



**Christmas Special**  
**26 December 2004**

**Hebrews 1:3** - The Son is the shining forth of God's divine essence, and the exact equivalent of His divine attributes, sustaining all things by His powerful Word. After He had provided purification for our sins ...

1. "Provided purification" makes reference to the completion of our so great salvation on the cross. He was qualified to be our substitutionary sacrifice because He maintained the perfection of His humanity by being identified as "Him who had no sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21). The sins of the human race were imputed to Him and then judged resulting in a judicial decision: the penalty of human sin is paid for by the vicarious work of Christ.
2. All sins were judged on the cross but each individual's personal sins are not forgiven until he or she expresses faith alone in Christ alone as Savior.

**John 3:16** - For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

3. When our Lord accomplished the solution to human sin He exclaimed from the cross:

**John 19:30** - Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, He bowed His head and gave up His human spirit.

4. "It is finished" is one word, the perfect passive indicative of **τετέλεσται, tetelestai**. It is an intensive perfect that looks retrospectively back on an event that has been brought to completion prior to time it is referenced. Since the action is completed then it continues from that point forward in an ongoing state of completion.
5. Consequently, the work of salvation was accomplished during the three hours Christ was being judged for our sins. His statement, "It is finished," was obviously made while He was still alive therefore His physical death is not associated with the payment of our sins but rather His spiritual death.
6. After the resurrection, our Lord spent forty days on earth ministering to His apostles and disciples. Then He ascended into heaven where He remains to this day.

**Hebrews 1:3** - The Son is the shining forth of God's divine essence, and the exact equivalent of His divine attributes, sustaining all things by His powerful Word. After He had provided purification for our sins **[ the work of salvation ]**, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven **[ session ]**.

7. The writer of Hebrews has now compiled a long list of reasons Jesus Christ is superior to the Old Testament prophets. He is identified as:
  1. the Son of God,
  2. the Heir of all things,
  3. the shining forth of divine essence,
  4. the possessor of the divine attributes,
  5. the power that sustains the universe,
  6. the vicarious sacrifice for our sins, and
  7. presently seated at the right hand of the Father.
8. If these things are not convincing enough, the remainder of chapter 1 drives the point home further.



**Hebrews 1:4** - So Christ became as much superior [ κρείττων, kreittōn ] to the angels ...

1. Here we see the word *kreittōn* first used in the epistle. The Lord is said to have *become superior* to the angelic creation. The inference is that at one time He *was inferior* to the angels.
2. This is confirmed in:

**Hebrews 2:7** - “You made Him a little lower than the angels; You crowned Him with glory and honor ...

3. Thus in His true humanity during the Incarnation, Jesus was made lower than the angels. But in resurrection body and seated at the right hand of the Father He is now superior to the angels.
4. Logic demands that if Jesus is superior to the angels then He is also superior to the prophets. His degree of superiority over the angels is amplified next.

**Hebrews 1:4** - So Christ became as much superior to the angels as the name He has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

1. The superiority of the Lord’s name is mentioned in:

**Philippians 2:6** -Jesus Christ, preexisting in the essence of God, in humility thought equality with God not a treasure to be retained.

**v. 7** - But He deprived Himself of the proper function of deity [ **Doctrine of Kenōsis** ], having assumed the form of a slave, having become in the likeness of mankind [ **emphasizes His true humanity minus the sinful nature** ].

**v. 8** - And having been recognized in the outward appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death [ **authority orientation to the salvation plan of God** ], even the death of the cross [ **the endurance of the three hours of judgment during spiritual death** ]!

**Philippians 2:9** - Because of which death [ **substitutionary spiritual death** ], God has bestowed the maximum exaltation [ **session at His right hand** ] and graciously bestowed a royal title that is above every name [ **“King of kings and Lord of lords” as per Revelation 19:16** ].

**v. 10** - By means of this royal title, at the presence of the person of Jesus [ **the Evaluation Tribunal of Christ** ] every knee should bow in heaven: those on earth [ **those believers alive at the Rapture** ] and those under the earth [ **those believers who are physically dead at the Rapture** ],

**v. 11** - and every tongue should openly acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, resulting in the glory of God the Father.

