

The Supremacy of Christ

1. The speaking Christ

When the apostle John, by the Spirit, used the title 'Word' (Gk. Logos) he was using a term familiar to the Greek mind of his day. The Greeks used it to express the principle, or rationale, which they understood to be behind the creation of the universe.

What came as a revelation from God through John's writing was the identification of this abstract creation principle with a person, God the Son. That this is a title of the Lord Jesus is quite clear from verse 14 of John chapter 1: *'The Word became flesh.'* God the Son became flesh in order to reveal the eternal God to us.

With that in mind, we might still ask ourselves: 'Why this particular title?' We think of how we ourselves use words in order to communicate with each other. We reveal what's in our mind by our words. The eternal God has expressed his mind in the one who is the Word. In Jesus, the Word, God has fully revealed his character and perfectly declared his will.

What can we learn about God's Son from the opening verses of John's Gospel, where he's introduced to us as the Word? What sort of person is he? Seven points have been noted (by J. Packer).

1. He was *'in the beginning'* (v.1). This reminds us of the opening words of the Bible, which take us back to the time of the creation. In other words, the first thing we learn here about the Word is his pre-existence. He didn't *'become'*, nor was he *'made'*, as is said of other things in the following verses. What this shows is his eternity, and it's confirmed by so many other Bible texts. *'He is before all (created) things'*, according to Colossians 1:17. This echoes the prophecy of Micah that the one who was to be born in Bethlehem - the Word become flesh - would be one whose *'goings forth are from of old, from everlasting'* (5:2). Yes, the Word is the eternal Word.

2. He was *'with God'* (v.1, literally 'towards God'). The word (Gk. pros) translated here as *'with'* conveys the idea of communion between distinct persons. It indicates personal companionship and the enjoyment of fellowship together. This teaches us about the personality of the Word, as someone capable of complete fellowship with God the Father and the Holy Spirit. In other words, the Word is the personal Word.

3. He *'was God'* (v.1). That's really plain, but this statement has been made the centre of controversy by false teachers. We may be absolutely clear that to insert the indefinite article (an 'a' – as in 'he was a god') is completely wrong grammatically. There's no question on which side the qualified experts are, as witness the rules of Greek grammar that even a novice can read – and find this very example discussed. Therefore, as it stands, it gives crystal clear testimony to the deity of the Word. In any case, this truth is very clear from many other Bible texts; two from Matthew will serve as our examples. In Matthew 3:1-6, we see how John the Baptist fulfils the prophecy of Isaiah 40:3 – which talked about preparing the way for the Lord, and the Baptist relates that to his very own work preparing the way for the Lord Jesus, which means Jesus is the very one whom Isaiah called God. Matthew then takes up another of Isaiah's great prophecies in describing the birth of the Lord Jesus in

terms of Isaiah's predicting of the virgin-born Immanuel (1:22,23), whose name means '*God with us.*'

Many among the cults profess difficulty with the truth of the Trinity. And while it's absolutely true that the term 'trinity' isn't found in the Bible, its truth certainly is. As Luke records the announcement to Mary by Gabriel concerning the birth of the Lord, we've clear reference made to the deity of the one who's to be born, and to the fact of the trinity. In Luke 1:32,35 the child to be born is declared to be '*the Son of the "Most High"*' or the '*Son of God*'. It's prophesied that the conception would be a work of the '*Holy Spirit*' (v.35) and that the '*Lord God*' would give the child the throne of David (v.32). There are references to three distinct persons there at one moment in time as we view it, and all with the same nature, existing as one God. In the first chapter of John's Gospel, John the Baptist publicly witnesses to the Lord Jesus as being the Lamb of God (v.29) and the Son of God (v.34); so the Lord is presented in that first chapter as the Word, the Lamb, and the Son. This Word is without doubt the divine Word.

4. '*All things were made by Him*' (v.3). Here we find the Word creating. Paul begins his letter to the Colossians with the same truth: '*For in Him were all things created ... all things have been created through Him, and unto Him*' (1:16). Nothing could be clearer than this, and it must be our final answer to the atheistic evolutionist.

5. '*In Him was life*' (v.4). And now we find the Word animating. He's the source of all life, whether natural or spiritual. Paul's words to the Athenians (Acts 17:25, 28) certainly apply to him: '*He Himself gives to all life*', and '*in Him we live*'. Whereas, regarding spiritual life: '*this life is in His Son*' (1 John 5:1 1).

6. '*And the life was the light of men*' (v.4). That is, here's the Word now revealing and enlightening. He's the true light that lights everyone (v.9). All, without excuse, should have a certain consciousness of God.

7. '*And the Word became flesh*' (v.14). This is the truth of the incarnation, of how this eternal, personal, divine Word, the Creator, Animator and Revealer of all, came into his creation.

In Philippians, Paul writes of the Lord emptying himself and '*being made in the likeness of men*' (2:7). We read with wonder from Genesis 1:26 how God said, '*Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness*'; yet here we have the infinitely greater miracle of one who is God but now in man's likeness. In eternity, as the Son of God, he emptied himself; in time, as the Son of Man, he humbled himself. The giving of himself was something that began in eternity, before he even came to earth to be born.

There are two points that we need to be clear about. First, that it wasn't of his deity that the Lord emptied himself in becoming flesh. We've already made reference to the fact that he was '*God with us*', and the Bible repeatedly declares that the one whom the Father sent into the world was '*the Son*' (e.g. 1 John 4:14). He was '*the Son*' before, and after, his birth at Bethlehem. Secondly, we must affirm that he became truly human. The Gospels faithfully record for us the reality of his humanity in describing his tiredness and thirst. Only as

someone who was truly man could he suffer and bleed and die in our place as the sacrifice for our sins. These twin truths of his deity and of his humanity are both to be found in John 1:14: *'And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.'* Thus, the tiny infant form that was upheld in the arms of Mary his mother, was at the same time the Mighty God simultaneously *'upholding all things by the word of His power'* (Heb. 1:3). Well might we say in the words of the Bible: *'Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness; He who was manifested in the flesh'*! (1 Tim. 3:16).

As well as John 1, there are two other places in the New Testament where the Lord is presented as the Word. They are: 1 John 1, and then also in Revelation 19:11-16 which views the Word as the Judge. How different his return to earth will be from his first Advent! For he'll come at the head of the armies of heaven to wage the fearful campaign of Armageddon and to judge the nations still alive at that time.

The letter to the Hebrews opens by informing us that God has spoken in his Son (the Word whom we've been tracing). This not only means through the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth but also and especially through his person and his actions, for in these the glory of God was seen.

In Hebrews 1:2-4, he's given the highest imaginable descriptive titles both in relation to the universe – for he's called Creator, Upholder, Heir - and also in relation to God himself – when he's also called the radiance, the image, and the Son. This glorious and unique person is presented as the grand finale, or last word, of God's self-disclosure. With Peter, who was an eyewitness of his majesty on the mountain of Transfiguration, we might also say *'such a voice'* (2 Pet. 1:17)!

