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The Herald of His Grace

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Volume 29 Issue 709

Was Jesus Christ Alive Before His Life on Earth Began?

Part 3 of 12

by — Aaron Welch

GOD THE SOLE CREATOR OF THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH

In contrast with what Scripture reveals concerning Jesus Christ's relationship to the rest of creation since He was roused from among the dead, made Lord of all and given all authority in Heaven and on Earth (I Corinthians 8:6; Colossia0ns 1:16-17; Hebrews 1:3), there is no indication from Scripture that anyone but God Himself was involved in the creation of the Heavens and the Earth in the beginning.

When speaking to the men of Athens, for example, Paul gave no indication that he believed anyone other than God Himself was involved in bringing the world into existence:

God, Who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of Heaven and Earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands, nor is He worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed anything ... Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man Whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all, by raising Him from the dead (Acts 17:24-25, 30-31).

In accord with the Hebrew Scriptures, Paul credited

God alone as the one responsible for the creation of everything. The "*Man*," Jesus (Whom Paul said God had ordained), is not said to have had anything to do with it.

Similarly, Christ Himself appears to have been completely unaware that anyone other than God, the Father, had anything to do with the creation of the universe. Whenever Christ referred to the creation event recorded in Genesis, He gave God – to Whom He referred in the third person – full credit for it (Matthew 19:4; Mark 10:6; 13:19). This, again, is in accord with what the Genesis narrative explicitly affirms.

Those who hold to the doctrine of the pre-existence of Christ typically deny that God was the One Who directly created the universe. Rather, they believe that, after directly creating His Son, God then used Jesus as an intermediary agent in His creative work.

I assume that those who believe that God created everything through the pre-incarnate Jesus believe that Jesus created everything through the exercise of His will in some way. Thus, according to this view, it was Jesus – and not God – Whose will directly brought everything into existence.

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Regardless of how Jesus is thought to have created everything, those who believe that God created everything through Jesus must believe that God was not directly or immediately responsible for bringing anything into existence (with the only exception being the creation of Jesus Himself).

The problem with this view is that it seems to be contradicted by what God Himself has declared concerning His involvement in the creation of the Heavens and the Earth. Consider, for example, the following verses where we read of Yahweh speaking of Himself as having brought the universe into existence by the direct use of His power:

Isaiah 45:12

I [Yahweh] *made the Earth and created man on* it; it was My hands that stretched out the Heavens, and I commanded all their host.

Isaiah 48:13

My hand laid the foundation of the Earth, and My right hand spread out the Heavens; when I call to them, they stand forth together.

Isaiah 66:1-2

Thus says **Yahweh**, "Heaven is My throne, and the Earth is My footstool; what is the house that you would build for Me, and what is the place of My rest? All these things My hand has made, and so all these things came to be," declares Yahweh.

The idea being conveyed through the words "My

hands," "My hand" and "My right hand" is simply that God created everything by His own power and authority (*cf.* Jeremiah 10:12-13).

God did not, in other words, "stretch out the heavens" through the instrumental "hands" of another person separate from Himself; it was His "hands" that did so. Moreover, the same divine being who referred to Himself as "I" in the above verses – and whose "hand" is said to have created everything (which, again, refers to God's direct involvement in the creation) – is elsewhere said to have created the Heavens by simply speaking/declaring them into existence:

By **the Word of Yahweh** the Heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host ... For **He** [Yahweh] **spoke**, and it came to be; **He** commanded, and it stood firm ... (Psalm 33:6, 9).

Notice how the words "by the breath of His mouth" qualify the words, "by the Word of Yahweh."

The Psalmist was not talking about a person distinct from Yahweh Himself being involved in the creation of the Heavens and all their hosts. This is, of course, in perfect harmony with what we're told in the original Genesis account:

In the beginning, God created the Heavens and *the Earth* ... and *God said* ... (Genesis 1:1, 3).

