

STUDY ONE

Introduction to the Theme

WHAT IS CHRISTOLOGY?

Christology is the study of the person and work of Christ. The materials available are limited almost to the Judeo-Christian Scriptures called the Bible. In history a group of followers gathered around the man Jesus, and the story of them is for the most part the story of the Christian Church. In fact it is quite amazing to think that much of history in the past two thousand years has had to do with the Palestinian, Jesus of Nazareth. The phenomenal amount of writing, research, and action which has come from this association with Jesus is quite remarkable. No wonder that not only Christian believers have studied the person and work of this man Jesus, but also atheists, agnostics, and religious unbelievers as well as religionists of non-Christian background have also closely examined his life and work. He is the one who intrigues all peoples.

For us an examination of Christology is valuable because we can gain richer perspectives, illuminating insights, and know more concerning this man. When we read such

statements in the first chapter of Colossians concerning him as: 'Christ in you, the hope of glory' (v. 27), 'in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell' (v. 19), 'in him all things were created' (v. 16), 'He is the image of the invisible God' (v. 15), and so on, then it must mean he is the most significant man who has ever lived. For this reason, therefore, we need to know about him, and also know him. He is not only important for history generally, but also for each believer, personally.

METHOD OF STUDY

In dealing with our theme, most systematic theologians have a fairly regular methodology. It is this—they set about to co-ordinate the materials available from the Scriptures, concerning the nature of: (i) his person; and (ii) his work. They do this in the following order:

- (a) They speak of his pre-creational existence, that is, of his relationship with the Father and the Spirit, reinforcing this mode of existence by the fact that he was the mediator of creation, and in fact always upheld and upholds creation by 'his word of power'.
- (b) Then they deal with his presence and work within the framework of the Old Testament. Here he is the eternal Son, the Word, or the Wisdom of God.
- (c) Next they cover his incarnation, life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension from the Gospels and Acts, thus proceeding to . . .
- (d) His further operations in history which will climax at the end of this age. These actions are deduced from Old Testament and New Testament prophetic

and apocalyptic passages. These Scriptures cover his present activities, his future triumph, and the establishing of the new age.

- (e) A full Christological picture can then be formed, and so his various ministries and offices can be defined; for example, that of Messiah, Son, Lord, Prophet, Priest, and so on.

This whole methodology is an excellent one and probably the best for systematising the materials available.

Our methodology will be somewhat different. Having examined intimations of the Old Testament prophecies we will then go directly to the New Testament, to see how he is presented or 'comes through' to us. We will see then:

- (a) Preparation for his coming by: (i) Old Testament intimations concerning Messiah; and (ii) John the Baptist and contemporary expectations.
- (b) The Christ of the Gospels as he is presented in his person and work.
- (c) The rationalisation of the Gospels, Acts, Epistles and Revelation, especially as they relate to the Old Testament in seeing the fullness of his person and work.
- (d) Distinctive reference to his various offices and ministries as they emerge in this rationalisation.

This methodology has weaknesses, but at least we are immediately confronted by Christ as he appeared visibly in history, and can then examine the rationalisations which were given by the apostles. It is more homely and personal to deal with acts than with images and concepts, and offices of his person, as such.

OLD TESTAMENT INTIMATIONS OF MESSIAH'S COMING

It is probably difficult for us to understand the thinking of the Jews current at the time of Christ. In history, from our vantage point of living two thousand years after the event, we can see that Jesus has come. That is what matters; indeed all that matters. Not so to the Jews, for they lived within their own times. Because they had been under many captors they did not want any man to come and attempt to release them unless his work could prove complete and permanent. In fact they did not just want a messiah. Oppressed peoples have always wanted messiahs to release them. This is a permanent principle in a world of warring nations.

In the case of the Jews it was somewhat different. Originating from the nation called Israel they looked for a restoration of their kingdom, so often promised by God through their own prophets. They had Scriptures which gave them many intimations of one coming who had such high-sounding titles as 'Wonderful Counselor', 'Mighty God', 'Everlasting Father', 'Prince of Peace'. His triumph over Israel's enemies was to be total, his kingdom eternal, and his rule one of righteousness and peace.

There are those who think that Israel's constant domination by its enemies had made this people 'dream up' such an outstanding person. Only such a one could be of true value to his people. Far from them dreaming this up, the whole body of prophecy from Genesis 3:15 through to the last verses of Malachi builds up a composite and dynamic picture of the one who was to come. We now append these ideas contained in Scripture, and whilst here these intimations are given in brief, we will need to

expand them as we examine the Christology of the New Testament. In fact even in this brief study we are forced to interpret to some degree the themes of the Old Testament by those of the New Testament. A full treatment of the Old Testament in regard to Christology would require very detailed and laborious study. What is given here, then, is simply that we may grasp something of the understanding of the more thoughtful Jews of Jesus' day. Of those, probably very few would have considered these aspects specifically, or seen all these facts coming together, as a whole. Let us, however, look at them:

- (a) *The Proto-evangel.* Genesis 3:15. The principle of enmity, of the one coming to crush evil at its head (cf. Matt. 1:18–22). This spoke of enmity and conflict with resultant victory, but no title or office is predicted.
- (b) *The 'Seed' Concept.* Already mentioned in Genesis 3:15, it is repeated in the covenantal promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:7; etc.) and the theme is repeated in the Immanuel promise of Isaiah 7:14 (cf. Matt. 1:22–23). From the general covenant promise to Abraham there is a narrowing down to Isaac, and then Israel. From Israel himself comes the strange prophecy of 'Shiloh' (Gen. 49:10), thus narrowing the seed to Judah, and the Davidic seed is promised (2 Sam. 7:12–13). The Judaic promise is repeated in Micah 5:2.
- (c) *The Messiah Concept.* The growth of the idea of Messiah over the inter-testamental period infuses this concept with a content not always found explicitly in the Old Testament. The phrase is taken largely from Psalm 2:2. Verse 6 of the Psalm

shows the 'anointed' is the 'king'. The anointing of kings we see in 1 Samuel 16:13, 2 Samuel 2:4, and 1 Kings 1:39. The *Servant Concept* (see later), found especially in Isaiah, is also linked with anointing in 61:1. In the Old Testament God Himself is Lord or King of all the earth. This Messiah, however, is set upon Zion as a King (Ps. 2:6).

