

CHAPTER 1

A Brief History

From the point of His entrance into this world, men have pondered the identity of Jesus. Shepherds were told by an angel that there would be born that day in Bethlehem a Saviour, Christ the Lord. Investigating, they found Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus. The shepherds spread abroad the message of their experience and all who heard them wondered at the meaning of what they said, Luke 2:8-10.

The Wise men from the east, having seen His star, traveled to discover what they had correctly concluded was an important event. They declared that this signaled the birth of the "King of the Jews." They found Jesus, by now a "young child" of some two years of age, dwelling in a house with Mary and Joseph. Herod, along with the chief priests and scribes, had understood the statement of the Wise men about the "King of the Jews" to mean the Christ was soon to be born, Matthew 2:1-12.

The Jews thought that the Christ would be just another man like themselves, though one who was far above the ordinary. The Christ would be a prophet of God who would restore the independence and past glory the nation. Each Jewish mother was hoping that she would be the chosen one to give birth to the Messiah. If John the Baptist had announced himself to be the Christ, the Jews would have been prone to accept him as such. Everyone wondered about John. Luke 3:15 says, "And as the people were in expectation, and all men reasoned in their hearts concerning John, whether haply he were

the Christ." To this end, the Jews sent priests and Levites to question John as to whether or not he were the Christ, John 1:19-28, 3:28. John denied it. When they asked John why he baptized if he were not the Christ, John pointed to Jesus as the one promised to come. But, the importance of who Jesus was did not register on the Jews even then.

Jesus asked His disciples what others were saying about His identity, Matthew 16:13-17. They said that others thought He was John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the other prophets. It was Peter who truly acknowledged Him as the Christ, the Son of God.

In John 10:22-33, the question of whether or not Jesus was the Christ was brought up by the Jews. The occasion was about four months before the crucifixion, so the Jews had been able to reflect on the previous three years. His high visibility, His obvious miraculous works, His wisdom and knowledge that refuted their best efforts to embarrass Him, His popularity with the people, all made Jesus extraordinary. John wasn't the Christ, so perhaps Jesus would be. The Jews were "in suspense." They wanted to be told plainly, "art thou the Christ?" Notice, they did not ask, "do you *think* you are the Christ?" Most would probably have accepted Him as the Christ, in keeping with *their* view of the Christ, if He had declared Himself so to be. However, Jesus told them, "I and the Father are one." The Jews correctly understood from this that Jesus was claiming Godhood. "The Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, Many good works have I showed you from the Father; for which of those works do ye stone me? The Jews answered him, For a good work we stone thee not, but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God." All that the Jews saw was a man just like themselves. To them, to be just a man and be the Christ was not only acceptable but expected. To be "just a man" and claim to be God was blasphemy and worthy of death. This had happened before when Jesus claimed the same rights as the Father

to work whenever He wished, John 5:18. They also tried to take Him when Jesus claimed to be the *I am*, existing before Abraham was born, John 8:58-59.

When brought before Caiaphas, Jesus was asked again, "I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou art the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus replied, "Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Henceforth ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." They again charged Him with blasphemy that was worthy of death, Matthew 26:57-66. Pilate asked Him if He was King of the Jews and while on the cross, He was mocked with various terms of His position as Christ, King and Son of God.

Even His disciples, after all that had been said and all that had happened, still didn't grasp the full truth. It was difficult for them to resist the idea that the Christ would come to restore national Israel. Just before Jesus ascended, the disciples asked, "dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" Acts 1:6.

The first century saw the expansion of many religious ideas and the groups to push them. Jesus warned of false teachers who would come to lead the disciples astray, Matthew 24:11. The Apostles also warned about false teachers. Paul told the elders of the Ephesian church that "after my departing, grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them," Acts 20:29-30.

The last half of the first century brought an increasing and detailed series of warnings about coming doctrinal and moral decay. After Paul's release from his first Roman imprisonment, he first left Titus in Crete to set some things in order and then left Timothy in Ephesus to charge certain ones not to teach a

different doctrine, Titus 1:5, I Timothy 1:3-7. In I Timothy 4:1-5, Paul also warned Timothy of the characteristics of a falling away from The Faith. II Timothy, written a year or so later, is even more pointed in this regard, calling some false teachers by name and specifying what errors they taught. II Peter is strident in its warnings as is the writing of Jude. I and II John are the most polemic writings in the N.T., attacking various false doctrines in exceptionally strong language.

From virtually the beginning, many Jewish converts regarded the new gospel to be just a patch on the Old Law. This attitude is seen in such places as Acts 15 where the problem between Jew and Gentile converts is emphasized. It came up again in Acts 21 in Jerusalem when Paul was pressured to pay for the ceremonial cleansing of four Jewish converts who had a vow. Paul also confronted the Judaizing teachers in his letter to the Galatians. The *Ebionite* sect grew out of radical Jewish converts such as these.

Ebionite comes from a Hebrew word meaning “poor.” The common variety of Ebionite was Pharisaic, insisting that circumcision was necessary to salvation of all mankind and the Law of Moses must be followed. By the second century, they vehemently opposed the Apostle Paul’s writings, insisting he was no more than a heathen who crept in to lead others into his own apostate views. They accepted only the writing of Matthew. In regard to the person of Christ, Ebionites believed that He was the Messiah, but was no more than a human, born of Joseph and Mary. Jesus was justified by scrupulously observing the Law and thus *became* the Messiah. He first got a sense of His being the Messiah at His baptism, at which time a higher spirit entered into Him, a view similar to Cerinthian Gnostics. Whereas the Ebionites grew out of a Jewish background, Gnosticism came from pagan origins.

The word *Gnostic* comes from the Greek word *gnosis* and refers to a seeking after knowledge, an enquiry. Adherents

considered they were privy to secret information, knowledge unavailable to the uninitiated in such mysteries. The sources of such “knowledge” that they claimed for themselves came from every part of the known world and all cultures. It combined cultural mythology, mysticism, magic and religious theology mixed with the imagination of some adept or other. The combination of such sources, and resulting beliefs, varied from group to group because the name *Gnostic* was more of an umbrella that covered many different groups and sects. And, these would change forms as time, place and leaders changed.

In some of these Gnostic sects, the Bible and “Christianity” were featured. Yet, all such groups had one belief in common. They considered that the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament to be two different Gods, the one of the New Testament being superior to the other. However, from that point on, there were varied depictions of the nature of these Gods, some even identifying the God of the O.T. with Satan.

The Apostle John had direct dealings with Gnostics. One has but to read through I John, noting the *numerous* places where he uses the word “know,” telling us what real knowledge produces, to see the Gnostic positions he exposes. Concerning the person of Christ, the errors of the Gnostics and Ebionites are answered by John. Both heretical groups made a distinction between Jesus and Christ, that they were not the same individual. Gnostics insisted Jesus was just another human without any divinity at all. Christ did not enter the human Jesus until his baptism. However, I John 2:22-23 says that the anti-christ is whoever denies the Father and the Son, thus denying that Jesus was the Christ. According to John, whatever and whoever was Jesus in the flesh was Deity; to deny that makes one a liar. This would apply to the Ebionites, also.

A position of other Gnostic imaginings involved the divine Christ as a distinct being who could not come into contact

with flesh at all, which they considered to be corrupt and evil of itself. The flesh is wholly corrupt and only through the last of a series of angels could God come into contact with the flesh, hence Jesus was only the last angel far removed from God. Docetic Gnosticism appeared in the last quarter of the first century and lasted about a century after that. It said there was no actual human flesh involved but rather Jesus was only a vision or a phantom.

Cerinthus, a Jew educated in Alexandria, appeared in Asia Minor in the year 88. This brought a direct confrontation with John who considered Cerinthus an enemy of truth. Polycarp, a pupil of John's, reports that on one occasion John was going to the public bath at Ephesus but learning that Cerinthus was there, John told his companions to flee from that place because Cerinthus, the enemy of truth, was within and they might be caught if the building happened to collapse on Cerinthus.

Cerinthus, as with some earlier Gnostics, taught that Jesus was born of both Joseph and Mary as just another human, but he was exceptional in wisdom, understanding and character. Jesus had no knowledge of what was planned for him until it was revealed to him at his baptism. At his baptism, the Christ, in the form of a dove, descended on Jesus and joined with him, thus endowing Jesus with two spirits, one human and the other divine. From that time on, Jesus was able to perform miracles, announce the Father and predict coming events. Just before his death on the cross, the Christ departed from Jesus so that it was just Jesus the man who died and was resurrected.