The words "and God said" are repeated ten times in chapter one. As is clear from Psalm 33:6 (and elsewhere), the One Who brought the universe into existence by His declaration/command was Yahweh

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by — E.W. Bullinger

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alone. There is no suggestion that, when Yahweh commanded the Heavens to come into existence, someone else "made it happen."

Moreover, the person speaking in Genesis 3:15 is the same divine person described as speaking in chapter one, and yet He referred to the "seed" of the woman – i.e., Jesus, the Messiah – as a person distinct from Himself ("He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel").

What about the plural "us" found in Genesis 1:26-27, 3:22 and 11:7? Some see the word "us" as a "veiled reference" to either a multi-personal God (consisting of Father, Son and Holy Spirit) or to God and a pre-existent Son (who was either directly or indirectly involved in the creation of humanity and the confusing of humanity's language at Babel). However, I don't think that either Moses or the original readers of this book understood the "us" to imply either a multi-personal God or a pre-existent Son of God.

A more likely interpretation of these verses is that God was speaking to, and on behalf of, the celestial members of His heavenly court. This is the view found in the *NIV Study Bible* as well as in the *NET Bible*, both of which affirm the pre-existence of Christ. In the *NET Bible* notes under Genesis 1:26 we read.

In II Samuel 24:14 David uses the plural as representative of all Israel, and in Isaiah 6:8 the Lord speaks on behalf of His heavenly court. In its ancient Israelite context the plural is most naturally understood as referring to God and His heavenly court (see I Kings 22:19-22; Isaiah 6:1-8). (The most well-known members of this court are God's messengers, or angels.) If this is the case, God invites the heavenly court to participate in the creation of humankind (perhaps in the role of offering praise, see Job 38:7), but He Himself is the one who does the actual creative work (:27). Of course, this view does assume that the members of the heavenly court possess the divine "image" in some way. Since the image is closely associated with rulership, perhaps they share the divine image in that they, together with God and under His royal authority, are the executive authority over the world.

The Hebrew people were not only monotheists in the

most natural and straightforward sense of the word (believing that God was a single individual or person), they also believed that Yahweh, the one God, dwelled in Heaven with a countless multitude of created, personal beings that served and worshipped Him (see, for example, Job 1:6-12; Psalm 82; 89:5-7; I Kings 22:19-22; Isaiah 6:1-8). Consequently, it is natural to understand these verses as a reference to the participation and involvement of these celestial beings in God's work in some way. To insert either a multi-personal God or a pre-existent Jesus into the words "us" is simply unwarranted.¹

Lest there remain any doubt as to Who, exactly, was involved in creating the Heavens and the Earth (and Who is said to have spoken everything into existence

1. In Hastings Dictionary of the Bible, we read, "The Old Testament can scarcely be used as authority for the existence of distinctions within the Godhead. The use of 'us' by the divine speaker (Genesis 1:26; 3:32; 11:7) is strange, but it is perhaps due to His consciousness of being surrounded by other beings of a loftier order than men (Isaiah 6:8)" (A.B. Davidson, "God," Hastings Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. II, p. 205).

Similarly, Gordon Wehham's *Word Commentary* on Genesis (p. 27) remarks as follows: "From Philo onward, Jewish commentators have generally held that the plural is used because God is addressing his heavenly court, *i.e.*, the angels (*cf.* Isaiah 6:8). From the Epistle of Barnabas and Justin Martyr, who saw the plural as a reference to Christ, Christians have traditionally seen this verse as foreshadowing the Trinity. It is now universally admitted that this was not what the plural meant to the original author."

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in Genesis 1), the following verse should clear up any misunderstanding:

Thus says Yahweh, your Redeemer, Who formed you from the womb: "I am Yahweh, Who made all things, **Who alone** stretched out the heavens, Who *spread out the Earth by Myself* ..." (Isaiah 44:24).

