

Focus on the Kingdom

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“When you see the Abomination of Desolation” — The Key to Future Events in Prophecy

In Matthew 24:3, Jesus was asked by his disciples about a “sign” of the end of the present era of history. The inquiry was a good one. Jesus had constantly promised to come back to the earth to inaugurate a successful world government, the Kingdom of God (Jesus based his Gospel on the promises of the prophets: Dan. 7:18, 22, 27; 2:44). Jesus expected to inherit the “throne of his father David” (Luke 1:32) and rule the world forever with his saints of all the ages (Rev. 5:10; Matt. 5:5; Luke 19:11-27; Rom. 4:13).

Jesus answered the disciples’ question with the words “when you see”: “When you see the Abomination of Desolation standing where *he* ought not to...” (Mark 13:14). Note the masculine participle here, pointing to a *person* as the Abomination of Desolation. This fact is detailed in many commentaries, for example, the *Oxford Bible Commentary*: “Grammatically the participle in Mark 13:14 is masculine in Greek qualifying a neuter noun [abomination]. Hence the ‘thing’ concerned is clearly personified in some way” (see ASV, RV — “where he ought not to,” NAB, NEB and Weymouth translations).

F.F. Bruce made exactly the same important point about the Greek text and its proper translation: “The leader of the apostasy and persecutor of the faithful would be a sinister personage sometimes envisaged as a demonic power, sometimes as a human tyrant modeled on Antiochus Epiphanes (175-164 BC) and later the emperor Gaius (AD 37-41), both of whom in one way or another demanded the worship which was due to the one God alone. In the Olivet discourse (Matt. 24; Mark 13)...it is probably this sinister personage who is referred to as ‘the abomination of desolation’ standing where *he* ought not to. At the height of his power he would be overthrown by an act of God.”¹

Thus it is unnecessary and misleading for Christians to be trying to forecast the end of the age, apart from that clear sign. Paul later had to calm the Thessalonians with the information that two definite events would precede the return of Jesus to the earth. Paul knew that there would be a final apostasy and with it the appearance of the Man of Sin or lawlessness (2 Thess. 2:1-12), obviously a reference to the final King of the

North of Daniel 11:31ff. Paul spoke of this personage sitting in the Temple of God, which reminds us of the “the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to” (Matthew has “standing in a holy place,” 24:15). When Paul introduced the idea of the temple of God as a reference to the church he did not use the definite article “the temple of God.” He speaks of the body of Christ as “a temple of God.” But in 2 Thessalonians he speaks directly of *the* temple of God. It is most improbable that he uses the term “the temple of God” figuratively to describe the church. Far more likely it is a literal holy place in which the final antichrist will take his place.

This information will help put to rest the various guesses and speculations which continually override the clear evidence of Jesus’ words “when you see...” When indeed we do see this, be it in our lifetime or later, then the final end times will have arrived. Until then the church is commissioned to announce the Gospel of the Kingdom to the full extent of its ability (Matt. 24:14). “Then,” as Jesus said, “the end will come: when you *therefore* see the Abomination of Desolation, spoken of by Daniel” (Matt. 24:14-15). The Abomination will appear as Daniel 12:11 states some 3 1/2 years before the arrival of Jesus and the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor. 15:23; Dan. 12:2). Our point was well put by a short article appearing in the magazine *Watching and Waiting*:

“The testimony of the prophetic Scriptures is clear beyond question that the end of the age (Matt. 24:3) will follow upon the fulfillment of certain **conspicuous events which are to be observed by Christ’s disciples** as signs of the approaching end and the arrival of the Day of the Lord. Jesus even forewarned his disciples — disciples whom he addressed as differentiating them from the Jewish nation and associating them with the Christian Church. These were the founding apostles of the Church, disciples to whom he gave the Church ordinances and the Church’s missionary orders — *not* to expect his return before those “signs” had taken place. Jesus pointed out the dual fact that the Church could indeed be certain of the *season* in which his return was to be expected — “When ye shall see these things, then know that he is near, even at the doors.” But the Church must remain uncertain as to the exact, *set time* — “You know neither the day nor the hour.”