And yet the Word was never more awesome than when he answered nothing to his accusers. The Silent Logos (or Word)! The silence of the Word then expressed as perfectly as ever the glory of the eternal God.

Questions:

1. Why does John begin his Gospel with the revelation of the second person of the Trinity as the Word?
2. In what ways has God expressed his mind, in Christ (as the Word)?
3. Which of the 7 points made in 'The Prologue' has impressed you most?

2. The humble Christ

There were a number of reasons for Paul writing his letter to the Church of God at Philippi. It was first and foremost an acknowledgement of some recent financial support he'd received from them (1:5-7; 4:14-19). It also seems that he felt the need to emphasise the

theme of 'joy' and 'rejoicing' to these Christian disciples. And another thing that evidently concerned Paul was a failure on the part of some of the members to pull together as harmoniously as could be desired (1:14-17, 27; 2:2ff.; 4:2,3). He urges them to reach agreement with one another and work together in joyful teamwork.

Paul's diagnosis was that if each put the interests of others before his or her own interests - if there was a greater willingness to make concessions - then all would be well. He begins chapter 2 by saying:

Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. (Philippians 2:1-4)

And it was to reinforce this, that Paul quoted some now famous Bible lines which celebrate the humiliation to which Christ voluntarily submitted himself in becoming man and dying on the cross. I say he 'quotes' them, for it's been widely agreed that in Philippians 2:6-11 we find an early Christian hymn fragment or poetic composition - whether Paul's own work or someone else's. Paul quotes it here to give his call to unity the greatest possible support. He continues by saying:

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11)

In itself this passage is a recital of the saving work of God in Christ - in his incarnation, passion and exaltation. But there's a major difference here. What is it, you ask? It's the context in which this is quoted. That's what brings fresh significance to the actions of Christ as they are rehearsed here. Remember, Paul's target here is some measure of disharmony among the Christian believers at Philippi. He'd already confronted disunity at Corinth, and dealt with it in the very first chapter of his first biblical letter to them. When doing that, he'd also taken them directly to the cross (1:10 - 2:16, before bringing before them to such other truths as the sovereignty of God; the judgement-seat of Christ; the Body of Christ; the love of God; and the unity in diversity of spiritual gifts). Again, here, Paul's Spirit-directed instinct is to go to the cross to ground his appeal in the most heartfelt terms. But there's a difference here. Paul introduces this poetic summary by saying: *Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus ...*

In other words, the attitude shown by Christ is recommended as an example for his followers. Paul was appealing (according to C. F. D. Moule), 'Adopt towards one another, in

your mutual relations, the same attitude which was found in Christ Jesus.' Jesus' attitude is presented as an example of what the Philippians' attitude should be, and they are being encouraged *'to become like him in his death'* (3:10). This is what Paul meant earlier when asking them to *'decide what is best'* (1:10 NIV). This is the best mindset to adopt. So here, in Philippians ch.2, it's not so much the actions of Christ, but the attitude behind them which is the focus. And by God's help we – as well as they – are to try to copy it. Attitude has always been as important - if not more important to God - than any actions a person may do. Remember how the Lord criticised the religious leaders of Israel:

"You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. (Matthew 15:7,8)

Things had got so bad that by the end of the Old Testament, through the last Bible prophet, Malachi, God said to his people:

"A son honors his father, and a servant his master. Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?" says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests who despise My name. But you say, 'How have we despised Your name?' "You are presenting defiled food upon My altar. But you say, 'How have we defiled You?' In that you say, 'The table of the LORD is to be despised.' "But when you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you present the lame and sick, is it not evil? Why not offer it to your governor? Would he be pleased with you? Or would he receive you kindly?" says the LORD of hosts. "But now will you not entreat God's favor, that He may be gracious to us? With such an offering on your part, will He receive any of you kindly?" says the LORD of hosts. "Oh that there were one among you who would shut the gates, that you might not uselessly kindle fire on My altar! I am not pleased with you," says the LORD of hosts, "nor will I accept an offering from you. (Malachi 1:6-10)

What a strength of feeling comes across in those words! The heart of God is expressing itself. They were kindling fire on God's altar, but it was useless because the attitude of the worshipers despised God, rather than exalting him.

And God recorded in the Bible books of Chronicles, those kings which did the right things; and those kings who not only did the right things but did them with the right attitude or with their *'whole heart'* (e.g. Amaziah in 2 Chron. 25:2).

So, it's right for us to praise God that Christ is as supreme in his attitude as he is supreme in his actions. In glorious, infinite contrast to God's commentary on Israel's performance, the Father opened the heavens and declared that he was *'well-pleased'* with his son, Jesus Christ who did always the things which were pleasing to the Father.

Well, coming back to Philippians chapter 2, the quoted hymn or poem begins by asserting that Christ, existing already in the form of God, did not put a false estimation on equality with God. Instead he chose to display the form of God in the form of a slave. One commentator (J. B. Lightfoot) paraphrases the opening in this way: 'He, though existing before the worlds in the form of God, did not treat His equality with God as a prize, [as] a treasure to be greedily clutched and ostentatiously displayed: on the contrary He resigned the glories of heaven'- and he adds that 'this is the common and indeed almost universal interpretation of the Greek fathers, who would have the most lively sense of the requirements of the language.'

I think we need to pause there and absorb the words *'equality with God.'* How utterly foolish and deceived are the cults who deny the equality of Jesus, the Son, with God the Father! But – and this is where it gets breath-taking – despite having equality with the Father as his eternal right, the Son of God, revealed to us as Jesus, did not regard equality with God as a vantage-point for achieving his personal ambitions. Precisely the opposite, in fact! He actually treated his equality with God as an occasion for renouncing every advantage or privilege to which he was entitled. He regarded his equality with God as an opportunity not for self-enrichment but for self-impoverishment and unreserved self-sacrifice. This is so amazing that it has confused some – as we've just been thinking – into rejecting his equality with God. How tragic! For this should be the very pinnacle of our praise!

This is not the only place where Paul points to Christ's self-denial as being an example for his people. Second Corinthians 8:9, is another place, for example, where Paul encourages generous giving to the Jerusalem relief fund, by supplying as an incentive *'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ who, though he was rich, yet for your sakes became poor, that through his poverty you might become rich'*. There, he uses his own language, but here, in Philippians 2:6-11, he appears to have used a readily available form of words.

In a Roman colonial city that resounded to the cry 'Caesar is Lord' at all civic events, the Philippian Christians marched to a different drumbeat: one that said 'Christ is Lord!' By *'emptying himself'*, by plumbing the depths of humiliation, Christ has now been honoured by God with the name high over all - the designation 'Lord', in its highest sense. The God who in the Old Testament declares, *'I am the LORD, that is my name; my glory I give to no other'* (Isaiah 42 :8), swears by himself, *'To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear'* (Isaiah 45:23). But now, says Paul, by God's own decree every knee is to bow in Jesus' name and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord - and in so doing they will enhance, not diminish, the glory of God!