John makes the test of the false prophets at that time as being, "every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not Jesus is not of God: and this is the spirit of the anti-christ, whereof ye have heard that it cometh; and now it is in the world already," I John 4:2-3. He says the same in II John 7, "For many deceivers are gone forth into the world, even they that confess

not that Jesus Christ cometh in the flesh." These statements were direct references to the Gnostics who denied that Jesus actually came in the flesh. If some teacher came along and said this, the Christian would know immediately that he was a false teacher. John emphasizes the truth when he begins his first letter, insisting Jesus is the word of life, eternal life and "that which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled." These witnesses to Jesus could testify to the reality of His fleshly body, the same as Thomas, who touched the wounds on the Lord's hands and put his hand into His side. It was a real flesh and blood body.

Gnosticism was basically a loveless system of antinomianism that magnified what Gnostics considered to be knowledge. To offset these views, Paul said that if we knew all mysteries and had all knowledge but didn't have love, we would be nothing, I Corinthians 13:2. He warns Timothy to "guard that which is committed unto thee, turning away from the profane babbling and oppositions of the knowledge which is falsely so called; which some professing have erred concerning the faith," I Timothy 6:20-21.

In Colossians 2:18-23, Paul speaks of those who practice a voluntary humility and worshipping of the angels, vainly puffed up by a fleshly mind. He then warns about subjecting oneself to ordinances, such as "Handle not, nor taste, nor touch (all which things are to perish with the using), after the precepts and doctrines of men. Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and severity to the body; but are not of any value against the indulgences of the flesh." Ascetic Ebionites and some Gnostics preached a withdrawal from the world, much as the Essenes did. They practiced and enforced celibacy and vegetarianism (I Timothy 4:1-5, characterizing a falling away from the Faith), deprivation and abuse of the body along with an elaborate system of what one could handle, taste or touch.

Ignatius, a pupil of the Apostle John, was born in the year Jesus died, 30 A.D. Right at the beginning of the second century and very shortly after the Apostle John died, Ignatius wrote to the church at Ephesus. At the time, he was on his way to Rome for martyrdom. He writes about the existence of these false teachers and states his convictions about the Lord. He says, "For some are in the habit of carrying about the name [of Jesus Christ] in wicked guile, while yet they practise things unworthy of God, whom ye must flee as ye would wild beasts. For they are ravening dogs, who bite secretly, against whom ye must be on your guard, inasmuch as they are men who can scarcely be cured. There is one Physician who is possessed both of flesh and spirit; both made and not made; God existing in flesh; true life in death; both of Mary and of God; first possible and then impossible, even Jesus Christ our Lord," *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, p. 52. Such "dogs" had been on the scene for quite some time when Ignatius wrote this.

For the next four centuries after this, there was great controversy over the Deity and humanity of Jesus. Every conceivable arrangement of positions and points of view are to be found in that time. Individuals battled and church councils pontificated official positions.

We have seen in modern times the periodic return of one ancient position or another, including Ebionism and Gnosticism. The only unshakable source of information to give us stability, the only ground of our faith, is found in the Bible. Through the centuries, man has tried to explain the spiritual realm by his own experiences, explain the infinite with the finite. Man is prone to accept only what seems reasonable to him. A virgin bearing a child by the power of God; the child born declared to be God with us; the child actually being God come in the flesh—all of this is rejected by men because it isn't reasonable to them. As a consequence, men invent schemes, doctrines and positions that will explain things to suit their own human sensibilities. Rather, we must accept the testimony

of Scripture even though we don't understand *all* there is about what is said; there is much that we aren't even told.

CHAPTER 2

The Godhead

The word for “God” in Genesis 1:1 is *elohim*, the plural form of the Hebrew word *el*. Being plural, it has attendant plural pronouns, Genesis 1:26, 3:22. Some insist that this plural form means a *pluralis majestatis*, a plural used only to emphasize the majesty of God. It is true that many Hebrew words do appear in the plural for emphasis; that is common Hebrew usage. However, we will see that there is more to the plural *elohim* than just an emphasis on His majesty. It is also true that *elohim* is used to refer to other individuals and used in other ways than to refer to Jehovah God. See Psalm 82:6 and John 10:34-35. But, this is a figurative use, descriptive rather than literal. In Genesis 3:5, Satan told Eve that “ye shall be as gods (*elohim*), knowing good and evil.” However, it says “as gods” and is limited by the phrase “knowing good and evil.” But, in regard to the title “Lord God,” *yaweh elohim*, it is unique and literal. Looking at the entirety of scripture usage, we must conclude that *elohim* has a special meaning referring to the *Godhead*.

To focus our attention on the same time frame as Genesis 1:1, the beginning, John 1:1-3 breaks *elohim* down into more than one person, “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 through him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made.” One person known as the *Word* was *with* God and *was* Himself *also* God. He was not *a god* but *God*. John 1:1-3 and Genesis 1:1-2 are connected.

The one identified as the Word was the prime *agent* in creation. I Corinthians 8:6 says that we have but one Lord, “Jesus Christ, through whom are all things.” The Lord Jesus Christ was God the Word who was the agent for the Godhead to create all things. Paul told the Colossians that Jesus is, “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through him, and unto him; and he is before all things, and in him all things consist,” Colossians 1:15-17.

Hebrews adds to this, “God, having of old times spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds; who being the effulgence of his glory, and the very image of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high,” Hebrews 1:1-3.

Yet, the New Testament is not the only testimony to this plurality of persons as one God. Here are a series of passages in Isaiah that bring all of the above facts together. Isaiah 42:5, “Thus saith God the Lord, he that created the heavens and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein.” Isaiah 44:6, 25, “Thus saith the Lord the King of Israel, and his redeemer the Lord of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God ... Thus saith the Lord, thy redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb, I am the Lord that maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself.” Isaiah 45:18, “For thus saith the Lord that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in

vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the Lord; and there is none else. Isaiah 48:12-13, "Hearken unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called; I am he; I am the first, I also am the last. Mine hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth and my right hand hath spanned the heavens: when I call unto them, they stand up together."

These passages all tie together with the claims of Jesus. We have seen the passages that identify Jesus as the creator and the passages that identify Jehovah God as the creator. They identify Jesus with Jehovah God. What we learn from these passages is that Jesus answers to the word *God*, *Jehovah*, *Lord* and *Saviour* in both Testaments.

I Am

The one who created all things, according to both Old and New Testaments, is identified by the present tense verb "I am." Actually, *I Am* is the meaning of the name *Jehovah*; *I Am* is His name. God told Moses at the burning bush, "*I am that I am*, tell them *I am* hath sent you ... This is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations," Exodus 3:14-15. That name would identify the person of Jehovah for ever.

We are thus not surprised that the same claim of being *I Am* is made by the Lord Jesus. Jesus told the Jews, "for except ye believe that I am *he*, ye shall die in your sins," John 8:24. The pronoun *he* has been added by translators. The phrase is literally a double nominative, *ego eimi*: "I, I am." Jesus also claimed, "Before Abraham was born, I am," John 8:58. The verb form is the same in both places. Before Abraham ever came into existence, *I am*, Jesus said. He did not say *I was*, or *I will be*. He didn't have to do so. Past, present and future are all wrapped up in the present tense of *I am*, just as it is in Exodus 3:14 and the passages in Isaiah. This is a similar thought to Hebrews 13:8, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yea and for ever." Hebrews puts the subject on the basis of His

being unchangeable, and Exodus 3:14 and John 8:24, 58 giving us His name and all that that name stands for.

Of course, *ego eimi* as a Greek verb form is not used *exclusively* to refer to *God*. It is like a lot of other words in the New Testament that have more than one application. For instance, the word *ekklesia*, (church), is not exclusively a religious word, even in the New Testament, Acts 19:32, 39, 41, but it is most often applied in the New Testament to the special people of God. *Ego eimi* is used by the angel Gabriel to identify himself in Luke 1:19; “*I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God.*” The man born blind, whom Jesus healed, had to identify himself to the people when they doubted his identity, saying, “*I am he,*” John 9:9. Peter uses *ego eimi* to identify himself to the messengers from Cornelius, Acts 10:21, “*I am he whom ye seek.*” It is also used by Paul, in Acts 26:29, to identify himself.