“History witnesses that an *any-moment* expectation of Christ’s return [“Jesus could come back tonight” promoted by Hal Lindsey and many others] has been **mistaken. [Hundreds of failed date-setting attempts**

¹ *Word Biblical Commentary, 2 Thessalonians*, p. xxxvi.

have also proven that calculating a year or day will not work.] Scripture indicates that we have no more warrant to expect Christ's return *at any moment* in our time than the Apostles had in theirs. But when the predicted events of the end-time take shape clearly, by which we 'see *the day* approaching,' and we 'know that our redemption draws near,' and when the age is about to reach its end, and 'he that shall come, will come, and will not delay,' then, perhaps, at any moment, that is, in the four watches of 'that Day,' the Church might expect her Lord, and so it is written of that time and to the saints then living and waiting, 'Watch, therefore, for you do not know *when* the Master of the house is coming, in the evening, or at *midnight*, or at the *cock crowing*, or in the *morning*.'"²

The appearance of the abomination of desolation, as described by Daniel and Jesus, is a definite sign that the end will be very close. ✧

Recovering Jesus, the Biblical Son of God Gabriel and Luke Were Not Trinitarians!

Churchmen of all stripes frequently complain about disunity among Christians. The current ecumenical movement attempts to neutralize contemporary denominational divisions and contentions by promoting elements of faith on which all believers in Christ can agree. The question is, Does such a version of faith, an irreducible minimum which everyone approves, reflect the "faith once and for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3), which Jude saw slipping away even in the first century? Jesus wondered if he "would find the faith on earth" (Luke 18:8) when he returned. He certainly did not seem to anticipate that it would be widely believed. He must have expected a falling away on a grand scale.

If church people desire a common meeting point for differing denominations, why should they not consider with all seriousness the classic words of Gabriel delivered to Mary? Gabriel (and Luke) introduced the Jesus they wanted us to believe in. They *revealed* his identity as protection against any false or imagined "Jesuses" who would confuse the real Jesus.

When angels speak they are concise and logical. Each of their words must be carefully weighed and every ounce of information extracted. Gabriel was sent to the most distinguished teenage Jewess in history. Replying to Mary's very reasonable objection that she was as yet unmarried, Gabriel declared, "holy spirit [the operational power and presence of God] will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, and for that reason indeed [in Greek, *dio kai*] the

child to be begotten will be called holy, Son of God" (Luke 1:35).

I suggest that this Christological statement from the angel Gabriel be taken as the bedrock basis for identifying who Jesus is. It should be understood as a clarion call for unity, a rallying point for divided Christendom. What better way of calling Christians back to their first-century roots? This statement is a definitive statement about who the real Jesus was and is. It is not hard to understand. The problem is that it has been rejected as heresy by mainstream Christianity, which has reinvented a Jesus who will not fit the description given by Luke 1:35.

Many good scholars are able to put away their own traditions and write objectively about what the biblical text actually says. They are quite clear about how Gabriel and Luke define the real Jesus. Here are two examples: Three Harvard scholars, Barker, Lane and Michaels, tell us about Luke's definition of the Son of God in their *The New Testament Speaks*:

"Jesus' birth was unique...In John the Baptist's case a miracle had been required so that Elizabeth could conceive but the conception of John the Baptist was wholly within the laws of human procreation. Zechariah actually was the father of John the Baptist and Elizabeth was his mother. With Jesus the miracle is of an entirely different order. Mary alone is responsible for his human parentage. Jesus had no human father. It is the spirit of God which provides for the conception. The angel Gabriel declares to Mary that he who is so born is *shown by this very sign* to be holy, the Son of God (Luke 1:35)...For Luke the importance of this tradition was that it demonstrated that Jesus was the Son of God from the moment of his birth...Jesus is born according to the creative activity of God; his sonship, saviorhood, and lordship are determined from this moment...Luke insists that the difference between Jesus and John is an essential one which can be traced to their *origin*" (p. 286).

The embarrassing fact for churches today is that they do not agree with Luke and Gabriel. The Son of God of the churches does *not* in fact have his origin in the womb of his mother. He has been alive from eternity as God the Son! This is a very different description from the one provided here by Scripture.

