

CHRISTOLOGY

WEEK 2

Patrick Reeder

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OUTLINE

PRE-INCARNATE EXISTENCE

Introduction

Before the Foundation of the World

Creator and Sustainer

OLD TESTAMENT THEOPHANIES

Embodied Theophanies

The Angel of the Lord

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WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

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Why should we investigate Jesus' pre-incarnate existence and activity?

- ▶ The case of the deity of Christ would be extremely difficult if there was no indication that he was pre-existent. He'd be (at best) a god after the style of Greek pantheon, breaking down the monotheism of Christianity.
- ▶ Fleshing out this information helps concretely shape Jesus' identity prior to his earthly ministry. Without this information, it would seem like Jesus was roused from some eternal sleep for his role on earth.
- ▶ If Jesus is God, then we would expect to find him in the Old Testament. His absence would at minimum create some puzzles. (Where was he?)
- ▶ Practically, our worship of Christ is not simply rooted in warm feelings. The more *content* we have to direct our adoration, the better.

Qualification: this requires some work—it won't be obvious to a casual reader.

DIFFERENT LEVELS OF PRE-EXISTENCE

We will examine escalating levels of pre-existence:

1. Jesus pre-dates his incarnation.
2. Jesus was with the Father before the creation.
3. Jesus is the God's agent in the creation event; Jesus also superintends its ongoing maintenance.

What will become clear is that this is a very widely taught doctrine explicitly witnessed by the New Testament. (The Old Testament comes later.)

BASIC PRE-EXISTENCE

Here are a few passages that (together with last week's content) that generically signal that Jesus existed before his incarnation:

- ▶ 1 Tim 3:16—He who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory.
- ▶ Luke 12:49—I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled! (Cf. Mark 2:17, 10:45; Matt 5:17, 10:34; Luke 19:10)
- ▶ John 16:28—I came forth from the Father, and have come into the world; I am leaving the world again and going to the Father.
- ▶ See also Matt 10:40, John 1:15, 3:13, 6:62, 13:3, 8:58; Phil 2:5-8.

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JESUS AND THE FATHER

In eternity past, Jesus and the Father had an intimate relationship, exhibited in the High Priestly Prayer (John 17):

- ▶ John 17:5—Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.
- ▶ John 17:22-24—The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.

What are some positional truths that we can draw from these passages?

JESUS AND THE FATHER

What are some positional truths that we can draw from these passages?

- ▶ Although our glory will not *equal* that of Christ, God will also glorify us in Christ (Col 3:4; 2 Thess 2:14).
- ▶ As Christ will return to the intimacy he enjoyed with the Father, he draws (will draw) us into that love as well (cf. Matt 11:27, 17:5)
- ▶ The trinity exhibits unity in diversity. Likewise, followers of Christ are together drawn into this eternal unity with the Godhead and with one another (though the latter must be fought for and preserved on this side of eternity). (Cf. Ephesians 4:3-6)

This unity and love forms an eternal basis out of which the entire rest of the universe draws its love (Psalm 33:5; 1 John 4:8,19).

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CHRIST AND CREATION

We saw these passages last week while discussing Jesus' identity as the Word, the concrete manifestation of God and His will:

- ▶ John 1:3, 10b—All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being . . . the world was made through Him
- ▶ Col 1:17—He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.
- ▶ Heb 1:3—And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high . . .

How might Jesus' relationship to creation impact how we relate to Him?

CHRIST AND CREATION

How does this impact how we relate to Him?

1. Jesus is not the runt member of the trinity, cast off thoughtlessly to deal with the mess of sin. He operates at the highest level of deity in His relationship to the creation (Cf. Gen 1:1):
 - ▶ Jesus deserves our worship and obedience!
 - ▶ As it relates to His sacrifice, Jesus' exalted identity makes his humiliation and condescension all the more precious!
2. As exhibited in the gospels, even in his "emptied" state, Jesus is master over nature. He is not just God's secretary or emissary but acts with authority in human history.
 - ▶ We can trust in Jesus' sovereignty over nature. Nothing happens without his awareness or permission.
 - ▶ We can trust that Jesus is fully capable of answering our prayers.
 - ▶ We can trust that if Jesus can create the universe, sustain it through cosmic history and defeat death in his resurrection that our sin problems will not be too much for Him.