In all places *ego eimi* is used, however, it draws special attention to the speaker that makes him stand out in a unique way. That is, I, I am and there is no other in my classification, whatever that classification is. As a special messenger, Gabriel was unique; there was no other Gabriel who stood in the presence of God. Peter was exactly the one person that the messengers sought. Paul was alone in the situation he describes for himself. This special and unique attention that is drawn to the individual is evident from the double nominative *I, I am*, as compared with the simple verb *eimi, I am*. So, this use of the verb form, *ego eimi*, calls attention to Jesus in some special way, and more. I am the door, I am the good shepherd, I am the resurrection and the life, I am the way, the truth and the life, I am the true vine, I am the living bread, I am the light are all statements made by Jesus concerning Himself. There is no other who can qualify to be those things. Jesus is especially identified with the special meaning of *I, I am*, Jehovah God. This fact is further emphasized by the abundant use of *ego eimi* in connection with words and phrases that identify the Lord God.

John 13:19 says, “From henceforth I tell you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am *he*.” Prediction and fulfillment would testify to the apostles that He was *I Am*. Certainly, no mere human could claim to be the *I Am* in the sense Jesus was using it here. John 13:19 is talking about something Jesus did of His own power to prove His Godhood. Now, keep *ego eimi* in mind as we continue with the next several paragraphs.

The translation of the Old Testament into Greek (285-140 B.C.) is called the *Septuagint*. It was used by Jesus and the Apostles so that their quotations from the Old Testament in New Testament writings are generally from that translation. This shows they accepted the accuracy of the Septuagint, at least in the passages cited.

The Septuagint reading of Exodus 3:14 (“I am that I am”), is *ego eimi ho on*, “I am the one who is.” *Ego eimi* is the same as in John 8:24, 58, “I, I am.” *Ho* is a relative pronoun meaning, “who, which.” *On* is the present active participle of *eimi*. The Septuagint reading of Exodus 3:14, in saying *ego eimi ho on*, is saying the same thing as “I am that I am.” This will be important in approaching other New Testament passages.

Revelation 1:8 says, “I am the Alpha and Omega, saith the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come the Almighty.” “I am” is from *ego eimi*, drawing special attention to Jesus as the Alpha and Omega. Revelation 1:17 records the words of the glorified Jesus, “I am (*ego eimi*) the first and the last.” Where verse 8 has Alpha and Omega, here it is *first* and *last*. They mean the same thing since Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. In Revelation 21:6, Jesus says, “I am (*ego eimi*) the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.” Here He adds to Alpha and Omega, the *beginning* and the *end*. In Revelation 22:13, Jesus puts *all three phrases* together, “I am (*ego eimi*) the Alpha and the Omega, the first and last, the beginning and the end.” They all express, in

different words, the same thought. These expressions are of timeless existence, yesterday, today and forever existence.

Isaiah 41:4, Jehovah God speaking, says, "Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I the Lord, the first, and with the last; I am *he*." In the Septuagint, "I am *he*" is, of course, *ego eimi*. The passage is the claim of Jehovah God to being the I am, the first and the last.

Isaiah 48:12 says, "Hearken unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called; I am *he*; I am the first, I also am the last." The last two instances of "I am" are from *ego eimi*, connected also with the claim of being the first and last. The very next verse says, "Mine hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens: when I call unto them, they stand up together." Jesus was the prime agent in creation so *all of this* refers to Him as God the Word. This is especially clean in verse 16 when the Lord says, "I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was there am I: and now the Lord, and his spirit, hath sent me." This is one Lord and his spirit sending another Lord who creates all things and is the I am, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.

Let's return to Revelation 1:8. "I am the Alpha and Omega, saith the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come the Almighty." "Who is" comes from *ho on*, the same verb form found in the Septuagint of Exodus 3:14, *ego eimi ho on*, I am the one who is or *I Am that I Am*. "Who is and who was and who is to come" is the same as what is said in Hebrews 13:8, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yea and for ever."

Hebrews 1:3 says, "who being the effulgence of his glory, and the very image of his substance." "Who being" is from *hos on*. *Hos* and *ho* from Revelation 1:8 and Exodus 3:14 are the same, *hos* and *ho* being two forms of the same pronoun. The claim for Jesus Is the same in all of these instances, "I am the

one who is," "I am," "I am that I am," "the same yesterday, today, yea and for ever," "who is, who was, and who is to come," the first and last, the Alpha and Omega, beginning and end, Lord God Almighty! All of this is brought together in a solid unity throughout the Old and New Testaments, testifying to the person, Jesus of Nazareth. No wonder the Jews violently reacted to the claim of Jesus that "I and the Father are one." They were familiar with that kind of language, they knew that Jesus was claiming to be God.

Jesus is the *effulgence* of the Father's glory. The term means a brightness that perfectly reflects the majesty of God, Thayer, p. 55. *Very image* is from *charakter*, meaning "2. the mark (figure or letters) stamped upon that instrument or wrought out on it; hence univ. a mark or figure burned in or stamped on, an impression; the exact expression (the image) of any person or thing, marked likeness, precise reproduction in every respect ... Heb. 1:3 ..." This is intensified by the word *substance*, *hupostasis*, meaning, "1. substantial nature, essence, actual being, reality ... an exact representation of his (God's) real being Heb. 1:3." Bauer, p. 857. This refers to the real nature of God, and Jesus is the exact imprint of that nature. No wonder *hos on* begins the statement of Hebrews 1:3.

This is why Jesus could say, "And he that beholdeth me beholdeth him that sent me," John 12:45. In John 14:8-9, Philip asks Jesus to "show us the Father, and it sufficeth." Jesus replied, "Have I been so long time with you, and dost thou not know me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." Notice that Philip asks to see the Father and Jesus replies, "don't you know me?" Jesus was such an exact image of the Father that to see Him was to see the Father. It was not a physical image of the Father that was before them. It can only mean that to see Jesus was to see the very being, the character of the Father in Him. This is also why, using the word *eikon*, Jesus is presented as the image of the invisible God in Colossians 1:15 and II Corinthians 4:4.

Oneness of the Godhead

To put this into the framework of a Godhead composed of more than one person, we must look closely at Deuteronomy 6:4, “The Lord our God is one Lord.” The word *Lord* on each end of this sentence is *Jehovah*, the *I Am*. The word *God* is the plural *elohim*, as in Genesis 1:1. So, *Jehovah* our *elohim* (plural) is *one Jehovah*. The key to understanding this simple and yet perplexing statement is in the word for *one* (*echad*). Among the several passages where this word is found are the following. It is translated by the word *first* in Genesis 1:5. It took two items, evening and morning, to make the *first* (one) day. “The two shall become *one* flesh,” Genesis 2:24. “The people arose as *one* man,” Judges 20:8. “They came out with *one* consent,” I Samuel 11:7. In other passages, it may be translated as *together*, Ezra 2:64, 3:9, 6:20, Isaiah 65:25.

If we can understand how the evening and morning made one day, or how a man and woman can become one flesh, then we can understand how the three persons of the Godhead form a *united one* as versus an absolute singular, a numerical one.

Jehovah our God is a *united* Jehovah. This wraps up the Godhead with the three persons we see individually in the New Testament roles as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Jehovah God

There are times that the name *Jehovah* is a synonym for the entire Godhead. At other times, *Jehovah* and *God* may be applied individually to each member of that Godhead in various passages, circumstances, work or relationships. For instance: “Then Jehovah rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from Jehovah out of Heaven,” Genesis 19:24. Here is one Jehovah directing something *from another*

Jehovah. "For thus saith Jehovah of hosts ... Jehovah of hosts hath sent me," Zechariah 2:8-11. "And I will strengthen them in Jehovah; and they shall walk up and down in his name, saith Jehovah," Zechariah 10:12. Evidently, two distinct persons are involved in these passages, *both* answering to the name *Jehovah*. This is not strange when we consider the nature of the Godhead.

Neither is it strange that Jesus claims for Himself, and it is claimed *for* Him, that He is God; not the Father, but God nonetheless. On one occasion, after stating that He had as much a right to work on the Sabbath as the Father, it says, "For this cause therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only brake the Sabbath, but also called God his own Father, making himself equal with God," John 5:18. Jesus said shortly after this that all were to "honor the son, even as they honor the Father," John 5:23. *Even as* means *in like manner*, or *just like*.

At another time, Jesus infuriates the Jews by first declaring that "I and the Father are one," John 10:30. This is identical with what we saw in Deuteronomy 6:4. The Jews knew *exactly* what He meant by that and took up stones to kill Him for blasphemy, because "thou, being a man, makest thyself God," John 10:33. When Thomas went beyond his doubts and accepted the person before him, he avowed, "My Lord and my God," John 20:28, and Jesus accepted this.

