

# CHRISTOLOGY: INCARNATION

## WEEK 3

Patrick Reeder

December 22, 2017

# OUTLINE

## BIBLICAL WITNESS OF INCARNATION

Old Testament

New Testament

## THE DOCTRINE OF INCARNATION

Incarnational Heresy

Why Did God Become Man?

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# OLD TESTAMENT THEOPHANIES

Review from last week:

1. The Angel of the Lord (Most likely Pre-incarnate Christ)
  - ▶ Genesis 16:7a,13a—Now the angel of the LORD found [Hagar] by a spring of water in the wilderness
  - ▶ Zech 12:8—and the house of David will be like God, like the angel of the LORD before them. [Note parallelism]
2. Embodied Theophanies (Possibly Pre-incarnate Christ)
  - ▶ Gen 3:8a—They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. . .
  - ▶ 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.

These are not incarnations proper but set a precedent for divine immanence, of which the incarnation is the highest form.

## PROPHETIC WITNESS

For each of these passages, how do they argue for divine incarnation?

1. Psalm 45:6,7—Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.
2. Psalm 110:1—The LORD [YHWH] says to my lord [adonai]: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”
3. Isaiah 9:6,7—For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD will accomplish this.

## PROPHETIC WITNESS

How do these argue for divine incarnation?

1. Psalm 45:6,7—This passage is directed towards the Davidic king and was a wedding song, but it directly addresses the King as God and addressing the same person (presumably) indicates that this God has a God (*Your throne, O God . . . your God, has set you . . .*).
2. Psalm 110:1—David, the greatest king of Israel, refers to this person as *adonai* (figure of authority, used *almost* exclusively of God). Cole quoting Kidner calls this “an example of the Old Testament language bursting its banks, to demand a more than human fulfillment.” (Cole, 84). See also Jesus’ pointed questions on this passage in Matt 22:41ff.
3. Isaiah 9:6,7—This is the most explicit given that a *child* (clearly human) will be called God (clearly divine) and other highly exalted terms. (Cf. Isaiah 7:14).

Some other striking passages (though somewhat veiled) include Isaiah 40:3,11; Ezekiel 34:20-24; Jeremiah 23:5-6; 33:15-18.

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# NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament is far more explicit about the incarnation. This should not be a surprise given the way God progressively reveals things (cf. Moses' understanding with Isaiah's.) We will look at a few different presentations of the incarnation through the New Testament:

1. Synoptic Gospels
2. Johannine Teaching (including epistles)
3. Pauline Teaching (including Hebrews)



## SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

There are hours of material on this. Let's look at a few passages that highlight both divinity and humanity:

- ▶ Matt 1:20b-21—for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus [YHWH Saves], for He [himself] will save His people from their sins.
- ▶ Luke 24:36-37, 41-43—While they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be to you.” But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit . . . While they still could not believe it because of their joy and amazement, He said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” They gave Him a piece of a broiled fish; and He took it and ate it before them.

## PAULINE TEACHING

- ▶ Colossians 2:9—For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form
- ▶ Phil 2:6-7—[Christ Jesus] who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. [*What in the context of this statement eliminates any doubt as to both the divinity or the humanity of Christ?*]
  - ▶ Regarding humanity, Jesus died (v. 8) which is a distinctively human thing.
  - ▶ Regarding deity, vv.10-11 make overt reference to Isaiah 45:23, which is God speaking in first person!
- ▶ Hebrews 1:3a—And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature  
2:14a—Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same  
2:17a—He had to be made like His brethren in *all things* . . .  
[Cf. context and passages applied to Christ! Passages both clearly divine (Psalm 102) and clearly human (Psalm 8)!]

## JOHANNINE TEACHING

The Gospel of John alone has so many passages that indicate this, we'd be here all night if we looked at even a hand full. These will due:

- ▶ John 1:1,14—In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.
- ▶ I John 1:1-2—What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life
- ▶ I John 4:2-3a—This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God.

