return of Jesus and the first resurrection are all yet future.

One can take the biblical statements at face value — i.e. days are days.

We don’t need to reposition the events Jesus described in Matthew 24 and cause a jumble, by dividing his answer to the disciples’ single question about his return and the end of the age in connection with trouble in the Temple. As it turns out, AD 70 is not the event prophesied. Jesus did not come back “immediately after the [great, v. 21] tribulation of *those* days” (Matt. 24:29).

Above all we avoid the impossible idea that we have been living in the awful days of the Great Tribulation since AD 70. Tribulation in general is characteristic of the Christian life at any time, but the **Great** Tribulation is an event clearly fixed by Daniel 12:1 and Matthew 24:21 and is certainly not nearly two millennia long!

### APPENDIX: The Beginning and the End of the 69 “Sevens” of Years

There are varying views regarding when the “sevens” began. However, the one that seems to fit best with the biblical and historical descriptions and astronomical calculations is detailed below.

Daniel 9:25, NIV: “From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One,

the ruler, comes, there will be 7 ‘sevens’ and 62 ‘sevens’” = 483 years.

The work of Dr. Harold Hoehner in refinement of Sir Robert Anderson’s work is the most widely accepted view. It begins with the decree to rebuild Jerusalem in the 20<sup>th</sup> year of Artaxerxes Longimanus — 444 BC.

Because the length of the last half of the 70<sup>th</sup> “seven” can be ascertained from Daniel 12 and Revelation 11, 12 and 13 as 1260 days, 42 months or 3½ years, it can be seen that Daniel was working from prophetic years of 360 days each. So if the 70<sup>th</sup> “seven” is based on a 360-day year this must also be the case for the earlier “sevens.”

NOTE: On this futurist scheme “the sanctuary” of Daniel 9:26 is Jewish, a yet to be built sanctuary as predicted in Revelation 11:1, 2 (unless this is taken in some way figuratively), 2 Thessalonians 2:4, Matthew 24:15, Mark 13:14, and Daniel 12:11. ✧

## There Is No “God, the Trinity” in the Bible

There is an easy way to engage your neighbor in a Bible discussion about who God and Jesus are. If your friend says “Jesus is God,” point out to him that since he also says “the Father is God,” that makes two who are God and this is not One God! It is two Gods. Two items which are both chairs makes two chairs, according to the ordinary laws of communication. 2x cannot equal one x. Invite your dialogue partner to show you a verse out of 31,000 Bible verses where “God” means the triune God or “God the Trinity.” He has some 12,000 chances, since the words for God are *Adonai* (Lord, 449 times), *Yahweh* (LORD, 7000 times), *Elohim* (God, 2600 times), and *Theos* (God, 1300 times). Where do any of these mean the triune God, or God, the Trinity?

He will not find one example. This shows that when the Bible says “God” it never signifies the triune God, and thus the Trinity is never mentioned as God in the Bible. The same is true of a “biune” God, or two-Person God. No verse which says “God,” or “Lord God” or “LORD” means a tri-Personal God. Yet the God of nearly all the churches is a triune God.

Ask your dialogue partner to explain the creed of Jesus in Mark 12:28-34. This is the creed of Israel, as the scribe, with whom Jesus discusses who God is, knows well. Jesus agrees entirely with that *Jewish* creed. That creed could not possibly be a Trinitarian creed, and so Jesus knows nothing of a triune God. Jesus defines God in perfect agreement with the professional scholar who was not a Trinitarian. Thus Jesus was not a Trinitarian. So why would Christians be Trinitarians, if Jesus certainly was not?

If Jesus is not God (if he were, that would make two Gods), who is Jesus? We all know he is *the Son* of God, but what does “Son of God” mean? Did God beget His Son *twice* — once in eternity and once in around 2 or 3 BC? The Son was begotten once (Luke 1:35; Matt. 1:18, 20, 1 John 5:18, not KJV) and to be begotten means to be “caused to *come into existence*.” Therefore Jesus the Son was not in existence before that time, and he cannot possibly be God, who has always existed. Jesus, the Son of God, later died (Rom. 5:10), and since God is immortal He cannot by definition die.

The Father, Jesus said, is “the only one who is truly God” (John 17:3), and so the Son cannot also be God. If the President of the USA is the only one in that office, there cannot be a second President of the USA.

Professor James Dunn, currently one of the world’s experts on Christology, states the facts: “The idea of preexistence is absent from Matthew (we are still far from talk of the eternal being of God in its threefold inner relationships [the Trinity]).”<sup>1</sup>

Without preexistence — a preexisting Son of God — there can be no Trinity, no “God the Son.” Matthew’s idea of Jesus is that his Sonship “dates from his conception and it is attributed to the creative power of the Spirit” (p. 50). The Son is thus, of course, according to Matthew a created person, beginning at a moment in history, *the view which was later flatly contradicted by the official creeds*, which thus obscured Matthew’s understanding of who Jesus was.

Equally clearly, Luke asserts the Sonship of Jesus only from his birth, and not before. Luke presents us with no preexistent Son and thus no Trinity. What Luke teaches us as the true faith is that Jesus, the Son of God, began as the direct result of “a virginal conception by divine power without the participation of any man” (p. 50). Dunn expands his observation of Luke’s teaching:

“It is sufficiently clear that it is a begetting, a becoming which is in view, the *coming into existence* of one who will be called and will in fact be the Son of God, not the transition of a preexistent being to become the soul of a human baby or the metamorphosis of a divine being into a human fetus. Luke’s intention is clearly to describe the creative process of begetting...Similarly in Acts there is no sign of any Christology of preexistence” (p. 51, emphasis added).

