

Bible Student's Notebook"

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Volume 29 Issue 708

Was Jesus Christ Alive Before His Life on Earth Began?

Part 2 of 12

by — Aaron Welch

THE SUPERNATURALLY GENERATED SON OF GOD

In Matthew 1:18-21 we read,

Now Jesus Christ's birth [Greek, gennēsis] was thus: At the espousal of His mother, Mary, to Joseph, ere their coming together, she was found pregnant by holy spirit. Now Joseph, her husband, being just and not willing to hold her up to infamy, intended covertly to dismiss her. Now at his brooding over these things, lo! a messenger of the Lord appeared to him in a trance, saying, "Joseph, son of David, you may not be afraid to accept Miriam, your wife, for that which is being generated [gennaō] in her is of holy spirit. Now she shall be bringing forth a Son, and you shall be calling His name Jesus, for He shall be saving His people from their sins."

In Luke 1:31-35, we read,

"And lo! You shall be conceiving and be pregnant and be bringing forth a Son, and you shall be calling His name Jesus. He shall be great, and Son of the Most High shall He be called. And the Lord God shall be giving Him the Throne of David, His father, and He shall reign over the House of Jacob for the eons. And of His kingdom there shall be no consummation." Yet Miriam said to the messenger, "How shall this be, since I know not a man?" And answering, the messenger said to her, "Holy spirit shall be coming on you, and the power of the Most High shall be overshadowing you; wherefore [i.e., as a result of which] also the holy One Who is being generated [gennaō] shall be called the Son of God."

The belief that the life of a human being – even one supernaturally conceived – does not begin until they've been conceived is one of the most natural beliefs to which one can hold. When Joseph and Miriam first heard and believed the words declared to them by the messenger Gabriel in Matthew 1:20 and Luke 1:30-37, it's unlikely that they thought that the "generating" of which Gabriel spoke would involve someone who was already alive and in existence somewhere. No one who isn't already presupposing the belief that Christ preexisted would come to this conclusion when reading the above verses, since (again) it's entirely natural and reasonable to believe that a human being comes into existence when they are generated by their father.

The Greek word translated "generated" in Matthew 1:20 and Luke 1:35 (gennaō) simply means "be-▶

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come." However, the exact idea that the writer or speaker intended to communicate by means of it depended on its usage. When the word was used in reference to what a child's father was understood as being responsible for, it meant "to generate" or "beget" (see, for example, all of the "begetting" that is referred in Matthew 1:2-16).

On the other hand, when the word was used in reference to what a child's mother was understood as being responsible for, it meant "to bear" or "give birth to" (for this latter usage, see, for example, Luke 1:13, 57).

However, it must be noted that the former meaning is the primary meaning of the word; only in a secondary sense does the word ever apply to a mother's giving birth. According to Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, for example, the word means "to procreate (properly, of the father, but by extension of the mother)." The Perseus Greek Word Study Tool defines it simply as "beget."

Since, in the passages quoted above, the One Who is responsible for the *gennaō* of Jesus is clearly God, the Father, the word is rightly translated "generated." So what, exactly, does it mean for a human to be generated or begotten by their father?

When a person is generated or begotten by their father, does this event involve an already-existing person being transformed into some other form? No. It means they begin to exist, and that a unique relation between father and child becomes actualized. "To bring into existence" is precisely what the English word "generate" means, while "beget" can be defined

as, "to cause to exist," "to produce as an effect," "to generate," "to procreate" or "to father."

Thus, in the above scriptural passage, we're essentially being told that, as a direct result of God's own spirit coming upon Miriam and the power of the Most High overshadowing her, Jesus ("the holy One") was brought into existence by God, and that this bringing into existence of Jesus resulted in God becoming Jesus' Father, and Jesus becoming God's Son.

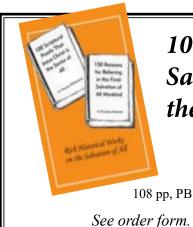
To assert that Jesus *didn't*, in fact, begin to exist – and that God didn't, in fact, become His Father - when Jesus was generated/begotten by God is to simply disregard the very idea that the word gennaō was intended to convey in this context.

We know what it means for a human to be "generated" or "begotten" by their father. This isn't something that anyone should consider "open to interpretation." A straightforward understanding of what we're being told in Matthew 1:20 and Luke 1:35 will, I believe, lead one to the logical conclusion that the "generating" of Jesus within His mother Miriam involved the coming into existence of someone who did not previously exist.

