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GOD THE SON

God the eternal Son became incarnate in Jesus Christ. Through Him all things were created, the character of God is revealed, the salvation of humanity is accomplished, and the world is judged. Forever truly God, He became also truly man, Jesus the Christ. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He lived and experienced temptation as a human being, but perfectly exemplified the righteousness and love of God. By His miracles He manifested God's power and was attested as God's promised Messiah. He suffered and died voluntarily on the cross for our sins and in our place, was raised from the dead, and ascended to minister in the heavenly sanctuary in our behalf. He will come again in glory for the final deliverance of His people and the restoration of all things.

GOD THE SON

The wilderness had become a nightmare of vipers. Snakes slithered under cooking pots, coiled around tent pegs. They lurked among children's toys, lay in wait in the sleeping pallets. Their fangs sank deep, injecting deadly poison.

The wilderness, which once had been Israel's refuge, became its graveyard. Hundreds lay dying. Realizing their predicament, terrorized parents hurried to Moses' tent, pleading for help. "Moses prayed for the people."

God's answer? Mold a serpent, and lift it high—and all who looked on it would live. "So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and...if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived" (Num. 21:9).

The serpent has always been Satan's symbol (Genesis 3; Revelation 12), representing sin. The camp had been plunged into Satan's hands. God's remedy? Not looking at a lamb on the sanctuary altar, but beholding a bronze serpent.

It was a strange symbol of Christ. Just as the likeness of the serpents that stung was lifted up on a pole, Jesus, made "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom. 8:3), was to be lifted up on the shameful cross (John 3:14,15). He became sin, taking upon Himself all the sins of everyone who has lived or will live. "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). By looking to Christ hopeless humanity can find life.

How could the incarnation bring salvation to humanity? What effect did it have on the Son? How could God become a human being and why was it necessary?

The Incarnation: Predictions and Fulfillment

God's plan to rescue those who strayed from His all-wise counsel (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9) convincingly demonstrates His love. In this plan His Son was "foreordained before the foundation of the world" as the sacrifice for sin, to be the hope of the human race (1 Peter 1:19,20). He was to bring us back to God and provide deliverance from sin through the destruction of the works of the devil (1 Peter 3:18; Matt. 1:21; 1 John 3:8).

Sin had severed Adam and Eve from the source of life, and should have resulted in their immediate death. But in accordance with the plan laid before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:20,21), the "counsel of peace" (Zech. 6:13), God the Son stepped between them and divine justice, bridging the gulf and restraining death.

Even before the cross, then, His grace kept sinners alive and assured them of salvation. But to restore us fully as sons and daughters of God, He had to become a man.

Immediately after Adam and Eve sinned, God gave them hope by promising to introduce a supernatural enmity between the serpent and the woman, between his seed and hers. In the cryptic statement of Genesis 3:15 the serpent and its offspring represent Satan and his followers; the woman and her seed symbolize God's people and the Saviour of the world. This statement was the first assurance that the controversy between good and evil would end in victory for God's Son.

The victory, however, would be painful: "He [the Saviour] shall bruise your [Satan's] head, and you [Satan] shall bruise His [the Saviour's] heel" (Gen. 3:15). No one would come out unscathed.

From that moment, mankind looked for the Promised One. The Old Testament unfolds that search. Prophecies foretold that when the Promised One arrived, the world would have evidence to confirm His identity.

A Prophetic Dramatization of Salvation

After sin entered, God instituted animal sacrifices to illustrate the mission of the Saviour to come (see Gen. 4:4). This symbolic system dramatized the manner in which God the Son would eradicate sin.

Because of sin the transgression of God's law the human race faced death (Gen. 2:17; 3:19; 1 John 3:4; Rom. 6:23). God's law demanded the life of the sinner. But in His infinite love God gave His Son, "that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). What an incomprehensible act of condescension! God the eternal Son, Himself pays vicariously the penalty for sin, so that He can provide us forgiveness and reconciliation to the Godhead.

After Israel's exodus from Egypt, the sacrificial offerings were conducted in a tabernacle as part of a covenant relationship between God and His people. Built by Moses according to a heavenly pattern, the sanctuary and its services were instituted to illustrate the plan of salvation (Ex. 25:8,9,40; Heb. 8:1-5).

To obtain forgiveness, a repentant sinner brought a sacrificial animal that had no blemishes a representation of the sinless Saviour. The sinner then would place his hand upon the innocent animal and confess his sins (Lev. 1:3,4). This act symbolized the transfer of the sin from the guilty sinner to the innocent victim, depicting the substitutionary nature of the sacrifice.

Since "without shedding of blood there is no remission" of sins (Heb. 9:22), the sinner then killed the animal, making the deadly nature of sin evident. A sorrowful way to express hope, but the sinner's only way to express faith.

After the priestly ministry (Leviticus 4-7), the sinner received forgiveness of sins through his faith in the substitutionary death of the coming Redeemer, which the animal sacrifice symbolized (cf. Lev. 4:26,31,35). The New Testament recognizes Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Through His precious blood, "as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:19), He obtained for the human race redemption from the ultimate penalty of sin.

Predictions About a Saviour

God promises that the Saviour-Messiah the Anointed One would come through Abraham's line: "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 22:18; cf. 12:3).

Isaiah prophesied that the Saviour would come as a male child, and would be both human and divine: "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6). This Redeemer would ascend the throne of David and establish an everlasting government of peace (Isa. 9:7). Bethlehem would be His birthplace (Micah 5:2).