Dunn is absolutely right here, and his words should caution us against the claims of those who differ from Matthew and Luke by stating that “Christ Jesus was thoroughly changed or metamorphized (sic) into flesh when He came to this earth...He was metamorphized from a spirit being into a fleshly existence.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Christology in the Making*, p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> Ernest L. Martin, *The Divine Titles and Their Christian Significance*, pp. 21, 17.

This is exactly what Matthew and Luke do *not* say. Rather, in their extensive description of who Jesus is they make clear that *his origin* as Son was in the womb of Mary. In the most lucid statement of all Luke says that it is *precisely because* of the virginal conception of the Son through the miraculous power of the Father, that Jesus is the Son of God. This text (Luke 1:35) provides us with a perfect definition of the term Son of God. Jesus is the Son of God expressly because God, by physical and biological miracle, procreated him in Mary. That is the biblical basis of Jesus' Sonship and the reason why he is indeed the unique Son of God. Luke, as Dunn says, is not the slightest bit interested in what the Church in post-biblical times taught, i.e., that the Son had *no beginning* in time at all! Luke did not recognize any "eternal Son" of the later creeds. Luke did not hint at any metamorphosis of a preexistent being, "the metamorphosis of a divine being into a human fetus." Luke and Matthew were obviously non-Trinitarians and would not be welcome in most evangelical or other congregations. This is worth serious consideration: Matthew and Luke would be rejected from the Church as heretics.

Most Bible readers have not given serious attention to this amazing notion of "preexistence" or a "pre-human existence." If you preexist your own birth, then your birth is not the beginning of your existence. If you have a pre-human existence, then you enter the womb of your mother from outside and do not originate in it. The whole concept smacks of paganism, "gods becoming men." German theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg makes our point about the absence of any pre-human existence in Matthew's and Luke's teaching about Jesus: "While in Luke the divine Sonship is established by the almighty activity of the divine Spirit upon Mary (Luke 1:35), in Matthew it is apparently thought of even more emphatically in the sense of a supernatural procreation (Matt. 1:18)...Jesus' uniqueness [is] expressed in the mode of his birth...[The virgin birth] explains the divine Sonship *literally* in such a way that Jesus was creatively begotten by the Spirit of God (Luke 1:35).

"Jesus' virgin birth stands in an irreconcilable contradiction to the Christology of the Incarnation of the preexistent Son of God [and thus to the Trinity]...Jesus first *became* God's Son through Mary's conception...[Preexistence] is irreconcilable with this: that the divine Sonship as such was first established in time. Sonship *cannot at the same time consist in preexistence and still have its origin only in the divine procreation of Jesus in Mary.*"<sup>3</sup>

If one is going to believe in a Son of God who antedates his own begetting (an illogical concept) one denies the human origin of Jesus. No person can begin

to exist if he already exists! Matthew and Luke insist that the Son was "begotten" in Mary (Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:35). To be begotten means to be brought into existence, meaning of course that one does not *already* exist. The concept of "pre-human existence" is a contradiction of terms. If Jesus was virginally begotten, this makes it impossible for him also to have existed before the moment of begetting. As Pannenberg stated well: "Sonship *cannot at the same time consist in preexistence and still have its origin only in the divine procreation of Jesus in Mary.*" Such would be sheer contradiction, giving with one hand and taking away with the other. Prince of church history Adolf Harnack confirms our point: "The miraculous genesis of Christ in the virgin and a real preexistence of Christ are of course mutually exclusive." Thus to say that the Son begotten in Mary had a pre-human existence is an abuse of language, just as claiming that "the Father is God and the Son is God" means that there is One God.

We invite the reader's careful attention to the remarks of a French professor of the history of religion. Albert Réville, D.D, wrote in 1905: "No thought of preexistence or Incarnation was associated in the minds [of Matthew and Luke] with the dogma [of the virgin birth]. The fact is that the two ideas cannot be reconciled. A preexistent being who becomes man reduces himself, if you will, to the state of a human embryo; but he is not conceived by action exterior to himself in the womb of a woman. Conception [and begetting] is the point at which an individual is formed *who did not exist before*, at least as an individual."<sup>4</sup>

Those who speak of a metamorphosis of the Son from a preexistence contradict the Bible at the most sensitive passages regarding the Son's origin and identity. There is a vast difference between a Son of God miraculously begotten in his mother and a being who comes literally from a heavenly life and is transmuted into a human being. Is this a genuine descendant of David, which the Messiah must be? Can David's descendant be older than he?

It is important for Christians to hold in their thinking and confess to others the right *mental* image of Jesus. We do not make *metal* images these days, but our understanding *mentally* seems to be a crucial issue in the New Testament. "Who do you say I am?" asks Jesus of his students. "You are the eternally begotten Son of God, coequal with the Father," or "You are a preexisting angelic being coming to earth" would hardly have scored points on that crucial and fundamental Christological test for genuineness issued by Jesus (Matt. 16:15-18).✧

<sup>3</sup> *Jesus, God and Man*, pp. 120, 143.

<sup>4</sup> *History of the Dogma of the Deity of Jesus*, p. 43.

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