Luke's beautifully concise and clear statement about who Jesus was did not escape the notice of James Denney in his *Jesus and the Gospel*: "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and the evangelist [Luke] does not leave us in any doubt as to what these epithets mean. He does indeed in the opening chapters use language of a peculiarly Jewish cast in describing the Savior and the work he had to do: 'He will be great and will be called Son of the Highest, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will rule over the

² John Wilmot, "Any Moment Expectancy of Christ's Second Coming: Is it Scriptural?"

house of Jacob forever, and of his Kingdom there will be no end (Luke 1:32-33). Like Matthew, Luke refers the *origination* of the historic person who is the subject of this prophecy to the immediate act of God" (p. 67).

The message is simple and clear. The Son of God of Gabriel's announcement is none other than a divinely *created* Son of God, coming into existence — that is what "begotten" means — as Son in his mother's womb. All other claimants to divine Sonship and Messiahship may safely be discounted. A "Son of God" who is the natural son of Joseph could not, on the evidence of Gabriel, be the Messiah. Such a person would not answer to the Son who is son on the basis of a unique divine intervention in the biological chain. Equally false to Gabriel's definition of the Son of God would be a "God the Son" who preexisted his own conception! Such a son could not possibly correspond to the Messiah presented by Gabriel and Luke, one whose existence is *determined and originated by a spectacular creative act in history on the part of the Father*. This event happened some 2000 years ago.

Gabriel does not present a Son of God in transition from one state of existence to another. He is not talking about a transmutation of an existing Being into a different form. He knows of no Person who underwent a metamorphosis from a divine existence in eternity by adding to himself a "human nature." He simply tells us that Mary conceived a baby by miracle. He announces the miraculous origin and beginning of the Messiah. That Messiah is the lineal descendant of David and Abraham. This would be impossible if he were "God the Son" who had no beginning of existence!

Matthew gave us a lengthy genealogy of the Son of God and spoke, just as Luke did, in Matthew 1:18, 20 of "the origin [Gk. *genesis*] of Jesus Christ," "the Son of the Most High God" (see Luke 1:32).

The *later*, post-biblical concept of the Incarnation of a preexisting "eternal Son" who reduced himself and took on human "nature" cannot possibly be forced into the mold revealed by Gabriel, Luke or Matthew. A preexistent Person who decides to become a man reduces himself, shrinks himself, in order to adopt the form of a human embryo. But such a Person is not *conceived or begotten* in the womb of a woman. He merely passes through that womb, adopting a new form of existence.

Most churchgoers seem unaware that the point of view of Matthew and Luke, taken as a straightforward account of who Jesus is, would today be banned from church! This is a shocking state of affairs, since churchgoers gather ostensibly for the purpose of honoring the God of the Scriptures and believing what the Bible says. One thing the Bible does *not* say is that there is a God the Son who left heaven to become a baby.

All of this proves, we think, that the Reformation in the 16th century was very partial and unfinished. Scholars speak of "the unfinished business of the Reformation" — and rightly so. The next great step forward will occur when we all reevaluate who this Son of God, Jesus really is.

Conception and begetting mark the point at which an individual begins to exist, an individual who did not exist before! It is this non-preexisting individual whom Gabriel presents in the sacred documents for our reception. This Son of God, of Scripture as opposed to later church tradition, is a Son of God with a history in time only, not in eternity. There is no visitor from another world of eternity who becomes the Son. The Son of God is begotten = "caused to come into existence" in Mary. This is a marvelous, unique human person, not a member of a Triune God who moves from Deity to humanity.

Following His marvelous promise that the Messiah would be the seed of Eve (Gen. 3:15), a prophet like Moses arising in Israel (Deut. 18:15-19) and the descendant by bloodline of David (2 Sam. 7:14), God, in a precious moment of history, initiated the history of His unique Son. This was a Son through whom God expressly did *not* speak in previous times (Heb. 1:2) — naturally enough, since that prophesied Son was not then alive! He was promised in 2 Samuel 7:14 (Heb. 1:5) as the greatest of all human beings. "I will be his father" did not, of course, mean "I *am* already his father and have been his father from eternity."