The birth of this divine-human person would be supernatural. Citing Isaiah 7:14, the New Testament states, "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, 'God with us'" (Matt. 1:23).

The Saviour's mission is expressed in these words: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Isa. 61:1,2; cf. Luke 4:18,19).

Amazingly the Messiah would suffer rejection. He would be perceived as "a root out of dry ground." "He has no form or, and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him....Despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief....We did not esteem Him" (Isa. 53:2-4).

A close friend would betray Him (Ps. 41:9) for thirty pieces of silver (Zech. 11:12). During His trial He would be spat upon and beaten (Isa. 50:6). Those who executed Him would gamble for the very clothes He wore (Ps. 22:18). None of His bones were to be broken (Ps. 34:20), but His side was to be pierced (Zech. 12:10). In His afflictions He would not resist, but "as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth" (Isa. 53:7).

The innocent Saviour would suffer immensely for sinners. "Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows;... He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed....And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all....He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken" (Isa. 53:4-8).

The Saviour Identified

Only Jesus Christ has fulfilled these prophecies. Scriptures trace His genealogy to Abraham, calling Him the Son of Abraham (Matt. 1:1), and Paul affirms that the promise to Abraham and his seed was fulfilled in Christ (Gal. 3:16). The Messianic title "Son of David" was widely applied to Him (Matt. 21:9). He was identified as the promised Messiah, who would occupy the throne of David (Acts 2:29,30).

Jesus' birth was miraculous. The virgin Mary "was found with child of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 1:18-23). A Roman decree brought her to Bethlehem, the predicted birthplace (Luke 2:4-7).

One of Jesus' names was Immanuel, or "God With Us," which reflected His divine-human nature and illustrated God's identification with humanity (Matt. 1:23). His common name, Jesus, focused on His mission of salvation: "And you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21).

Jesus identified His mission with that of the Messiah predicted in Isaiah 61:1,2: "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:17-21).

Although He made a profound impact on His people, His message was generally rejected (John 1:11; Luke 23:18). With few exceptions He was not recognized as the world's Saviour. Instead of acceptance, He met death threats (John 5:16; 7:19; 11:53).

Toward the end of Jesus' three-and-a-half-year ministry, Judas Iscariot, a disciple, betrayed Him (John 13:18; 18:2) for thirty pieces of silver (Matt. 26:14,15). Instead of resisting, He rebuked His disciples for trying to defend Him (John 18:4-11).

Though innocent of any crime, less than twenty-four hours after He was arrested He had been spat upon, beaten, tried, condemned to death, and crucified (Matt. 26:67; John 19:1-16; Luke 23:14,15). Soldiers gambled for His clothing (John 19:23,24). During His crucifixion none of His bones was broken (John 19:32,33,36), and after He died soldiers pierced His side with a spear (John 19:34,37).

Christ's followers recognized His death as the only sacrifice of avail to sinners. "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). "Walk in love," he wrote, "as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma" (Eph. 5:2).

The Time of His Ministry and Death

The Bible reveals that God sent His Son to earth in "the fullness of the time" (Gal. 4:4). When Christ began His ministry He proclaimed, "The time is fulfilled" (Mark 1:15). These references to time indicate that the Saviour's mission proceeded in harmony with careful prophetic planning.

More than five centuries earlier, through Daniel, God had prophesied the exact time of the beginning of Christ's ministry and the time of His death.

Toward the end of the 70 years of Israel's captivity in Babylon, God told Daniel that He had allocated to the Jews and the city of Jerusalem a probationary period of 70 weeks.

During this time, by repenting and preparing themselves for the Messiah's coming, the Jewish nation was to fulfill God's purposes for them.

Daniel also wrote of "reconciliation for iniquity" and a bringing in of "everlasting righteousness" as marking this period. These Messianic activities indicate that the Saviour was to come within this time (Dan. 9:24).

Daniel's prophecy specified that the Messiah would appear "seven weeks and sixty-two weeks", or a total of 69 weeks, after "the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem" (Dan. 9:25). After the sixty-ninth week the Messiah would be "cut off, but not for Himself" (Dan. 9:26)--a reference to His vicarious death. He was to die in the middle of the seventieth week, bringing "an end to sacrifice and offering" (Dan. 9:27).

The key to understanding time prophecies lies in the Biblical principle that a day in prophetic time is equivalent to a literal solar year (Num. 14:34; Eze. 4:6). According to this year-day principle, the 70 weeks (or 490 prophetic days) then represent 490 literal years.

Daniel states that this period was to begin with "the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem" (Dan. 9:25). This decree, giving the Jews full autonomy, was issued in the seventh year of the Persian King Artaxerxes and became effective in the fall of 457 B.C. (Ezra 7:8, 12-26; 9:9). According to the prophecy, 483 years (69 prophetic weeks) after the decree "Messiah the Prince" would appear. Four hundred and eighty-three years after 457 B.C. brings us to the fall of A.D. 27, when Jesus was baptized and began His public ministry. Accepting these dates of 457 B.C. and A.D. 27, Gleason Archer comments that this was "a most remarkable exactitude in the fulfillment of such an ancient prophecy. Only God could have predicted the coming of His Son with such amazing precision; it defies all rationalistic explanation."