Hebrews 1:8 begins a series of passages quoting from several of the Psalms. It says "but of the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; And the sceptre of uprightness is the sceptre of thy kingdom." To further identify of whom he is speaking, notice verse 10 in the same context, "And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of thy hands." Here is the Lord God who laid the foundations of the earth and created the heavens. This could only refer to God the Word who came in

the flesh as Jesus of Nazareth but who was the prime creator for the Godhead.

There are other lines of evidence, such as Old Testament prophecies that specify Jehovah in the O.T. but are fulfilled in Jesus. For instance, Isaiah 40:3 promises one to come who would prepare the way for *Jehovah*. Matthew 3:3 identifies the fulfillment as being John the Baptist preparing the way for *Jesus*, (John 1:22-34, 3:28). There are several other such prophetic fulfillments. They identify Jesus with being Jehovah.

Son of God

What is the meaning of the statements that say Jesus is the *Son of God*? Does that not imply a lesser being than God? No, it does not. Though it is used to describe an offspring of parents, it is used in different ways in the Bible even as it is in our own English language.

Both Son and Father may refer to *sameness or equality*, such as John 5:18 where Jesus calls God *his own* Father, which the Jews well understood to be a claim of equality with God. To claim God as *his own* Father declares a special identity. Isaiah 9:6 says that “unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given ... his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.” Here, *son* is on an equal basis with these other terms. *Son* may also mean a *title*, sometimes used as equal with *Christ*, Matthew 16:16, 26:63, John 1:49, 11:27.

Only begotten Son is from *monogenes*. It is a compound of *monos* and *genos*. It does not mean to *beget* or *generate* as a father begets a son. It would require the root *gennao* in that event. It is from *genos*, meaning of particular *kind* or *class*, Bauer, p. 156. Of course, it is used at times to refer to a single offspring, one only. Yet, it also refers to *one of a kind* or *unique*, even *one of the same nature* as another. Jesus was unique, of the

same kind or nature of the Father. This tells us that *monogenes* refers to the Godhood of Jesus.

To illustrate that, notice that Isaac is called the *only begotten son* of Abraham in Hebrews 11:17. Yet, Isaac was not the *only* son nor the *first* son born to Abraham. Isaac was preceded in the family by Ishmael. But, in regard to the *promises*, in regard to the *position* in God's plan of redemption, Isaac was the *only begotten son*, the son of Abraham through whom the plan would flow. Isaac was unique, one of a kind, of the same nature as his father in that the promise was to come from God through Abraham through Isaac.

Regarding Jesus as the Son of God, the prophecy of Psalm 2 includes the statement, "thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee." This does not refer to some creation in a distant past, nor to the time of His birth by Mary. It refers to the entrance into His position of universal authority. To the Jews in Antioch, Paul applies this statement from Psalm 2 to the events of His resurrection, not His birth into the world, Acts 13:32-35, Romans 1:4. Paul told the Ephesians that the universal dominion, as spoken of in Psalm 2, is connected with the events of His resurrection, Ephesians 1:19-23. The reference to setting "my king upon my holy hill of Zion" is another reference to the events of His resurrection, Acts 2:30-36. It is also used to refer to the time of His priesthood in heaven following His resurrection, Hebrews 5:5-6. Psalm 2 is a prophecy of His position of authority in every area of His work. In *this* sense of the term, He was not a "son" until the events of His resurrection and ascension.

The Firstborn

Jesus is also portrayed as the *Firstborn*, a term that originated in the social practice of the eldest son receiving the largest share of inheritance as well as taking the place of authority on the death of the father. It was the right of *primogeni-*

ture. While there are passages that use the word *firstborn* to refer to the first son born into a family, it is not the sole use in scripture. In Job 18:13, it refers to the most fatal and deadly disease, *firstborn of death*. In Isaiah 14:30, it means pre-eminent in poverty, *firstborn of the poor*. Psalm 89:27 uses it to mean a superior position, "I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth."

Colossians 1:15, 18 present Jesus as the firstborn of all creation and firstborn from the dead. Being the firstborn of all creation emphasizes His position as the creator of all things, which the next few verses show. This whole section declares His preeminence and power. When in verse 18 it says He is the *firstborn from the dead*, it is followed by a conclusion to all that has gone before, "that in all things he might have the preeminence." *Firstborn from the dead* refers to a position. We can see that clearly in Romans 14:9, "For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living." This is a position of authority, even over the dead.

Diversity of Function in the Godhead

The Godhead is always united in purpose for whatever it decides to do, but will *implement* that purpose by the members of that Godhead performing different functions to make the plan work. In Jeremiah 51:5, the God (*Elohim*) of Israel and Judah is identified as *Jehovah of hosts*. In verses 15-16, it is said, "He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding hath he stretched out the heavens; when he uttereth his voice, there is a tumult of waters in the heavens, and he causeth the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh the lightnings for the rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of his treasures." *Elohim* claims to have made all things *and* still control all things. We have already seen that the Word, Jesus, was the prime agent in creation and Colossians 1:17 says that "in him all things consist." That is exactly what Jeremiah is saying.

While on the one hand Jesus created all things, it is also clear from scripture that *elohim* created all things, illustrating the unity *and* diversity in the Godhead. There was certainly *unity in function* but not *identical function*. Why or how God does such things, we don't know. They simply function differently in the work the Godhead has planned.

Each person of the Godhead has a function that seems peculiar to Himself, *which is uniform throughout the Bible*. Whether or not this has always been the situation from eternity past, we do not know. As best we can tell from the Bible record, the person we identify as the "Father" in the New Testament is never spoken of as being sent, but rather as sending, working through both the Word and the Holy Spirit. The "Word" is usually spoken of as being sent on some task. The Holy Spirit had a primary work as Revelator, making known the mind of God to men, I Peter 1:10-12, II Peter 1:21. Such functions were as much so in the Old Testament as the New. The Holy Spirit also provided assistance in carrying out their plans by using miraculous powers in both the Old and New Testaments. In addition to the work of the Word in creation, the Holy Spirit had a part as well. According to Genesis 1:2, the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. We get only an occasional glimpse of the Holy Spirit in His work, indicating that He has had a far greater part than we know anything about in carrying out the work of God.

We have also seen several passages, primarily in Isaiah and Zechariah, where one Jehovah sends another Jehovah to do something. Isaiah 48:16-17 shows the three persons of the Godhead at work: "Come ye near unto me, hear ye this; I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, there am I: and now the Lord God, and his spirit, hath sent me. Thus saith the Lord, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; I am the Lord thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go." Just before that, verses 12-13 identify the I am, the first and the last

who created all things, "Hearken unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called; I am he; I am the first, and I also am the last. Mine hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth and my right hand hath spanned the heavens: when I call unto them, they stand up together." Here are three equal persons functioning toward a common goal with a common plan, with a common unity but diversity of function, Jehovah and His spirit sending another Jehovah who was the prime agent in creation. We are not expected to fully understand how God does such things, any more than we can understand the *existence* of such an all powerful God. We *are* expected to believe it, however. Our faith is based on what we are told, not on what we see, walking by faith and not by sight.

Paul told the Corinthians, "and did all eat the same spiritual food; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of a spiritual rock that followed them: and the rock was Christ," I Corinthians 10:3-4. More accurately, the rock *accompanied* them, He was a *companion*. As Israel wandered in the wilderness, directed by the cloud or pillar of fire, in need of manna, and so many other things, Jehovah (Christ) was there as a companion. He furnished spiritual food and drink. He was the Jehovah of their most direct contact.

In the incarnation of Jesus, the division of function is most evident. Mary was told, "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: wherefore also the holy thing which is begotten shall be called the Son of God," Luke 1:35. The Father was in the role of the director, the Holy Spirit initiating conception by His power, and the one conceived was the Word, a division of function that mirrors what has been from the beginning.

At the baptism of Jesus, Matthew 3:13-17, we are given this scene, "And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway from the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, and

coming upon him; and lo, a voice out of the heavens, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The three working in perfect union but functioning differently.

Immediate following His baptism, Jesus was led *by the Spirit* into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan, Matthew 4:1. Luke 4:1 adds that He was "full of the Holy Spirit." That was to be expected seeing that the Spirit had just descended on Him at His baptism. This is referred to by Peter in Acts 10:37-38, "...beginning from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; even Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him." Notice that all three are specified in the tasks portrayed here. Anointing someone was an open proclamation and ordination to an important task. Saul and David were anointed by Samuel to indicate the position they were to take as Kings of Israel. From the time of His baptism, Jesus began His public ministry that would lead to His death on the cross. It was appropriate for Him to be anointed by the Holy Spirit Himself, and the voice from heaven declaring His identity. Each person of the Godhead had different duties to perform, but they were done in unison, as one, together.

