

Focus on the Kingdom

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Can God be the High Priest?

by Terry Anderson, Minnesota

In Genesis 14:18 we are introduced to the concept of High Priest. We learn that the enigmatic Melchizedek is the priest of the Most High God. He blesses Abram *and* the Most High God. His exact functions are unclear, but this we do know: He was king of Salem and he acted as God's agent on earth in those early days of mankind. This was long before the existence of Israel and the Levitical priesthood.

It should be evident from the statement that he "blessed the Most High God" that this Melchizedek was not God. Unless we imagine that God is blessing Himself, we can reasonably understand that the Priest is someone *other than* God! I mention this because there are those who believe that Melchizedek was Christ, and if the Christ of orthodoxy, then God the Son.

In fact Melchizedek was "*like* the Son of God" (Heb. 7:3), which means he could not have *been* the Son of God. Melchizedek had no recorded genealogy ("no father and mother," Heb. 7:3, just as Jews said of Sarah whose lineage is not known). His parenthood, we know, was not traced from Levi (v. 6).

Was Melchizedek just a priest or can we deduce that he was the High Priest? The text says that he was the priest of the Most High God. Were other priests involved or was Melchizedek the only priest at the time, thus making him the de facto High Priest? The indication is that Melchizedek was alone, acting on behalf of God for that man (Abram) who would become the recipient of a very special "covenant."

It is puzzling that Melchizedek didn't appear, in the Bible, until the meeting with Abram. We can assume he was alive and functional prior to this event, but we just don't know what he was doing. There is no indication that Abram was surprised to see Melchizedek appearing, just in time to receive the tithe of his war spoils. It seemed quite natural, no questions asked; so Abram turned over a tenth of his spoils. Since a normal person wouldn't turn over his possessions to a complete stranger, wouldn't it follow that Abram had knowledge of or possibly a close relationship with Melchizedek?

It is interesting that this Melchizedek is mentioned three times in the Bible — once in Genesis with Abram (in connection with a covenant), once with David in Psalm 110 (David received the royal covenant of kingship, foreshadowing Messiah) and finally in Hebrews 6 and 7 (the New Covenant). In fact, the whole covenant

arrangement is tied together through Melchizedek to Abram, to David and to Jesus the Messiah. So God's promises to make Jesus king and lord (*adoni*, lord, not Lord, Ps. 110:1) are inextricably woven together with the promise of Jesus also becoming a priest (High Priest) forever according to the order of Melchizedek. This is an everlasting priesthood, as is Christ's kingship over all the nations.

In contrast to this priesthood, the priesthood of Aaron and his descendants would come to an end. The High Priest under the Aaronic, Levitical priesthood served God and ministered to the people as God's agent in religious matters. This has been the function and purpose of all biblical priesthood since Melchizedek. Why? Because God has ordained that He would not deal with man on a direct basis.

1 Timothy 2:5 states plainly and definitively that there is now "one God and one **mediator** between God and men, the **man** Messiah Jesus." Jesus' mediation is accomplished through his role as High Priest after the order of Melchizedek. *God* does not mediate between Himself and man. He chooses men or angels to do this, and under the Christian economy it is a *man*, the glorified, immortalized Jesus Christ. (Jesus also appeared on earth as high priest, Heb. 9:11.) Any inference that Jesus is both God and High Priest makes no sense whatever, for if God has ordained that there be a "go between," then by what logic can anyone claim that this mediator is God? If God is doing the mediating then why not simply say, "*I* will be mediator between me and man"?

There are many reasons to challenge orthodoxy in regard to Jesus Christ's so-called Deity. God cannot die, God cannot be tempted, God is incorruptible, God is omniscient, and now we see one more: **God cannot be the High Priest**. Jesus is High Priest and therefore cannot be God. This is a basic syllogism in logic.

