

When Did God's Son come into Existence?

THE BACKGROUND TO THE IDEA OF PRE-EXISTENCE

Ray Faircloth

The idea of pre-existence originated with PLATO and was later developed by XENOCRATES (d.314 BC). In time, the first century Middle Platonic philosopher NUMENIUS introduced the idea of a **2nd transcendental entity** between the Supreme Being and the universe. This entity, subordinate to the Supreme God, was called the **Demiurge**. Because matter was viewed as evil God could not have anything association with it. Only the Demiurge could deal with it and so he acted as agent of creation.

The concept that Jesus had existed in a different form prior to birth has been believed by many since the Christian philosopher Justin Martyr first used the word 'pre-existence' with reference to Jesus in about 150 AD. However, Justin was a believer in the idea that Socrates and Plato were inspired by God. He had been thoroughly schooled in the Greek philosophical thinking of his day, including the thoughts of Numenius whose ideas he found attractive. With his mind so receptive Justin found it easy to apply such ideas in his interpretation of the Christian Scriptures. This was similar to the thinking of the Jewish philosopher PHILO, who had earlier reinterpreted the Hebrew Scriptures in pagan Greek terms.

Applying the Demiurge concept to Jesus JUSTIN spoke of him as an "arithmetically second God" saying : "There is and there is said to be another God and Lord subject to the Maker of all things; who is also called **an Angel**, because he announces to all men whatsoever the Maker of all things." To develop his thinking Justin inaccurately quoted and even modified scripture. He held that Jesus only came **through** Mary not **from** her as Matthew describes. Justin also stated "though I should not be able to prove his pre-existence...For some of our race, who admit that he is the Christ, while holding him to be **man of men**; with whom *I do not agree*."

This is in direct contradiction of the apostle John's words at:

1John 4:2, "Every inspired expression that confesses Jesus Christ as having come **in the flesh** originates with God,..." *i.e. a fully human Jesus.*

Catholic theologian Karl-Josef Kuschel shows this to be the first major step away from biblical Christianity when he makes the comment that "The Christology of **Jewish Christianity** which had been dominant for decades and **knew of no pre-existence** Christology was increasingly swept aside and was finally branded heretical."

From the earlier perspective the Apostle Paul had said as recorded in 2 Timothy 4:3,4. ESV : "They will ...wander off into myths." He also said at 2 Corinthians 11:4 that some would come "preaching **another Jesus**." This pagan Greek teaching of a pre-existent Jesus was further developed by the Gnostics who taught that Jesus was not a human but a spirit being inhabiting a human body.

Please consider the following facts concerning Jesus in relation to literal pre-existence.

1. *RELATIVELY FEW SCRIPTURES SEEM TO INDICATE ANY PRE-EXISTENCE OF JESUS.*
2. *THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES PORTRAY MESSIAH AS ONE WHO WAS YET TO EXIST*
3. *THE SONSHIP OF JESUS WAS PROPHESED AND WAS THEREFORE FUTURE*

4. THE SON DID NOT SPEAK PRIOR TO HIS RECORDED LIFE.

5. THE SON OF GOD CAME INTO EXISTENCE AT HIS BEGETTING IN MARY'S WOMB.

6 JESUS WAS EXALTED ---- HE WAS NOT PREVIOUSLY PRE-EMINENT.

7. JESUS NEVER GOES **BACK** TO THE FATHER.

1. RELATIVELY FEW SCRIPTURES SEEM TO INDICATE ANY PRE-EXISTENCE OF JESUS

The vast majority of the scriptures are not used in any way in an attempt to prove the doctrine of pre-existence. For instance, from the entire Hebrew Scriptures only Genesis 1:26; Proverbs 8:22, 30 and Micah 5:2 are used in any attempt at such proof.

In the Greek Scriptures there is no hint of pre-existence in: Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts, Romans, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2 and 3 John, or Jude. The most significant book used for such proof is the Gospel of John. Additionally, 1 Corinthians 8:6, Philippians 2:6-8, Colossians 1:15-17, Hebrews 1:10-12 and Revelation 3:14 are all viewed as proof of the pre-human existence of Jesus.

THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS AND ACTS MAKE NO MENTION OF PRE-HUMAN EXISTENCE

Luke's introductory words to his Gospel are:

Luke 1:3,4

"I resolved also, because I have traced **all things from the start with accuracy**, to write them in logical order to you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may **know fully** the certainty of the things that you have been taught orally." *In spite of Luke's tracing 'all things from the start with accuracy' there is no mention throughout this gospel of Jesus having existed in another form prior to his birth. If such an idea were true, then from his own words, Luke would not have left out this vital information for Theophilus to 'know fully'. Luke firmly puts the coming into existence of Jesus as being at the time of his conception in Mary's womb as we shall see in the next section. This is not a coming into only human existence that is spoken of in Luke, but of actual existence.*

*The gospel of **Matthew** similarly gives no hint of a pre-human existence for Jesus. It too explains Jesus' conception as his time of coming into existence.*

*The Gospel of **Mark** does not deal with the events surrounding Jesus' birth but makes its start with the events concerning the baptism of Jesus. However, a thorough examination of this entire gospel reveals no hint of a pre-human existence for Jesus.*

*The same applies to the book of **Acts**. Again, why did the only meeting recorded in the scriptures, of the body of Christians, namely the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, discuss the major issue of whether or not Gentile Christians should keep the Mosaic law and yet makes no mention of the supposed revolutionary revelation that the Messiah had previously been an archangel in heaven?*

THE RESEARCH OF THE LEADING SCHOLARS CONFIRMS THAT:

*Matthew and Luke "show no knowledge of Jesus' pre-existence; seemingly for them the **conception** was the becoming (begetting) of God's Son"*

Raymond Brown America's leading Catholic theologian.

"The idea of pre-existence lies completely **outside the Synoptic sphere** of view"

F.C. Baur Most distinguished Greek scholar.

"there is not a single reference in the Synoptic Gospels to Jesus having been the Son of God before his birth." Professor *William Sanday* of Oxford.

2. THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES PORTRAY THE MESSIAH AS ONE WHO WAS YET TO EXIST

Did any of the Hebrew scriptures direct Jews of the first century to expect a Messiah who had to give up conscious life as an Archangel in heaven?

Deuteronomy 18:18

"I will raise up a prophet **from among** their brothers like you [Moses]". *This prophet would originate from human stock not angelic stock. This was shown to be fulfilled in Acts 3:22, 7:37 and John 6:14*

Genesis 3:15 "enmity...between your [*the serpent's*] seed and her [*the woman's*] seed".

Galatians 3:16 "the **promises** were spoken to Abraham and to his seed... who is Christ"

2 Samuel 7:14-16

"your [*David's*] seed...will establish his kingdom to time indefinite. I **shall become** his father, he will become my son" *Quoted in Hebrews 1:5. 2 Sam 7:19 says it is "down to a distant future time". Evidently the Messiah would be a person who was fully human (Moses had not pre-existed); one promised who would come to be God's Son at a future time.*

MESSIAH'S ORIGIN ACCORDING TO

MICAH 5:2

"And you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, the one too little to get to be among the thousands of Judah from you there will come out to me the one who is to become **ruler in Israel**, whose origin (goings forth) is from early times, from the **days of time indefinite**." Or '*ancient days*' Hebrew interlinear, NAB, ESV, NRSV, ROTH, REB, and NIV. *Firstly it must be noted that we see that a similar phrase is used to point back, not beyond the world's creation, but only as far as the Hebrew forefathers in:*

Micah 7:20

"the loving-kindness given to Abraham, which you swore to our forefathers from **days of long ago**"

Also, Amos 9:11

"In that day I shall raise up the booth of **David** that is fallen...I shall build it up as in the **days of long ago**."

The New American Bible study notes explain Micah 5:2 as a reference to the Messiah's descent from the ancient Davidic dynasty : "The tiny city and clan of Bethlehem-Ephrathah, from which comes the ancient Davidic dynasty (whose origin is from old, from ancient times)with its messianic king, one who is to be ruler in Israel"

Additionally, the Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges says: "origins" in Micah 5:2 refers to his (the Messiah's) descent from the ancient Davidic family.

If 'origin' in Micah 5:2 referred to that of Jesus' coming into existence it would be in contradiction of Matthew 1:18 which details the 'origin' of Jesus as his 'begetting by holy spirit'.