To say that the Holy Spirit contributed certain functions in assisting Jesus does not detract at all from the Godhood of Jesus. Neither does it mean that Jesus had given up all powers and abilities of God and had to depend on the Holy Spirit for powers and assistance.

Because the Holy Spirit assisted in the creation of Genesis 1 does not mean that the Word had no powers of His own nor does it mean that He had the powers to create all things but didn't use them. It doesn't mean He had to depend on the Holy Spirit for the powers of creation. It only means the Godhead worked together but with different functions. The same could be said about all of the work of the Godhead throughout

history. Would anyone suppose that the Father and Son would cut the Holy Spirit out of any part to play in the work of creation just because one of them was designated as the primary creator? Likewise, would anyone suppose the Father and Son would cut the Holy Spirit out of any part to plan in the work of Jesus on earth? Their functions even overlapped at times as they worked in unison toward man's redemption.

Jesus said in John 14:26, "But the Comforter, even the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you." This is stated again in John 16:13-15 in a slightly different way. Verse 16 says that the Father would send "another comforter," the "spirit of truth." The word "another" is from *allos* which means *another of the same kind*, as versus *heteros*, another of a *different kind*. The Holy Spirit was a comforter of the same kind as Jesus. Yet, the *function* of the Holy Spirit spoken of here was to bring revelation, I Corinthians 2:10-13.

Acts 13:30 says that God raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus said that He would raise Himself from the dead, John 2:19-21. If we take the phrase in I Peter 3:18, as in the King James, "being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit" to refer to the Holy Spirit, then the Holy Spirit raised Him from the dead. What was said of one was said of all.

After the ascension of Jesus, Peter said on Pentecost, "Being therefore by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he hath poured forth this, which ye see and hear," Acts 2:33. In John 14:26, Jesus said that the Father would send the Holy Spirit in Jesus' name. It amounted to the same thing either way. The three working together with different functions.

This diversity of function in the Godhead, the different roles taken in a given task, explains a couple of passages that have puzzled many commentators and have been abused by

many as well. Jesus said concerning the time of His second coming, "But of that day and hour knoweth no one, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only," Matthew 24:36. We must connect this with another passage wherein the disciples ask Jesus if He would at that time restore the kingdom to Israel, Acts 1:6-7. Jesus replies, "It is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father hath set within his own authority."

Some have leaped to the conclusion that Jesus had to give up His Godhood when He came into the world because here was something He didn't know. Well, if that's so then it proves the Holy Spirit also lost His Godhood because Jesus said *the Father only* knew it. The passage in Acts 1 shows that being the director, the Father had exclusive authority in certain things, this area being one of them. Given the communication between the three, it is evident that the decision about the time of His *second coming* had not been made as yet. Notice how Jesus worded what He said to the disciples in Acts 1. He didn't say at that occasion that He didn't know the time of the *establishment of the kingdom*. Rather, "It is not for *you* to know the times" of the establishment of the kingdom. In any case, it was the Father's role to make whatever decision that was made.

This diversity of function in the Godhead has its most important and direct action in the incarnation of Jesus. When God the Word came into this world it was to function in the role of a servant. All of the passages where Jesus speaks of the Father's being greater, or that Jesus came to do the will of the one who sent him, only attest to the role that He took when He came here. He stayed within that role throughout His time here and yet, infrequently, showed His true nature by word and deed. He did not cease being who He was, that is God. His nature was something that could not change nor be changed.

We will see in the next chapter, on His Deity/Humanity, that the major reason for the close working together of Jesus and the Holy Spirit was for the Spirit to be a witness to the Godhood of Jesus. That was part of the plan.

Immutability

God does not change. This is described by the word that means “unchangeable,” *immutability*. Malachi 3:6 says, “For I am the Lord, I change not.” The word *Lord* here is the name *Jehovah* in the Hebrew text. That Jehovah is unchangeable is implied in his very name: “I am that I am,” Exodus 3:14, timeless existence. What the Lord tells us in Malachi 3:6 is that, first, he does not change because He is Jehovah (I am that I am) and then *emphasizes* it by adding “I change not.” Psalm 90:2 says it another way: “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.”

To center these facts on Jesus, let’s look at Hebrews 1:10-12, “Thou, Lord, in the beginning didst lay the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of thy hands: They shall perish; but thou continuest: And they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a mantle shalt thou roll them up, As a garment, and they shall be changed: But thou art the same, And thy years shall not fail.” God the Word never changed who He was; He could not cease being God. This is why Hebrews 13:8 declares “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever,” referring to the nature of being God. Some have supposed it means that God will never change the things that He does so that He must still perform miracles today. If that were so, then God would still be created men out of dust as He did Adam, as well as doing many other things like that. Others have claimed His immutability means *only* that God will never change His prophecies, He will fulfill what He has promised. I agree that He will fulfill what He promises, and we will look at that point more closely in a later chapter. However, it is easi-

ly seen that it is Jesus Christ who is today and forever what He was yesterday; He doesn't change from being God. Malachi 3:6, the verb in "I change not" is intransitive, turning back on the subject, God.

Balancing Our View

We must balance our view of the Deity and humanity of Jesus. He entered the world as we do, functioned on a human level and had human experiences. At the same time, we must keep in mind that He was *more than just a human*.

As God, Jesus planned and prophesied His entrance into the world, John 1:1-2, Colossians 1:15-18. He was conceived in an earthly woman by means of the Holy Spirit and the overshadowing by the power of God, the three working in perfect cooperation, Luke 1:35. He had no human father. Not only had no woman ever conceived without a human father, no woman had ever given birth to someone who had existed before she did, Luke 3:23, Matthew 22:41-45. The unusual event surrounding His conception was followed a few months later when His birth was pointed to by a star in the heavens, angels declared it, shepherd from the field came to worship Him and, later, wise men from the east traveled far to find Him; most unusual for a mere human birth, Luke 2:8-20, Matthew 2:1-12. He lived a perfect life, one without a mistake or a sin whether it was legally, socially, morally, theologically, openly, privately, overtly or mentally, Hebrews 4:15, I Peter 2:22. He claimed, with evidence, that He was God come in the flesh to be honored and revered just like the Father, John 5:18, 23. He claimed equality with God, possessing the same rights and authority to function, John 5:17-18. He and the Father were one in a way that no human ever was or will be, John 10:30. Though insisting that God is the only one to be worshipped and served, Matthew 4:10, He accepted worship, showing that He was, therefore, God, Matthew 14:33, 15:25, 28:9, John 9:35-38. It would have been wrong to worship just a man, Acts 10:25-26.

Though only God can forgive sins, Mark 2:7, He forgave sins by His own authority and pronouncement, Mark 2:10. He remembered His existence in Heaven and could speak of it, John 3:31-32. He knew where He came from, what was in heaven, why he came to earth, how He would die, when he would die, who would betray Him, just when all He had come to do was finished and where He was going, John 6:38, 14:2, 12:32, 18:4, 13:1, 6:64, 19:28, 6:62, 7:33. As was His life, His death was pre-determined and prophesied, Acts 2:23. When He died, his spirit separated from His body and went into the paradise part of Hades for three days and nights, Luke 23:43, 24:46. His body suffered no decay or corruption during that time, Acts 2:27, 31. At His resurrection, His spirit was reunited with the uncorrupted body, John 20:26-29. His body was changed to a spiritual body at His ascension into heaven, John 3:13, Ephesians 4:9-10. His glorified body is the proof, promise and blueprint for the glorified bodies of all the saved of all ages, I John 3:2.

The Apostle John said: "That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life (and the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare unto you the life, the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us)," I John 1:1-2. The phrase "from the beginning" is amplified by the phrase "which was with the Father." He was with the Father from the beginning and before He came into the world. The one who was with God in the beginning, the Word of life, was seen, heard and handled by the Apostles. The one who was with the Father was manifest to men. He was not just life, but eternal life, John said. Whoever and whatever He was in the beginning with God was the same when they saw, heard and touched Him with their hands. The same one they saw, heard and handled was also eternal life.

In John 8:40, Jesus says, "But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth," yet in verse 58 He says, "Before

Abraham was born, I am." The "man" of verse 40 was also the "I Am" of verse 58.