At His baptism in the Jordan, Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit and received God's recognition as the "Messiah" (Hebrew) or the "Christ" (Greek)--both meaning the "anointed one" (Luke 3:21,22; Acts 10:38; John 1:41). Jesus' proclamation, "the time is fulfilled" (Mark 1:15), refers to the fulfillment of this time prophecy.

In the middle of the seventieth week, in the spring of A.D. 31, exactly 3 ½ years after Christ's baptism, the Messiah brought the system of sacrifices to an end by giving His life. At the moment of His death the veil of the Temple was super-naturally "torn in two from top to bottom" (Matt. 27:51), indicating the divine abolition of all Temple services.

All the offerings and sacrifices had pointed forward to the all-sufficient sacrifice of the Messiah. When Jesus Christ, the true Lamb of God, was sacrificed at Calvary as a ransom for our sins (1 Peter 1:19), type met antitype, and shadow melded into reality. The earthly sanctuary services were no longer necessary.

At the exact time prophesied during the Passover festival, He died. "Indeed," Paul said, "Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7). This amazingly accurate time prophecy gives one of the strongest evidences of the fundamental historic truth that Jesus Christ is the long-predicted Saviour of the world.

The Resurrection of the Saviour

The Bible predicted not only the Saviour's death but also His resurrection. David prophesied "that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption" (Act 2:31; cf. Ps. 16:10). Although Christ had raised others from the dead (Mark 5:35-42; Luke 7:11-17; John 11), His own resurrection demonstrated the power behind His claim to be Saviour of the world: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die" (John 11:25,26).

After His resurrection He proclaimed, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death" (Rev. 1:17,18).

The Two Natures of Jesus Christ

In stating, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14) John set forth a profound truth. The incarnation of God the Son is a mystery. Scripture calls God's being manifested in the flesh "the mystery of godliness" (1 Tim. 3:16).

The Creator of worlds, He in whom was the fullness of the Godhead, became the helpless babe in the manger. Far superior to any of the angels, equal with the Father in dignity and glory, and yet He condescended to wear the garb of humanity!

One can barely grasp the meaning of this sacred mystery, and then only by calling on the Holy Spirit for enlightenment. In trying to comprehend the incarnation it is well to remember that "the secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children" (Deut. 29:29).

Jesus Christ Is Truly God

What is the evidence that Jesus Christ is divine? How did He perceive Himself? Did people recognize His divinity?

1. His divine attributes.

Christ possesses divine attributes. He is omnipotent. He said the Father has given Him "all authority...in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18; John 17:2).

He is omniscient. In Him, Paul said, "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3).

Jesus asserted His omnipresence with the assurances "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20) and "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20).

Although His divinity has the natural ability of omnipresence, the incarnate Christ has voluntarily limited Himself in this respect. He has chosen to be omnipresent through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-18).

Hebrews attests to His immutability, stating, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8).

His self-existence was evident when He claimed life in Himself (John 5:26) and John testified "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4). Christ's announcement "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25) affirmed that in Him is "life, original, unborrowed, underived."

Holiness is a part of His nature. At the annunciation, the angel said to Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). At the sight of Jesus demons cried out, "Let us alone!...I know who You are the Holy One of God" (Mark 1:24). He is love. "By this we know love," John wrote, "because He laid down His life for us" (1 John 3:16).

He is eternal. Isaiah called Him "Everlasting Father" (Isa. 9:6). Micah referred to Him as the One "whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2). Paul dated His existence "before all things" (Col. 1:17), and John concurred: "He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:2,3).

2. His divine powers and prerogatives.

The works of God are ascribed to Jesus. He is identified as both the Creator (John 1:3; Col. 1:16) and the Sustainer or Upholder "in Him all things consist" (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3). He is able to raise the dead with His voice (John 5:28,29) and will judge the world at the end of time (Matt. 25:31,32). He forgave sin (Matt. 9:6; Mark 2:5-7).

3. His divine names.

His names reveal His divine nature. Immanuel means "God with us" (Matt. 1:23). Both believers and demons addressed Him as Son of God (Mark 1:1; Matt. 8:29; cf. Mark 5:7). The sacred Old Testament name of God, Jehovah, or Yahweh, is applied to Jesus. Matthew used the words of Isaiah 40:3, "Prepare the way of the Lord," to describe the preparatory work for Christ's mission (Matt. 3:3). And John identified Jesus with the Lord of hosts sitting on His throne (Isa. 6:1,3; John 12:41).

4. His divinity acknowledged.

John depicted Jesus as the divine Word that "became flesh" (John 1:1,14). Thomas acknowledged the resurrected Christ as "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). Paul referred to Him as the One "who is over all, the eternally blessed God" (Rom. 9:5); and Hebrews addressed Him as God and Lord of Creation (Heb. 1:8,10).

5. His personal testimony.

Jesus Himself claimed equality with God. He identified Himself as the "I AM" (John 8:58), the God of the Old Testament. He called God "My Father" instead of "our Father" (John 20:17). And His statement "I and My Father are one" (John 10:30) sets forth the claim that He was of "one substance" with the Father, "possessing the same attributes."

6. His equality with God assumed.

His equality with God the Father is taken for granted in the baptismal formula (Matt. 28:19), the full apostolic benediction (2 Cor. 13:14), His parting counsel (John 14-16), and Paul's exposition of the spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:4-6). Scripture describes Jesus as the brightness of God's glory and "the express image of His person" (Heb. 1:3). And when asked to reveal God the Father, Jesus replied, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

7. He is worshiped as God.

People worshiped Him (Matt. 28:17; cf. Luke 14:33). "All the angels of God worship Him" (Heb. 1:6). Paul wrote that "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,...and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil. 2:10,11). Several benedictions accord to Christ the "glory forever and ever" (2 Tim. 4:18; Heb. 13:21; cf. 2 Peter 3:18).