ONE CANNOT HAVE 2 POINTS OF ORIGIN. ". The word for 'origin' is also used in Matthew 1:1. There, too, it refers to Jesus' ancestry as being human – his **origin** because of his line of descent through David to Abraham. Yet logically Jesus only comes into actual existence at the end of that line --his conception.

Referring to Micah 5:2, James Dunn. Professor of Divinity Durham University comments that:

"The Hebrew does not suggest pre-existence"

Cross-referencing shows that It likely was Micah 5:2 that the 1st century Jews had in mind, when they said:

John 7: 42

"Has not scripture said that the Christ is coming **from the offspring of David**, and **from Bethlehem** the village where David used to be? *Therefore, the Messiah being the final one of the Davidic dynasty is part of and from within a dynasty that is ancient, which thereby makes the Messiah's origin ancient. In context it would be incorrect to assume that this meant that the Messiah existed before the world's creation.*

Similarly, in trying to assess who Jesus is :

John 7:40.41

"Some of the crowd ...began saying: 'This is for certainty **the prophet**'. Others were saying: 'This is **the Christ**.'" *And when asked by Jesus in:*

Matthew 16:13, 14

"Who are men saying the Son of Man is?' They [*the disciples*] said: 'Some say **John the Baptist**, others **Elijah**, still others **Jeremiah** or one of **the prophets**."

John 1:49 gives:

Nathaniel's recognition of Jesus as: "Rabbi, you are the **Son of God**, you are **king of Israel**"

In no case does anyone suggest that Jesus may have been an archangel.

3. THE SONSHIP WAS PROPHESED AND WAS THEREFORE FUTURE

No son would exist before his birth otherwise such would be the unscriptural idea of a passing through the womb as taught by Justin Martyr and would, therefore, be an incarnation.

Isaiah 7:14 "A virgin **will be** with child and bear a son"

Isaiah 9:6 "There has been a Son given to us".(evidently proleptic of '**will be given**').

Psalm 2:7

"You are my Son; I **today**, I have become your father." (Today I have **begotten** you." NASB, RSV) *quoted in Heb 1:5 and Acts 13:33 (not NWT)*

Psalm 89:26,27

"He himself calls out to me "You are my father, my God...I myself **shall place** him as first born, the most high of all the kings" *All these statements are of a future 'begetting' of God's firstborn Son.*

4. THE SON DID NOT SPEAK PRIOR TO HIS RECORDED LIFE.

Hebrews 1:2

"He [God] has **at the end** of these days spoken to us by means of a Son." *Jesus became **God's spokesman** only 'at the end of these days' ; whereas God previously had used prophets and angels. If Jesus had pre-existed, he would have spoken for God prior to "the end of these days"*

5. THE SON OF GOD CAME INTO EXISTENCE AT HIS BEGETTING IN MARY'S WOMB

SONSHIP BEGINS NO EARLIER THAN HIS CONCEPTION

Protestant theologian Wolfhart Pannenburg states :

"In Luke the divine **Sonship is established** by the almighty activity of the divine **spirit on Mary**...

In Luke 1:35 Jesus' divine Sonship is explicitly established by his miraculous birth."

Luke 1:35 "for that reason what is born will be called holy, **God's Son**." *Therefore Jesus was never God's Son at any time prior to his birth. No only-begotten son existed before this point in time. Holy spirit at his conception was **the cause** of Jesus' becoming God's Son.*

Luke 1:32 "This one...will be called Son of the Most High" *Christians "will be sons of the Most High." (Luke 6:35) and yet they did not pre-exist.*

Matthew 5:9

demonstrates that "will be called sons of God" = "will be sons of the Most High." in Luke 6:35

*THE ORIGIN ('genesis') OF JESUS. One is what one is according to one's origin. In the birth narrative given by Matthew he uses the word 'genesis' in 1:18. This word means 'beginning', 'origin' or 'birth'. According to Bauer's Greek / Eng Lexicon 'genesis' is defined as "One's coming **into being** at a specific moment, birth. State of being --existence" and "of ancestry as point of origin"*