What we read above is precisely what we would expect to find in Scripture if God alone was directly responsible for the creation of the Heavens and the Earth. If Yahweh had wanted to communicate the fact that He created everything directly and without anyone else's involvement, I'm not sure what more He could have said to express this fact more clearly than is stated in the above verse.

It is evident that only one Person was speaking these words, and the words "alone" and "by myself" rule out any sort of intermediary agent used by the person speaking to accomplish the creation of the Heavens and the Earth.

If the One speaking is to be understood as Yahweh Himself, then He created everything without the involvement or aid of Jesus Christ. If it was Jesus Christ speaking, then He created everything without the involvement or aid of His God and Father. Since the latter is clearly impossible, then we must understand God, the Father, to have been the sole Creator of the Heavens and the Earth.

To this point it has been objected that it's only in a relative sense that God was the sole Creator of the Heavens and the Earth. To defend this position, the context of Isaiah 44:24 has been appealed to. The problem with appealing to the context in support of this view, however, is that there is nothing about the context which in any way justifies the view that God's

words in Isaiah 44:24 should be understood as anything less than absolutely true.

The context-informed fact that pagan idols are worthless – or that the false gods of the nations cannot save anyone - doesn't make Isaiah 44:24 express a truth that can (or should) be understood as true in only a "relative sense."

The fact that no false gods assisted Yahweh with the creation of the Heavens and the Earth (which can be understood as an implied fact of Isaiah 44:24) is based on the more fundamental fact that no one assisted God with the creation of the Heavens and the Earth.

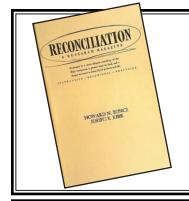
Another point to take into consideration when reading Isaiah 44:24 is this: What reason would the original readers/hearers of the book of Isaiah (or indeed, any Israelite from the time that this book was written until the time of Christ) have had to understand the words of Isaiah 44:24 as anything less than absolutely true? Is there anything at all about the context of Isaiah 44 that would have given them any reason to doubt that God wasn't speaking absolutely? No. We can, therefore, understand Isaiah 44:24 (as well as the other verses quoted above) as further confirming the fact that God alone was directly involved in the creation of the Heavens and the Earth. Although Isaiah 44:24 and other related verses are certainly not "proof texts" for the position that Christ's existence began when He was conceived, what we read in these verses are precisely what one would expect to read if this position were true.

(edited)

(to be continued)

About the Author, see part 1, Bible Student's Notebook #707, page 6077.

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



Reconciliation

A Research Magazine – 1942-1943

Editors — Joseph E. Kirk, Howard N. Bunce

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Christ and Paul

by — William Mealand (1873-1957)

'hy is it that today there is no impelling conception of the risen Christ and, through Him, of a gracious, understanding God and Father? Is it not true to say that, because of this lack, and understatement of the evangel, people are kept at a great remove from the glorious God they should intimately know?

From long years of experience and observation, we are inclined to think one reason lies in the fact that Paul's evangel and heralding of truth to the nations has been so tragically unheeded. Enrichment of life, and a rare illumination of mind in the things of God, always attended his ministry, and wherever a recovery of the precious truth he enunciated has been grasped, there has been vital blessing. It has not, however, been clearly seen that his teaching is progressive: ever mounting upwards and leading, as it were, to a pinnacle of grace and glory.

Now, it is surely true to say that the zenith of grace was reached in the grand unfoldings of the prison epistles. Therefore it is for us in these later days to base our position upon them. Since within them we have Paul's latest and quite unique revelation from the ascended Christ Himself, should we not rest our constructive thinking on such a great announcement?