There is a great deal to be said about the subject of the priesthood in Hebrews chapters 6-9. I'll summarize some of the most salient points. The Levitical priesthood was a temporary priesthood ordained to provide mediators between God and Israel. This function was phased out with the arrival of Jesus on the scene of history as High Priest for all mankind for all time. He is established in the heavens at the right hand of God and will remain so until the time of the restoration of the Kingdom on earth when Jesus comes back.

The Torah of the priesthood was changed, the High Priest was changed and the Torah administered by the priesthood was changed (Heb. 7:11-12). It is declared that Jesus arose from the tribe of Judah, of which tribe nothing was spoken concerning the priesthood. Yet Jesus became the High Priest in spite of the requirements delineated in the Torah. How? By God's will, and by Christ's ministry and eternal offering on the altar of the Holy of Holies he became a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

Think again about the opportunity God the Father had to set the record straight and clarify the relationship between Himself and His Son, the ultimate High Priest. The Scripture says, "It is evident that our Lord arose from **Judah**" — **not from heaven, not from eternity!** And again, Hebrews 7:15 states that "it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek [a man, v. 4], there arises another priest." In verse 24 Jesus receives the unchangeable priesthood. Why? Not because he is God and always possessed it, but because after being raised, he continues in office forever. He won this position through sacrifice.

In Hebrews 8 we read that Jesus had to offer himself in sacrifice in order to enter into the Most Holy Place, as did the Levitical High Priest under the Old Covenant on the Day of Atonement. In Hebrews 8:3 we see that "this one [Jesus] had to have something to offer" and, of course, that was his life, his own blood on the altar. As a result of this offering "he has *obtained* a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as he is also **mediator** of a better covenant."

The Melchizedek priesthood was temporary and destined to be replaced by a new system of mediation. This would be based on the eternal understanding of man's nature and the need for a new empathetic, perfect and resurrected man to be the compassionate High Priest. This was God's plan for Christ. If it was in the mind of God that the Messiah "was slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8), then it stands to reason that God knew from the beginning that Melchizedek was the model of the everlasting priesthood and the Levitical system was temporary.

Hebrews 6-9 must not be forced into the later mold of orthodox beliefs about Christ's Divinity. There is no indication here of anyone other than man Messiah Jesus fulfilling the most important role of priest and mediator, yet in a New Covenant format. When we allow the Scripture to flow forth from its Hebrew source we can indeed drink of fresh and living waters.

Jesus cannot be God and High Priest at the same time, and since it is clear that he is High Priest then he cannot be God. Priests are selected from among men (Heb. 5:1). ✧

The Astonishing Admission of Christian Leaders that the Teaching of Christ Really Does Not Matter!

Many of our readers I hope will gain an important lesson about the debased character of much of what goes under the name of Christian faith. The most fundamental of all systematic mistakes in reading the Bible is to miss its central and fundamental point. God said, intervening to make His point utterly clear: "This is My Son; listen to him!" (Mark 9:7). Popular versions of the so-called faith have systematically decided not to listen to Jesus as teacher, but rather to dodge Jesus and plead an adherence to Paul! This however is a catastrophic misreading of the Bible. Paul would have put himself under his own curse for preaching another Gospel (Gal. 1:6-9) if he had in any way failed to preach the same Gospel of the Kingdom on which Jesus had based his entire ministry (Luke 4:43).

A verse which seems to hide from public discussion and ought never to do so is this: In Acts 20:24, 25, the Gospel of the grace of God is exactly synonymous with the preaching and proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom! There is no difference between the two. Many ministries could undergo a complete reformation once this easy fact is realized. Many are not preaching the Gospel as the Gospel about the Kingdom of God. Many, in other words, are offering a partial Gospel, which sounds alarmingly unlike Jesus or Paul! (Please see my *Coming Kingdom of the Messiah: A Solution to the Riddle of the New Testament*, at www.focusonthekingdom.org)

I offer you these astonishing quotations from leading "evangelical ministries." They deliberately relegate the teaching of Jesus to a matter of non-interest!

