

10-2017

An Overview of the Activities of Jesus Christ Prior to Bethlehem (Part B)

Harold Willmington

Liberty University, hwillmington@liberty.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/second_person



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), [Practical Theology Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Willmington, Harold, "An Overview of the Activities of Jesus Christ Prior to Bethlehem (Part B)" (2017). *The Second Person File*. 52.
https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/second_person/52

This The Eternal Son of God, Jesus Christ is brought to you for free and open access by the Theological Studies at Scholars Crossing. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Second Person File by an authorized administrator of Scholars Crossing. For more information, please contact scholarlycommunications@liberty.edu.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE ACTIVITIES OF JESUS CHRIST PRIOR TO BETHLEHEM (PART B)

- **THE ANALYSIS (A SPECIAL INTRODUCTION)**

The Preexistence of Jesus Christ as God– It is possible (as some have done) to hold to his preexistence without believing in his deity. For instance, the Jehovah’s Witness cult brazenly declares that Christ preexisted as Michael the archangel prior to Bethlehem. But the Bible dogmatically declares both his preexistence and His deity.

A. The fact of his divine preexistence

1. As taught by Isaiah – *“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace”* (Isa. 9:6).
 - a. His eternal preexistence is seen through the title “the everlasting Father,” a phrase that can also be translated “the Father of Eternity” – The Hebrew word for father is *ah*, which can also be rendered “source,” and “inventor.” In other words Jesus is the father and source of eternity itself.
 - b. His divine preexistence is seen by the twin titles “wonderful,” and “mighty God.”
 - (1) Wonderful – The Hebrew word for wonderful is *pehleh*. The same phrase occurs in Isaiah 28:29: “This also cometh forth from the LORD of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.”
 - (2) The mighty God – Here the Hebrew is *el gibbor* and can be found in many Old Testament passages, all of which refer to God himself. (See Deut. 10:17; Judg. 5:23; Psa. 24:8; 45:3; Isa. 10:21; 42:13; Jer. 32:18.)
2. As taught by Micah – *“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times”* (Mic. 5:2, NIV).
3. As taught by John the Baptist – *“John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me”* (John 1:15).

What does this verse mean? According to Luke 1:36, John’s birth to Elisabeth occurred some six months prior to Jesus’ birth. Even though, humanly speaking, John the Baptist was born before Jesus was born, John declares in these verses that Jesus existed before him and that he recognizes Jesus as our Messiah... “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

4. As taught by the Apostle John – “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). “(For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;)” (1 John 1:2).

In these verses the Apostle John connects Jesus’ preexistence to his deity.

5. As taught by the Apostle Paul – “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist” (Col. 1:16-17). (See also 2 Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:6-8.)
6. As taught by the Apostle Peter – “Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you” (1 Pet. 1:20).
7. As taught by Christ himself – “For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me” (John 6:38). “I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.... When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?” (John 6:51, 61-62). “Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58). “And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was” (John 17:5). Here Christ requests that the Father share his glory with the Son. But note the Father’s previous statement about his glory in Isaiah: “I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another” (Isa. 42:8).

One is forced to conclude that either Christ was God indeed and had a rightful claim to this glory, or he was an arrogant imposter demanding something the Father would never give him. Of course Jesus’ divine preexistence is inescapable. Jesus Christ is God. (See also Rev. 1:8, 11; 22:13.)

8. As taught by the book of Hebrews – “But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom” (Heb. 1:8). “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever” (Heb. 13:8). (See also Heb. 1:10-12.)

- **The activities of the divine preexistent Christ** – What was our Savior doing prior to his Bethlehem appearance? The Scriptures make it plain he was busy indeed.

1. He was creating the universe – “*All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made*” (John 1:3). “*For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him*” (Col. 1:16). “*Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he*

made the worlds; and, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands” (Heb. 1:2, 10).

Moses, in Genesis 1:1, tells us, *“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.”* In other words, Moses, who wrote the book of Genesis, tells us that the universe was created by God. However, in the above verses John tells us that the world and the universe were made by Christ. Of course there is no contradiction. Jesus was God, and he created all things. This creation included everything, from electrons to galaxies, and from angels to Adam.

2. He was controlling this created universe – *“Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb. 1:3); “And he is before all things, and by him all things consist” (Col. 1:17).*

From the time he created the earth and placed it some 93 million miles from the sun right on up to this very day he is controlling that distance. If the earth would suddenly venture too close to the sun – get a few million miles closer to it – we would all “boil away.” If the earth would stray a few more million miles from the sun in its orbit around the sun, we would freeze to death. However, we have the assurance he is controlling the universe.

3. He was communing with the Father – *“Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24).*

- C. The Old Testament Ministry of Jesus Christ – The Old Testament records a number of theophanies. A theophany is a pre-Bethlehem appearance of Christ. Most Bible theologians hold that the recurring angel of the Lord episodes in the Old Testament are to be identified with Christ himself. This theological position is strongly suggested by two key passages.