Questions:

1. What is the striking perspective on 'the Christ story' presented in Philippians?
2. Where else in the New Testament has Paul based an appeal for Christian unity on the cross-work of Christ? Why does he select this approach?
3. There have been various views about what Christ 'emptied' himself of – does the understanding shared in the text convince you? Why or why not?

3. The cosmic Christ

There was a time when non-conformist Jews took it upon themselves to try to emulate the rapturous experience of the Bible prophet Ezekiel. To achieve this, they engaged in religious exercises designed to recreate the vision which the prophet had of a heavenly chariot with God visibly enthroned above it (Ezek. 1:15-28). To arrive at such a mystic experience, they believed that detailed observance of the Law was necessary, as well as a prolonged period

of denying themselves all sorts of things. When they thought they were ready, they depended on help which they saw as coming from angelic beings in order to assist their upward passage. The biblically quoted book of Enoch references all this in some detail.

No wonder people tried to reproduce it, for Ezekiel's vision must have been awesome. To be standing by the Chebar river and to see the heavens opened, and in the middle of a bright storm cloud, there was some kind of mobile throne or throne on a chariot. And on the throne located above the 'wheels within wheels' and those strange '*living creatures*,' was '*the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD ... a figure with the appearance of a man*' (Ezek. 1:28,26). Nothing clearer than that was discernible in this fiery spectacle which seemed to pretty much defy words. This was the vision of the glory of God which was permitted to Ezekiel, as the heavens were opened to the exiled prophet on the riverbank.

It was rather different in the case of a young Jewish rabbi who lived much later in time. He had a fanatical belief which fuelled a hatred of what he and many of his contemporaries viewed as a perverse sect within Judaism – the cult of the Nazarene, who was known as Jesus Christ. With all his heart, young Saul of Tarsus longed to exterminate this delusion. Not just a longing in fact, he was on his way to Damascus to make even more violent arrests, when he himself became the one struck down by the brilliance of a light which outshone the sun, and which left him grovelling on the dust of the highway. A voice addressed him out of what the Apostle Paul later referred to as '*the heavenly vision*.' This was the vision of the glory of God as permitted to Paul. To his total shock, it would turn out to be none other than the resurrected and ascended Jesus Christ who was speaking to him, and later he would describe to others '*the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ*' (2 Cor.4:6). Notice how Paul has sharpened up the vision of the glory of God. Whereas Ezekiel had seen the semblance of the likeness of a man; Paul saw '*the glory of God in the face of Christ*.' Not even '*one like unto a son of man*' as Daniel saw, but this is now pin-sharp.

The light Paul saw that day put out every other light in his life. Whatever he'd previously prized about the light of the Hebrews or the knowledge of the Greeks or the glory of the Romans, it was now nothing at all compared to the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. That alone directed his life-long ambition to magnify Christ.

And this is what we find him doing as he begins to write to the Colossians. Unlike other letters where he begins by denouncing heresy, after greeting the Colossians, Paul launches straight into what is perhaps the greatest detailed presentation of the person of Christ in all of the Bible. The fact that he does it in rhythmical prose with some repetition of terms suggests that he may have been borrowing from - or more likely extending - an existing early Christian hymn.

Teaching that was about the person of Christ was the major truth being attacked by the false teachers at Colossae, and so Paul brings the correct teaching about Christ which he presents to his readers before dealing with the false versions. Beginning in verse 15, he says:

*He who is the image of the invisible God,
Firstborn before all creation,
because in Him all things were created —*

*things in heaven and things on earth,
things visible and invisible,
whether thrones or dominions,
whether principalities or powers —
they have all been created through Him and for Him (FFB translation).*

The first verse of this ancient hymn celebrates the role of Christ in creation, introducing him to us as *'the image of the invisible God'* (see 2 Cor. 4:4 in a context which again appears to recall Paul's conversion experience). Did Paul's sense of Jesus Christ as being the image of God date all the way back to his Damascus Road experience, we wonder?

To call Christ *'the image of God'* is to say that in him the being and nature of God have been perfectly manifested – indeed the invisible has become visible. In another of his letters, Paul declares that since the creation of the world the *'everlasting power and divinity'* of the unseen Creator may be *'clearly perceived in the things that have been made'* (Rom. 1:20). But in Christ there's an all-surpassing disclosure of the invisible God's *'power and divinity.'*

'The light of the gospel of the glory of Christ' has shone into believing hearts through the same creative Word that first called on light to shine out of darkness (2 Cor. 4:4-6; Gen.1:3). The idea of Christ as the goal of all creation resonates powerfully with us from this first verse as we now proceed further ...

*He indeed is before all things,
and they all cohere in Him;
He is also the head of the body, the church (FFB's translation).*

This is a kind of link piece or bridge before we arrive at verse two, and it serves to re-affirm the pre-existence and cosmic significance of Christ which we've already learnt from verse one. But notice it also introduces Christ as the head of the body which is his church. This is Paul's distinctive contribution to our understanding of the person of Christ. Was this seed also sown in his mind when the risen Lord addressed him on the Damascus Road, crying out from heaven about the injuries being inflicted on his body on earth? Other Bible writers – such as the apostle John and the writer to the Hebrews – inform us equally of Christ's cosmic significance and pre-existence, but God granted it to Paul to break the news of the metaphor of the church being the body of which Christ is head. The risen Christ is head of the body, which is the church. In his earlier letters of Corinthians and Romans, Paul has developed the idea of the body; it's here – and in Ephesians – that he now subsequently develops the idea of Christ as the head of the body – in all things he must have the supremacy. But let's now get into the second verse – with its mention of further reasons for Christ's supremacy:

*He is the beginning,
Firstborn from the dead,
that He might be preeminent in all things,
because in Him it was decreed that all the fullness should take up residence
and that through Him, [God] should reconcile all things to Himself,
having made peace through the blood of His cross - [through Him],*

whether those on earth or those in heaven (FFB's translation)

Just as the first verse celebrates Christ's role in the old creation, the second verse celebrates his role in the new creation. In reconciliation as in creation the work of Christ has a cosmic significance. 'All things' in heaven and on earth were created through him, but '*all things*' equally have been estranged from their creator. Paul had elsewhere argued that the whole created order had been subjected to futility - here he implies hostility. Creation itself will one day be liberated, he tells us, from its present enslavement to decay. As with the freedom experienced by the children of God, this too is underwritten by Christ's redemptive work at the cross (Rom. 8:20-21). The peace available through the death of Christ may be freely accepted, or it may be imposed. The reconciliation of '*all things*' spoken of here would seemingly include pacification, as distinct from salvation. All will bow the knee, and in that sense be reconciled to the truth of who Jesus is, even when it's too late to save them.