God the Word combined with the fleshly body to give us Jesus of Nazareth, but He was still God when He was Jesus of Nazareth. Mary said to the angel, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word," Luke 1:38. Later, Elisabeth, being filled with the Holy Spirit, declared, "And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come unto me?" verse 43. Mary was both the handmaid and mother of the Lord that she brought into the world within the physical form of Jesus Christ. So also says Matthew 22:41-46. Though Jesus was the son of David, David called Him Lord. Jesus was the physical descendant of David through Mary, but He was still much greater than David, which David prophetically declared in Psalm 110:1. The Jews couldn't comprehend such a thing for they continued to think of the Christ as being nothing more than a man, John 1:19-28, 3:28, 10:22-33. They would have accepted even John as the Christ, but John denied it. They would have accepted Jesus as the Christ if He had been nothing more than a man. When Jesus declared that He and the Father were one, the Jews understood that He was claiming to be more than just a man, in fact God.

Now, is all this what we could describe as Jesus' being just an ordinary human? No, He was far from ordinary and more than just human! He was not just another man.

With these facts in mind, let's approach the incarnation. We will identify the role and function of God in human form, God manifest in the flesh, I Timothy 3:16.

CHAPTER 1

Introducing the Subject

For centuries, the birth of Jesus has been the base line for tagging historical events, though some in modern times are trying to delete Him from the picture entirely. Most of us, however, still cling to pinpointing history as B.C., *Before Christ* or A.D., *Anno Domini*, in the year of our Lord. Though Jesus had to be born in order to die, the focal point of what is truly important in history is not the birth of Jesus, but His death, and *all the steps in the scheme of redemption that were connected to that death*. This is not to lessen the value nor the nature of His birth, the perfect life He lived nor the work that He did while on earth; these all had their own important place in the scheme of things. But, He came to die, to offer His life to take away the sin of the world in order to bring us to eternal life. From the shadow of Eden and throughout the centuries, God pointed to that event. Our very existence as people of God looks back to and is dependent upon that sacrifice.

There are several hundred details concerning the conception, birth, life and accomplishments of the coming saviour that are given in the Old Testament. Jesus said that these scriptures "*testified of me,*" they "*testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.*" God "*showed by the mouth of all the prophets, that Christ should suffer.*" He died for our sins "*according to the scriptures.*" He was crucified by the "*determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.*" Though some have wanted to believe that His death, burial, resurrection and priesthood were accidental, these events establish the hub of revelation, the essential elements of our eternal salvation.

Further, just as the blood of Jesus flowed forward for all those who have lived and will live since that sacrifice, it also flowed backward and was the basis of actual forgiveness for all the true servants of God who lived before the first century: *“And for this cause he is the mediator of a new covenant, that a death having taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant, they that have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance,”* Hebrews 9:15.

The Time of His Crucifixion

Establishing the dates for important events is essential to placing even later events in their proper places. Jesus began His public work sometime in the fall of 26 A.D., after the arrival of Pontius Pilate as the Roman governor and some months after the beginning of the work of John the Baptist. Consider the evidence.

(1) In the sixth century A.D., Dionysius Exiguus, a scholarly monk, introduced what is called the Dionysian Period. It formulated a starting point for modern chronology: the birth of Jesus was in the year 1. Granting his figures, that would make Jesus 30 years old in the year 30, and crucified in 33. However, by the reckoning of his chronology, Jesus was born four years after the death of Herod, which does not correspond with Bible facts.

(2) The work of John the Baptist began in the *“fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea,”* Luke 3:1. If we count the fifteenth year from the time of the death of Augustus, then 28 or 29 would be the correct time. But, that doesn't connect with other facts. If we count the fifteenth year from the time Tiberius became co-regent, effectively taking control of the government from the aging Augustus, we arrive at the year 26. This corresponds with Luke 3:23 that Jesus was 30 years old at the time He began his work. Pilate had just recently arrived as the Imperial representative in

Judea in the year 26. John began his work sometime in the summer. Jesus began His public work a few months after that. Pilate would remain in Judea for ten years, his governorship covering the work of John and Jesus, the crucifixion and resurrection, the establishment of the church on Pentecost, the conversion of Saul of Tarsus and beyond.

(3) The first Passover of His ministry, John 2:13, was the occasion for Jesus' statement about his resurrection that brought the response that "*forty and six years was this temple in building ...*" John 2:19-20. Since the temple was begun in 19 B.C., forty-six years would bring the time to April of 27 A.D. Jesus observed three other Passovers after this, John 5:1, 6:4, 12:1. That would bring events to the Passover of the year 30.

(4) For His last Passover, Jesus came to Bethany six days before the Passover, John 12:1. The events of the text show that this journey to Bethany *had* to occur on Friday; they couldn't have come there on the Sabbath because of Sabbath travel restrictions, and the first day of the week would have been too late for the events of the following week. Passover always came on the 14th of Abib, or Nisan, Exodus 12:6, Leviticus 23:5. That date could fall on any day of the week, depending on the year. Six days before the Passover would place the Passover on Thursday of the following week.

Thus, the crucifixion was on Friday and the resurrection the third day afterward. So, the crucifixion was on Friday, April 7, the resurrection on Sunday, April 9, 30 A.D. The Pentecost of Acts 2 came fifty days later, Sunday, May 28, 30 A.D. By law, Leviticus 23:15ff, Pentecost always fell on the first day of the week.

In this way, we can pinpoint the day of Jesus' death in history, even the hour. We can identify the day of His resurrection. But, the exact date and time of His birth is not so precise. We are never taught in scripture to celebrate His birth, but we

are taught to weekly commemorate and proclaim His death on the prescribed day that commemorates His resurrection, the first day of the week, I Corinthians 11:23-27, Acts 20:7.

As we will see in material ahead of us, it was not just the death of Jesus that was the point of our redemption. If Jesus had just died, and nothing more, we could not be saved. His death, burial, resurrection and ascension to fulfill redemption as our High Priest were all essential. Yet, while there is more to the gospel than just the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, those facts stand at the very *heart* of the gospel *message*. They furnish the core of gospel preaching since Pentecost. No other gospel can be preached to man, nor be accepted by man, without bringing anathema down from God; He will condone no other, Galatians 1:6-9. Paul said that this gospel is the power of God to salvation, Romans 1:16-17. Life and immortality is brought to light through the gospel, II Timothy 1:10.

Several terms identify the work of Jesus as our Saviour. Jesus was a *ransom* for us, *redeeming* us from sin. He is a *propitiation* on our behalf, *reconciling* us to God and bringing *justification*. Other terms are also appropriated by the Holy Spirit to describe the *sacrifice* of Jesus. We will look at the significance of these in the course of this book.

We covered the person of Christ in Volume 1. It is clear that there are many things God has not told us about the Godhead and the person of Jesus. We must take great care not to go beyond what the Bible tells us. The secret things belong to God and the things that are revealed belong to us. The Bible tells us this. The same is true about our present subject. Many of our questions are not answered. Man seems to have a drive to “know it all” on any subject. If the answers are not readily available, then some are made up by philosophy. Then, other doctrinal positions are drawn from the philosophical conclusions. That only results in multiplying error.

Theories

There are numerous theories regarding the sacrifice of Jesus. We will attempt to briefly explore some of these in the following pages, some more thoroughly than others. George Barker Stevens observes—

“It should be understood, then, that the differences among theological interpreters and thinkers do not concern so much the nature of salvation as the method or conditions on which it is provided and offered. Different expositors have derived different results from the New Testament in regard to this latter subject, and, not infrequently, have pushed their divergences so far as to involve themselves in widely separated views regarding the ethical nature of God. Why, it may be asked, have candid and conscientious interpreters gone so far asunder? Partly, no doubt, because of the different pre-suppositions which they have brought to their study, and partly because the subject is variously represented and illustrated in the New Testament, and every interpreter may find something there to encourage his own favorite mode of thought.” *The Christian Doctrine of Salvation*, page 112.

There are a variety of theories emphasizing one aspect or another and others making up whole systems that fit into a larger picture of “systematic theology.” Our aim is, as always, to take what the Bible teaches on any subject. Although, in truth, the Reformation was somewhat a revival of the teachings of Augustine, the “modern approach” to theology begins with Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury in the eleventh century. John R.W. Stott, in *The Cross of Christ*, page 118, gives us a little of the background:

“Anselm was a godly Italian, who first settled in Normandy, and then in 1093 following the Norman Conquest was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury. He has been described as the first representative of medieval ‘scholasticism’, which was an attempt to reconcile philosophy and theology, Aris-

totelian logic and biblical revelation. Although he included in his writings a number of biblical quotations, however, and referred to Holy Scripture as ‘a firm foundation’, his overriding concern was to be ‘agreeable to reason’ (ii.xi). As his imaginary interlocutor Boso put it, ‘the way by which you lead me is so walled in by reasoning on each side that I do not seem able to turn out of it either to the right hand or the left’ (ii.ix).”

