

## Did Jesus Christ really come down from Heaven? by Alan Hayward

### QUOTES:

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He is the greatest Being in all the universe, apart from God Himself. The purpose of this booklet is to honour the Lord Jesus, as he should be honoured.

Unfortunately, the Bible's teaching about the Lord Jesus is often misunderstood.

"I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me." (Verse 38.)

But we must not jump to a conclusion. This subject is not nearly as simple as it might seem.

A difficulty arises because there are two very different kinds of language, literal language and figurative language. Well, what about the statement, "I came down from heaven." Is this literal, or figurative?

There is good reason to think that it could be figurative. In verse 31 of the same chapter there is a mention of what the Old Testament called "manna". This was a kind of bread which God provided, by a miracle, for His people to eat while they were in the desert. The words of verse 31 are, "He (God) gave them bread from heaven to eat."

This is obviously figurative language. This miraculous bread was not baked in heaven and then delivered to the earth. The statement that it came from heaven informs us that the God of heaven created it on earth.

The Bible uses this sort of figurative language about men, as well as about things. It tells us that "there was a man sent from God, whose name was John." (John 1:6.) Yet John was never in heaven. "Sent from God" simply means that God gave him a special job to do.

But this explanation could only apply to those verses that actually speak of Jesus "coming down" from heaven. There are a number of other passages which seem to suggest, in one way or another, that Jesus once lived in heaven, long before he appeared on earth. This is one of them:

"Father (said Jesus), glorify me in your own presence with the glory which I had with you before the world was made." (John 17:5)

At the present time Jesus is seated at God's right hand (Psalm 110:1; Hebrews 1:13.). In these words and in various other ways the Bible tells us how great Jesus is. He is the second greatest person in all creation, second only to God Himself.

Now suppose that we were to ask the question, "Why is this? Why is Jesus so great? Why has God given such a high place to him?"

Those who believe that Jesus is God or an angel have a simple answer. They say, "Because he always was great. He was a great Spirit in heaven before he came to earth. Afterwards he went back where he belonged. He returned to the high place that he came from."

But this is not the answer of the Bible.

The Bible says that Jesus became great after his life on earth. It says that he became great then because God made him great. And it tells us, time after time, that God made him great because he had deserved it by what he did on earth. "We see him crowned with glory and honour now because of the death he suffered." (Hebrews 2:9, Today's English Version.)

"Because he (Jesus) hath set his love upon me (God), therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name." (Psalm 91:14, King James Version.)

"You (Jesus) love righteousness and hate wickedness, therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your fellows." Psalm 45:7.)

"He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him." (Philippians 2:8,9.)

This, surely, is the final, conclusive evidence that Jesus is a real man. A real man, but nevertheless a very special man. He is the only man who has ever conquered human temptation completely. That is why he now Sits at God's right hand.

## Seeing Things from God's Point of View

On pages 1 and 2 we looked at the words of Jesus, "I came down from heaven." Remembering the Bible-based words of the hymn, "All good gifts around us are sent from heaven above", we saw that these words of Jesus could easily have been figurative, not literal.

Jesus was a real man. That being so, his words about "coming down from heaven" simply must have been figurative. We can be sure of that now. He evidently meant that his life began when the God of heaven reached down to earth and worked a mighty miracle on his mother, Mary.

This still leaves a number of puzzling verses. There are, for instance, the words from John 17:5, where Jesus referred to the glory which he "had with God before the world was made", and a few others? Bible passages where similar expressions occur. Could this also be figurative language?

Yes, it could indeed. But to appreciate the meaning of such sayings we must make a special effort to see things from God's point of view. There are many differences between God and ourselves. The one that concerns us just now is this. To us the future is unknown: we can only guess what will happen tomorrow. But God knows the future; tomorrow is as real to Him as today is to us. That is why Bible prophecy always comes true.

Paul commented on this fact in Romans 4:17. He pointed out that God had said to Abraham in the Book of Genesis, "I have made you the father of many nations." Note that word, "have". Not, "I will make you," but, "I have made you". At that time Abraham had only one child. But when God promises something, that promise is certain. The thing is as good as done.

When a man makes a promise he normally says, "I will do such-and-such". But God, through His prophets, frequently says about the future, "I have done such-and-such", when He means that He is certainly going to do it. In the second half of Romans 4:17 Paul drew out this same lesson. He said, in the words of the New English Bible, that God "summons things that are not yet in existence as if they already were."