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THEOPHANY

What is a *theophany*?

A theophany is some kind of appearance of God. Examples include:

- ▶ Wild visions of Daniel and Ezekiel
- ▶ Burning Bush, Pillar of Fire
- ▶ More subdued examples of God appearing to people in the form of a man (more to follow)

The concept of *theophany* typically does not include the pre-glorified, post-incarnated Christ. Incarnation is such a full-scale entry into human history that theophany doesn't quite do it justice.

EMBODIED THEOPHANY

Throughout the Old Testament, there are examples of God appearing with a body, sometimes very unremarkably.

- ▶ Gen 3:8a—They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. . .
- ▶ Gen 18:1-2—Now the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre . . . When he lifted up his eyes and looked, behold, three men were standing opposite him. . .
- ▶ Gen 32:24—Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. . . So Jacob named the place Peniel, for he said, “I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved.” (Cf. Gen 32:28, Hosea 12:3-5)
- ▶ Exodus 24:9-10—Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself.

How would you reconcile these examples with God saying the following to Moses: “You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!” (Exodus 33:20)?

EMBODIED THEOPHANY

How would you reconcile these examples with Exodus 33:20?

- ▶ Context! In Exodus 33, Moses requests to see God's *glory*. God replies, "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you." This episode is a very special exhibition of glory.
- ▶ Context! Exodus 24:11—*Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they saw God, and they ate and drank.* This passage seems to imply that this was unexpected. Perhaps God exercised restraint in dispensing judgment.
- ▶ The tabernacle's design implies a match in the hierarchies of holiness and revealed glory (i.e. God's revelation is proportionate to the recipient's sanctification as legally prescribed).

In any event, the point of examining these cases is that God taking the form of man in the NT is not entirely without precedent. Some argue that these are pre-incarnate embodiments of Christ.

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WHO OR WHAT IS THE ANGEL OF THE LORD?

Throughout the Old Testament, there is a being, *the Angel of the Lord*, who appears in a number of settings and behaves with extraordinary authority.

The term (*mal'ak*) translated 'angel' is much closer to the Greek term *angelos*, both of which just mean messenger or representative (envoy, ambassador). Unfortunately, in English the word 'angel' carries automatic connotations of spiritual being while the original connotation of carrying a message is lost.

This somewhat crude word study does suggest that this special being's title is *reminiscent* of the description of Christ in John 1. In what follows, I will make the case that the Angel of the Lord is the pre-incarnate Word of God.

WHO OR WHAT IS THE ANGEL OF THE LORD?

The vast majority of appearances of the Angel of the Lord include in context an identification with God himself. Some examples:

- ▶ Genesis 16:7a,13a—Now the angel of the LORD found [Hagar] by a spring of water in the wilderness . . . Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, “You are a God who sees” . . .
- ▶ Exodus 3:2a, 4a—The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush. . . When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush. . . (Cf. 3:6.)
- ▶ Judges 13:21b-23—Then Manoah knew that he was the angel of the LORD. So Manoah said to his wife, “We will surely die, for we have seen God.” But his wife said to him, “If the LORD had desired to kill us, He would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering from our hands, nor would He have shown us all these things, nor would He have let us hear things like this at this time.”
- ▶ Zech 12:8—and the house of David will be like God, like the angel of the LORD before them. [Note parallelism]

THE ANGEL OF THE LORD AS PRE-INCARNATE CHRIST

1. The Angel of the Lord is God and therefore is a member of the trinity.
 2. The Angel of the Lord cannot be God the Father, given that the New Testament regularly characterizes him as invisible (Cf. John 1:18, Col 1:15, I Tim 6:16, I John 4:12).
 3. The Angel of the Lord is unlikely to be the Holy Spirit, because:
 - 3.1 In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is never presented as embodied in human form (cf. Luke 3:22, Acts 2:3)
 - 3.2 In the Old Testament, the *Spirit of God* is present but with no form, only clues of His presence (prophesy, special wisdom).
 4. In addition, the Angel of the Lord exhibits characteristic of the Word: God's manifest agency within Creation.
- ∴ The Angel of the Lord is the pre-incarnate Christ.

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