- (d) *The King Concept*. This cannot really be taken apart from the *Messiah Concept*. The same word (translated Messiah or anointed one) is used for Cyrus the king in Isaiah 45:1 and for David (Ps. 89:20). The promises of 2 Samuel 7:12–14 and Psalm 132:11 make it clear that the king will be the son of David, and his kingdom eternal. Linked with Psalms 2 and 110, the king is a subduer of enemies. See also Isaiah 9 and 11, Jeremiah 33, Zechariah 9 and 12. It has been suggested that the constantly battered nation of God's people saw the figure of King–Messiah as future, dynamic and eschatological.
- (e) *The Concept of Lord*. Again, it is the New Testament which lights up this term 'Lord' (cf. Rom. 10:9; Acts 2:36; etc.). Jesus raised the question of Psalm 110 with the contemporary leaders of the Jews. It shows the high authority of the Lord (my Lord). It does not, in fact, differ from that of king. The Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 9:6–7 is proven Messianic, because its full import could not be accorded to other than a divine figure. The fact that Psalm 110 is quoted 24 times in the New Testament highlights its significance in the Old Testament.

- (f) *The Concept of Prophet.* Deuteronomy 18:15–19 speaks of the prophet who is to come. He is a person to be reckoned with, since to disobey him is deadly. As Moses was a prophet who led his people, so the new prophet would be greater (a greater exodus?). Malachi 4:5 has a reference to an Elijah coming before the great and terrible day of the Lord. Acts 3:21–26 make use of the Deuteronomic promise. (Note: The Dead Sea scrolls, which have an amount of anticipation of the Messiah, use the passage in Deuteronomy—‘the prophet’—with reference to Messiah.)
- (g) *Son of David Concept.* This phrase, used a number of times in a Messianic sense in the New Testament, is a high concept in the Old Testament (see 2 Sam. 7:12–14; Ps. 132:11; cf. 1 Kings 8:25; 2 Chron. 6:16f.). However, it is fair to say that the promises seem primarily to deal with the perpetuity of the Davidic government.
- (h) *The Servant Concept.* The figure of the Suffering Servant in the latter half of Isaiah is undoubted. He is a coming one. His person is rather mysterious, but the ministry and the claims of this are not in doubt. The Servant Songs of Isaiah 42:1–4, 49:1–6, 50:4–10, and 52:13–53:12, speak of one who will be a powerful instrument in the hand of the Lord. He is the one who holds the mystery of suffering and its solution in his actions. His is a redeeming ministry. In one sense this coming one seems different to the more splendid Messianic figure of Psalm 2 and 110. Indeed it is again that the New Testament gives the key to understanding

in such passages as Mark 10:45, and Philippians 2:6–7.

- (i) *General Old Testament Considerations.* Whilst there are various pictures of ‘One to come’ in the Old Testament, there are also other considerations. For example, there are the indications of plurality in the Godhead (Gen. 1:26; 3:22; 11:6–7; Isa. 6:8; etc.).¹ The theophanies which from time to time occur in the Old Testament do not indicate a detachment of a person from the Godhead—these are usually referred to as ‘the Angel of the Lord’—yet the *identification* of these theophanies with God and a Person indicate that the One God is not a bare monolithic Being. See also the use in the Wisdom literature and *in particular* the personification of wisdom (cf. Job 28:12, 23–28; Prov. 8:22–31). This personification would have no great point either, without the Prologue to John’s Gospel where the concept appears to be met in developed form. Again we have the strange figure of Daniel 3:25, ‘like the Son of God’ (AV). In Daniel 7:13–14 we have the one ‘like a [the] son of man’ who comes near to the Ancient of Days and receives great honour and an eternal kingdom. In Zechariah 13:7 we have one who is God’s ‘fellow’, that is, ‘equal’ or ‘peer’. All of these references point to the emergence of a person whose stature is beyond that of a man, as such, although his humanity must not be in doubt.

¹ H. P. Liddon, *The Divinity of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, Rivingtons, London, 1889, pp. 49ff.

We conclude then that there were sufficient intimations in the Old Testament of a special, coming person of outstanding characteristics. However, who would gather together these intimations and see them as all contained in the one special person? Few, if any, would see it this way.

CONCLUSION

Even though it had been rare for many Jews to have considered all these intimations of the Old Testament, yet much of what we have described, and other material we have not included, would have been basis enough for the Jews of Palestine to look forward to a great emancipation under the hand of a divine deliverer, whatever he may have humanly been called.

The fact is there was strong anticipation which was in the air around the time the narratives open in the Gospels, particularly at the time of the births of John and Jesus. We will examine these narratives, for they are most important. We can conclude there was strong anticipation of a deliverer, even if they did not fully understand the nature of that coming one.

THE PERSON AND WORK OF CHEST