Paul alone gives us the truth of "the Body of Christ,"

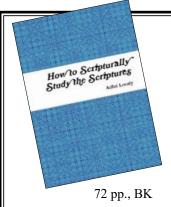
but this is not all. When the flood tide of grace came, and the apostle to the nations was entrusted with "the administration of the grace of God," so specially given to him, that body became a joint-Body, an altogether new and rare organism. Very simply and beautifully is it set forth:

In spirit the nations are to be joint-enjoyers of an allotment, and a joint-Body, and joint-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus, through the evangel of which I became the dispenser, in accord with the gratuity of the grace of God, which is granted to me in accord with His powerful operation (Ephesians 3:6-7).

So short a quotation may fail to bring home to heart and mind the sublime import of the apostle's message. It calls for the whole chapter, for there is Paul's fervent prayer and marvelous doxology, followed by an exhortation which surely stands alone for spiritual breadth and grandeur.

Indeed, so transcendent a statement should in itself give settlement of belief, and, in harmony with the Philippian and Colossian letters, establish the standing and outlook of all believers. It is one of vivid clearness. Paul tells us that there is,

One Body and one spirit, according as you were called also with one expectation of your calling.



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How to Scripturally Study the Scriptures

by — Adlai Loudy (1893-1984)

This book deals chiefly with the correct partitioning of the Word of Truth. The seven chapters are titled as follows: God Has Spoken; A Divine Admonition of Endeavor; How to Scripturally Study the Scriptures; Have a Pattern of Sound Words; Distinguish the Things that Differ; Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth, and the Conclusion.

"The book should prove extremely valuable in introducing the knowledge of Paul's special ministry to those who are strangers to it." - A.E. Knoch (1874-1965)



One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, Who is over all and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:4-6).

Surely, in this sevenfold summary of belief, we have a spiritual program that should be satisfying to all believers in Christ Jesus. It is a simple yet comprehensive declaration, which, had it been faithfully adhered to, would have meant volumes of blessing to God's people. However, when its clarity is marred by addition or subtraction of words, its beauty and beneficence are gone. We should remember that whatever preceded the teaching Paul unfolds in his rare trio of Prison Epistles, it is absorbed and carried forward to a veritable zenith of grace. We do not read such language elsewhere, the phraseology of which is so fitting to this wondrous era of grace.

Maybe its purely celestial character is not seen as completing what hitherto was but fragmentary. In his presentation of the Christ of God, Paul is unique as the interpreter of the risen Christ,

Head over all to the ecclesia which is His Body, the complement by which all in all is being completed (Ephesians 1:23).

Again, who but Paul so writes of Christ as the One through Whom God purposes to reconcile the universe to Himself?

When we note the language which so characterizes Ephesians, do we not feel that the last word has been written with regard to the present attitude and future destiny of the Body of Christ? The tendency to merge teaching which should be kept apart causes confusion of mind and detracts from the full enjoyment of the grace and truth for this time present.

Take, for instance, the subject of baptism. John's baptism by water was distinctly for the time being. Note the words of Christ Himself to John:

By your leave, at present, for thus it is becoming for us to fulfill all righteousness (Matthew 3:15).

It was truth just for the time, a test of faith at that particular era, and truth at that moment. It was also fitting that the King should thus come into line with the proclamation of the Kingdom. Therefore, His

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disciples continued to administer the rite in accord with the evangel they preached.

When, however, the Kingdom proclamation met with final rejection at Rome, the practice of baptism appears to cease, as Paul had emphatically declared that baptism is not included in his own special testimony (I Corinthians 1:17). Therefore, the "one baptism" mentioned in Ephesians is in spirit, for everything in that unity is spiritual.

We may think of other things which obtained *just for* the time, but when we enter upon our celestial citizenship, things made with hands have little appeal, and the apostle Paul was brought into the light and liberty of this realm that he might pass on to others the illumination and enrichment he himself received.

It is well, too, to bear in mind the distinctiveness of Paul's commission. It so stands by itself. Some of its wording sets the apostle quite apart as a pioneer and pathfinder in the realm of grace. From the glory above the brightness of the sun came a voice in utterance of these expressive words,

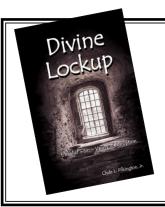
I was seen by you for this, to fix upon you before for a deputy and a witness both of what you have perceived and that in which I will be seen by you, extricating you from the people and from the nations, to whom I am commissioning you (Acts 26:16-17).

