

The Mystery of Jesus as God



SABBATH—APRIL 5

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Isaiah 9:6; Micah 5:2; Matthew 16:13–17; John 1:1, 14, 18; John 8:58; John 17:5; John 20:28; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 13:14.

MEMORY VERSE: “In the beginning, the Word was already there. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things were made through him. Nothing that has been made was made without him” (John 1:1–3, NlrV).

LET US CONSIDER WHAT THE BIBLE TELLS US ABOUT JESUS. His life has commanded so much attention through many hundreds of years. As we do so, we should remember the important talk between Jesus and His disciples (followers) at Caesarea Philippi. Jesus heard Peter say that He was the Messiah, the Son of God. But Jesus reminded Peter that this wisdom did not come from human¹ thought. Instead, it came from “‘my Father in heaven’” (Matthew 16:17, NIV). (Read Matthew 16:13–17, also Matthew 11:25–27.) “Flesh and blood” (Matthew 16:17, KJV), our own human wisdom, is very limited when compared with God.

To believe in Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God is to support the idea that He did not have His beginning in Mary’s womb. It is to believe that Jesus was different from the rest of the human race (group) no matter how much He might be the same as us in other ways. In short, it is to believe that He lived a life before His time on earth. He was “the exact likeness of God, who can’t [cannot] be seen. . . . All things were created by him” (Colossians 1:15, 16, NlrV). “Before anything was created, he was already there. He holds everything together” (verse 17, NlrV).

1. human—of, or concerning, men, women, or children.

SUNDAY—APRIL 6**HIS PREEXISTENCE²—WHAT IT MEANS TO US (Isaiah 9:6)**

Why should we care about Christ's preexistence? How is it connected with salvation?³ What hint(s) toward an answer do you find in Hebrews 1:1–4 and Colossians 1:15–20?

For all of us, our existence (life) began when we were born. (Some may argue that it began when we were conceived.⁴) Christ was different. He did not come into existence in Mary's womb. He lived before that, eternally (forever) so. That is what we mean by His preexistence. He was there before all time.



Before Jesus was born as Mary's Son, He existed (lived) as God before all time began.

How do Isaiah 9:6 and Micah 5:2 give us hints about Christ's preexistence? Read also Matthew 2:1–6.

The word *mosa'ah* (KJV: "goings

forth; RSV: "origin") in Micah 5:2 is not easy to translate. But the other part of the verse clearly shows the preexistence ("pre-life") of the coming Ruler and His *eternal* preexistence "from everlasting." (Read *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 4, page 1025.)

Isaiah 9:6 teaches the eternal preexistence of Jesus Christ, the special Person who was to come into the world. It is an unusual claim for this One to be called "Mighty (Powerful) God" and "Everlasting Father" (NIV). It is all the more important when we remember that the prophecy⁵ was given to a group of people who believed in one God. And it is also important for Isaiah to call this Son "Mighty God, Everlasting Father" because it breaks through the prophet's⁶ own usual way of thinking. *The Son is also the Father, "the Everlasting Father"?* Talk about having to live by faith!

What other parts of our beliefs do we have to take on raw, naked faith and nothing else? Is there something wrong with having to do that? Discuss.

MONDAY—APRIL 7**THE WITNESS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT (John 17:5)**

Other proof appears in the New Testament that shows the preexis-

2. preexistence—life before life on earth. Christ had a life before He lived on earth.

3. salvation—God's plan for saving sinners from eternal (without end) death.

4. conceived—life begins when a sperm joins and fertilizes an egg which causes a woman to become pregnant.

5. prophecy—a message given about what will happen in the future.

6. prophet—a man or woman sent by God to warn us about what will happen in the future.

tence (“pre-life”) of Jesus. Perhaps some of the most interesting proof comes from the mouth of Jesus Himself. He says things that suggest that He, Himself, knew of His own preexistence.

We find good examples that Jesus knew of His own history. One example is that Jesus said in Luke 19:10, “‘The Son of Man came to look for the lost and save them’ ” (NirV). Another clear example from Jesus came in the words of His great Passion Week⁷ prayer. He asked His Father to give Him “‘the glory I had with you before the world began’ ” (John 17:5, NirV).