Only a few pages later in his gospel, the evangelist Luke traces the lineage of Jesus, Son of God, back to Adam who likewise is called Son of God (Luke 3:38), as being a direct creation of God, just as Jesus the Son of God is a result of a miraculous creative act of God. The parallel is striking and immensely informative. Just as God by divine fiat created Adam from the dust as Son of God, so in due time He procreates within the womb of a human female the one who is the supernaturally begotten Son of God. It is surely destructive of straightforward information and revelation to argue that the Son of God did *not* have his origin in Mary but existed as an eternal Spirit-Person. This is to dehumanize the Son — to make him essentially non-human, merely a divine visitor disguised as a man. You cannot be pre-human and human! You are who you are based on your origin (see Matt. 1:18; *genesis*, origin).

Luke presents Jesus as Son of God related to God in a parallel fashion to Adam (Luke 3:38). The attentive reader of Scripture will hear echoes of Israel as Son of God (Ex. 4:22; Hos. 11:1) and of course the prophecy of *the* Davidic king, the Messiah — anointed one (Ps. 2:7). Like Israel before him, Jesus, the Son of God, goes through water to begin his spiritual journey (Luke 3:21; cp. Exod. 14, 15). In the wilderness and under trial Jesus

proves himself to be the obedient Son unlike Israel who failed in the wilderness (Exod. 14-17; 32-34; Num. 11).

The whole story is ruined and befuddled if another new dimension is added to it: namely that the Son of God was *already a preexisting member of an eternal Trinity*. Gabriel has carefully defined the nature of Jesus' Sonship, and his words exclude any origin other than a supernatural origin in Mary. Jesus is the Son of God because he is a miraculous creation in Mary (Luke 1:35).

Gabriel's Jesus, Son of God — the biblical Son — originates in Mary. He is conceived and begotten by miracle. In preexistence Christology, the main plank of Trinitarianism, a conception/begetting in Mary's womb does *not* bring about the existence of God's Son. According to Gabriel it does. Neither Gabriel nor Luke could possibly have been Trinitarians.

No need for centuries of complex wrangling over words. All that is required is belief in the angelic communication: "For this reason precisely (*dio kai*) — the creative miracle of God through His divine power — the child will be Son of God." For no other reason, for this reason only. (Note the very watered-down rendering of the NIV: "so the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.")

Jesus as Son of God is "the Son of the Most High" (Luke 1:32; 8:28). Christians are also given this title, "sons of the Most High" (Luke 6:35; cp. Ps. 82:6). Jesus' royal Sonship is established by his miraculous begetting. That of the Christians originates with their rebirth or regeneration.

Luke has given us an authoritative definition of what Son of God means. Later creeds contradicted this and these creeds remain "on the books" of most Protestant churches. Is anyone concerned?

As the center of a new ecumenism the simple truth about the identity and nature of Christianity's central figure has the backing of those many scholars who know well that neither Luke nor Matthew show any sign of believing in a *pre-human eternal Son of God* of the post-biblical creeds. Raymond Brown's magisterial treatment of the birth narratives in his *Birth of the Messiah* makes a major point of the fact that neither Matthew nor Luke believed in the Incarnation of a pre-human, prehistoric Son.

Commenting on Luke 1:35, "therefore," Raymond Brown says, "Of the nine times *dio kai* occurs in the New Testament, three are in Luke/Acts. It involves a certain causality and Lyonnet (in his *L'Annonciation*, 61.6) points out that this has *embarrassed* many orthodox theologians **since in preexistence Christology a conception by the holy spirit in Mary's womb does not bring about the existence of God's son**. Luke is seemingly unaware of such a Christology; conception is causally related to divine Sonship for him...And so I

cannot follow those theologians who try to avoid the causal connotation in the 'therefore' which begins this line, by arguing that for Luke the conception of the child does not bring the Son of God into being." Raymond Brown insists that according to Luke, "We are dealing with the begetting of God's Son in the womb of Mary through God's creative spirit."