The words '*firstborn,*' and '*beginning,*' as well as '*all things*' are common to both verses of this hymn fragment in Colossians 1. For example, both in relation to the old creation and the new, Christ holds the rank of '*firstborn*' – in other words, he's supreme.

The fullness of God was pleased to dwell bodily in Christ. The terminology takes us back to the mystic vision error we began with. False teachers were saying God's substance was smeared across a range of demi-gods, angelic beings who gave access to higher realms of mystical experiences. How wrong! Jesus Christ is fully God. No created being shares that status.

I once heard of the famed conductor Toscanini as he was conducting the Philadelphia Philharmonic. They had just completed a performance of one of Beethoven's symphonies and the audience was in raptures. It had been one of those nights when everyone had performed seemingly flawlessly and the result had sounded like perfection. The audience acclaimed the conductor and his orchestra. They had to take many bows. Toscanini was a man famous for his criticisms by which he attempted to secure further improvement from his orchestra. That night, after many bows, he turned to his orchestra and said in a low voice 'you are nothing.' They didn't flinch: that was normal treatment from their conductor. But he then went on to say something which truly did shock them, he said 'and I am nothing.' Then quickly he added, 'but Beethoven is everything!' We could capture Paul's message here and say 'you are nothing,' and 'I am nothing,' but '*Christ is all and in all*' (Col.3:11).

Questions:

1. Compare and contrast the visions of Ezekiel and Saul of Tarsus. What do we learn about God's glory from each?
2. What links and similarities do you find between the two stanzas (verses) of what we've endorsed as an original Christian hymn which Paul quoted?
3. What hints of the background heresy which Paul was countering do you pick up from the text?

4. The incarnate Christ

Let's begin our look at Christ's supremacy in this chapter with a reading from:

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world ... is the radiance of [God's] glory and the exact representation [or imprint] of His nature [hupostasis, hoop-os'-tas-is, substance], and upholds all things by the word of His power. (Heb.1:1-3)

That last verse we just read tells us that Jesus Christ is the exact imprint of the divine substance. But historically some have stumbled over the Bible's teaching here – the very teaching which underscores the supremacy of the Son which is our topic. In the early 4th century, a man called Arius proclaimed that the Son was brought into being by God's will and so was not self-existing as God is. Arius claimed, wrongly, that God the Father always existed, but the Son of God had a finite beginning. At the same time, it must be pointed out that the Arian Christ is not, by his essential nature, truly human any more than he is truly God. His nature and being is that of a creature like our own in that sense, but elevated far above ours in degree. Arius never denied his godlike pre-existence. The Christ whom Arius preached is not God become man – *but someone less than God who became more than man*. This shows how careful we need to be with the Bible language at this point in Hebrews 1:3. When it speaks of the exact imprint of the divine substance, it's asking us to picture the distinct, but totally equivalent, imprint made by a seal in hot wax. The imprint made answers perfectly to the seal that made it. Therefore, the teaching here is that everything that's in the Father is in the Son. They share the very same substance.

Now let's complete the third verse of that first chapter of Hebrews. It tells us that Jesus:

When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they. For to which of the angels did He ever say, "YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU"? And again, "I WILL BE A FATHER TO HIM AND HE SHALL BE A SON TO ME"? (Heb.1:3-5)

This really is showing to us the supremacy of Christ! And here we're given two specific reasons why. They're stated either side of the claim that Christ is better than the angels – and stated in order to support the fact of the Lord's supremacy over the angels. Did you notice them? Actually, both relate to the Lord being both God and man, but we'll come to that later.

The first reason is that he's the exalted purifier of our sins – no angel could ever be that. And the second reason was the one about the Lord belonging to the line of David – again something that could never be true of any angel. Perhaps, you don't think our quoted verse (Hebrews 1:5) is talking about how Jesus was a son of king David? You may have thought it was talking directly about Jesus being God's son? After all, isn't that how he's shown to be better than the angels – because he's God's son?

Well, wait a moment, Heb.1:5 is built from two Old Testament quotations: one from the book of Psalms and the other from the first book of Samuel. To appreciate what it's saying we need to research those Old Testament quotations. The first quote in Hebrews 1:5 comes

from Ps.2:7 where the speaker, historically, was the then newly installed king in Jerusalem. His position was under some threat, but he confidently says: *"I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.*

So we need to explain in context the royal significance which the term 'my son' has in that particular verse. I agree that, as we read that now, with the great gap in history standing between, our thoughts immediately turn to Jesus. Not least because we know those words are certainly applied by New Testament writers to Jesus. For example, by the Apostle Paul in Acts chapter 13. But the place to start in all Bible exposition is by researching what the original hearers were meant to understand by it in the first place. So let's do that. Psalm 2 appears to have been a coronation psalm – or at least it was used to recall and reaffirm the enthronement of the king in Jerusalem at some point in history when surrounding nations were flexing their muscles and wanting to rebel from being under Judean sovereignty. Before Solomon's coronation, you remember, God had promised to David concerning his son:

"I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. "Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever."" (2 Sam.7:14-16)

This is, in fact, the other Old Testament text quoted in our Hebrews verse, and makes it very clear, specifically in the case of Solomon, that each king belonging to David's dynasty was viewed as God's adopted son. This was true in a functional sense – meaning that the earthly king was viewed as the one charged with the same duty as God – which was administering rule over God's people. This wasn't limited to Solomon, because there's talk of David's throne being established for ever. Other successive descendants of David, down to the Messiah himself, would be used to fulfil this. So, we see that in general, the great king in heavenly Zion and the king of David's line in Jerusalem were viewed in such scriptures as existing in a father-son relationship.

So, going back to Psalm 2, we shouldn't overload it with mysticism. The 'today' it mentions is most likely the historical coronation day of a new king in David's dynasty. Someone had recently ascended to the throne in Jerusalem, and the surrounding vassal states were taking the opportunity to signal that they were unhappy with imperialist Judean rule in his hands. Of course, the greatest application of this text is, indeed, in its application to the Lord Jesus, the Messiah. The first church of God in Jerusalem, could see that its message was very meaningful in terms of what had taken place at the cross (Acts 4).

And now, returning to Heb.1:3-5, we've shown how these OT texts are combined in appealing to the fact that the Lord Jesus was born as a royal son of David's line. And in that - as in the fact that he went to the cross and established the basis for all purification of sins - we have the two stated reasons why he's better than any angel – and why he's supreme! And each of these two reasons involve the wonder of his becoming flesh.