Consider the following argument:

Premise 1: Jesus Christ is said to have been "generated" (gennaō) by God.

Premise 2: When referring to an event for which the father of a child is responsible, the word translated "generated" or "begotten" in Scripture (gennaō) involves a person's being brought into existence and



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the actualization of a father-child relation.

Conclusion: Jesus Christ was brought into existence by God within the womb of His mother, and this resulted in God becoming Jesus' Father and Jesus becoming God's Son.

Notice that the generating of Jesus within Miriam is attributed solely to the activity of Jesus' God and Father. In Matthew's account we read that Miriam "was found pregnant by holy spirit" and that He Who was "being generated in her is of holy spirit."

Similarly, in Luke's account we read that Miriam was told by Gabriel,

Holy spirit shall be coming on you, and the power of the Most High shall be overshadowing you.

There is absolutely nothing said in these accounts or elsewhere about a pre-existent Christ – human or otherwise – entering into Miriam and being transformed into an (embryonic) human person.

When Gabriel told Miriam that "holy spirit" would be "coming on [her]," the celestial messenger wasn't referring to anything personally distinct from God Himself (Who, we're told by Christ in John 4:24, "is Spirit"). The "holy spirit" referred to in each of the verses quoted above is God's own spirit (i.e., His unseen, personal essence), and the "power" referred to in Luke 1:35 is God's own power. God's power and His holy spirit are inseparable; no matter how subtle or inconspicuous the activity of God's spirit may seem, it is always an expression of His divine

power.1

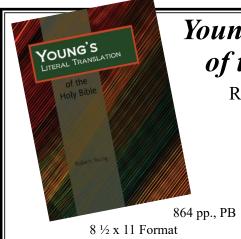
There is, consequently, no indication that a pre-existent human person was either actively *or* passively involved in Jesus being generated by God within the womb of His mother (something which should come as no surprise to the reader, given the fact that for someone to be "generated" by their father – including the human person who received the name "Jesus" and the title "Christ" – is for them to be brought into existence).

Miriam, of course, passively contributed to the generation of Christ by providing the egg that God supernaturally fertilized (as well as the womb in which Christ came into being), but the only other person who we're told was involved in Christ's being generated was God Himself.

Moreover, it is clear from Luke 1:35 that Jesus being the holy "Son of God" is directly tied to (being the result of) His being supernaturally generated by the direct power of God. That is, Jesus Christ is the "Son of God" because He was directly "generated" by the unseen power of God.

This fact is crucial to understanding Christ's identity as the Son of God. Simply put, *there was no Son of God* (and thus no Father-Son relationship be-▶

1. The words "holy spirit shall be coming on you, and the power of the Most High shall be overshadowing you" are most likely an example of the figure of speech known as "synonymous parallelism." According to this figure of speech, the same basic/general idea is repeated by using two different words or expressions for the sake of emphasis (for some other examples of this figure of speech, see Job 4:17; 8:11, 15; 27:3-4; 34:14; Psalm 1:5; 19:1-2; 24:1-2; 38:1; 119:105; Proverbs 3:1; Isaiah 42:5).



Young's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible

Robert Young (1822 – 1888)

First published in 1862, this is the 3rd and last edition of Young's translation (1898). It is a literal translation of the Old and New Testaments, making it a perfect study tool. The 9-point print is larger and easier to read than those published in the past. Young was also the compiler of Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible.

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tween God and Jesus) until after Jesus was "generated" in the womb of His mother by God. The assertion of uninspired Roman Catholic and Protestant creeds notwithstanding, there is no suggestion in Scripture that Jesus was "begotten by the Father before all ages," or that He pre-existed as the Son of God (let alone as "God the Son") before the time He was "being generated" by God within the womb of His mother.

It is *because* of the fact that Jesus was generated by God at this time that He can "be called the Son of God." Jesus being the Son of God is, in other words, **based on** the event referred to in Luke 1:35 (in fact, what Gabriel said here is simply an explicit affirmation of the truth that is *implied* by the fact that Jesus was generated, or begotten, by God in the womb of His mother Miriam, since becoming the son or daughter of someone is inseparably connected with the primary meaning of *gennaō*).