Though several of the conclusions of Anselm were later rejected, he set the tone for the Reformation with his approach of philosophy and logic instead of taking his position strictly from biblical evidence. Ever since, human philosophy has been as much a part of “theology” as scripture has been, although there had been far too much of that before Anselm.

Some theories are more of a danger to properly understanding the Bible than others; their consequences are dangerously far reaching for God’s people in modern times. We will take an extra amount of time in reviewing such theories.

For example, the reader has no doubt read or heard some preacher say that Jesus literally took our sins upon Himself on the cross, that our guilt was transferred to Him there, that the Father had to withdraw His presence from Him at that time in order for Jesus to suffer the punishment of sinners, that Jesus thus died spiritually on the cross, etc. However, none of these items are true.

Without doubt, the current predominant view concerning the *sacrifice* of Jesus found in denominationalism is the “vicarious suffering and death” of Jesus. It is sometimes referred to as “penal substitution.” Though a few Theologians define *vicarious* to mean only something done *on another’s behalf*, “*vicarious*” literally means *substitution, one person taking the place of another*. This is why, in Roman Catholicism, the Pope is re-

ferred to as the *Vicar of Christ*; the Pope supposedly takes the place of Christ on earth.

Vicarious thus refers to the theory that Jesus took our place on the cross, died in our stead, suffered the guilt and punishment that rightly belongs to us, became a curse in our place. Yet, it involves much more than Jesus' dying in our place. Having *originated* in the Protestant Reformation, *vicarious sacrifice* is cross connected with other doctrines peculiar to that time. It is the basis of Reformation opinions on the nature of God, the character of God, Divine justice and penal suffering. It is cross connected to original sin, imputed sin and imputed righteousness and even salvation by faith and grace alone.

Vicarious is not a biblical word. It has been coined by theologians. This they admit, as Roger Nicole says—

“The words *substitution* and *vicarious* are not found in Scripture, but the idea of substitution is amply and unmistakably taught ... The analogy with Old Testament sacrifices, the language examined under D and E, the prepositions ... the direct statements of many texts ... all contribute to establish this great truth, which, as we shall see later, is at the very heart of a proper representation of the atoning work of Christ,” *Christian Faith and Modern Theology*, p. 205.

The reader will notice a typical approach of books on Systematic Theology: the terms and phrases are not found in the Bible, but “the idea is found everywhere!” Well, if the idea is found everywhere, then they should be able to use Bible words and phrases that express the doctrine. To the quotation of Nicole, I add a paragraph from J. Oliver Buswell:

“The most satisfactory single term for designating the scriptural doctrine of the atonement for our generation is, I believe, the word *substitution*. This term indicates that Christ died for our sins in our place as our *substitute*. The word, *vicarious*, strictly implies the *substitutional* view, but the latter

term is less likely to be misunderstood. The moral order and the necessity for satisfying its demands, together with the necessity of penalty for the vindication of the moral order, all these considerations are assumed in the *substitutionary* view," *A Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, p. 72.

Notice he admits that the elements he refers to are "assumed" in the substitutionary view. An "assumption" is a conclusion without evidence. That is a more fatal admission than Buswell could imagine. Buswell goes on to dismiss any idea that atonement simply means a "forgiveness" of sins as just modern "liberalism." For him, one must believe in the Calvinist substitution theory, filled with assumptions as it is, in order to be "orthodox" as versus being a heretic. William Clarke says

"At the Reformation, this doctrine (of Anselm, MB) was modified by the introduction of the analogies of criminal law. In this view, the satisfaction that was due to God consisted in punishment. It was now held that Christ actually took the place of sinners in the sight of God, and as their substitute suffered the punishment that was due to them, including, as many of the Reformers taught, the sufferings of hell. Upon him fell all the punishment of all the sins of all the men for whom he died; against them, therefore, penal justice could have no further claim," *An Outline of Christian Theology*, p. 319.

Writers from the second century to the eleventh did little more than restate scripture or express ideas in Bible language. The most popular view during those centuries was that the death of Jesus was a ransom paid to Satan. Man was owned by Satan and so Jesus paid the price to free us. Anselm, in the eleventh century, reversed this to say the ransom price was paid to God, a debt paid to God in order to release sinners. Calvinists try very hard to find *penal substitution* in these early centuries. Yet, they must admit that there was no "theory" of

any sort until Anselm. Avid Calvinist, George Smeaton, in *Atonement According to Christ*, page 510, says—

“The true theory of the atonement, not in full development, but in its fundamental principles, or in that which gives it systematic form, was propounded by Anselm, well termed by one the Grotius and Leibnitz of his age, and by another Wolf and Augustine united. Any correct view of the medieval period will always place Anselm at the fountainhead. He stands between two epochs, inheriting the one, moulding the other ... Anselm himself was quite dissatisfied with the current modes of explanation that had descended from the patristic theology, for no attempt had been made to demonstrate on solid grounds the inward necessity of the atonement.”

According to Smeaton — *First*, there weren't even “fundamental principles” of a “theory” of atonement *until* the eleventh century. He would include the first century as well. The New Testament writers didn't even have a “theory” of the atonement, we are told, as though they needed one! Whatever keeps modern theologians so precisely involved about the atonement came over a thousand years after the first century. By their admission, *they had to invent a whole new vocabulary to express the new theology*. But, why should we ever say more than what the Bible teaches? We do not need the modern theories for something that is so extrabiblical; they will only lead us into error.

Second, Anselm only presented the “fundamental” *beginnings* of an atonement theory so there was much more building on the theological structure to be done.

Third, it was not until the Protestant Reformation that “the true theory of the atonement” appears in its “full development.”

Fourth, before Anselm, no one had attempted to place on “solid ground” the “inward necessity of the atonement.” So, again, *there was no true theory that explained what the atonement was all about until the “Reformers” instructed us.* That is, according to Calvinists.

Smeaton, page 525, continuing with this explanation of the Reformation theology, says (emphases are his)—

“Previous theories wanted a full recognition of THE CLAIMS OF THE DIVINE LAW, and of the atonement as a satisfaction of these claims in all their extent; and this became the element in which the theology of the Reformation moved, and by which all other truth was coloured.”

So, no one understood the atonement of Christ, we are led to understand, until the sixteenth century. According to Smeaton, these theological theories of the Reformation are those “by which all other truth is coloured.” True, once accepted, Reformation theology affects more than just that Jesus was a sacrifice for us, as we shall see.

As we have noticed, from the first to the eleventh centuries it was taught that the price of redemption was paid to Satan. This position was reversed in the eleventh century by Anselm. The ransom price was paid to God to satisfy His honor, said Anselm. This position is still found in the Roman Catholic Church and was the basis for the “Indulgences,” to which Luther reacted so energetically, viz., Jesus obtained *excess* merit which is then applied to sinners; the church was the administrator of this merit.

Lelius and Faustus Socinus, in the sixteenth century, presented what is known as the “Moral Influence Theory.” This emphasized an “ethical influence” of the sacrifice on sinners, inspiring the sinner to moral struggle and victory. This theory is found among modern Unitarians.

In the seventeenth century, Hugo Grotius presented the “governmental” view that emphasized the government of God. Sin was a violation of the rule of God. Public justice had to be upheld. The sacrifice of Jesus allowed God to forgive sins without endangering his rulership; it was a demonstration of how God looked at sin. Augustus H. Strong says—

“When, and how, did Christ take this guilt and this penalty upon him? With regard to penalty, we have no difficulty in answering this ... penalty rested upon him from the very beginning of his life. *This penalty was inherited*, and was the consequence of Christ’s taking human nature ... if Christ *inherited penalty*, it must have been because he *inherited guilt*,” *Systematic Theology*, p. 761.

So, the sacrifice of Jesus must have been as much for His own redemption as for the rest of mankind. Notice that inherited total depravity is interwoven with and essential to the penal substitution theory. We must, however, point out that the view that Jesus inherited sin and guilt by being born of Mary is not universally held even among those who agree on inherited total depravity; they will exclude Jesus from such inherited sin.