8. His divine nature a necessity.

Christ reconciled humanity to God. People needed a perfect revelation of God's character in order to develop a personal relationship with Him. Christ filled this need by displaying God's glory (John 1:14). "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (John 1:18; cf. 17:6). Jesus testified, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

In total dependence on the Father (John 5:30) Christ used divine power to reveal God's love. With divine power He revealed Himself as the loving Saviour sent by the Father to heal, restore, and forgive sins (Luke 6:19; John 2:11; 5:1-15,36; 11:41-45; 14:11; 8:3-11). Never, however, did He perform a miracle to spare Himself from the personal hardship and sufferings that other people would have experienced if placed in similar circumstances. Jesus Christ is "one in nature, in character, in purpose" with God the Father. He truly is God.

Jesus Christ is Truly Man

The Bible testifies that in addition to His divine nature, Christ has a human nature. The acceptance of this teaching is crucial. Every one who "confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God" and every one who does not "is not of God" (1 John 4:2,3). Christ's human birth, development, characteristics, and personal testimony provide evidence of His humanity.

1. His human birth.

"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). Here "flesh" means "human nature," a nature inferior to His heavenly one. In plain language Paul says, "God sent forth His Son, born of a woman" (Gal. 4:4; cf. Gen. 3:15). Christ was made in "the likeness of men" and "in human form" (Phil. 2:7,8, RSV). This manifestation of God in human nature is "the mystery of godliness" (1 Tim. 3:16).

Christ's genealogy refers to Him as "the Son of David," and "the Son of Abraham" (Matt. 1:1). According to His human nature He "was born of the seed of David" (Rom. 1:3; 9:5) and was the "Son of Mary" (Mark 6:3). Though He was born of a woman as is every other child, there was a great difference, a uniqueness. Mary was a virgin, and this Child was conceived of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:20-23; Luke 1:31-37). He could claim true humanity through His mother.

2. His human development.

Jesus was subject to the laws of human development; He "grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom" (Luke 2:40,52). At the age of 12 He became aware of His divine mission (Luke 2:46-49). Throughout His boyhood He was subject to His parents (Luke 2:51).

The road to the cross was one of constant growth through suffering, which played an important role in His development. "He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey" (Heb. 5:8,9; 2:10,18). Yet though He experienced development, He did not sin.

3. He was called a "man".

John the Baptist and Peter refer to Him as "a Man" (John 1:30; Acts 2:22). Paul speaks of "the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:15). He is the "Man" who brought "the resurrection of the dead" (1 Cor. 15:21); the "one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). In addressing His enemies, Christ refers to Himself as Man:

"You seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God" (John 8:40).

Jesus' favorite self-designation, one He used 77 times, was "Son of Man" (cf. Matt. 8:20; 26:2). The title Son of God focuses the attention on His relationship within the Godhead. The name Son of man emphasizes His solidarity with the human race through His incarnation.

4. His human characteristics.

God made humans "a little lower than the angels" (Ps. 8:5). Similarly Scripture presents Jesus as One "who was made a little lower than the angels" (Heb. 2:9). His human nature was created and did not possess superhuman powers.

Christ was to be truly human; this was part of His mission. Being so required that He possess the essential characteristics of human nature He was "flesh and blood" (Heb. 2:14). "In all things," Christ was made "like" His fellow human beings (Heb. 2:17). His human nature possessed the same mental and physical susceptibilities as the rest of humanity: hunger, thirst, weariness, and anxiety (Matt. 4:2; John 19:28; 4:6; cf. Matt. 26:21; 8:24).

In His ministry to others He revealed compassion, righteous anger, and grief (Matt. 9:36; Mark 3:5). At times He felt troubled, and sorrowful, and He even wept (Matt. 26:38; John 12:27; 11:33,35; Luke 19:41). He prayed with cries, and tears, once to the point of perspiring blood (Heb. 5:7; Luke 22:44). His life of prayer expressed His complete dependence on God (Matt. 26:39-44; Mark 1:35; 6:46; Luke 5:16; 6:12).

Jesus experienced death (John 19:30,34). He was resurrected, not as a spirit, but with a body (Luke 24: 36-43).

5. The extent of His identification with human nature.

The Bible reveals that Christ is the second Adam, He lived "in the likeness of sinful flesh" or "in the likeness of sinful man" (Rom. 8:3; 8:3, NIV). To what extent did He identify with or become identical to fallen humanity? A correct view of the expression "the likeness of sinful flesh," or sinful man, is crucial. Inaccurate views have brought dissension and strife throughout the history of the Christian church.

a. He was "in the likeness of sinful flesh."

The uplifted serpent in the desert, described earlier, provides an understanding of Christ's human nature. As the brass image made in the likeness of the poisonous serpents was lifted up for the people's healing, so the Son of God made "in the likeness of sinful flesh" was to be the Saviour of the world.