Dr. James Kennedy of Coral Ridge Ministries (he died some years back):

"Many people today think that the essence of Christianity is Jesus' teachings, but that is not so. If you read the Apostle Paul's letters, which make up most of the NT, you will see that there is almost nothing said about the teachings of Jesus. Throughout the rest of the NT, there's little reference to the teachings of Jesus, and in the Apostles' creed, the most universally-held Christian creed, there is no reference to Jesus' teachings. There is also no reference to the example of Jesus. Only two days in the life of Jesus are mentioned — the day of his birth and the day of his death. Christianity centers not in the teachings of Jesus, but in the person of Jesus as Incarnate God, who came into the world to take on himself our guilt and die in our place."¹

¹"How I Know Jesus is God," *Truth Notes*, Nov. 1989.

Dr. Kennedy has overlooked entirely the 8 Gospel of the Kingdom texts in Acts (1:3; 1:6; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; **20:24-25**; 28:23, 31). These verses show that Paul taught to everyone as Gospel exactly the same Gospel of the Kingdom as Jesus had preached and announced as the essential heart of Christian faith (Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:43; Matt. 24:14; Heb. 5:9, etc.).

It is fundamentally false to say that Jesus and Paul disagreed on the Gospel. It is fundamentally false to Scripture to maintain that the teachings of Jesus are relatively unimportant! (see 1 Tim. 6:3; 2 John 7-9; Heb. 5:9). It is true of course that Jesus assigned to Paul additional information about the Law of Moses in terms of circumcision, holy days and food laws, and their irrelevance to the New Covenant inaugurated by Jesus.

Now we ask the reader to consider this amazing statement:

“Christianity takes its name from its founder, or rather from what he was called, the Christ. Buddhism is also named for its founder. And non-Muslims often call Islam Mohammedanism. But while Buddhism and Islam are based primarily on the *teaching* of the Buddha and Mohammed, respectively, Christianity is based primarily on the person of Christ. **The Christian faith is not belief in his teaching**, but in what is taught about him. The appeal of Protestant liberals to ‘believe as Jesus believed,’ rather than to believe in Jesus, is a dramatic transformation of the fundamental nature of Christianity.”²

Not only does the professor guide us away from Jesus, he misleads us into thinking that belief and obedience to the teaching of Jesus is some lamentable “liberal error.”

From James Dunn comes this instructive comment:

“Dr. Hurtado **does not think it necessary for Jesus to have thought and spoken of himself in the same terms as his followers thought and spoke of him in the decades subsequent to his crucifixion**, in order for the convictions of those followers to be treated as valid by Christians today; though he also notes that most Christians probably think that there was ‘some degree of continuity’ [!] between what Jesus thought of himself and subsequent Christology.”³

Has he read the NT?! Did Jesus ever advocate anything other than strict adherence to his teachings as the basis of salvation “until the end of the age”? (Matt. 28:19-20; cp. Heb. 5:9).

Readers should reflect on, and be duly shocked by, the insightful words of Professor Richard Hiers: “Interpreters of Christian persuasion have ordinarily not

been especially interested in what Jesus intended and did in his own time.”⁴✧

A Letter to a Christadelphian on the Devil

Thanks so much for sending me the literature on the Devil. Your booklet on the Trinity is so very excellent, as are many of the Christadelphian insights.

After a career in a Bible College (I suppose, the only biblical unitarian college there is), and because of our common interest in Truth, I am bound to make a brief comment on your points on the Devil and demons.

There are many, many who would have to raise some protests, kindly I hope! It is the way you deal with the evidence.

The NT is Scripture for us, and the spirit of God does not take on board Greek falsehoods! It speaks the truth about God, Jesus and the Gospel of the Kingdom.

If one does not believe that demons exist, it is incredible that one would lace one’s narrative accounts with demons, who speak and are spoken to!

I just don’t think that the treatment of Christadelphians *on this subject* will do so well in the judgment — the only thing that really matters.