The first is found in Genesis 48, where the dying patriarch Jacob is blessing his two grandchildren. The old founder of Israel prays: *“The angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads” (Gen. 48:16a).* As no regular angel can redeem men, it is assumed the angel here is actually Jesus Christ.

The second passage is found in Judges 13, where a barren couple has just learned from the angel of the Lord about the future birth of Samson. In gratitude, Manoah (the father) requests the name of the angel, that he might call the babe after him. Note the answer, however: *“And the angel of the Lord said unto him, Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret?” (Judg. 13:18).*

This word secret is from the same Hebrew root word found in Isaiah 9:6, where it is translated “Wonderful.” *“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6).* Since we know the

“Wonderful” in this verse is a reference to Christ, it is highly probable the “secret” in Judges 13:18 is also referring to Christ.

Let us now examine some other Old Testament theophanies.

1. He appeared to Hagar, Abraham's Egyptian wife, on two occasions.
First occasion, prior to the birth of her son Ishmael (Gen. 16:7-14) – The first biblical reference to the angel of the Lord occurs here as he tenderly ministers to a pagan and pregnant Egyptian girl.
Second occasion, following the birth of Ishmael (Gen. 21:16-20)
2. He appeared to Abraham.
 - a. Concerning the birth of Isaac (Gen.18:10)
 - b. Concerning the destruction of Sodom (Gen.18:17)
 - c. Concerning the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen. 22:11)
3. He appeared to Jacob.
 - a. At Bethel (Gen. 28:12-15)
 - b. By the brook Jabbok (Gen. 32:24-30)
4. He appeared to Moses – These three occasions were all connected with Mount Sinai.
 - a. The first occasion was near the mountain – *“And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I. And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground”* (Exod. 3:4-5).
 - b. The second occasion was on the mountain – *“Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared”* (Exod. 23:20).
 - c. The last occasion was in the mountain – *“And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cliff of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by”* (Exod. 33:22).
5. He appeared to Joshua (Josh. 5:13-15) – He appeared to Joshua on the eve of the battle against Jericho and introduced himself as *“captain of the host of the Lord.”*
6. He appeared to Gideon (Judg. 6:11-24) – The angel of the Lord found a very discouraged Gideon threshing wheat beside a wine press to hide it from the opposing Midianites.
7. He appeared to Samson's parents (Judg. 13).
8. He appeared to Isaiah (Isa. 6:1-13) – A study of the book of Isaiah reveals that Isaiah was allowed to see more of the glory of the preincarnate Christ than any other Old Testament prophet.
9. He appeared to three young Hebrews in the fiery furnace – How exciting are the astonished words of the pagan king Nebuchadnezzar as he witnessed this appearance. *“Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said*

unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God” (Dan. 3:24-25).

10. He appeared to Daniel.

- a. The first of these appearances was in a lions’ den – *“Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever. My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions’ mouths, that they have not hurt me” (Dan. 6:21-22).*
- b. The second occurred during the beginning of King Belshazzar's reign – *“I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his shall not be destroyed” (Dan. 7:13-14).*
- c. The third occurred by the Tigris River – *“Then I lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz: His body also was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude” (Dan. 10:5-6).*

11. He appeared to Zechariah (Zech. 1:8-13; 2:8-11; 3:10; 6:12-15) – In his book Zechariah describes Christ as protecting Jerusalem (1:8-13), measuring Jerusalem (2:8-11), cleansing Jerusalem (3:10), and building Jerusalem (6:12-15).

As you can see, from the above study of the Old Testament ministry of Christ, he was busily at work, even before his Bethlehem appearance. John MacArthur summarizes:

The ministry of the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament parallels the ministry of Jesus Christ in the New Testament:

He revealed God's Word (Exod. 3:2-6; John 1:18).

He called leaders like Moses, Gideon, and Samson into God’s service just as Christ called his disciples (Exod. 3:6-10; Judg. 6:14-16; 13:1-5, 24-25; Matt. 10:1-4).

He delivered his people through Moses, Gideon, and Samson just as Christ delivered his people through his work on the cross (Exod. 14:19-20; Judg. 6:14-16; Gal. 5:1).

He protected his people. Psalm 34:7 says, “The angel of the Lord encampeth around about those who fear him, and delivereth them.” Christ protects us as well.

He interceded for Israel (Zech. 1:12). Similarly Christ is our intercessor (Heb. 7:25).

He defended believers against the attacks of Satan (Zech. 3:1-6), which is precisely what Christ does (1 John 2:1-2).

He confirmed the covenant with Abraham (Gen. 22:15-18), and Christ sealed the New Covenant with his blood (Matt. 26:28).

He comforted Hagar (Gen. 16:7-11), which is reminiscent of how Jesus comforts us (Matt. 11:28-30). (God, Satan, and Angels, p. 147)