Of course, for the writer to the Hebrews, Jesus is also the Son of God 'through whom also he made the worlds' (Heb. 1: 2) and is addressed (by the application of Old Testament

scripture) not only as 'Lord' (Heb. 1:10) but actually as 'God' (Heb. 1:8). But there's no New Testament writer who more emphatically underlines the necessity of Jesus' humanity if there was to be any hope for humanity – none more so than the writer to the Hebrews – who tells us:

'Since ... the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death' he might 'deliver' them (Heb. 2:14). 'He had to be made like his brethren in every respect' if he was to be their effective high priest, we read: 'it is not of angels that he takes hold; [but] he takes hold of the descendants of Abraham' (Heb. 2:16). He sympathizes with the weaknesses of his fellow-men and knows how best to help them, for 'he himself has suffered and been tempted' - tempted indeed 'in every respect ... as we are, yet without sinning' (Heb. 2:18; 4:15). There's everything warmly and appealingly human in the picture of one who poured out his soul in 'prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death', and 'learned obedience through what he suffered' (Heb. 5:7) - who blazed the trail of faith and persevered to the end, enduring the cross and despising the shame, putting up with sinners' hostility so that his people, profiting by his example, need not 'grow weary or fainthearted' (Heb. 12:2).

The reality of Christ's humanity is shown here. Another ancient misunderstanding was called Docetism, from a Greek word meaning 'to seem.' This early heresy questioned Jesus' humanity – saying he only seemed to be human. This is equally in error, but has tended to be more tolerated – as when some say that from conception to birth our Lord passed through the body of his mother 'like water through a pipe', deriving no part of his humanity from her. To defend against such a view, how wonderfully precise the inspired writing of the Apostle Paul is when he says: *For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh (Rom.8:3).* Our Lord did not come in the mere likeness of flesh; far less in sinful flesh; but *in the likeness of sinful flesh* – fully human as we are (which, as our kinsman redeemer, was required of him), but without sin and incapable of it.

It's in our Lord's humanity, as well as his deity, that we appreciate his supremacy. In Hebrews 2:7, we read *'You have crowned him with glory and honour'*. Verse 9 expands on this and tells us: *Jesus was made for a little while lower than the angels ... because of the suffering of death - [and it goes on to tell us, he was] - crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.*

When the verse is read like that – and I believe it's the correct emphasis – we see that this crowning with glory and honour relates to the Lord's life on earth. You may well ask: 'How was this glory and honour seen in the Lord's earthly life?' To answer, we only need to state the facts. He was with the wild beasts in the desert (Mark 1:13); he made water into wine (John 2); he calmed the wind and waves (Luke 8:24); he walked on the sea, putting it under his feet (John 6:19); he compelled a fish to bring him a coin (Mat.17:23); he multiplied fish and bread to feed a crowd (John 6); he withered a barren fig tree with a word (Mark 11:13); he healed leprosy, paralysis, blindness and deafness; he commanded demons and they obeyed him; he raised the dead; when he was born a star appeared, when he died the sun disappeared. As one commentator has summed it all up: 'Only by the life of One so crowned with glory and honour could the dominion be restored to man' (J. M. Flanigan,

WTBT-Hebrews, Ritchie) – he was referring, of course, to the original God-given dominion over creation which was frustrated by the fall in the garden of Eden. What a saviour!

Questions:

1. The term 'substance' (or 'nature'), and the phrase containing it, have had a colourful and controversial history – try to explain what it means in your own words.
2. The approach taken with the two quotations found in Hebrews 1:5 may have been new to you. On reflection, do you agree that these were historically presenting the earthly king-son (of which Jesus is the special case)? Why or why not?
3. How do you see the Lord's humanity as enhancing his supremacy? (And did you agree with the suggested grammar of Heb.2:7?)

5. The Creator Christ

The concluding book of the New Testament begins in this way: *'The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave him to show to his servants.'* (1:1a). One of the intriguing questions discussed by scholars is the phrase that's found there, and which says *'of Jesus Christ'* - as in the expression *'the revelation of Jesus Christ'*. An interesting question is: 'Is this possessive or is it descriptive?' In other words, is it the revelation **belonging to** Christ and conveyed by him? Or is it a revelation **about** Christ? Or could it even be both?

In his *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, Professor Daniel Wallace suggests that this combined sense is most likely here. For clearly, the messages of this inspired book come **from** our Lord (22:16); and yet it's also true that the content is 'supremely and ultimately **about** Christ' (1996, 120-121; emphasis added). The title 'revelation' is from an original word meaning 'unveiling' – and it's not so much the unveiling of the future that we find here but rather the unveiling of the glory of Jesus Christ as he stands related to all that's going to come about in God's future purposes for this world – and in the world to come.

As early as verse 13 of the first chapter, the Apostle John describes for us the Christ he saw in his vision:

I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash.

His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire.

His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters.

In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength. (Rev. 1:13-16)

That very much sets the scene for what follows. It's centred on Christ. In this book we're developing some of the thrilling truths about our Lord Jesus Christ – including those we encounter in the text of the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation.

The Apostle John tells us in verse 19 that the Lord told him to:

... write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things. (Rev. 1:19)

It's probably worth being clear about that. There are three parts to that statement: first, the things John had seen; second, the present state of things; and third, the things which were still to happen. First of all, the thing John had seen was the vision of Jesus. Then in the second place, those things which were then a present reality refer to the state of the seven churches we're introduced to in the seven messages of chapters 2 and 3. By the way, this clarifies that these were actual local churches existing at the close of the first century in Asia Minor or modern day Turkey. Then, finally, the third part of the statement in v.19 mentions the things to come, as they're detailed from the sixth chapter onwards – being the overall shape of future events. There's not the space here to defend the futuristic interpretation of the book of Revelation, but I do want to strongly commend it to you as the only viable way of looking at the book if we are to avoid taking great liberties with the text.

So, let's come to the last example of the seven messages given to John to communicate to the then seven local churches of God in Turkey. It's the letter to the Church of God in Laodicea, whose existence in history is confirmed by the mention it receives in Paul's Bible letter to Colosse.

So now let's hear this last letter:

*"To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:
'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot.
'So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.
'Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,
I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.
'Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.
'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.
'He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.
'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'" (Rev. 3:14-22)*

If we had read through every one of the seven messages, by this stage, we'd have come to recognise a certain structure which repeats itself each time. Each message begins with the Lord referring to himself in a brief way which each time recalls something of the vision John had of Christ in Revelation chapter 1. Then the Lord declares 'I know ...' and proceeds to some notable feature of the church in question, usually positive. Then the Lord says: 'But I

have this against you ...' and proceeds to a negative review of the church. He then recommends a remedy; and promises a reward to those who respond victoriously.

Here, in the message that was directed to Laodicea, Jesus identified himself as the *"faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God"* (3:14; cf. 22:13).

Several important expressions strike us. First, there's the Lord's affirmation of his integrity. He's faithful in character and true in his testimony. Second, Christ didn't offer any support to the theory that the universe is eternal, or as is found more commonly today that it's the result of a self-caused accident – on the contrary, Jesus declares it to be a creation in time. Third, he affirmed his personal, active role in the creation process.