It is worthy of special note that John is the most explicit about the deity of Christ, he is also the most explicit about Jesus' dependence on the Father (Cf. John 5:19, John 10:30, John 14:28)

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## HERESIES CONCERNING CHRIST'S DEITY

*Ebionism* was a very early Jewish Christianity splinter group that believed that while Jesus was the Messiah and empowered by God for a time, he was not divine. The Christ came upon the man Jesus during the baptism and departed before his crucifixion. [Issues?]

*Arianism* developed in the early church from the teaching of Arius (cf. Jehovah's Witnesses). For each of the following key features of Arianism, indicate some problems for it:

1. God (the Father in our terminology) is wholly singular and undivided.
2. The Word (who is not God) was created by the Father. The Word then created everything else.
3. The Word is higher than all other creatures but still beneath God—he is a kind of demi-god.

## HERESIES CONCERNING CHRIST'S DEITY

For each of the following key features of Arianism, indicate some problems for it:

1. God (the Father in our terminology) is wholly singular and undivided.
  - ▶ This raises concerns for the relational aspects of God
  - ▶ There is an abundance of evidence that God seems to exhibit some kind of complexity within himself (e.g. John 1:1; Matt 3:13ff).
2. The Word (who is not God) was created by the Father and then created everything else.
  - ▶ It's clearly unbiblical (John 1:3).
  - ▶ The types of passages used to defend this view are often misinterpreted (cf. Colossians 1:15).
3. The Word is higher than all other creatures but still beneath God—he is a kind of demi-god.
  - ▶ This raises serious concerns about his efficacy as a sacrifice. In this interpretation, he's not really human, nor infinite.
  - ▶ All the fullness of deity (Col 2:9).

## HERESIES CONCERNING CHRIST'S HUMANITY

One of the earliest heresies was to deny that Christ was truly human: he merely *appeared* to be human (Docetism). Docetism was born from Greek teaching, specifically its low view of matter and high view of mind/spirit. Hence, if matter is necessarily bad, then Jesus could not be truly human. [Can you see ways that this dualism is still with us?]

Another historical heresy comes from Apollonarianism: they taught that Jesus had a divine soul but a human body. This view is more plausible and tempting—what might be wrong with it?

- ▶ Jesus' sacrifice would appear to be limited to his physical death; likewise, his sympathy with our plight would be diminished (Heb 4:15).
- ▶ Like the previous view, it exaggerates the difference between body and spirit. While distinct, they are deeply entangled in the human person.
- ▶ Jesus seems to exhibit distinctly human reactions to things (e.g. agony in the garden). (Cf. Hebrews 2:17)

## HERESIES CONCERNING THE HYPOSTATIC UNION

A key question develops: *how* is Jesus both God and man? We teach that the incarnation involved a hypostatic union between the eternal Word and an individual human being, Jesus of Nazareth. Some alternatives that developed over the years follow. For each indicate a biblical passage passage that could refute it?

1. *Adoptionism*—Jesus was an ordinary man, *adopted* as divine by God.
  - ▶ John 1:1-3!
2. *Anhypostatic Christology*—Similar to Apollonarianism, this teaches that the eternal Word was not united with an individual human person.
  - ▶ Luke 1-2 and Jesus' birth makes this very implausible.
3. *Kenoticism*—Jesus laid aside his divine attributes while on earth, transitioning from the eternal Word into a man, and then back after his ascension. This takes Phil 2:7 to teach that Jesus laid aside the divine attributes (not just their use).
  - ▶ “The kenosis of Philippians 2:7 must be understood in the light of the pleroma of Colossians 2:9. (Erickson, 751)”



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## CUR DEUS HOMO

We will examine the question as to why God became Man in greater detail next week with the Atonement. In the mean time, here is a broader list from (Cole,122):

- ▶ To reveal God to humanity (John 1:18; 14:7-11)
- ▶ To offer a pattern of living (I Peter 2:21; I John 2:6)
- ▶ To bind up the demonic powers (Hebrews 2:14,5; I John 3:8)
- ▶ To provide a high priest, sympathetic to our human weakness (Hebrews 4:14-16)
- ▶ To provide a substitutionary sacrifice for all of humanity (Hebrews 10:1-10)

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