“Demon” is an easy word in Greek and English and it means a supernatural personality — evil in the case of the NT. All demons are evil.

Thus James says “the demons believe in the One God and tremble” (James 2:19). It is only fair to ask who is this category of personality? James knew quite well what he wrote. What is the semantic value of the word *daimonia* here? It must have intelligible meaning.

In Luke 4:41 demons cried out (the Greek verbs agreeing with the demons and not their human victims are even clearer). The demons recognized that Jesus was the Messiah, and this is patently not true of deranged human beings unaided! The demons are not the demonized humans! “Employer” and “employee” are well understood and differentiated in English. The lexical facts are quite clear. Lucidly clear.

There are perfectly good NT and other Greek words for “madness” and mad humans. But demons are demons. They have intelligence and Jesus speaks to them and they to him. They use the minds and vocal chords of their victims, obviously.

On “**the Satan**” (with the article pointing to the one who needs no definition) — “the ancient serpent **is** the Devil” according to Revelation 20:2. John Thomas, founder of Christadelphianism, alas falls apart in his attempt to explain the serpent.

²Dr. Harold O.J. Brown, *Heresies*, 1984, p. 13.

³*Did the First Christians Worship Jesus?* p. 93, fn 2.

⁴*Jesus and the Future*, 1981, p. 1.

Obviously the serpent was held responsible for lying in Genesis. He is punished. "Serpent" is a kind of code word like "that fox" for Herod (Luke 13:32).

Thomas says that "the serpent did not intend to lie but it did lie...He was a non-morally responsible animal!"⁵ That produces the much to be avoided blasphemy that God did the lying!

No, the Satan "fell into condemnation" as Paul said in 1 Timothy 3:6. The Satan was very much responsible for the sin of lying and was duly punished as were Adam and Eve. God does not punish the non-morally responsible!

You say *logos* is called a "he" because the word *logos* is masculine. But, with respect, that muddles the distinction between grammatical and sexual gender. **Logos is treated as "he" because Trinitarians see a person there. The grammatical gender of the word *logos* has nothing to do with the issue.**

In Matthew 4 it is really amazing to treat verbs like *proselthon*, "to approach, to come up to someone," as movements internal to the mind of Jesus. They are movements from the outside towards the person. The Satan came up to Jesus just as Pharisees came up to Jesus.

Language is quite obvious here, and some Christadelphians I met in England were convinced that "the Satan" there was the High Priest!

Jesus spoke back to the Satan, the Devil. The language has to be contorted to make it a conversation of Jesus with himself. One must warn against this.

I would suggest banning the KJV mistake of "devils." No, "demons" is the Greek. At one point you say "that there is no mention of the Devil in the OT."

But that is because the Greek word is not in the Hebrew OT! We all know that "a satan" can be a human adversary, but honestly who in the history of commentary ever advanced the idea that Job's human associates were the Devil! (They are never called "the Satan," who is a supernatural personality.) That is so far-fetched, since the text does not support it at all.

No one thinks Satan is a rival to God. God permits evil in the supernatural realm as he permits it among humans.

The "kosmocrats" of Ephesians 6 are not the Roman empire. One should examine the word in the *Theological Dictionary of the NT*. There is also inter-angelic warfare in Daniel 10.

We are monotheists like you, but as teachers we will be held more responsible. We must face the lexical facts and avoid the unfounded and accusatory theory that Jesus just went along with gross ignorance! That implies a

weakness and dishonesty on the part of Jesus (which we all want to avoid).

At one point you almost yield! You say they "seemingly believed in demons"! The fact is that they obviously did, and if one has been to Africa there are amazing events which are easily explained by the demons. Paul of course thought demons could teach falsehoods! (1 Tim. 4:1). He was right.