How is both the preexistence of Christ and His knowledge of that preexistence shown in John 3:13; John 8:23; John 8:58, 59; and John 17:8, 24?

“ ‘Before Abraham was, I am’ ” (John 8:58, KJV). The “I AM” sentence in this verse suggests the idea of eternal preexistence. Jesus’ audience understood this point very well. For this reason they took up stones to kill Him for what they considered to be His blasphemy⁸ (verse 59).

“In speaking of His pre-existence, Christ carries the mind back to the very beginning. Jesus comforts us with the promise that He never failed to be in close fellowship with the eternal God. He spoke to the Jews as One brought up with God from the

beginning.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, in *Signs of the Times*, August 29, 1900.



The crowd wanted to stone Jesus for saying He existed (lived) before Abraham did.

How does Ellen G. White’s quote above help us to better understand the unbelievable sacrifice⁹ made for our sake at the Cross?

TUESDAY—APRIL 8

CLEAR DIFFERENCES (John 3:16)

The Bible is very clear in presenting Jesus as God, equal to God the Father. But we still have verses that need to be explained. One example is the most beloved and well-known verse in all the Bible, John 3:16 (KJV): “ ‘For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.’ ” The problem is: How can the verse

7. Passion Week—life before life on earth. Christ had a life before He lived on earth.

8. blasphemy—to boast by saying, “I am God, or I am equal to God.”

9. sacrifice—Jesus’ death for us on the cross.

say Jesus was “begotten” if He was eternal? Did someone beget¹⁰ Him, just like the rest of us?



God loved the world so much that He gave His one and only Son to save it.

The wording “only begotten” is one word in the Greek language: *monogenes*. It appears nine times in the New Testament. Five of those times point to Jesus, and all five are in the writings of John (John 1:14, 18; John 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9). From the start of his Gospel¹¹ John tries to prove that Jesus Christ is God. Really, John starts his Gospel on that point: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). Would it make much sense for this Jewish writer (John) to claim that someone who was created was God?

10. beget—give birth to.

11. Gospel—one of the four books in the New Testament that tells the story of Jesus’ life and His teachings. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are called the Gospels.

12. uniqueness—one of a kind; the only one.

13. unique—single, alone.

In Luke 7:11–15; Luke 8:41, 42; and Luke 9:38, the word *monogenes* points to someone other than Jesus. What do you think it means?

The boy from Nain who had died is described as an “only son” (“the only son of his mother”). Nothing is said here about the idea of *begetting*. Rather, the focus is on *singleness, onliness, uniqueness*.¹² The same is true with Jairus’s daughter—she was his “only . . . daughter,” his *monogenes*, the only one of a kind, his only child. In this way she was unique.¹³ That is also the point of Luke 9:38.

Bible thinkers support the idea that *monogenes* does not really mean begetting or begotten. Instead, it means unique or the oneness of a kind. How does this idea, too, help us better understand the great sacrifice made for us at the Cross?

WEDNESDAY—APRIL 9

CHRIST AS GOD (Matthew 3:3)

The writers of the New Testament make it clear that Jesus deserves the title of God. This fact is especially true when one remembers that all those writers except Luke were Jews. They strongly believed in one God. They

did not use the title of God carelessly. We need to understand that their testimony to Jesus came from their Holy Spirit-inspired belief in one God.

How do the following verses in Matthew 3:3; John 1:1; John 1:18; John 20:28 make the case for Jesus as God?

Matthew 3:3 goes back to Isaiah 40:3, where Isaiah uses the word *Yahweh*. This is the most sacred (holy) name for God in the Old Testament. The framework of the John 1:1 verse in the original language does not leave any doubt about what John was saying. Some sixty-five years after His death, Jesus is called God by one who knew Him very well. In John 1:18, the Greek wording calls Jesus “the unique [one of a kind] God.”