Now, the words purposely placed in bold font, surely prepare our hearts and minds for such a revelation as Paul unfolds in Ephesians. That revelation discloses the transformation that was to affect the Body of Christ. It was to become a joint-Body. This was a new and unparalleled thing, a perfect equality of membership of the Body of Christ unheard of before. Neither Peter nor the other apostles present with Christ in His earthly ministry mention anything like it. Paul's heralding of the evangel alone led to it as part of his stewardship to the nations.

There is nothing in nature, or in aught "made with hands," to compare with its divine beauty. Its grandeur is that it is "in spirit." Why, then, seek to make a blend of Paul with Peter, or even with John? It is no disparagement to the other writers to emphasize the value of Paul's ministry. If we would realize maturity in both grace and knowledge, he is our true teacher. If we would live and walk in spirit, and enter into the very "depths of God," he is also our guide.

Many godly men of the past, who from various causes may not have fully seen the vastness of such grace as the great apostle discloses, have yet sensed, as it were, something of its celestial character. Who but Paul gives us so exalted a conception of Christ? Who associates the Lord of life and glory with such fullness of reward and regal potency? Who, but he, points the believer to so glorious a consummation of God's purpose as we find unfolded in the sacred Scriptures?

As "the Image of the invisible God," Christ is set forth as by no other. Well, then, may the faith he brings us into be the "one faith" for believers of today. It makes Christ not only our Expectation but the Reconciler of the universe, and for our everyday life brings Him so near to our hearts. Should we not, then, thank the God and Father of our Lord Iesus Christ, as did Paul himself, for such rare communications of grace?



Divine Lockup

by — Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

This work deals scripturally with God's sovereignty in the midst of humanity's current condition of, and future deliverance from, unbelief, sin, vanity and corruption. Without question, for all creation, the best is yet to come.

66 pp., PB See order form. Œ

Well may Paul have found in Christ his *All in all*, for he had found in Him the Daysman of God Who could lay His hand upon them both. Paul knew man, but how much he also knew of the power of Christ! So he was greatly used by God as the ambassador of Christ. It has been said that "Paul never knew Jesus in His life-time, but nevertheless it was he who best understood Him." He proclaims the Christ of God in a way to bear Him to the heart in an effulgence of grace and glory.

Would that more preachers and teachers of today could thus see the might and majesty of Christ, as so set forth. However, most of them hark back to Christ's earthly ministry or to other epistles rather than Paul's and do not therefore reach the heights of grace and knowledge they would attain by study of Paul's peerless ministry. How enhanced their messages would be if they heralded Christ as the Image of the invisible God and the Son of His love! Ministries would be profoundly changed, and their sermons, dry and dead, would be freshened by the dew of heaven and throbbing with life in its fullness.

There is need for Christ to be preached as Paul

1. Wernle, Paul; cited by Percy Gardner in *The Religious Experience* of Saint Paul (1911).

preached Him. For, in his writings the themes are their own grandeur and eloquence as they so movingly tell of God's indescribable gift of the Son of His love. Preachers who would saturate themselves in such divine phraseology could bring truths to the enlightenment of the heart unheard of by many of God's people. Darkness would be pierced, and a wonderful light and liberty rest upon speaker and hearer alike. To our God there would ascend a fragrant odor, for His Christ would be truly exalted, and His excellencies magnified as never before.

May it then be that to us, to whom God has made known so rich an understanding and blessedness, there might increasingly come the *knowledge-transcending* love of Christ.

— *UR*, Volume 36 (1945)

(edited)

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- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret in ages past" (Romans 16:25);
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- the organic nature of the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Ephesians 1:1-3);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
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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