A corollary of this fact is, I submit, that Jesus didn't exist before He was generated by God and became God's Son. How so? Well, let's assume, for the sake of argument, that Jesus was, in fact, the first person created by God (preexisting as a celestial being, as most Christians believe). If that were the case, then Jesus would've already been God's Son, from the time he was first brought into existence until the time when his mother first became pregnant.

Consider the following: We know that other created, non-human persons are called "sons of God" or "sons of the Most High" (Genesis 6:1-2; Deuteronomy 32:8; Job 1:6; 38:7; Psalm 82; 89:5-7), and that these non-human beings were directly brought into existence by the agency of the same being (which I believe to have been God Himself).

Thus, if Christ had been the first being brought into existence by God, we can reasonably conclude that He – perhaps more so than any other created celestial being – would've been deserving of the designation, "Son of God." Yet, Scripture reveals that Jesus being the Son of God is the result of His being generated by God at the time when His mother became pregnant with Him. It follows logically from these facts that Christ didn't exist before He was generated by God. It was at this time that God became Jesus' Father, and Jesus became God's Son. It was at this time that "the Man, Christ Jesus" – our Savior and Lord – was brought into existence by his God and Father.

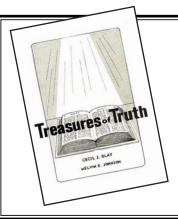
For the sake of clarity, here's a more formally expressed version of the above argument:

Premise 1: Non-human celestial beings who were directly brought into existence by God before God created mankind on the Earth are called "sons of God" and "sons of the Most High" (Genesis 6:1-2; Deuteronomy 32:8; Job 1:6; 38:7; Psalm 82; 89:5-7).

Premise 2: If Christ was the first being brought into existence by God (*i.e.*, before all of the other "sons of God") and thus existed before His mother became pregnant with Him, then He would've been the "Son of God" and "the Son of the Most High" during this time of "preexistence."

Premise 3: Scripture reveals that Jesus being the "Son of God" is the result of His being generated/begotten by God (Luke 1:35; Matthew 1:24), and that it was at this time that God became Jesus' Father and Jesus became God's Son.

Conclusion: Christ Jesus, the Son of God, didn't exist



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before He was generated/begotten by God.

It should also be noted that the same word translated "generated" in Matthew 1:20 and Luke 1:35 (gennaō) is translated "begotten" (Acts 13:33; Hebrews 1:5; 5:5). In each of these verses, it is the resurrection of Jesus – rather than His conception – that is in view; thus, the gennaō of Jesus by God referred to here most likely refers to Jesus' resurrection.

If this is the case, then this usage of *gennaō* provides further evidence that, when used in reference to that for which a father is responsible, the word involves the child's being brought into existence. For, as those who understand the nature of death will know, Christ *ceased to exist when He died*. That is, for three days and nights Jesus did not exist and was utterly dependent on His God and Father to bring Him back into existence by resurrecting Him.

It is because Christ's resurrection was an event that involved God bringing Christ back into existence that the "begetting" imagery was used. Christ's resurrection was essentially the second time that the Son was brought into existence by the Father. Although Jesus did not become the Son of God for the first time when he was resurrected, it was at this time that he was "designated the Son of God with power" (Romans 1:4).

Christ wasn't alive in another state of existence when He was begotten by God a second time. Thus, a consistent understanding of what it means for Christ to have been "generated" or "begotten" by God demands that we understand that Christ wasn't already in existence when He was begotten/generated by God the *first* time.

The doctrine of the "preexistence of Christ" thus turns out to be nothing more than the doctrine that the Son of God was brought into existence before the Son of God was brought into existence. When we understand what it actually *means* for Jesus to have been generated by God (as well as the necessary connection that Jesus being generated by God has to His Sonship), the doctrine of the preexistence of Christ turns out to be a subtly-disguised contradiction. This being the case, it follows that those who believe that there are other verses of Scripture which "clearly reveal" that Jesus was brought into existence *before* His conception are, necessarily, mistaken and have simply misunderstood whatever verses they consider to be "proof texts" for this position.

Is Christ the "Exception to the Rule?"