Then how about John 20:28? Was this simply an example of surprise on Thomas’s part? Was it the same way people today would use the name of God to show surprise or shock? To decide that this is true would be to read the New Testament in the wrong way. In the first place, the Jews were very careful to stay clear of blasphemy. And they did not have the wording, “Oh, my God” in their vocabulary (language). Furthermore, how the verse was framed does not permit such an interpretation (meaning). The verse says: “Thomas said to him” (NIV). Thomas was speaking to Jesus. It was a show of faith, not of surprise. And the fact that Jesus did

not rebuke (scold) him shows that He was satisfied with Thomas’s announcement of faith.

Jesus as God is the same Jesus who offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins. How much more should the Cross mean to us when we know that it was God—God hanging there for our sins?

THURSDAY—APRIL 10

AND THERE IS MORE (1 Corinthians 1:3)

The New Testament is full of proof for Jesus as God. But space is limited for more details. But we might point out that Jesus has received credit for being an eternal God and Creator. He has claimed to forgive sins. He has claimed to be the final Judge of the last day. In addition, we find the name of Jesus to be equal with that of the Father. For example, we find this in the baptismal command (Matthew 28:19). Also, in John 14:9, Jesus uses the words that clearly would be blasphemy on the lips of any other human: “ ‘Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father’ ” (NIV).

What do 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Revelation 20:6; and Revelation 22:23 teach about Christ as God?

The above verses show Christ as equal with God the Father. And this all measures up with Jesus’ own claims when He walked the dusty streets of

Palestine. In John 10:30, for example, Jesus said, “ ‘I and the Father are one’ ” (NIV). The Greek word used here for “one” suggests a union as close as our minds can imagine. Jesus and the Father are of the same kind, but not one and the same Person. (If so, He would have used a different word.) If you have trouble understanding this, you are not alone. The deeper you explore the subject, the more clearly you understand your limits.

JESUS = GOD

Jesus and God are equal in power but are not the same person.

But suppose what would happen if God the Father came to die for us, and the one we have come to know as Jesus stayed back in heaven? Nothing would have changed except that we would have been calling each by the name we now use for the other. That is what God the Father and God the Son being equal means to us.

Review the life of Jesus. Keep in mind the points we have touched on this week. What does all this tell us about who God is? Why should this help us to be so full of hope

and joy and trust even in difficult times?

FRIDAY—APRIL 11

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, “ ‘God With Us,’ ” pages 19–26, in *The Desire of Ages*.

It is helpful to note how cleverly Matthew and Luke deal with the family history of Jesus (Matthew 1:16, 18; Luke 3:23; read also Luke 1:26–35). These Bible writers could not have done better on this point. We find no confusion on this important point. John’s Gospel gives perhaps the strongest support anywhere in the Bible of Jesus being God (John 1:1–3, 14). It shows how important the idea of virgin birth is for the whole plan of salvation. The virgin birth supports the idea of Christ’s preexistence as God and stands rock solid in the Gospels.

“Another dangerous error is the teaching that denies Christ as God. It is wrong to claim that He had no existence (life) before His first coming to this world. This belief is accepted by a large group of people who claim to believe the Bible. But they are opposed to the clearest claims of our Saviour about His relationship with the Father, His character¹⁴ as God, and His preexistence. Their belief cannot be supported by the very careful study of the Bible. It lowers man’s understanding of the work of salvation and destroys faith in the

¹⁴ character—who God is; understanding the character of God means being kind, loving, honest, and so on. God’s law (Ten Commandments) shows us His character.

Bible as God's Word. If men refuse to accept what the Holy Bible says about Christ as God, it is useless to argue the point with them. This is because no argument could make them believe otherwise. . . . None who hold this error can have a true understanding of the character or the mission of Christ. Nor can they understand the great plan of God for man's salvation."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, "Snares [Traps] of Satan," page 524, in *The Great Controversy [War]*.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ❶ Look at Ellen G. White's quote above. Why is it so important that we accept and follow the doctrine of Christ being God and equal to the Father? What does the plan of salvation lose if we do not follow this teaching?
- ❷ How important is the event of Matthew 9:1–8? How clever was Jesus in bringing up the issue of His being God? What lessons was He trying to teach? What connection was He making between our physical and our spiritual problems?
- ❸ Think about what Christ as God means to you, with the Cross in mind. Be prepared to bring your thoughts on this topic to class on Sabbath.