When Jesus describes himself as *'the beginning of the creation of God,'* the term *'beginning'* comes from a word that's found fifty-five times in the New Testament and which is used in a variety of senses. In studying the Bible, we must be prepared to look at the entire range of possible meanings of an original word, but equally, we must select the one meaning which is best suited to the way the word is being used in the text in question. In this context, it describes the **cause** or source by which something was begun (Thayer 1958, 77; Balz and Scheider 1990, 162). It's mischievous in the extreme that anyone should have misappropriated this text to suggest that Christ did not exist eternally, but was created by God as the first of his creations. The same author, the Apostle John, wrote in the opening of his Gospel:

All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. (John 1:3)

The most superficial comparison with any number of other totally lucid Bible texts such as Colossians 1:15, 18 or 1 Corinthians 8:6 or Hebrews 1:2 would show that this word - as applied to Christ - cannot mean that he was the first created thing, but rather that he himself is the first cause or originator of all created things.

Even liberal scholars (such as William Barclay) have flatly denied that there can be any other legitimate meaning here by saying that this signifies that Jesus 'was the moving cause of all creation.' He was the one who 'began the process of creation and who initiated the work of creation' (1960, 177).

Therefore, when we read in Genesis chapter one those famous opening words of the Bible, they fully account for the fact that God was, in Christ, creating the heavens and the earth. Jesus Christ is the beginning, and in the beginning God created this magnificent universe.

With this first of our featured titles of Christ selected from the book of Revelation, the words of Colossians chapter one agree:

*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.
For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible,
whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created
through Him and for Him.
He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.*

He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. (Col. 1:15 -18)

Clearly this final book of the New Testament is very much **about** Christ, as well as being conveyed **by** him.

Questions:

1. What other Bible passages is your mind drawn to by the description of Christ in the opening vision?
2. Take one of the other 6 messages to the churches and identify all its features along the lines indicated into which each message falls.
3. How does the Bible describe Christ's role in creation?

6. The eternal Christ

We are continuing our look at some of the rewarding truths about our Lord as we now focus down on the last book of the Bible, the book of The Revelation.

Very soon - almost immediately after the resurrection – we've the clearest expression of how Jesus' followers viewed him, when standing before him in the secure room:

Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28)

Sadly, the waters would soon be muddied by false teachers like Arius who introduced the novelty of claiming Jesus was an inferior being to the Father. Although these false novelties were effectively countered, various forms of them have persisted right down to the present day. From the United Kingdom to The Philippines, in nominally Christian sub-cultures, the teaching of Arius still surfaces in pseudo-Christian cults.

Of course, the entire New Testament testifies to the eternal deity of the Son of God, known to us in humanity as Jesus Christ. In particular, the divine nature of Christ is well documented in Revelation, which is our chosen text for the latter part of this book.

In the Bible's final chapter, Jesus says:

"Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."
(Rev. 22:12,13)

Yes, Jesus promises here that he is coming back again. Let me say that reminds me of how one day a professor gave his students a harsh assignment: They each had to preach one sermon in the upcoming month, without any notes!

The professor promised his anxious students, that if they ever lost their train of thought (which they all did!), they only had to repeat their last uttered sentence over and over again with more and more dynamism. The promise? They would remember the sermon they had written. Guaranteed!

To poor Johnny, that promise was never realized. Although he was preaching in an ideal situation - a small church comprised of older people - as soon as the words "I am coming" were out of his mouth, all of the rest of his sermon fled.

He started to panic. All eyes in the audience were on him and he couldn't remember a word of what he was supposed to say! He stared at them for a minute, sweat dripping from his face. He wanted to scream "Help!", but that wouldn't look too good on his résumé.

With relief he remembered his professor's promise, and with a bit more energy, he again uttered: "I am coming!" When his mind was still blank, he did it again. And again. In desperation he took a firm hold of the old pulpit and screamed out with all of his might: "I am coming!"

He was shaking so much by this time that the ancient wood of the pulpit gave way under his weight, and he fell off the platform in front of an older lady on the front row, with the top of the pulpit still tightly gripped in his fists.

Embarrassed, he apologized. The old lady reassuringly replied: "That's all right, young man! After all, you did warn me you were coming!" Mmm, that's not at all what he was intending when attempting to preach about Christ's second coming!

Back to what we were saying: In the Bible's final chapter, Jesus says:

"Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." (Rev. 22:12,13)

These words – this self-description – of himself as the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, and the beginning and the end, repeats identically the description of the 'Lord God,' the 'Almighty' in chapter one where we find the following statement:

John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood - and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father - to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen. "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." (Rev. 1:4-8)

So the title 'Alpha and Omega' is equally applied to Jesus Christ as it is to the Father. It's a title, of course, which brings together the first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet. It indicates, therefore, one who is both the beginning and the end of all things. All things having been created by him and for him (Col. 1).

Without question, this is an affirmation of deity as applied to Jesus Christ here in Revelation and expressed in **eternal** terms.

I have a friend who was delivered from the error of a pseudo-Christian cult quite a few years ago. The pivotal point, naturally, was the Bible's clear teaching about the person of the Lord Jesus. The two Bible texts which the Holy Spirit used to crystallise his thinking were the ones we've just used.

Similarly, he was also startled when he first read the words of Thomas in John 20 who confessed in breathless worship to the risen Jesus: you are '*my Lord and my God!*' Now, it so happened – but, of course, it was no coincidence - that my friend had also been reading in the Bible's last chapter from which we've quoted. He'd been reading these words:

I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. But he said to me, "Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God." (Rev. 22:8,9)

It was as if a shaft of brilliant light hit him, dispelling the darkness of error. He'd been conditioned to think of Jesus as a created being, as are the angels. But now he could see the difference. The angel told John not to worship him; but Jesus received worship from Thomas and the other disciples. The difference was clear. Then his eyes fell on the later words '*I am the Alpha and the Omega*' and he laid them alongside Rev.1:8 to observe that what is true of Jesus is true of Almighty God. He now uses this combination of verses to confound former colleagues, even using their own corrupted Bible version to do so.

Of course, as we said earlier, the testimony of the Book of The Revelation to the eternal deity of Christ is fully consistent with teaching throughout the New Testament. We will content ourselves in closing this chapter just to take two selected quotes from the letter to the Hebrews which emphasise very explicitly the 'for ever' character of our Lord.

There in the first chapter, we read the words of God the Father addressing his Son and saying:

But of the Son He says, "YOUR THRONE, O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER, AND THE RIGHTEOUS SCEPTER IS THE SCEPTER OF HIS KINGDOM. (Heb. 1:8)

And again, from the last chapter, we have ...