Before the incarnation Jesus was "in the form of God," that is to say the divine nature was His from the beginning (John 1:1; Phil. 2:6, 7 NIV, NEB). In taking the "form of a servant" He laid aside divine prerogatives. He became His Father's servant (Isa. 42:1), to carry out the Father's will (John 6:38; Matt. 26:39,42). He clothed His divinity with humanity, He was made in the "likeness of sinful flesh," or "sinful human nature," or "fallen human nature," (cf. Rom. 8:3). This in no way indicates that Jesus Christ was sinful, or participated in sinful acts or thoughts. Though made in the form or likeness of sinful flesh, He was sinless and His sinlessness is beyond questioning.

b. He was the second Adam.

The Bible draws a parallel between Adam and Christ, calling Adam the "first man" and Christ the "last Adam" or "second Man" (1 Cor. 15:45,47). But Adam had the advantage over Christ. At the Fall he lived in paradise. He had a perfect humanity possessing full vigor of body and mind.

Not so with Jesus. When He took on human nature the race had already deteriorated through 4,000 years of sin on a sin-cursed planet. So that He could save those in the utter depths of degradation, Christ took a human nature that, compared with Adam's unfallen nature, had decreased in physical and mental strength—though He did so without sinning.

When Christ took the human nature that bore the consequences of sin, He became subject to the infirmities and weaknesses that all experience. His human nature was "beset by weakness" or "compassed with infirmity" (Heb. 5:2; 5:2,KJV; Matt. 8:17; Isa. 53:4). He sensed His weakness. He had to offer "prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death" (Heb. 5:7), thus identifying Himself with the needs and weaknesses so common to humanity.

Thus "Christ's humanity was not the Adamic humanity, that is, the humanity of Adam before the fall; nor fallen humanity, that is, in every respect the humanity of Adam after the fall. It was not the Adamic, because it had the innocent infirmities of the fallen. It was not the fallen, because it had never descended into moral impurity. It was, therefore, most literally our humanity, but without sin."

c. His experience with temptations.

How did temptations affect Christ? Was it easy or difficult for Him to resist them? The way He experienced temptations proves that He was truly human.

i. "In all points tempted as we are."

That Christ was "in all points tempted as we are" (Heb 4:15), shows that He was a partaker of human nature. Temptation and the possibility of sinning were real to Christ. If He could not sin He would have been neither

human nor our example. Christ took human nature with all its liabilities, including the possibility of yielding to temptation.

How could He have been tempted "in all points" as we are?

Obviously "in all points" or "in every way" (NIV) does not mean that He met the identical temptations we meet today. He was never tempted to watch demoralizing TV programs, or to break the speed limit in an automobile.

The basic issue underlying all temptations is the question of whether to surrender the will to God. In His encounter with temptation Jesus always maintained His allegiance to God. Through continual dependence on divine power He successfully resisted the fiercest temptations even though He was human.

Christ's victory over temptation qualified Him to sympathize with human weaknesses. Our victory over temptation comes by maintaining dependence upon Him. "God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

It must be recognized that in the end "it is a mystery that is left unexplained to mortals that Christ could be tempted in all points like as we are, and yet be without sin."

ii. "Suffered, being tempted."

Christ suffered while subjected to temptation (Heb. 2:18). He was made "perfect through sufferings" (Heb. 2:10). Because He Himself faced the power of temptation, we can know that He understands how to help anyone who is tempted. He was one with humanity in suffering the temptations to which human nature is subjected.

How did Christ suffer under temptation? Though He had "the likeness of sinful flesh," His spiritual faculties were free from any taint of sin. Consequently His holy nature was extremely sensitive. Any contact with evil pained Him. So, because He suffered in proportion to the perfection of His holiness, temptation brought more suffering to Jesus than to anyone else.

How much did Christ suffer? His experience in the wilderness, Gethsemane, and Golgotha reveal that He resisted temptation to the point of shedding His blood (cf. Heb. 12:4).

Christ not only suffered more in proportion to His holiness, He faced stronger temptations than we humans have to. B.F. Wescott notes, "Sympathy with the sinner in his trial does not depend on the experience of sin but on the experience of the strength of the temptation to sin which only the sinless can know in its full intensity. He who falls yields before the last strain." F.F. Bruce concurs by stating, "Yet He endured triumphantly every form of testing that man could endure, without any weakening of His faith in God or any relaxation of His obedience to Him. Such endurance involves more, not less, than ordinary human suffering."

Christ also faced a powerful temptation never known to man the temptation to use His divine power on His Own behalf. E.G. White states, "He had received honor in the heavenly courts, and was familiar with absolute power. It was as difficult for Him to keep the level of humanity as it is for men to rise above the low level of their depraved natures, and be partakers of the divine nature."

d. Could Christ sin?

Christians differ on the question of whether Christ could sin. We agree with Philip Schaff, who said, "Had he [Christ] been endowed from the start with absolute impeccability, or with the impossibility of sinning, he could not be a true man, nor our model for imitation: his holiness, instead of being his own self-acquired act and inherent merit, would be an accidental or outward gift, and his temptations as unreal show." Karl Ullmann adds, "The history of the temptation, however it may be explained, would have no significance; and the expression in the Epistle to the Hebrews 'he was tempted in all points as we,' would be without meaning."

6. The sinlessness of Jesus Christ's human nature.

It is self-evident that the divine nature of Jesus was sinless. But what about His human nature? The Bible portrays Jesus' humanity as sinless. His birth was supernatural—He was conceived of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:20). As a newborn baby He was described as "that Holy One" (Luke 1:35). He took the nature of man in its fallen state, bearing the consequences of sin, not its sinfulness.

He was one with the human race, except in sin.