This is not an easy letter to write, but one must be honest. I think that Christadelphians do themselves a great disservice with this attempt to soften the text. They have so much to offer. ✧

A Plain Statement about the One God, the God of Jesus and of the Bible

God is one. There is only one Person who is God. Before the universe came into being, the living, personal, self-existent God was alone (Isa. 44:24). This one infinite and perfect Being is unique. He has no identical. He is in a class of his own. In his nature, personality and attributes God is undivided and indivisible. The unity of God includes primary thoughts: the oneness of God and the unity of God's character. The oneness of God refers to the fact that there is **only one Person** in the universe who is the supreme source and ruler of all things (John 17:3; 5:44).

The unity of God's character refers to the truth that His nature is undivided. Christianity is based on this unitary monotheism (Deut. 6:4; Mark 12:29). The God of the Old Testament is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus was a unitary monotheist (Mark 12:29).

Christianity in the Roman empire was in constant conflict with paganism. The unity of God naturally became a fundamental doctrine of the apostolic church. Wherever they went, the early missionaries of the church proclaimed the truth of God's oneness. Their converts "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9). They then waited for the Messiah, God's Son, to return from heaven (1 Thess. 1:10). Writing to the church in the idolatrous city of Corinth, Paul asserted: "We know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. For though there may be so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are gods many and lords many), but to us there is but **one God, the Father**, of whom are all things, and we in him; one Lord Jesus Christ through whom are all things, and we through him" (1 Cor. 8:4-6).

"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5). There is one God, one human race, and one mediator between the two. The one God is a unity who alone is the source

⁵ *Elpis Israel*, p. 88.

of all created things. His character is holiness, love, and truth. The one human race has descended from its common ancestors, Adam and Eve. The human race had a common origin and constitutes a unity. The entire human race is in sin and needs salvation. The one mediator is Jesus Christ, the man Messiah, the uniquely and miraculously begotten (brought into existence) Son of God (Luke 1:35; Matt. 1:18, 20; 1 John 5:18, not KJV).

The view of God and Jesus presented in this magazine is based on the indisputable fact that the teachings of Jesus must be the foundation of any genuine Christianity. Jesus insisted as did Paul that the words and teaching of Jesus are fundamental to true Christian faith. Jesus insisted in John 12:44ff, in a last cry aimed at getting our attention, that his words are to be listened to and obeyed. That is because his words are the words of his Father who commissioned him as unique spokesman. In John 3:36 belief in Jesus is parallel to and equivalent to obeying Jesus. The obedience of faith is the essential basis and framework of genuine Christian faith (see Rom. 1:5; 16:26). Paul warned in the strongest terms that any deviation from the words and teaching of Jesus is to be avoided as a threat to salvation (see 1 Tim. 6:3). It is a fatal confusion to speak vaguely of believing “in the person of Jesus” without believing his teachings and obeying them.

The original faith, which we are all required to contend for and maintain (Jude 3), was certainly not a Trinitarian religion. The definition of God in the teaching of the Hebrew Bible, affirmed by Jesus in agreement with a fellow Jew (Mark 12:29), is a strict unitary monotheism.

How then did we arrive at the confusing denominationalism of today? The departure from Scripture began early in the second century. It was the influence of pagan philosophy which worked as a leaven to undo the essential Messianism of Jesus and the Apostles. In his informative book *How Jesus Became God* Bart Ehrman describes how Justin Martyr was influenced in his understanding of the faith by a previous unrepented allegiance to philosophy. This led him to think of Jesus as existing as an angel and in some sense a second god/God (pp. 323ff).

This disturbed the strict monotheism of Scripture and Jesus. Once Jesus was thought to be a preexisting Son, it was impossible for him also to be the lineal, biological descendant of David (Ps. 132:11). Without that link to David, one cannot be the Messiah. Justin spoke of a “begetting” of the Son long before his begetting, coming into existence in Mary (Luke 1:35). This twist in the story of Jesus inevitably undermined the essential fact that Jesus must be a genuine member of the human race.