Herschell Hobbs, a popular Baptist author, said in a flier that God paid the ransom to himself. So, theories have ranged from Jesus paying the ransom to Satan to God paying the ransom to himself. William Clarke says,

“The modern study of Biblical theology tends at once to clearness and to freedom of thought upon this subject. It makes plain what has commonly been overlooked; namely the fact that the New Testament does not contain a single and uniform explanation of the work of Christ, but rather exhibits the various thoughts of various apostles and apostolic men, whose minds were full of the fact of salvation, but who did not possess so uniform a theory of it as we have often supposed. Such study will gradually teach us to dis-

tinguish between the permanent and essential elements in their doctrine, and the temporary forms of thought which it was both necessary and useful for them to employ. It will help modern students to grasp the divine reality in its simplicity, and confirm them in the conviction that they are at liberty to express that reality in forms that are suited to the life of our own age," *op.cit.* page 320.

Clarke says that *"The modern study of Biblical theology tends at once to clearness and to freedom of thought upon this subject. It makes plain what has commonly been overlooked..."* However, the phrase, "Systematic Theology," does not mean an orderly, reasonable approach to understanding the scriptures. It is the name given to a particular philosophical approach to certain Bible subjects. Anyone who has attempted to read a modern book on Systematic Theology soon finds himself lost in theological language more suited to philosophy than to clear, plain communication. Nor is there any unity of thought found in various authors of such books. Modern Biblical Theology is tailored especially for other theologians so they will have something with which to disagree or to quote. Notice that Clarke admits that, *"the New Testament does not contain a single and uniform explanation of the work of Christ ... various apostles and apostolic men ... did not possess so uniform a theory of it as we have often supposed."* "Systematic Theology" had to be manufactured around the time of the Protestant Reformation. Thus, it seems, we must go to modern scholars to get a full view of truth; man had to wait 1500 years to get a clear explanation of the sacrifice of Christ. Yet, for most people, to read such scholars is to become more confused than ever.

Another claim in the above quotation from Clarke involves the indictment of Biblical inspiration; God was somehow at fault for not revealing all we needed to know about these important subjects. The apostles just didn't have a uniform theory of the sacrifice of Jesus, important as that sacrifice was. The

Protestant Reformation, human “theologians,” corrected that failure.

However, Jesus promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit would guide them into all the truth, and teach them all things, John 14:26, 16:13. II Peter 1:3 says—

“seeing that his divine power hath granted unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that called us by his own glory and virtue.”

See also II Timothy 3:16-17. Everything God wants us to know has already been revealed.

As a young preacher, I once asked an older, experienced and knowledgeable preacher to explain to me what the Bible teaches, if anything, on the “providence” of God. His reply was that it was a very difficult and complicated subject. In order to understand it, we would have to go back to Augustine and understand what he had to say about it. That was the end of the discussion on the subject. My question was based on the assumption that we would discuss any scripture that had a bearing on God’s providence; I wanted to go back further than Augustine. I wanted to go back to the Bible to learn what God had said on the subject, but it seemed that Augustine was the vital link to do that. Perhaps the fact is that God did not give us a systematic theory on His providence any more than He did on the sacrifice of Jesus.

In order to establish our faith, we need to go beyond the Protestant Reformation, Anselm and the Councils and get back to the Bible. In this book, we *will*, to some extent, look at Augustine, Anselm and the Protestant Reformation, especially Calvinism, but it will only be because of the errors of the Protestant Reformation that color so much thinking among so many on the subject of the sacrifice of Jesus, and other subjects. Calvinism is, probably, the most pervasive error in mod-

ern religion. It has been picked up in part or in whole by many denominations. No one, it seems, has been wholly immune.

Calvinism is, by its own admission, self-contradictory and proud of it. The dedicated Calvinist, Professor Henry Meeter, explains it in the following way—

“But there is another reason why Calvinism is able to maintain a proper balance. It is the fact that the Calvinist does not hesitate to include in his theological beliefs ideas which are logical opposites, that is, ideas which seem to be in direct conflict, paradoxes. The Calvinist has the reputation of being a strong logical reasoner; nevertheless, because he makes the Bible his ultimate foundation, he does not hesitate to include in his system ideas difficult for reason to harmonize, ideas which seem to be logical opposites, as long as his Bible gives him reason for so doing. This fact is of great importance. It keeps the Calvinist from becoming a one-sided extremist. A few examples may serve as illustrations. Take the seemingly logical opposites of predestination and human responsibility. John Calvin and Calvinists believe wholeheartedly in absolute predestination. But nowhere do you find human responsibility stressed more emphatically than in Calvin’s writings and among Calvinists. If you should ask the Calvinist, ‘But how do you harmonize these two?’ he would reply, ‘That is unnecessary! God reconciles them, and that is enough for me.’ While he can illuminate this harmony to a certain extent, basically it is a mystery and he is content to let it be so,” *The Basic Ideas of Calvinism*, pages 40-41.

So, for a Calvinist, to take *only* the position of absolute predestination would make him a “one-sided extremist.” To keep from being that, human responsibility is also accepted and insisted upon, even though that creates, admittedly, a logical inconsistency. Two pages over, Meeter says—

“Furthermore, this sad condition of man’s total depravity cannot be altered except by a supernatural change wrought by God. Man is as enslaved to his sinful habits as a drunkard

to drink, so that he cannot and will not turn to God of himself.”

So much for human responsibility! There is no resolution of such inconsistencies with them; things are just relegated to the status of a mystery, unexplainable and unexplained. Yet, these theologians also want us to believe that their “Systematic Theology” clearly explains what the Apostles failed to explain. Thomas Crawford, in *The Doctrine of the Atonement*, page 510, echoes the same dilemma—

“...that there is great difficulty in the way of harmonizing the general invitations of the Gospel on the one hand, with the special reference of the Atonement to those who shall eventually be partakers of its benefits, on the other hand, it would be altogether fruitless to disguise. And if these two things were alike within the reach and comprehension of the human understanding, in that case our inability to reconcile them might warrant a strong suspicion that they cannot both be true. But inasmuch as one at least of these subjects far exceeds the power and compass of our faculties, we cannot without presumption hazard the assertion, that our inability to reconcile it with the other is proof of any real inconsistency between the two. For it may be that the missing link that is needful, and would be available for their thorough reconciliation, may be hidden from our view in that profound abyss of God’s everlasting counsels which we cannot fathom.”

That contains a lot of words to mask his helplessness over the contradiction his theology has created. He cannot reconcile Bible teaching on the universal appeal and preaching of the gospel, the statements on the death of Jesus being for all men, with his Calvinist position of predestination and limited atonement. So, it is just relegated to a mystery. He makes a lame attempt at reconciliation but has already given up the field in the opening paragraph of his section. Calvinist A.A.

Hodge, in *The Atonement*, page 418, agrees with Meeter and Crawford on this dilemma—

“There is unquestionably a difficulty in the neighborhood, but it will require some discrimination to determine exactly the point upon which the difficulty presses.”

I will agree, even insist, that there are many things God has not told us. There are “secret things” that belong to God, meaning they are hidden from us, Deuteronomy 29:29. We have more questions than answers sometimes. This is true on the subject of this volume. However, it does not justify our manufacturing a contradiction with the scriptures and then just declaring it to be a “mystery” when challenged for the evidence.

Calvinist positions on the sacrifice of Jesus have far too long been accepted as Bible teaching by brethren. It’s time for us to go back further than the Protestant Reformation, earlier than the “Church Fathers,” and rest our faith on Bible teaching, discarding all the deadwood as we do so. Seeing it is true that there is no “systematic theology” on the sacrifice of Jesus to be found in the Bible, then we must accept matters as the Bible presents them. The way we find what is presented in the Bible must have been the way God wanted things to be. Further, we must not take modern theories on anything and force them into the Bible as though the Bible teaches any such theories. Seeing that modern theologians readily admit, even insist, that there was no “systematic” theology until Anselm’s rudimentary approach, that there was no complete system on the subject until Calvin, then we should be very, very suspicious of such modern theologies.

Numerous theories, both mystical and otherwise, litter the ground of inquiry, appealing to fanciful and imaginative minds. The position that will be taken and argued in this book is that Jesus died for all men, “on our behalf,” *not* “in our

place;" there was no "penal substitution" of Jesus for our sins, guilt and punishment; a ransom price was not paid *to* anyone or anything. We will diligently try to stay away from areas where speculation might form the premises of our conclusions.

This is a sample of the material contained in

The Scheme of Redemption

Volume 1: The Person of Christ

Volume 2: Reconciliation

by Maurice Barnett

To order single copies, visit:

store.gospelarmory.com/product/scheme-of-redemption/

To place a bulk order (10 or more copies)

and receive a discount, visit:

www.gospelarmory.com/bulk/

Note: Each volume may be purchased in bulk separately for a discounted rate. However, the two-volume set may be purchased together at an already discounted price. Therefore, no additional discounts are offered on the two-volume set.

Thank you!