Matthew 1:18 "the **origin** (Greek 'genesis' KIT) of Jesus Christ was..." *The next thing stated is that "Mary...was found to be pregnant by holy spirit". So the word genesis as used here has less to do with the actual birth than with the conception which was Jesus' point of coming into existence – his 'beginning'. Associate Professor of Religious Studies Bart Ehrman states that "the earliest and best manuscripts agree in introducing the passage with the words: 'The **beginning** of Jesus Christ happened this way'" *This alone shows that Jesus did not come into existence at any prior time..**

*The word 'genesis' is also used in Matthew 1:1 which is translated by Darby as: "Book of the generation of Jesus Christ". In this usage it refers to Jesus' ancestry – his **origin** because of his line of descent through David to Abraham. Yet logically Jesus only comes into actual existence at the end of that line -- his conception. This fact will be helpful when we later examine Micah 5:2*

At no time do any of the above accounts indicate that Jesus was only 'coming into existence as a human' as though he only came through Mary and not from her.

JESUS WAS BEGOTTEN ('gennao') ONCE.

James Dunn - Professor of Divinity. University of Durham comments: "**begetting** -- the coming into existence of one who will be called and **will in fact be the Son of God**, not the translation of a pre-existent being to become the soul of a human baby or the metamorphosis of a divine being into a human foetus." *Perhaps **Incarnation** is a more appropriate term than metamorphosis.*

Matthew 1:20

"That which was **begotten** (generated) in her.."

Every single individual described in the scriptures as having been begotten came into existence only at the time of his conception. It is illogical to propose that anyone could be begotten in essence a second time.

1John 5:18

"everyone **having been begotten** of God sins not, but the **one begotten** of God keeps him." Marshall's Interlinear.

"anyone born of God does not practice committing sin, but **the One who was begotten of God** carefully watches over and protects him..." Amplified also see NAB, Darby, and Young.

*The phrase "**having been begotten**" is in the perfect tense in the Greek text indicating an ongoing situation for Christians. However, the phrase "**the One who was begotten**" with reference to Jesus, is in the aorist tense in the Greek and refers to a once only and never to be repeated event of the past. Hence the begetting of Jesus occurred according to Matthew 1:20 and Luke 1:35 only on the one occasion of his conception in Mary's womb.*

The terms 'only-begotten of a father', 'only begotten Son', 'only begotten Son of God' as occurring at John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18 and 1John 4:9 all refer to Jesus' uniqueness as a son in particular the uniqueness of his virginal begetting in Mary and having no human father. This means that Jesus, although fully human, is never to be viewed as a 'mere man'.

The apostle Paul expresses Jesus' coming into existence in the same terms as Matthew / Luke

Galatians 4:4

"when the full limit of the time arrived, God sent forth **his Son**, who **came to be** ('*genomenon*') out of (from) a woman." *The Greek word 'genomenon' (from the form **ginomai**) = **came into existence**. This excludes the idea of one who came through Mary as would be the case with someone who had had a pre-human existence. **Ginomai is defined as:***

(1) to come into being through process of birth. Gal 4:4. Bauer's lexicon

(2) to come into existence. Bauer's lexicon

To become, i.e. to come into existence, begin to be, receive being. Thayer's lexicon

If there was a pre-existence, then terms such as incarnation, or transmigration would be more appropriate. But this is the beginning of a new person as prophesied in :

Psalm 2:7 "You are my Son, **today** I have begotten you." NASB. *This was fulfilled when Jesus was born as shown in Heb 1:5 and Acts 13:33. F.F Bruce states with reference to Acts 13:33 : "The*

promise of v.23, the fulfilment of which is described in v 33, has to do with the sending of the Messiah, **not his resurrection** (for which see v.34). Verse 34 adds "from the dead" and thus differentiates the word 'raise up' in v.33 from 'raise from the dead' in v.34"

"The *VIRGIN CONCEPTION* stands in irreconcilable contradiction to the christology of...a pre-existent Son of God." *Pannenburg*

JESUS' GENEALOGY

In the gospel of Matthew the genealogy of Jesus is shown to run back through David and Abraham. The genealogical record given by Luke takes things even further back to Adam. These would have been the opportune time to mention that Jesus had pre-existed himself, but no such thing is described in these accounts. However, closely linked with Matthew's genealogical list is the statement that Jesus was begotten into existence in Mary's womb (Matt 1:20). Luke also tells that the Son of God would be coming into existence in Mary's womb. (Luke 1,32,35). Throughout the synoptic gospels Jesus is called 'Son of David', he is never called or linked with Michael.