"Orthodoxy" derived from later church councils has to turn a blind eye to Gabriel's definition of the Son of God. It contradicted Gabriel by denying that the conception of Jesus brought about his existence as Son of God. A different sort of "Jesus" was invented and placed center stage in traditional systems. This is a very serious issue. Is the Jesus of the creeds, the Jesus under whose umbrella churches gather, really the created Son authorized by Scripture in Luke 1:35 and Matthew 1:18, 20?

Again, the exhaustive work of Raymond Brown on the birth narratives brings us the important fact that the Jesus of the gospels is quite unlike the "eternally begotten" Son of the later creeds: "Matthew and Luke press [the question of Jesus' identity] back to Jesus' conception. In the commentary I shall stress that **Matthew and Luke show no knowledge of preexistence**; seemingly for them the conception was the becoming (begetting) of God's Son" (p. 31).

"The fact that Matthew can speak of Jesus as 'begotten' (passive of *gennan*) suggests that for him the conception through the agency of the holy spirit is the becoming of God's Son. [In Matthew's and Luke's 'conception Christology'] God's creative action in the conception of Jesus begets Jesus as God's Son...**There is no suggestion of an Incarnation whereby a figure who was previously with God takes on flesh**. For preexistence Christology [Incarnation], the conception of Jesus is the beginning of an earthly career but not the begetting of God's Son. [Later] the virginal conception was no longer seen as the begetting of God's Son, but as the incarnation of God's Son, and that became orthodox Christian doctrine. This thought process is probably already at work at the beginning of the second century" (pp. 140-142).

Do we really believe the words of the Bible or has our tradition made it difficult to hear the text of Scripture without the interfering voices of later tradition drowning out the health-giving words of the Bible (1 Tim. 6:3)? There is the constant danger for us believers that the words of the Bible can be silenced by the clamorous and sometimes threatening words of ecclesiastical teaching, which mostly goes unexamined. At stake here is the whole nature of the Savior. Is he really a human being, or did he have the benefit of billions of years of conscious existence before deciding to become a man? Is this latter picture anything more than a legendary addition to Apostolic faith?

The Son of God, Messiah and Savior, is defined in precise theological terms by Gabriel, laying the foundation of the whole New Testament and fulfilling the promises of the Old. Christians should unite around that clear portrait of Jesus presented by Gabriel. Jesus is the Son of God on one basis only, his miraculous coming into existence in Mary's womb. This was God's creative act, initiating His new creation and providing the model of Christian Sonship for us all. Though obviously we are not, like Jesus, brought into existence supernaturally, nevertheless we, like him, are to receive a supernatural birth from spirit by being born again under the influence of the Gospel (Mark 1:14-15; Gal. 3:2; Eph. 1:13-14; Rom. 10:17; Matt. 13:19; Luke 8:11-12; 1 Pet. 1:23-25; James 1:18).

The "divine" nature of Jesus has no other foundation than the stupendous miracle granted to Mary and to humanity. God was his father, not Joseph. God has outdone Himself with this climactic miracle. A Jesus who claims to be Son of God for any other reason should be rejected. A natural son of Joseph cannot qualify as the Messiah, nor can a person whose existence did not originate in his mother's womb by a divine creative miracle.

The constitution of Jesus as the unique Son of God is given its basis by the superb words of Gabriel in Luke 1:35. This definition of the Messiah, Son of God, should be allowed to stand. It was later, post-biblical tradition which interfered with the definitive, revealing statement of Gabriel. Once Jesus was turned into a preexisting Son of God who gave up one conscious existence for another, Christology immediately became problematic (as witnessed by the centuries of disputes, excommunications, argumentation and fierce dogmatic decisions of church councils by which all dissenters were cowed into silence, or killed). A Son of God who is *already* Son of God before his conception in his mother is a personage essentially non-human. Under that revised scheme what came into existence in Mary was not the Son of God at all, but a created "human nature" added to an already existing Person. But Gabriel describes the creation of the Son of God himself, not the creation of a "human nature," added to an already existing Son. The two models are quite different.

Some may object that John 1:1 ("in the beginning was the word...") presents us with a second Personage who is alive before his conception. If that it is to be argued, let it be clear that John would then be in contradiction of Luke and Matthew. Matthew's and Luke's Jesus comes into existence as the Son of God, not in eternity, but some six months later than his cousin John the Baptist.