Some would suggest that Christ is the exception to the rule. While Christ is clearly an exceptional human being in a number of important respects, there is absolutely nothing about His exceptional nature that gives us any good reason to suspect (let alone *conclude*) that, when Christ was generated by God, He wasn't brought into existence by God. We cannot simply argue that, because Christ is an "exceptional human being," therefore X [fill in the blank] is true of Him, or even *probably* true of Him. Here are just a few examples demonstrating why the "Christ is an exceptional human being" argument just doesn't work:



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- **∱** .
- "Jesus Christ is an exceptional human being. Therefore, He never cried."
- "Jesus Christ is an exceptional human being. Therefore, He didn't have to learn obedience."
- "Jesus Christ is an exceptional human being. Therefore, He didn't have to learn or be taught anything."
- "Jesus Christ is an exceptional human being. Therefore, He couldn't have been 'tried in all respects like us."
- "Jesus Christ is an exceptional human being. Therefore, He never suffered physical pain."

The fact is that, unless Scripture clearly informs us of how Christ is the exception to some rule concerning human existence, we shouldn't simply assume that He is. I believe, for example, that Christ never sinned, but I don't believe this because of some presupposition about Christ's being "the exception to the rule." I believe it because I find this truth revealed in Scripture. I also believe that Christ came into existence apart from the involvement of a human father, but this belief is not due to some presupposition about Christ's being "the exception to the rule." It's because I believe this truth to be revealed in Scripture. It is Scripture that should inform our understanding about how, exactly, Christ is an "exception to the rule."

CHRIST FOREKNOWN BY GOD

In Romans 8:29 we read that those in the Body of Christ were "foreknown" by God and designated beforehand. The saints in the Body of Christ didn't exist when they were foreknown by God; had they existed, they wouldn't have been "foreknown" by God. They would've simply been "known."

Now consider I Peter 1:20, where we're told that Christ was,

... foreknown, indeed, before the disruption of the world, yet manifested in the last times because of you ...

Had Christ personally existed before the disruption of the world, He wouldn't have been "foreknown" by God at this time. He would have been simply known. As is the case with us, the fact that God foreknew Christ before the disruption of the world presupposes that Christ didn't exist before the disruption of the world. Just like His sacrificial death (Revelation 13:8), the only sense in which Christ could be said to have existed before the disruption of the world (or at any point prior to his conception) was in God's foreknowledge.

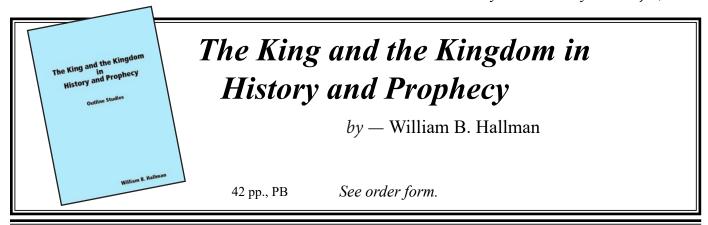
Consider the following argument:

Premise 1: God having foreknowledge of something involves His having knowledge of it *before* it actually exists or occurs.

Premise 2: Christ was "foreknown" by God "before the disruption of the world" (I Peter 1:20, Concordant).

Conclusion: Christ didn't exist "before the disruption of the world."

After writing that Christ was "foreknown, indeed, before the disruption of the world," Peter went on to say that Christ was "manifested in the last times because of you." A similar expression is found in Hebrews 1:1, where we read that it is "in the last of these days" that God "speaks to us in a Son" (as opposed to other "portions and modes" before the "last of these days").



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The Son has not always been the means (or even "a" means) through which God has spoken to humanity. The Son is simply the ultimate agent through Whom God has chosen to speak and make Himself known to His creation.

The "last of these days" does not refer to any time prior to when Christ was "generated" by His God and Father. This means that any celestial being speaking on behalf of Yahweh at any time prior to when Christ was generated by God (and which some Christians have claimed or suggested was the "pre-incarnate Christ" speaking to people) was, necessarily, not the Son of God. The only time that Jesus, the Son of God appears in the Hebrew Scriptures is in prophecy, or in some sort of vision of the future (e.g. Daniel 7:13-14).