Jesus was "in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin," being "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners" (Heb. 4:15; 7:26). Paul wrote that He "knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21). Peter testified that He "'committed no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth'" (1 Peter 2:22), and compared Him with "a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:19; Heb. 9:24). "In Him,"

John said, "there is no sin....He is righteous" (1 John 3:5-7).

Jesus took upon Himself our nature with all its liabilities, but He was free from hereditary corruption or depravity and actual sin. He challenged His opponents, "'Which of you convicts Me of sin?'" (John 8:46). When facing His severest trial, He declared, "'The ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me'" (John 14:30). Jesus had no evil propensities or inclinations or even sinful passions. None of the avalanche of temptations could break His allegiance to God.

Jesus never made a confession of sin or offered a sacrifice. He did not pray, "Father, forgive Me," but rather, "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34). Always seeking to do His Father's will, not His own, Jesus constantly maintained His dependence on the Father (cf. John 5:30).

Unlike that of fallen humanity, Jesus' "spiritual nature" is pure and holy, "free from every taint of sin." It would be a mistake to think He is "altogether human" as we are. He is the second Adam, the unique Son of God. Nor should we think of Him "as a man with the propensities of sin." While His human nature was tempted in all points in which human nature is tempted, He never fell, He never sinned. Never was there in Him an evil propensity.

Indeed, Jesus is humanity's highest, holiest example. He is sinless, and all He did demonstrated perfection. Truly He was the perfect example of sinless humanity.

7. The necessity of Christ's taking human nature.

The Bible gives various reasons as to why Christ had to have a human nature.

a. To be the high priest for the human race.

As Messiah, Jesus had to occupy the position of high priest or mediator between God and man (Zech. 6:13; Heb. 4:14-16). This function required human nature. Christ met the qualifications: (i) He could have "compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray" because He was "beset by weaknesses" or "compassed with infirmity" (Heb. 5:2, 5:2, KJV). (ii) He is "merciful and faithful" because He was in all things made "like His brethren" (Heb. 2:17). (iii) He "is able to aid them who are tempted" because "He Himself has suffered, being tempted" (Heb. 2:18). (iv) He sympathizes with weaknesses because He "was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15).

b. To save even the most degraded person.

To reach people where they are and rescue the most hopeless, He descended to the level of a servant (Phil. 2:7).

c. To give His life for the sins of the world.

Christ's divine nature cannot die. In order to die, then, Christ had to have a human nature. He became man and paid the penalty for sin, which is death (Rom. 6:23; 1 Cor. 15:3). As a human being He tasted death for everyone (Heb 2:9).

d. To be our example.

To set the example as to how people should live, Christ must live a sinless life as a human being. As the second Adam He dispelled the myth that humans cannot obey God's law and have victory over sin. He demonstrated that it is possible for humanity to be faithful to God's will. Where the first Adam fell, the second Adam gained the victory over sin and Satan and became both our Saviour and our perfect example. In His strength His victory can be ours (John 16:33).

By beholding Him, people "are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory" (2 Cor. 3:18). "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith....Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (Heb 12:2,3,NIV). Truly, Christ "suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps" (1 Peter 2:21; cf. John 13:15).

The Union of the Two Natures

The person of Jesus Christ has two natures: divine and human. He is the God-man. But note that the incarnation involved the eternal Son of God taking on Himself human nature, not the man Jesus acquiring divinity. The movement is from God to man, not man to God. In Jesus, these two natures were merged into one person.

Note the following Biblical evidence:

Christ Is a Union of Two Natures

The plurality associated with the triune God is not present in Christ. The Bible describes Jesus as one person, not two. Various texts refer to the divine and human nature, yet speak of only one person. Paul described the person Jesus Christ as God's Son (divine nature) who is born of a woman (human nature; Gal. 4:4). Thus Jesus, "being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God" (divine Nature), "but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men" (human nature; Phil. 2:6,7).

Christ's dual nature is not composed of an abstract divine power or influence that is connected with His humanity. "The Word," John said, "became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Paul wrote, God sent "His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom. 8:3); "God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16; 1 John 4:2).

The Blending of the Two Natures

At times the Bible describes the Son of God in terms of His human nature. God purchased His church with His own blood (Acts 20:28; cf. Col. 1:13,14). At other instances it characterizes the Son of Man in terms of His divine nature (cf. John 3:13; 6:62; Rom. 9:5).

When Christ came into the world, "a body" had been prepared for Him (Heb. 10:5). When He took upon Himself humanity, His divinity was clothed with humanity. This was not accomplished by changing humanity into divinity or divinity into humanity. He did not go out of Himself to another nature, but took humanity into Himself. Thus divinity and humanity were combined.

When He became incarnate, Christ did not cease to be God, nor was His divinity reduced to the level of humanity. Each nature kept its standing. "In Him," Paul says, "dwells all the fullness of the God-head bodily" (Col. 2:9). At the crucifixion His human nature died, not His deity, for that would have been impossible.

The Necessity of the Union of the Two Natures

An understanding of the interrelationship of Christ's two natures gives a vital insight into Christ's mission and our very salvation.

1. To reconcile humanity with God.

Only a divine-human Saviour could bring salvation. At the incarnation Christ, in order to impart His divine nature to believers, brought humanity into Himself. Through the merits of the blood of the God-man believers can partake of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4).

The ladder in Jacob's dream, symbolizing Christ, reaches us where we are. He took human nature and overcame, that we through taking His nature might over-come. His divine arms grasp the throne of God, while His humanity embraces the race, connecting us with God, earth with heaven.