1 John 4:2 warns against the threat of a less-than-human Jesus. The real Jesus was the one who came “in

the flesh,” that is genuinely a member of the human race. Luther mistranslated (corrected by all modern German versions) John’s words as “coming *into* the flesh” (i.e. German *in das Fleisch*, rather than as John wrote *im Fleisch*, that is as fully human). A preexistent, pre-human Jesus, Son of God, cannot be fully human. One cannot be older than one’s ancestor! The virginal begetting of the Son in Mary was ruined once it was proposed that the Son was already in existence. Justin Martyr was driven by his false philosophical presuppositions to imagine that the Son engineered his own conception!

Justin also fell for a number of serious twistings of Scripture. He taught that in Genesis 19:24 “the LORD rained brimstone and fire from the LORD out of the heavens” implied two LORDs. Instead of recognizing (as any scholar now does) that this is a Hebrew idiom, Justin thought that there were two LORDs! He should have read 1 Kings 8:1 where “Solomon gathered...to Solomon.” No one imagines that there were two Solomons! Nor two Lamechs in Genesis 4:23!

Once the Son of God’s *origin* by miracle in Mary (Matt. 1:18, *genesis*) was discarded in favor of a twisted version of John 1, producing a preexisting Son of God rather than as John wrote a preexisting word, wisdom and plan of God, fearful conflict and argumentation, disputes, excommunications and disunity followed. Jesus’ unitary monotheism (Mark 12:29) was lost and recovered only by certain minorities (the so-called Dynamic Monarchians).

At the Reformation the Socinians led a significant movement which recaptured the unitary monotheism of Jesus and the Apostles (Mark 12:29, repeated in 1 Cor. 8:4-6 by Paul). Paul believed in the unitary monotheistic Shema (“Hear, O Israel”) as had Jesus. Without that firm foundation there is little hope for a united, single Christian faith. At present the denominations are unable to pay attention to and put into practice the clear command of Paul: “I urge and entreat you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Messiah that all of you be in perfect harmony and full agreement in what you say and that there be no dissensions or factions or divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in your common understanding and in your opinions and judgments” (1 Cor. 1:10, Amplified Bible).

For further information about how the faith lost its essential unity soon after the death of the Apostles please consult the introduction to my *One God, the Father, one Man Messiah Translation* of the New Testament with commentary, available at Amazon.com or Atlanta Bible College (800) 347-4261.

For a succinct definition of who Jesus is, read Luke 2:11, where his birth certificate is clearly announced. He is the Messiah lord, that is the anointed lord. God certainly cannot be born, and cannot be “the anointed.”

And no one in Bible times ever imagined that God could *die*! God is immortal (1 Tim 6:16), and one who is immortal cannot by definition ever die. Likewise holy angels are immortal (Luke 20:35-36). It is therefore equally impossible that Jesus can ever have been an angel (see Heb. 1:3, 13; Dan 10:13 where Michael is “*one of the chief princes, angels*”). The Son of God is defined with absolute clarity by Luke 1:35 and as the now exalted man Messiah, the “my lord” (mistranslated in many versions as Lord) of Psalm 110:1, a verse beloved by Jesus in Mark 12:35-36 (cp. Acts 2:34-36), and designed to put all arguments to an end.

1 Timothy 2:5 in its perfect simplicity and clarity can undo the confusion of many centuries — one God and one man, the one mediator who is the Messiah Jesus. ✧

Antichrist and Futurism: Views from the Church Fathers

It is sometimes wrongly said that futurism — the belief in a future tribulation and short reign of antichrist just prior to the Second Coming — is a modern phenomenon unknown before its appearance in 1580. It was then that the Jesuit Francisco Ribera published a long commentary on Revelation restricting most of its prophecies to the reign of a single Antichrist dominating the world for 3½ years just before the return of Christ.

This idea of a modern phenomenon is demonstrably untrue in the light of the clear evidence of the early church fathers. Some of these had much to say about eschatology. As we will see they also looked for a short reign of Antichrist just before the arrival of Christ to establish the Kingdom on earth.