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. (Heb. 13:8)

From first to last (Heb. 1 & 13), as with the Book of Revelation (chs. 1 & 22), Jesus Christ is shown to be the one who is *'the first and the last'*!

Questions:

1. Have you ever encountered a religious group who tried to persuade you that Jesus is inferior in nature to the Father? Which counter-argument do you find strongest?
2. Why is it that the title 'the Alpha and the Omega' from chapter one of Revelation and repeated in the last is strong proof that the son is of the same nature as the Father?
3. When, in the Gospels, do we read of Jesus being worshipped? Why was John, by contrast, forbidden to worship an angel?

7. The sacrificed Christ

In this section of the book we're continuing our look at some of the rewarding truths about our Lord as we now focus down on the last book of the Bible, the book of The Revelation.

In Revelation 5, there's a moving description of Jesus as the sacrificial Lamb. The description tells us that the Lamb had been 'slain,' but the amazing and wonderful thing in John's vision is that it was also 'standing' (v. 6). Let's hear the Bible text we're talking about ...

I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals.

And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?"

And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it.

*Then I began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it; and one of the elders *said to me, "Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals."*

And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth.

And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.

(Rev. 5:1-7)

This is very precious in the original sense of the word. In the Old Testament we sometimes read of the Word of God being very 'precious' or rare in those days. Compare how we talk about precious metals or precious stones. Why are they precious? It's because they are rare! If they were common or easy to find, they would lose their value. They are precious precisely because they are rare. The Old Testament talked about God's Word being precious

at times when it was rare – when, as it says, there was no frequent revelation from the Lord through his prophets to his people.

The Apostle Peter wrote about *'the precious blood of Christ'* (1 Pet. 1:19). This is about rarity in the extreme: for we're talking about someone who's unique, without peer. This is what's communicated in the heavenly scene John was privileged to witness in his vision of heaven. The question resounded in the vault of heaven, *'Who is worthy?'* The response was a deafening silence. No-one moved. A pregnant pause, during which time John was moved to tears. He was then ordered to stop crying, and his attention was drawn to someone initially described as a Lion, but who appeared as a Lamb. The majesty and triumph of the Man of Calvary, Jesus Christ, is presented in this dramatic way. The one who died the shameful death of the cross has now entered into his glory.

The Apostle Paul spoke about his sufferings for Christ's sake. He said he bore branded in his body the marks of Christ. Those marks in Paul's body will heal: his new body will display no trace of them. By contrast, the marks of the nails and spear and thorns will never be erased from Christ's body: the slain one who's now standing. Their continuing existence, the scars of a divine sacrificial love, will melt our hearts in worship in his presence for ever.

And so we return to the description which tells us that the Lamb had been *'slain,'* but which wonderfully also proclaimed that it was *'standing'* (v. 6). Both verbs are in what's known as *'the perfect tense'* in the original language of the New Testament. This grammatical feature tends to emphasize the continuing effect of these actions. In other words, the results and benefits of Jesus' death are lasting. They are permanent, never needing to be repeated (cf. Hebrews 9:28). When we carefully observe detail like this - as found in the Bible text - we see at once the error of any false teaching which might attempt or want to enact repeatedly the sacrifice of Christ. That's as utterly foolish as it is utterly unnecessary.

What's more, the permanent standing aspect of the second verb indicates that following his resurrection Jesus never died again (cf. Romans 6:9). The Bible again and again resounds to the note of triumph that he *'ever lives'* to intercede for us, to save us to the uttermost, and to represent us before his God and Father. No Christian service would be worth a thing without the truth of this glorious fact. The same wonder is expressed vividly by Paul in his verbal *'shift of gears'* in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4. Christ *'died'* (aorist tense) he says - meaning a one-time act - was *'buried'* (aorist) – again meaning a one-time act - but *'has been raised'* (perfect) - meaning he was raised and **remained** raised! When the Lord first appeared to the Apostle John as recorded in the first chapter of the book of Revelation, he's described as the *'firstborn of the dead'* (1:5) and then later it is said that he's alive *'forever more'* (1:18). Praise God for the Lamb that was slain but is standing! Because if Christ has not been raised, our Christian faith is an empty, useless thing. Everything stands or falls based on whether or not he is standing. But John reports from his insight into heaven that he stands!

Death could not keep its prey. The gates of Hades could not prevail against him to keep him in its domain, the domain of the dead. As a result, he's building his Church today, one new believer at a time. Have you bowed at the feet of Calvary's Lamb – so that you can stand in the grace of God and walk in newness of life?

Just a word about the term, '*lamb*.' It's a common symbol in Revelation. Twenty-eight times Jesus is pictured as a lamb. In 5:6, the Saviour is described as a slain Lamb, which involved the shedding of his blood on the cross some two thousand years ago outside the city wall of Jerusalem. In addition to the blood of the Lamb, it's inspiring to read of:

The wrath of the Lamb (6:16);

The book of life of the Lamb (13:8);

The presence of the Lamb (14:10);

The song of the Lamb (15:3);

The marriage of the Lamb (19:7);

The marriage supper of the Lamb (19:9);

The wife of the Lamb (21:9);

The twelve apostles of the Lamb (21:14), and

The throne of ... the Lamb (22:3).

What a story these all tell! And what a remarkable expression: '***the wrath of the Lamb!***' which we find at the head of that list we read out which is in the order in which we find them employed in the book of the Revelation. As I write this, I'm in an eastern country celebrating 'the year of the sheep.' An emphasis is being placed on the gentle character of a sheep, which some are hoping will be an antidote to aggression within society. Whereas, in the west, some have mocked a lack of aggression in others by sneeringly saying that confrontation with them was like being savaged by a sheep. But there's no mockery here. The strangeness of the expression makes it all the more ominous. For we remember the Lamb is the Lion. The same one who subjected himself to the cross is the one who has all authority now in heaven and earth. The time is approaching when he'll take up that authority and reign on this earth.

Those who trust in the blood of the Lamb, whose only hope is the acknowledgement that he died for them, have had their names written in ***the Book of Life of the Lamb***. That's the ultimate cause for rejoicing, Jesus informed his disciples on earth (Luke 10:20). The fact that the name of the believer is written there is our title to be there, our passport to those realms of bliss – the essence of which is captured by the words: ***the presence of the Lamb***. It'll be glory just to be with him, to hear among the anthems of eternal days ***the song of the Lamb*** which will be given to some future overcomers to sing. The idea of ***the wife of the Lamb*** and ***the marriage supper of the Lamb*** is a reminder that human marriage is used in the New Testament as a metaphor for the union of all Christian believers of this Church age with Christ himself. That's why it's wrong - even blasphemous - to meddle with its definition. And so, in celebrated union with him, we share eternal glory with the occupant of ***the throne of the Lamb***. What amazing grace! The last book of the Bible draws back the curtain to unveil this much of a glimpse of the entrancing destiny of blood-bought believers on Jesus Christ – they will reign with Christ - the slain Lamb who's '*standing*' (alive) for ever!