The combined divine-human nature makes effective Christ's atoning sacrifice. The life of a sinless human being or even an angel could not atone for the sins of the human race. Only the divine-human Creator could ransom humanity.

2. To veil divinity with humanity.

Christ veiled His divinity with the garb of humanity, laying aside His celestial glory and majesty, so that sinners would be able to exist in His presence without being destroyed. Though He was still God, He did not appear as God (Phil. 2:6-8).

3. To live victoriously.

Christ's humanity alone could never have endured the deceptions of Satan. But in Him dwelt "all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9). He was able to overcome sin because He relied completely upon the Father (John 5:19, 30; 8:28), and "divine power combined with humanity gained in behalf of man an infinite victory."

Christ's experience in victorious living is not His exclusive privilege. He exercised no power that humanity cannot exercise. We may also "be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:19). Through Christ's divine power we can have access to "all things that pertain to life and godliness."

The key to his experience is faith in the "exceeding great and precious promises" through which we "may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter 1:3,4). He offers the same power by which He overcame so that all may faithfully obey and have a victorious life.

Christ's comforting promise is one of victory: "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Rev. 3:21).

The Offices of Jesus Christ

The offices of prophet, priest, and king were unique, generally requiring a consecration service through anointing (1 Kings 19:16; Ex. 30:30; 2 Sam. 5:3). The coming Messiah, the Anointed One—prophecies pointed out—was to hold all three of these offices. Christ performs His work as mediator between God and us through the offices of prophet, priest, and king. Christ the Prophet proclaims God's will to us, Christ the Priest represents us to God and vice versa, and Christ the King wields God's gracious authority over His people.

Christ the Prophet

God revealed Christ's prophetic office to Moses: "I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him" (Deut. 18:18). Christ's contemporaries recognized the fulfillment of this prediction (John 6:14; 7:40; Acts. 3:22,23).

Jesus referred to Himself as "prophet" (Luke 13:33). He proclaimed with prophetic authority (Matt. 7:29) the principles of God's kingdom (Matthew 5-7; 22:36-40), and revealed the future (Matt. 24:1-51; Luke 19:41-44).

Before His incarnation Christ filled the Bible writers with His Spirit and gave them prophecies about His sufferings and subsequent glories (1 Peter 1:11). After His ascension He continued to reveal Himself to His

people. Scripture says He gives His "testimony"—"the spirit of prophecy"—to His faithful remnant (Rev. 12:17; 19:10; see chapter 17 of this book).

Christ the Priest

A divine oath firmly established the Messiah's priesthood: "The Lord has sworn and will not relent, 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek'" (Ps.110:4). Christ was not a descendant of Aaron. Like Melchizedek, His right to the priesthood came by divine appointment (Heb. 5:6,10;). His mediating priesthood had two phases: an earthly and a heavenly.

1. Christ's earthly priesthood.

The priest's role at the altar of burnt offering symbolized Jesus' earthly ministry. Jesus qualified perfectly for the office of priest: He was truly man, and He was "called by God" and acted "in things pertaining to God" with the special task of offering "gifts and sacrifices for sins" (Heb. 5:1,4,10).

The priest was to reconcile the worshipers to God through the sacrificial system, which represented the provision of atonement for sin (Lev. 1:4; 4:29,31,35; 5:10; 16:6; 17:11). Thus the continual sacrifices at the altar of burnt offering symbolized the availability of continual atonement.

These sacrifices were not sufficient. They could not make the offerer perfect, take away sins, or produce a clear conscience (Heb. 10:1-4; 9:9). They were simply a shadow of the good things to come (Heb. 10:1; cf. 9:9,23,24). The Old Testament said that the Messiah Himself would take the place of these animal sacrifices (Ps. 40:6-8; Heb. 10:5-9). These sacrifices, then, pointed to the vicarious sufferings and atoning death of Christ the Saviour. He, the Lamb of God, became sin for us, a curse for us; His blood cleanses us from all sins (2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; 1 John 1:7; cf. 1 Cor. 15:3).

So during His earthly ministry Christ was both priest and offering. His death on the cross was part of His priestly work. After His sacrifice at Golgotha, His priestly intercession centered in the heavenly sanctuary.

2. Christ's heavenly priesthood.

The priestly ministry Jesus began on earth He completes in heaven. His humiliation on earth as God's suffering servant qualified Him to be our High Priest in heaven (Heb. 2:17,18; 4:15; 5:2). Prophecy reveals that the Messiah was to be a priest on God's throne (Zech. 6:13). After His resurrection the humiliated Christ was exalted. Now our High Priest sits "at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens," ministering in the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 8:1,2; cf. 1:3; 9:24).

Christ began His intercessory work immediately following His ascension. The ascending cloud of incense in the holy place of the Temple typifies Christ's merits, prayers, and righteousness, which makes our worship and prayers acceptable to God. Incense could be offered only on coals taken from the altar of burnt offering, which reveals an intimate connection between intercession and the atoning sacrifice of the altar. Thus Christ's intercessory work is built on the merits of His completed sacrificial atonement.

Christ's intercession offers encouragement to His people: He is "able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25). Because Christ mediates for His people, all of Satan's accusations have lost their legal basis (1 John 2:1; cf. Zech. 3:1). Paul asked rhetorically, "Who is he who condemns?" Then He offered the assurance that Christ Himself is at God's right hand, interceding for us (Rom. 8:34). Affirming His role as Mediator, Christ said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you" (John 16:23).