George Ladd, highly respected writer on eschatology, makes the point clearly: “The futuristic interpretation was essentially *a return to the method of prophetic truth found in the early fathers*, essential to which is the teaching that the antichrist will be a satanically-inspired world ruler at the end of the age who would inflict severe persecution upon the church during the Great Tribulation.”⁶

W.R Kimball agrees that the early church was “generally premillennial, post-tribulational and futuristic in their eschatological belief.”⁷ (It is most important to add that the *pre-tribulation* rapture theory is entirely missing from any writer before the 1800s.) It is true that the church fathers did not expect a long period of time to intervene before the appearance of the Antichrist. However, they believed that the prophecies, read in a straightforward manner, described a *final short period* of intense tribulation *just before* the arrival of Jesus. This time of intense suffering, in which the church would be

involved, would last for 3½ years. The early church fathers definitely did not expect the Beast of Revelation 13 and Daniel 7 to rule for 1260 *years*. Such a day-year theory was not known prior to 1000 AD.

In 1826 modern futurism (still without the pre-tribulation rapture theory) was given publicity with the appearance of a book by Dr. Maitland, curator to the Archbishop of Canterbury. In his *An Enquiry into the Ground on Which the Prophetic Period of Daniel and St. John Has Been Supposed to Consist of 1260 Years*, Maitland refuted the day-year theory and contended that the 1260 days be taken literally as a final period of unequalled persecution of the saints just before the Second Coming.

Of these 19th-century futurists George Ladd wrote: “They followed a pattern of prophetic events similar to that found in the early fathers....In fact they appeal to the fathers against the [then] popular historical interpretation for the support of their basic view. A pretribulation rapture is utterly unknown by these men.”⁸

It is important that we examine the actual words of the church fathers to demonstrate their clear futurism. It is important that the false idea that futurism was introduced by the Roman Catholics be corrected. The early church fathers’ type of futurism should make a special appeal to all premillennialists who all agree that it was later developments, particularly under Augustine, which led to the so-called amillennialist view of prophecy. The work of the ante-Nicene fathers, some of whom wrote in detail on Daniel, Matthew 24 and Revelation, reveals that they read the prophecies in straightforward, natural way, using the words of Jesus to interpret Daniel.

The earliest post-NT writers on prophecy were premillennial, post-tribulational **futurists**: “Until Augustine in the fourth century, the early church generally held to the premillenarian understanding of biblical eschatology. This millennialism (chiliasm) entailed a **futuristic** interpretation of **Daniel’s seventieth week**, the abomination of desolation and the personal Antichrist. And it was post-tribulational...The possibility of a **pre-tribulational rapture** of the church seems never to have occurred to anyone in the early Church.”⁹

That the seventieth “week” was **future** and close to the end of the age was understood in 243 AD by **Hippolytus** (*De Pascha Computus*). This fact is noted in the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*: “**The one ‘week’ [of Daniel 9:24-27] is taken off as belonging to the eschatological period in the future**” (Vol. III, p. 606). **Irenaeus** also expected a **3 ½-year tribulation and**

⁶ *Blessed Hope*, p. 37.

⁷ *The Rapture—A Question of Timing*, p. 29.

⁸ *Blessed Hope*, p. 39.

⁹ Dr. Robert Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, Zondervan, 1973, p. 173.

a rebuilt temple. “In which [temple] the enemy shall sit, endeavoring to show himself as Christ as the Lord also declares: ‘When you shall see the Abomination of Desolation standing in the holy place, as Daniel spoke of it’...Everything will be given into his hands until a time of times and half a time: that is **for three and a half years**, during which time, when he [antichrist] comes, he will reign over the earth...The Abomination shall be brought into **the temple**, even until the consummation of the time shall the desolation be complete [Dan 9:27]. Now **three years and six months constitute the half week**” (*Against Heresies*, Book 5, chs. 25, 26). Irenaeus sees the antichrist, not just Antiochus, in the **eighth** chapter of Daniel and quotes **Daniel 9:27** as a prophecy of the final reign of the antichrist “for three years and six months.” Daniel 9:26b, “**his end**,” excludes any reference to Titus. ✧