With a little help from the apostle Paul we have now established an important principle. To us, only the past and the present are real. The future is hidden from our eyes.

But God is different. He can see the future perfectly. The future is as real to God as the present is to men. Consequently, God can speak of the future as if it had already happened.

There are many places in the Bible where God has done this. Here are three of them.

(1) "Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you.' "(Jeremiah 1:4,5.) So God knew Jeremiah before the man was born! Obviously, this is figurative language. It does not mean that Jeremiah really existed before his birth. It means that God could look into the future and see Jeremiah before he was born. To express it another way, before Jeremiah was born he existed in the mind of God.

(2) "Before the world was made, God had already chosen us to be his in Christ, so that we would be holy and without fault before him. Because of his love, God had already decided that he would bring us to himself as his sons - this was his pleasure and purpose." Ephesians 1:4,5, Today's English Version.)

So it was not only Jeremiah; God also knew the members of His church before they were born! This, too, is figurative language, based on God's knowledge of the future. In the second sentence of that quotation, Paul said what he really meant, in literal language: "God had already decided that he would bring us to himself."

(3)"He (Jesus) was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of the times for your sake." (I Peter 1:20.)from which we get the English word "prognosis". In that quotation the word "destined" is interesting. It is the translation of a Greek word meaning "known in advance".

This is a form of the Greek word Prognosis is a word mostly used by doctors. Like its Greek equivalent, it means "advance knowledge". A doctor might say, for instance, "This man has cancer of the stomach. My prognosis is that the bleeding will continue, and he will be dead within a month."

Doctors, of course, can make mistakes. They admit that their prognosis, like weather forecasts, often turn out to be wrong. God is different. He really does know in advance. A prognosis by God is absolutely certain.

The verse quoted above, then, tells us that God knew all about Jesus before He created the world. This is only what we might expect. We saw in the previous quotation that God knew all about the early Christians before the world began.

Jeremiah, the early church, and the Lord Jesus Christ. They were all there, in the mind of God, from the beginning of time.

So it is not surprising that Jesus should have said to his Father in heaven, "Glorify me with the glory which I had with you before the world was made." (John 17:5.)

We know now what he must have meant by this.

Whenever men propose to do anything important they begin by drawing up a plan. Before launching an attack an army commander prepares a plan of battle, and reveals it to his generals. Before any great building is erected an architect is engaged to draw a plan of it.

The plans of men often come to nothing. The enemy might make a surprise move and make it impossible for the generals to begin their attack. The customer might run out of money and tell the architect to tear up his drawings.

But nothing can stop God from carrying out His plan for this world. As we have seen, He began to speak as if His plan had already been completed, even before He started work.

The Old Testament had a name for God's plan. It called it God's "Wisdom". The New Bible Dictionary (which is written by churchmen, not by Christadelphians) says that wisdom in the Old Testament stands for "God's irresistible fulfilment of what He has in His mind."

That is a good definition. It fits the following Old Testament passage very well:

"Does not wisdom call, does not understanding raise her voice? ... at the entrance of the portals she cries aloud: "... The Lord created me (Wisdom) at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.' Proverbs 8:1-23.)

In other words, before God started work on this world He drew up His Plan -Wisdom, as the Jews called it.

The Greeks - who believed in a god or gods, although not the God of the Bible - gave it a different name. They called it God's "Word". The same Bible Dictionary says that the Greek word for "word" means "both God's plan and God's power of creation."

This is helpful because it enables us to understand the first chapter of John's Gospel. John seems to have combined the Greek idea of God's Word with the Jewish idea of God's Wisdom. His Gospel begins, "In the beginning was the Word." Some people cannot make any sense out of this passage. Others think they can, but they take the wrong sense from it, because they think the Word is a living Being. (This, by the way, is why the translators in this passage refer to the Word as "he" in our English Bible. The Greek word for "he" also means "it", and that is how it should be translated here.)

Now if we think of God's "Plan" instead of His "Word", and use "it" instead of "he", this is what we learn from John 1:

"In the beginning was the Plan, and the Plan was with God, and the Plan was God. It was in the beginning with God; all things were made through it, and without it was not anything made that was made. In it was life, and the life was the light of men. . . . And the Plan became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father." (John 1:1-14.)

These words of John's summarise the Bible's teaching beautifully. Jesus did exist in heaven from the beginning, but not as a person. He existed as a great idea in God's mind, as the very centre of God's Plan. He did not exist as a person until he was born in Bethlehem. Then, in John's phrase, "the Plan became flesh".

By Alan Hayward, 1975