6. JESUS WAS EXALTED ---- HE WAS NOT PREVIOUSLY PRE-EMINENT

Philippians 2:8,9

"he humbled himself and became obedient as far as death...*For this very reason* also God **exalted him** to a superior position and kindly gave him the name that is above every name."

The Greek word 'kai' for 'also' or 'and' does not need to be translated separately because it is part of a Greek phrase which is correctly translated as 'Therefore' (NRS, ESV, NIV, REB), 'Because of this' (NAB), 'And for this' (NJB), 'That is why' (Barclay) or 'For this reason' (NASB in Luke 1:35),

Also the phrase 'to a superior position' is not in the Greek but rather the word 'highly', which word does not imply any comparison of positions.

ESV gives "Therefore God has highly exalted him..." most other translations are the same or similar

Colossians 1:18,19

"the firstborn from the dead that he **might become** the one who is first (**pre-eminent** *ESV and others*) in all things."

Hebrews 1:4

"So he has become better than the angels, to the extent that he has **inherited** a name more excellent than theirs". *This was because "he had made a purification for our sins."(vs 3). It does not say that he was being restored to some past inheritance i.e. **the number 2 position** in the universe.; but, that he **is only now worthy of** such inheritance because he "became obedient as far as death" and "had made a purification for our sins."*

7. JESUS NEVER GOES BACK TO THE FATHER

Jesus never says he will be returning to the Father as if he had been with Him previously, but says : "and was going to God" John 13:3

"I am going my way to the Father." John 14:12,28 ;16:28

"I am going to the Father" John 16:10,17

"I am ascending to my Father" John 20:17

(For 13:3 and 16:28 See ENIGMATIC / FIGURATIVE STATEMENTS)

NWT, NKJV, NRSV, Rotherham, and KJV are main versions that are correct for all these verses.

THE 'SENDING' OF JESUS WAS HIS COMMISSIONING FROM BIRTH

Just as for Jeremiah :

Jeremiah1:5, 7, 10

"before you proceeded to come forth from the womb I sanctified you. Prophet to the nations I made you...to all those to whom I shall **send you**...see I have **commissioned** you this day.." *'Sending' did not mean that Jeremiah literally pre-existed and came down from heaven.*

Galatians 4:4 "God **sent forth** His Son, who came to be out of a woman"

"Linguistically there is no support for the thesis that in Gal 4:4 the *ex in exapostellien* indicates that prior to the sending, the one sent was in the presence of the one who sent him."

Rengstorf in the Theological Dictionary of the NT

Romans 8:3 "by **sending** His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh."

1 John 4:14 "The Father has **sent forth** His Son as Saviour of the world"

1 John 4:9, "God **sent forth** his only-begotten Son into the world."

John 17:18 "Just as you **sent me forth** into the world, I also **sent them (the disciples)**

Forth into the world"

'The sending forth' of the disciples in the same way as Jesus was 'sent forth into the world' did not mean that they pre-existed.

John 1:6:

"There came a man...having been **sent forth** from God...his name was **John**". Young's Literal

'The sending forth' of John did not mean that he literally pre-existed and came down from heaven.

1 CORINTHIANS 10:4 ? "THAT ROCK WAS CHRIST"

This is typology with reference to Christ accompanying Christians through life. It is being read back into the experiences of the Israelites' deliverance from Egypt and their wilderness wanderings toward the promised land.

Passing through the red sea/cloud = Christian baptism

The miraculous manna = continuous supply of spiritual food

Striking the rock (tsur) at Rephidim = Christ in the flesh smitten for the sins of mankind

The gushing out of water = the giving of holy spirit

Striking the rock (sela) at Kadesh = Christ our High Priest not to be smitten twice but

Water came out abundantly = only to be addressed, to supply holy spirit. "they

impale the Son of God afresh "Heb 6:6

The 2 rock incidents were at each end of the wanderings. Exodus 17 and Numbers 20. So Paul is in no way saying that Christ literally existed as a rock or that he existed in the time of the wilderness wanderings.