John cannot have contradicted Luke and Matthew. The solution is to harmonize John with Luke, taking our stand with Luke. John did not write, "In the beginning

was the *Son of God*." What he wrote was "In the beginning was the word" (not Word, but word). *Logos* in Greek does not describe a person before the birth of the Son. The *logos* is the self-expressive intelligence and mind of the One God. *Logos* often carries the sense of plan or promise. That promise of a Son was indeed in the beginning. The Son, however, was still the object of promise in 2 Samuel 7:14. David did not imagine that the promised Son of God ("My Son"), David's descendant, was already in existence! That Son was in fact begotten in due time. He was "raised up" — that is, made to appear on the scene of human history — when Mary conceived him. Acts 13:33 applies "this day I have begotten you" (Ps. 2:7) to the origin of the Son in his mother.

F.F. Bruce agrees with us: God "raised up" Jesus "in the sense in which he raised up David (Acts 13:22; cp. 3:22; 7:37). The promise of Acts 13:23, the fulfillment of which is here described [v. 33], has to do with the sending of Messiah, not his resurrection which is described in verse 34."³

The word, plan and promise which existed from the beginning was also "with God." In the wisdom literature of the Bible things are said to be "with God" when they exist as decrees and promises in His divine Plan (Job 10:13; 23:14; 27:13). Wisdom was also "with God" (Prov. 8:22, 30) in the beginning but she was not a person! Neither was the *logos* a person, but rather a promise and plan. So closely identified with God was His word that John can say "the word was God." The word was the creative purpose of God, in promise and later in actuality. That creative presence of God eventually emerged in history as the Son of God begotten in Mary, the unique Son (*monogenes*, uniquely begotten Son).

A number of unfortunate attempts have been made to force John not only into contradiction with the clear Christology of Matthew and Luke but into agreement with the much later decisions of church councils. There is no capital letter in the Greek texts on "word" in John 1:1. And there is no justification for reading "All things were made by him." That rendering improperly leads us to think of the word as a second divine Person, rather than the mind and promise of God. Eight English translations from the Greek before the KJV did not read "All things were made by him." They read "All things were made by it," a much more natural way of referring to the word of God. Thus, for example, the Geneva Bible of 1602: "All things were made by it, and without it was made nothing that was made." No one reading those words would imagine that there was a Son in heaven before his birth. And no one would find in John

³ *Acts of the Apostles, Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*, p. 269.

a view of the Son different from the portrait presented by Gabriel in Luke.

Christian tradition from the second century embarked on an amazing embellishment of the biblical story which obscured Jesus' Messianic Sonship and genuine humanity. The "new, improved version" has been a failure, producing hundreds of differing denominations. Once the Son was given a **pre-history** as coequal and coessential with his Father, the unity of God was threatened and monotheism was compromised, though every effort was made to conceal this with the protest that God was still "one," albeit no longer one Person, the Father, but one "essence," comprising *more than one* Person. But this was a dangerous shift into Greek philosophical categories alien to the New Testament's Hebrew theology and creeds (cp. John 17:3; 5:44; Mark 12:28-34). Jews and Muslims, amounting to well over a billion human beings, are rightly appalled at the idea that God is "three Persons in one God."

The Jews were the custodians of the Hebrew Bible and they understand God to be one Person, never three. Jesus was a Jew and never imagined that the definition of God had to be altered or "improved."

Several other "adjustments" became necessary under the revised doctrine of God. John was made to say in certain other verses what he did not say. This trend is well illustrated by the New International Version in John 13:3, 16:28 and 20:17. In none of these passages does the original say that Jesus was going *back* to God. In the first two Jesus spoke of his intention to "go to the Father" and in the last of his "*ascending*" to his Father. The NIV embellishes the story by telling us that Jesus was going *back* or *returning* to God. A Son whose existence is traced to his mother's womb cannot go back to the Father, since he has never before been with the Father.