2. Again we can see that the royal title of Jesus Christ —King of kings and Lord of lords—is superior to the angels and by deduction superior to the prophets.
3. Consequently, the New Testament and its revelation to Church Age believers are superior to the Old Testament. Further, the sophisticated spiritual life of the Church Age is superior to the ritual plan of God in the age of Israel.
4. Having established that the Lord is superior to the prophets and the angels, the writer turns his attention to the superiority of His priesthood:



**Hebrews 8:6** - The priesthood function Jesus has received is as superior [ κρείττων, kreittōn ] to theirs [ the Levite priesthood in the Age of Israel ] as the covenant of which He is Mediator is superior to the old covenant, further, it is founded on superior [ κρείττων, kreittōn ] promises.

1. The Lord is called our High Priest in a dozen passages in Hebrews and we are referred to as His royal priesthood in 1 Peter 2:5; 9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10; and 20:6.
2. The Lord is superior to the Levitical high priest and Church Age believers are superior to the Levitical priests.
3. Further, the spiritual life of the Church Age—our “covenant” and “promises”—is superior to the spiritual life of the Age of Israel—the “old covenant.”
4. Our superior spiritual life consists of the mystery doctrines of the Church Age: the baptism, sealing, indwelling, and filling ministries of the Holy Spirit, the distribution of spiritual gifts, the grace apparatus for perception, the ten problem-solving devices, the sophisticated spiritual life characterized by spiritual self-esteem, spiritual autonomy, and spiritual maturity, and rewards and blessings for both time and eternity.
5. We have a superior priesthood, a superior spiritual life, and superior rewards and blessings, all made possible by our superior Savior, Jesus Christ.

### 3. *Doctrinal Conclusions*

1. This is the time of year during which we pause to celebrate the entrance of our Lord into human history. The impact of Christmas is not so much its unique beginnings but its ultimate victory.
2. The Virgin Birth was the beginning of a vast divine experiment designed to provide salvation to all mankind.
3. It was due to the virtue, integrity, and honor exhibited by Jesus of Nazareth that made this salvation a reality.
4. The fact He fulfilled the salvation plan of God on the cross is our guarantee of a superior spiritual life.
5. Superior dividends from His substitutionary sacrifice are being paid out daily in the superior dispensation called the Church Age.
6. We are the grace beneficiaries of this unspeakable gift simply through faith alone in Christ alone.
7. A superior High Priest + a superior system for spiritual growth + superior promises + superior delegated power + superior divine operating assets = superior invisible historical impact from a superior spiritual life.
8. Christmas therefore becomes for us an “Auld Lang Syne” whereby we pause to reflect back upon the Father’s deployment of His uniquely-born Son to execute His superior plan: Operation Reconciliation.
9. Through these superior things we are given the opportunity of living a superior life.
10. So in conclusion let us remember the Source of our so great salvation and His entrance into the human race for our benefit and for the purpose of our eternal redemption:



**Numbers 24:17** - "I see Him but not now; I behold Him, but not near. A Star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel."

**Genesis 49:10** - "The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between His feet until Shiloh [שִׁילֹה]—the One to Whom tribute belongs—comes ..."

**Micah 5:2** - "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for Me One Who will be Ruler over Israel, Whose origins are from of old, even from eternity past."

**Isaiah 7:14** - "The Lord Himself will give you a sign [תּוֹא 'oth]: the virgin [עַלְמָה 'almah] will be with child and will give birth to a Son, and will call Him Immanuel: God with us."

11. The word "sign" is the Hebrew noun *'oth* and is defined by:

**Botterwech, G. Johannes and Helmer Ringgren (eds.). *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Translated by John T. Willis. Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 1:168, 170:**

**תּוֹא 'oth.** The word occurs 78 times in the Old Testament and in 75 cases the Septuagint translates it by the Greek *sēmeion*. (p. 168)

*oth*, "sign," is an object, an occurrence, an event through which a person is to recognize, learn, remember, or perceive the credibility of something. (p. 170)

12. Isaiah's prophecy includes a sign by which future generations will be able to recognize the arrival of the Messiah and to perceive His credibility: the Virgin Birth. There is controversy among theologians as to the definition of the word for "virgin." The word **עַלְמָה 'almah** is one of three words in the Hebrew that could be translated "virgin" or "young woman of marriageable age," i.e., nubile.
13. However, one of the major principles of hermeneutics is to allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. Of the seven uses of *'almah* in the Old Testament the six apart from Isaiah 7:14 all refer to literal virgins. There is no reason therefore, especially in view of the context, to assume Isaiah's prophecy does not also refer to a virgin, a conclusion discussed by:



**Fruchtenbaum, Arnold G. *Messianic Christology: A Study of Old Testament Prophecy Concerning the First Coming of the Messiah.* (Tustin: Ariel Ministries, 1998), 34-35:**

Since everyone agrees that **עַלְמָה** 'almah, means an unmarried woman, if the woman in Isaiah 7:14 were a non-virgin, then God would be promising a sign involving fornication and illegitimacy. It is unthinkable that God would sanction sin, and in any case, what would be so unusual about an illegitimate baby that could possibly constitute a sign? (p. 34)

As far as ancient Jewish writers were concerned, there was no argument about Isaiah 7:14 predicting a virgin birth. The *Septuagint* is a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures made about 200 B.C., 200 years before the issue of Jesus' Messiahship ever arose. The Jews who made this translation, living much closer to the times of Isaiah than we do today, translated Isaiah 7:14 using the Greek word *parthenos* which very clearly and exclusively means a virgin. (p. 35)

14. Isaiah later speaks of both the Lord's birth and the Incarnation but skips the Church Age to describe His titles as Ruler over His millennial kingdom:

**Isaiah 9:6 -** Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, [ **Church Age is skipped** ] and the government shall be on His shoulders [ **millennial kingdom** ]. And He will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

**v. 7 -** Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on [ **the Second Advent** ] and forever [ **eternity future** ].

15. Now we move to the New Testament and two major Messianic passages. The first announces the imminency of Isaiah's prophecy and the other documents its fulfillment. The latter includes an angelic disclosure of another "sign" to be used to verify the Messiah's identity. First, the prophecy reiterated and the virgin identified:

**Luke 1:26 -** In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee,

**v. 27 -** to a virgin [ **παρθένος, parthenos: a youthful woman who has not had relations with a male** ] pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

**v. 28 -** The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

**v. 29 -** Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

**v. 30 -** But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God.

**v. 31 -** "You will be with child and give birth to a Son and you must call His name Jesus.

**v. 32 -** "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David,

**v. 33 -** and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; in fact, His kingdom will never end."

16. Next, Luke relates the fulfillment of the prophecy:



**Luke 2:1** - In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.

**v. 2** - (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.)

**v. 3** - And everyone went to his own town to register.

**v. 4** - So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.

**v. 5** - He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

**v. 6** - While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born,

**v. 7** - and she gave birth to her firstborn, a Son. She wrapped him in burial cloths and placed Him in a feeding trough, because there was no room for them in the inn.

**v. 8** - And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks by night.

**v. 9** - And angel of the Lord [ **the seraph-rank King of Arms of the angelic College of Heralds** ] appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

**v. 10** - But seraph angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news [ **the provision of salvation to all who believe** ] of great joy that will be for all the people [ **unlimited atonement** ].

**v. 11** - “Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord.

**v. 12** - “This will be a sign [ **σημεῖον, sēmeion: that which distinguishes one person from another** ] to you: You will find a Baby wrapped in burial cloths and lying in a feeding trough.”

**v. 13** - Suddenly with the seraph there appeared a great army of angelic warriors who were praising God and singing:

**v. 14** - “Glory to God in the heavenlies, and on earth, peace among those with whom God is well-pleased.”

**Luke 2:15** - So it was, when the angelic army had passed in review and gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds began speaking to one another, “Let us go straight through to Bethlehem and see this truth [ **“thing”**: **ῥῆμα, rhēma: the “word of life” or the subject matter of the seraph’s message** ] which has happened which the Lord [ **God the Father** ] has made known to us.”

**v. 16** - And they hastened and found by searching Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a feeding trough.

**v. 17** - And having seen this sign they made known to others this saying [ **ῥῆμα, rhēma: this “word of life”** ] which had been told them about the Child.

17. The shepherds put together the signs and came to the doctrinal conclusion that the Baby they visited in the feeding trough in Bethlehem was the long-awaited virgin-born Messiah of Israel, and His name is Jesus, Who is Christ the Lord.



18. On 26 December circa 4 B.C., the Lord Jesus was awakened by the first sunrise of His Incarnation. It introduced him to a life that would change the dynamics of the entire world from that day to this. That life would end 33 years later in a sacrificial death that would provide eternal life to millions who would believe the sign of the cross: the work of our Savior Jesus Christ made possible by the matchless grace and undiminished love of God.

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