Christ the King

God "has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all" (Ps. 103:19). It is self-evident that the Son of God, as one of the Godhead, shares in this divine government over the whole universe.

Christ, as the God-man, will exercise His kingship over those who have accepted Him as Lord and Saviour. "Your throne, O God," it said, "is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of your kingdom" (Ps. 45:6; Heb. 1:8,9).

Christ's kingdom was not established without strife, for "the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed [Messiah]" (Ps. 2:1). But their schemes fail. God will establish the Messiah on His throne by decree: "I have set My king on My holy hill of Zion"; He has declared, "You are My Son, today I have begotten You" (Ps. 2:6,7; Heb. 1:5). The name of the King who is to occupy the throne of David is "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Jer. 23:5,6) His rule is unique, for He is to function on the heavenly throne as both priest and king (Zech. 6:13).

To Mary the angel Gabriel announced that Jesus was to be that Messianic ruler, saying, "He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:33). His kingship is portrayed by two thrones symbolizing His two kingdoms. The "throne of grace" (Heb. 4:16) represents the kingdom of grace; the "throne of His glory" (Matt. 25:31) stands for the kingdom of glory.

1. The kingdom of grace.

Immediately after the first human had sinned, the kingdom of grace was instituted. It existed by the promise of God. Through faith people could become its citizens. But it was not fully established until the death of Christ. When He cried out on the cross, "It is finished," the requirements for the plan of redemption were met and the new covenant ratified (cf. Heb. 9:15-18).

Jesus' proclamation, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15) was a direct reference to the kingdom of grace soon to be established by His death. Founded on the work of redemption, not Creation, this kingdom receives its citizens through regeneration the new birth. Jesus ruled, "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:5; cf. 3:3). He compared its growth to the phenomenal development of a mustard seed and the effect of yeast on flour (Mark 4:22-31; Matt. 13:33).

The kingdom of grace is not seen in outward show, but by its effect on the heart of the believers. This kingdom, Jesus taught, "does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:20,21). It is not a kingdom of this world, He said, but a kingdom of truth. "I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears My voice" (John 18:37). Paul said this kingdom is Christ's kingdom of "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" into which believers have been transferred (Rom. 14:17; Col. 1:13).

The establishment of this kingdom was an excruciating experience, affirming that there is no crown without a cross. At the close of His public ministry Jesus, the Messiah, the God-man, came to Jerusalem as the rightful heir to the throne of David. Seated on a donkey, as was the Jewish custom for a royal entry (Zech. 9:9), He accepted the masses' spontaneous, enthusiastic display of support. During His triumphal entry into the royal city "a very great multitude" spread their clothes to form a royal carpet, cutting down palm branches and shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" (Matt. 21:8,9) thus fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy. Now Christ presented Himself as the Messianic king.

Unfortunately, His claim to the throne did not go unopposed. Satanic hatred against the "sinless One" reached its culmination. In a twelve-hour period the defenders of the faith, the Sanhedrin, had Him arrested secretly, put Him to trial, and condemned Him to death.

During His trial, Jesus publicly affirmed that He was the Son of God and King of His people (Luke 23:3; John 18:33-37). In response to His claim He was scornfully clothed in a royal robe and crowned, not with a crown of gold, but of thorns (John 19:2). His reception as king was sheer mockery. Beating Him up, the soldiers scoffed, "Hail, King of the Jews!" (John 19:3). And when the Roman governor, Pilate, presented Him to the nation, saying, "Behold your King!" His own people unanimously rejected Him, crying out, "Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!" (John 19:14,15).

Through the deepest humiliation death on the cross Christ established the kingdom of grace. Soon afterward exaltation ended His humiliation. Upon His ascension He was enthroned in heaven as Priest and King, sharing His Father's throne (Ps. 2:7,8; cf. Heb. 1:3-5; Phil 2:9-11; Eph. 1:20-23). This enthronement did not give Him, as the divine Son of God, any power that was not already His. But now, as the divine-human Mediator, His human nature participated in the heavenly glory and power for the first time.

2. The kingdom of glory.

A representation of the kingdom of glory was given at the Mount of Transfiguration. There Christ presented Himself in His glory. "His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became white as light" (Matt. 17:2). Moses and Elijah represented the redeemed—Moses representing those who have died in Christ and will be resurrected, and Elijah representing believers who will be taken to heaven without experiencing death at the Second Advent.

The kingdom of glory will be established with cataclysmic events at Christ's return (Matt. 24:27,30,31; 25:31,32). Following the judgment, when the Son of man's mediatorial work in the heavenly sanctuary has ended, the "Ancient of Days" God the Father will bestow upon Him "dominion and glory and a kingdom" (Dan. 7:9,10,14). Then the "kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him" (Dan. 7:27).

The kingdom of glory will finally be established on earth at the end of the millennium, when the New Jerusalem will descend from heaven (Revelation 20,21). By accepting Jesus Christ as our Saviour, we can become citizens of His kingdom of grace today and the kingdom of glory at His second coming. Before us lies a life with unlimited possibilities. The life Christ offers is not a life filled with failure and scattered hopes and dreams, but one of growth, a successful walk with the Saviour. It is a life that increasingly displays genuine love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22,23)--the fruits of the relationship Jesus offers to all who commit their lives to Him. Who can resist such an offer?