In John 17:5 Jesus spoke of the glory which he "had" before the foundation of the world. But in the same context (vv. 22 and 24) that same glory has already been "given" (past tense) to disciples not yet born at the time when Jesus spoke. It is clear then that the glory which both Jesus and the disciples "had" is a glory in promise and prospect. Jesus thus prays to have conferred on him at his ascension the glory which God had undertaken to give him from the foundation of the world. John speaks in Jewish fashion of a preexisting purpose, not a preexisting second Person. Our point was well expressed by a distinguished Lutheran New Testament professor, H.H. Wendt:

"It is clear that John 8:58 ['Before Abraham was I am he'] and 17:5 do not speak of a real preexistence of Christ. We must not treat these verses in isolation, but understand them in their context. The saying in John 8:58, 'Before Abraham came to be, I am' was prompted by the fact that Jesus' opponents had countered his

remark in v. 51 by saying that Jesus was not greater than Abraham or the prophets (v. 52). As the Messiah commissioned by God Jesus is conscious of being in fact superior to Abraham and the prophets. For this reason he replies (according to the intervening words, v. 56) that Abraham had 'seen his day,' i.e., the entrance of Jesus on his historical ministry, and 'had rejoiced to see' that day. And Jesus strengthens his argument by adding the statement, which sounded strange to the Jews, that he had even been 'before Abraham' (v. 58). This last saying must be understood in connection with v. 56. Jesus speaks in vv. 55, 56 and 58 as if his present ministry on earth stretches back to the time of Abraham and even before. His sayings were perceived by the Jews in this sense and rejected as nonsense.

"But Jesus obviously did not (in v. 56) mean that Abraham had actually experienced Jesus' appearance on earth and seen it literally. Jesus was referring to Abraham's spiritual vision of his appearance on earth, by which Abraham, at the birth of Isaac, had foreseen at the same time the promised Messiah, and had rejoiced at the future prospect of the greater one (the Messiah) who would be Israel's descendant. Jesus' reference to his existence before Abraham's birth must be understood in the same sense. There is no sudden heavenly preexistence of the Messiah here: the reference is again obviously to his earthly existence. And this earthly existence is precisely the existence of the Messiah. As such, it was not only present in Abraham's mind, but even before his time, as the subject of God's foreordination and foresight. The sort of preexistence Jesus has in mind is 'ideal' [in the world of ideas and plans]. In accordance with this consciousness of being the Messiah preordained from the beginning, Jesus can indeed make the claim to be greater than Abraham and the prophets.

"In John 17:5 Jesus asks the Father to give him now the heavenly glory which he had with the Father before the world was. The conclusion that because Jesus possessed a preexistent glory in heaven he must also have preexisted personally in heaven is taken too hastily. This is proven by Matthew 6:20 ('Lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven'), 25:34 ('Come, you blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'), Col. 1:5 ('the hope which is laid up for you in heaven about which you heard in the word of Truth, the Gospel'), and 1 Pet. 1:4 ('an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, which does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you'). Thus a reward can also be thought of as preexistent in heaven. Such a reward is destined for human beings and already held in store, to be awarded to them at the end of their life.

"So it is with heavenly glory which Jesus requests. He is not asking for a return to an earlier heavenly

condition. Rather he asks God to give him now, at the end of his work as Messiah on earth (v. 4), the heavenly reward which God had appointed from eternity for him, as Messiah. As the Messiah and Son he knows he has been loved and foreordained by the Father from eternity (v. 24). Both John 8:58 and 17:5 are concerned with God's predetermination of the Messiah."⁴

Note: Things which are held in store as divine plans for the future are said to be "with God." Thus in Job 10:13 Job says to God, "These things you have concealed in your heart; I know that this is with You" (see KJV). "He performs what is appointed for me, and many such decrees are with Him" (Job 23:14). Thus the glory which Jesus had "with God" was the glory which God had planned for him as the decreed reward for his Messianic work now completed. The promise of glory "preexisted," not Jesus himself. Note that this same glory which Jesus asked for has already been given to you (see John 17:22, 24). It was given to you and Jesus whom God loved before the foundation of the world (v. 24; cp. Eph. 1:4). You may therefore say that you now "have" that glory although it is glory in promise and prospect, to be gained at the Second Coming. Jesus had that same glory in prospect before the foundation of the world (John 17:5).