WHAT ABOUT 1 TIMOTHY 3:16?

"Who was manifested in flesh" KIT "He was revealed in flesh" NRSV

'manifested' (ephanerothe) simply means: 'appeared' "without any implication of previous hidden-ness (cp John 9:3; Rom 3:21; 2 Cor 3:3; 4:10; 5:10; 1 John 3:5,8), so that the context becomes of crucial importance in determining the intended meaning of the text."

"In this case, there is no indication that the thought was intended to include a third stage of existence prior to appearance on earth...(that is) without any intention of implying a previous (pre-existent) hiddenness." James Dunn.

E.g. John 9:3 "that the works of God might be manifested in his case" *Such 'works' did not pre-exist literally.*

THE RAINBOWED ANGEL OF REVELATION 10:1 IS NOT CHRIST

Because :- *Hebrews chapter 1 shows the great difference between all angels and Christ.*

And because:-*The rain-bowed angel is described as "another strong angel". Earlier a strong angel is noted in 5:2.*

Also because:-*The description in 10:1 is not the same as the description of Christ in 1:13-16.*

The differences are :- *golden sash, eyes are flames of fire, voice is like the sound of many waters, he holds 7 stars, and has a sharp 2 edged sword protruding from his mouth.*

The similarity is :- *face like the sun, (the woman of chap 12 and the angel of 19:17 are also associated with the sun. This angel's appearance displays the glory of God and Christ and he is likely a special angelic herald of Christ, but he cannot be Christ*

THE CONCLUSIONS OF LEADING BIBLE SCHOLARS

*Matthew and Luke "show no knowledge of Jesus' pre-existence; seemingly for them the **Conception** was the becoming (begetting) of God's Son" Raymond Brown America's leading Catholic theologian.*

"The idea of pre-existence lies completely **outside the Synoptic sphere** of view" F.C. Baur Most distinguished Greek scholar

"there is not a single reference in the Synoptic Gospels to Jesus having been the Son of God before his birth." Professor William Sanday of Oxford

"But of pre-existence and equality of being with God we cannot discover any trace in Paul's letters" Bas van Iersel, 'Son of God in the New Testament.' p45.

"When John presents the eternal Word he was not thinking of a Being" C.J.Wright

"There is no indication that Jesus **thought or spoke of himself** as having pre-existed with God prior to his birth.....a complete discontinuity between Jesus' own self assertions and the subsequent claims made about him would constitute a fatal flaw..." p254 of '*Christology in the making*'. James Dunn Professor of Divinity

"One thing is certain, the Prologue of John does not represent direct descriptive knowledge of a divine entity or being called Word, who descended and became a human being. To read a metaphor as literal speech is misinterpretation;..." Roger Haight. Jesuit scholar

"The christology of **Jewish Christianity** which had been dominant for decades and knew of no pre-existence christology was increasingly swept aside and was finally branded heretical."

"a christology today which heedlessly uses the dogmatic theme of 'pre-existence' and introduces it into the NT **foists on the NT** an idea which it does not contain in this form."

'Born before all time ?' pp392-394 Karl-Josef Kuschel. Catholic theologian

"the assertion of Christ's pre-existence, placed **a strain**, so to speak, **upon the humanity of Jesus** which it was unable to bear...it is simply incredible that a divine person should have become a fully and normal human person---that is, if he was also to continue to be, in his essential identity, the same person" '*The Humanity and Divinity of Christ*' by John Knox

"what exactly, according to this term, pre-exists what else, and in what sense does it do so.. the logical path to alleged pre-existence is a tortuous one." James Mackey

Recommended reading.

Christology in the Making. James Dunn. Professor of Divinity at the University of Durham.

Born Before all Time. Karl Joseph Kuschel. Catholic theologian at the University of Tubingen.

The Human Face of God. John A.T Robinson. Leading Protestant theologian in the UK

The Christian Experience of God as Trinity. James P. Mackey. Professor of Divinity.

The Birth of the Messiah. Raymond E. Brown. Leading Catholic theologian in the USA

Jesus Symbol of God. Roger Haight. Jesuit Professor of Systematic Theology.