Comments

• “Peace to you in the name of our Savior, Jesus the Messiah and his Father Yahweh. I have thoroughly enjoyed receiving the *Focus on the Kingdom* monthly newsletters. What a blessing these have been! I can’t wait for this month’s issue. I have been criticized and set apart from a few of the ‘Christians’ here. But for the ones who accept me, regardless of my beliefs and thought processes, I have been able to show them why I believe what I believe, using your newsletters, as well as the booklet *Who is Jesus?* Most do not care to agree of course, but with some the wheels start turning in their minds. I was thrown a text in Isaiah 44:6 and I had no way of answering the question. I told them I would look into this and get back to them before answering. Can you help please?” — *North Carolina*

*This verse is not so hard. There is one subject here and He is “the Lord, the King of Israel and his [Israel’s] Redeemer, the Lord of Hosts. I am the first and I am the last, and besides Me there is no God.” God is said to be one Person (never two or three) thousands and thousands of times in the Bible. Singular personal pronouns — I, me, he, him, etc — define one person. That one YHVH (LORD) is of course one Person who has many titles. Jesus can share the same titles, i.e. redeemer and lord, but no one is equal to the One God, the Creator of all things by Himself (see Isa. 44:24 and use it often). To be “the first and last” is to be the ultimate within the category under discussion. Jesus is the first and last **who died (Rev. 1:17-18)**. God cannot die! He is immortal (1 Tim. 6:16). This Messiah is a human person, the Son of Man., who died. Jesus is “the author and finisher of our faith.” There is no one like him in the human race. But he cannot possibly be God, which would make two GODS, and then the universe is shattered! Always begin with the creed of Jesus in Mark*

12:29 and John 17:3. God is One Person, one Lord. One means one!

*Then go to Psalm 110:1 which is a microcosm of the whole Bible. There the one Person Yahweh addresses an oracle to David’s lord, the Messiah. The word for lord in “my lord” is **adoni** (adonee) in the Hebrew, and God is never ever called **adoni**. **Adoni** is the title of human or angelic superiors. The Lord God is **Adonai**. With our understanding that GOD is one Person we can attract a billion Muslims and millions of Jews to the true faith in Messiah Jesus. 1 Timothy 2:5 says it all simply and perfectly.*

• “I am in the process of finishing your book *Our Fathers Who Aren’t in Heaven* and I am so encouraged. I am 51 years old and ever since I was a youth I have such a longing to know God and have been on a roller coaster of a journey. Your book has confirmed so much I have felt in my heart but just could not nail it down; and while I have had so many questions answered so many more have surfaced. For now I would just like to say thank you for your truth and courage, and God bless you.” — *Ohio*

• “Today I was guided to find your site and have just completed your article ‘The Promises to Abraham...’ WOW! This will be a great afternoon prayer walk! After suffering for a long time, arm wrestling with all the dogmas and doctrines, living day to day on grace here in an extended stay; your one article has verified so much.” — *Texas*

• “Thank you for all that you do to bring the truth of our human Messiah and his God to a hungry and truth-seeking people. My wife and I look forward to *Focus on the Kingdom* with great anticipation every month. We have been blessed many times over by your work.” — *Washington*

• “I would just like to say I greatly appreciate your website. It has served as a stepping stone in my search for truth, especially understanding the Jesus of history. Though I never subscribed to the doctrine of the Trinity, I had for 7 or so years believed Jesus had an existence before his conception in the womb of Mary. For the past 3 years however I started to have reservations about his pre-existence as a spirit being ever since I came to the conclusion that he had no part in the creation of the heavens and the earth, but that God, Yahweh, was the sole creator.” — *Email*

I pledge allegiance to my God,
The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
And to His great Kingdom
Which is to come.
One Kingdom,
Under God
Incorruptible!
With righteousness and true life for all!
— *Dana Larsson, Washington*