The most likely reason why the author referred to the prophets here is because, as God's "spokesmen" (whose divinely-sanctioned office involved speaking to mankind on behalf of God), the prophets represent the means of communication between God and the rest of humanity. The contrast that the author is making here is not between Jesus-as-prophet and the rest of the prophets (for God continued "speaking in prophets" even *after* Christ began His prophetic career). Instead, the point of these verses is that a *new* Spokesman had arrived on the scene – a Spokesman who was (and is) superior to those in whom God spoke *before* the "last of these days" began. The contrast being made in :1-2 is between how God spoke

"of old" and the new way in which God speaks to us "in the last of these days" (which is "in a Son"). The implication, then, is that God had not yet spoken to us "in a Son" prior to the start of "the last of these days."

The idea that God had been speaking to the fathers "in a Son" before the last of these days began completely trivializes the contrast and point being made in :1-2. The force of the contrast being made is derived from the implied fact that God had never communicated to mankind "in a Son" before the last of these days began or before the Son to whom the prophets bore witness came to be on the scene.

Although Christ was foreknown by God (and fore-told by the prophets) before the "last of these days" began, it was not until the "last of these days" and "last times" that the Son of God came to be manifested (I Peter 1:20).

(to be continued)

About the Author, see part 1, *Bible Student's Note-book #707*, page 6077.

TOPICS:

Major: Jesus Christ (Pre-Existence of); Trinity



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I came across a sentence that made me think of you, the context being Divine paradoxes: "He is despised and rejected of men - yet He is the APPOINTED Savior" (A.T. Pierson, Bible Student's Notebook #691). Obviously, one would think a Savior should be preordained to be "loved and accepted" that He might save more, yet Father appointed circumstances exactly opposite of our "way" of thinking. My mind reworded it to: "He is despised and rejected of men - yet he is the APPOINTED Gleaner." A Divinely preordained appointment to catalog and distribute the "hidden/lost" writings of others (who also were "despised and rejected of men," so that those whom Father has called may find their "acceptance" through the very truth the world has rejected. "HEAVEN'S GLEANER" appointed by Father, before the downcasting of the world. It's humbling to me, dear Clyde, that Father lets me sit at your feet as He leads you in the hidden paths for the glory of His Great Name. I remember you preaching on "Buy the truth and sell it not!" (Proverbs 23:23)1 decades ago, and

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you are through it may cost you far more than you had thought – hours of ease and pleasure, friends and money. Yes, the truth costs.

"Salvation is gloriously free but the truth costs – that is, if you want it for yourself. Many who know the truth won't buy it. They won't pay what it costs to say, "This is what I believe. This is my conviction." The truth isn't worth that much to them.

Yet in Proverbs 23:23 God's Word urges us, "Buy the truth!" Not, "Buy it if you can get it at a bargain; if the price is not too great." No, "Buy the truth!" Buy it at any price. It is worth far more than anything you can give in exchange for it.

"Then when you have bought it, "sell it not." How many, alas, have bought the truth only to sell out again! For a while they valued and defended some God-given light from His Word, but presently they sold it again for something that seemed more valuable at the moment. Perhaps it was peace with others, or position, or popularity or some other temporal gain. They still gave mental assent to it but it formed no part of them. It was no longer a conviction.

"Such should read again the Spirit's counsel: "Buy the truth, and sell it not." He does not say, "Don't sell it unless you can get a very good price for it." He says, "Sell it not." Sell it not at any price. Buy it, no matter what it costs, and when it is yours do not sell it for any price or under any consideration.

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For definitions of abbreviations/acronyms, see index after the order form.

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ABBREVIATION KEY

Scripture Version

CV: Concordant Literal Version

DAR: Darby Translation DT: Dabhar Translation FF: Ferrar Fenton Bible KJV: King James Version **NET:** New English Translation RE: Rotherham's Emphasized Bible

WT: Weymouth Translation *YLT*: Young's Literal Translation

Reference Sources

AA: Analytical Analysis (Welch)

BDB: Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew Lexicon CB: Companion Bible Notes & Appendixes (Bullinger)

CC: Concordant Commentary (Knoch)

CKC: Concordant Keyword Concordance (Knoch)

CL: A Critical Lexicon and Concordance

(Bullinger)

CWS: Complete Word Study Dictionary (Zodhiates)

FoS: Figures of Speech (Bullinger) SEC: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance TGL: Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon

UR: Unsearchable Riches

VED: Vine's Expository Dictionary YAC: Young's Analytical Concordance

Reference Notations

cf. – compare *e.g.* – for example et al. - and others

etc. – et cetera (and so on) ff. – and the following

i.e., – that is