Paul can say that we now "have" a new body with God in heaven ("We have a building from God," 2 Cor. 5:1) — i.e., we have the promise of it, not in actuality. That body will be ours at our resurrection at the return of Christ. We now "have" it in anticipation and promise only. We do not in fact have it yet. This is the very Jewish language of promises decreed by God. They are absolutely certain to be fulfilled.

Finally, where did that strange notion of Messiah as a being who antedated his own birth come from? Readers might like to ponder this from an apocryphal Christian writing dated about 150 AD. This is fictitious literature and was never included in the Bible, and for good reason! *Epistula Apostolorum*: "Do you not remember that I previously said to you that I became like an angel to the angels and we said to him, 'Yes, Lord.' And he said to us: at that time I appeared in the form of the archangel Gabriel to the virgin Mary and spoke with her and her heart received me and she laughed and I, the Word, went into her and became flesh...for you know this, that the angel Gabriel brought the message to Mary. We answered 'Yes, Lord.' Then he answered, 'Do you not remember that a little while ago I told you: I became an angel among the angels. I became all things in everything.' We said, 'Yes, Lord.' Then he answered, 'On the day that I took the form of the angel Gabriel I appeared to Mary and spoke with her: her heart received me and believed. I formed myself

and entered into her womb, for I alone was servant to myself in respect to Mary." This blatant contradiction of the biblical Luke and Gabriel needs to be exposed! ✧

Comments

"I had quite a discussion with my mother on the phone. I confessed to her that I believe Jesus to be the Son of God but not God Almighty. This elicited quite a response concerning her understanding of John 1:1ff, 1 Cor. 10:4, 1 John 5:7 (KJV), Genesis 1:26, etc. I countered with the error of Erasmus in adding in 1 John 5:7 to the *textus receptus*, that the 'he' in John 1 the first several verses should be 'it' as the *logos* is defined in the rest of the NT (neuter in sense, as word, until it takes on masculine gender by becoming Jesus, the Son). I pointed out that 1 Cor. 10:4 is figurative in that Christ is not literally the rock that Moses struck, and that the supplying rock was a *type* of the Messiah to come. Then I pointed out to mother that Genesis 1:27 switches back to the singular personal pronoun for God and so 'Why would three be referred to by "he" and "his" in the next verse?' I then used 1 Tim. 2:5, John 17:2-3 and 1 Cor. 8:3-6 and had her read all three of these to me. This slowed down our rapid fire encounter and gave pause to consider. I asked her if she saw the word 'only' in John 17:3. (She had read over it so quickly.) She paused and I called her attention to the word 'only' and I said 'Mother, I know you see it there.' She said, 'I do. I see it.' She was concerned that I might be 'taking away from this book' and therefore suffer the curse given in Revelation 22:18-19. (**She was not aware that someone had added to the text used in the KJV for 1 John 5:7.** She, like many, had been taught that the **KJV is error free.**)

"We calmed and stopped the 'tit for tat' and began to discuss how some make Jesus God Almighty and then have Him as the Son of God. I pointed out that there are a very few verses where Jesus is referred to as 'God' but they are grammatically ambiguous. She said, 'But Jesus was given all power!' I replied, 'Indeed he was, and that is the point about him being exalted as the human being at the right hand of God in Psalm 110:1.' I told her about the different uses of 'God' and how Jesus even quotes the Psalms where judges are called 'god.' Finally, she said she thought she understood what I was saying but would have to study it. She seemed really hung up on 1 Cor. 10:4. We agreed that sometimes in a heated discussion, neither side is really listening to the other and both give too much information and this makes it hard to remember. So I said, 'Mother, I should have just taken you to one verse tonight — perhaps John 17:3 and had you focus on the word 'only.' That might have been enough. Sometimes we tend to overwhelm each other and become defensive.' She agreed. Our conversation ended in an attitude of contemplation. We reaffirmed our love for each other. That was enough for tonight." — *Arkansas*

⁴ *The System of Christian Teaching*, 1907.