Questions:

1. What have you learned about the word 'precious' used in some versions at the beginning of 1 Samuel 3?
2. Sometimes Jesus taught an important point based on the tense of a verb (Mat.22:32) – where have we seen this as important in the description of the victorious, sacrificial lamb?
3. From the various expressions which include '... of the Lamb' in Revelation, could you construct a comprehensive statement of the Gospel?

8. The worshipped Christ

Because of the Lord's divine nature, and because of his becoming also man to complete his redemptive mission at Calvary, Jesus is supremely worthy of the worshipful adoration of both angels and men.

Historically, and down to present day throughout the world's cults and false religions, there've been, and continue to be, people who refuse to acknowledge that Jesus Christ is God – despite the clearest Bible statements which this book has already been considering. When we come to the songs recorded in the fifth chapter of Revelation (5:9-10, 12, 13b), we again discover that Christ is worthy of worship – and that's only appropriate to someone who's divine. Verse 9 says:

*And they *sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.*

"You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth."

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing."

And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever." (Rev. 5:9-13)

I'm afraid, I think many modern worship songs are shallow and at times concentrate too much on our freedom and our happiness. By contrast, this song in Revelation chapter 5 has a depth that's immense. I'd like you to notice with me the following facts about this hymn of praise which gives us many reasons to praise the Lord:

The first reason: Christ is presented as having been the one qualified to take the prophetic scroll that foretold events to come. Remember,

And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book. (Rev. 5:9)

He literally holds the future in his hands. In the upper room – even as he bent down to wash the disciples' feet – it was in the full realisation, even then, that the Father had entrusted everything into his hands (John 13:3). He's the sovereign Lord of history. In resurrection, he's been exalted to the supreme place. He's been given the highest name or title – that of sovereign Lord - even as Isaiah had glimpsed him on the throne of heaven long before. Why would we not praise him? In fact, that's the title of a hymn our churches in the Philippines love to sing. It's called 'Walay rason' – or 'No reason.' It's asking what we've just said: what reason could there be not to praise the Lord?

As well as being the one qualified to take the book, another reason, the second reason to worship Christ: is based on Jesus' worthiness to orchestrate the future.

*And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book **and to break its seals.*** (Rev. 5:9)

I'm intending to emphasize those last words: '*and to break its seals*' – declaring things to come: the theme which occupies the book of Revelation, and gives it its content. For we take a futurist view of the book of Revelation. But Jesus' sovereignty over the future is, in turn, based on the fact that he shaped the past. The Lord of history entered history and, by his own shameful death on the cross, secured a glorious destiny for all who put their sole trust and hope in him.

for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

Now, coming to the third reason for Jesus' worthiness to be praised, we're reminded, that his work at the cross was not only to deliver us from sin – it was not only to grant us forgiveness - but also to satisfy that which the heart of God had been searching for. In John 4, Jesus defined his mission. Let's look at that – these are among the words Jesus spoke to a woman from Samaria as recorded in John chapter 4 and verses 23 and 24. He said:

... salvation is from the Jews.

"But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.

"God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:23-24)

What a mission statement: '*the Father seeks ... worshipers!*' It's worth realising that our mission statement in evangelism should be nothing short of that. Mission is a means to an end. The chief end of all things is the glory of God. And so the goal of Jesus' death was to provide his God and Father with worshipers. Nothing short of the cross could achieve this. And nothing less than this is an appropriate assessment of its value. That's why the praise of heaven is:

You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

"You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth." (Rev. 5:9,10)

Yes, the destiny of once-lost sinners is to be a kingdom and to be priests for God the Father. We're to worship God for Christ.

And fourth, the one who succeeded in bringing about such a staggering transformation is associated with power, riches, wisdom, might, honour, glory, and blessing. All these are ascribed to him – and they are his by right.

... saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." (Rev. 5:12)

And finally, we observe from this song that the worship addressed to him is identical to the worship offered to the Father:

And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever." (Rev. 5:13)

This reflects the fact that deity of God the Son is an undiminished deity. There's absolutely nothing inferior about his divine nature, as compared with the Father, as we've commented on before in this book about Jesus' supremacy. And so, the worship of heaven was directed to 'him who sits on the throne' – the Father – and 'to the Lamb' – the Son.

This is in full agreement with the fact that the Hebrews' letter opens by informing us that when Jesus again comes into our world the angels will worship him.

And when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says, "AND LET ALL THE ANGELS OF GOD WORSHIP HIM." (Heb. 1:6)

In addition, we read in the Gospels of recorded times when Christ received human worship, beginning with the well-known incident shortly after his birth when the so-called wise men:

After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was.

When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. (Mat. 2:9-11)

It was no different for those whom he'd later call to be his followers. Once when

... in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea.

... the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear.

But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid."

Peter said to Him, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water."

And He said, "Come!" And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!"

*Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and *said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"*

When they got into the boat, the wind stopped. And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, "You are certainly God's Son!" (Mat. 14:25-33)

It was the same story with the blind man whom Jesus healed and who'd been persecuted for his testimony to Jesus' power. John chapter 9 tells us:

Jesus heard that they had put him out, and finding him, He said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?"

Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you." And he said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped Him. (John 9:35-38)

Could any more conclusive evidence be given that Jesus is fully God and deserving of full divine honours? And yet, while serving in capacity as our human high priest, he too is a worshiper and brings all those gathered as God's obedient people before God as a spiritual priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices of praise *to His God and Father* – through him (Rev.1:6). Who can compare with him?

Questions:

1. What is the significance of Christ being seen as the one to take the book and open its seals?
2. Try to list some of the important things which the cross has accomplished – for us and God.
3. If it is right to worship Jesus, why do you think he has made us to be priests who should direct our worship 'to his God and Father'?

9. The prophesied Christ

As we near the end of this book, we're continuing our look at some of the rewarding truths about our Lord set before us in the last book of the Bible, the book of The Revelation, we now want to consider him as the prophesied Christ.

John describes the Lord as *'the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David'* (5:5). Let's consider for a moment those references to Judah and David. Taking Judah first, Jacob prophetically declared: *'The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh come. And unto him shall the gathering of the peoples be'* (Genesis 49:10).

Additionally, in relation to David, the prophets of the Old Testament indicated that the Messiah would descend from David. Nathan informed Israel's king: *'When your days are fulfilled, and you will sleep with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, that shall proceed from your body, and I will establish his kingdom'* (2 Samuel 7:12). This is confirmed by the book of Hebrews (1:5) as having ultimate reference to Christ.

In fact, throughout the three sections of the Jewish Old Testament, Jesus was prophesied. The Bible tells us that when humanity corrupted itself at the very beginning, God gave a promise of a time when another human (someone described as the *'seed of the woman'*) would make deliverance possible: deliverance from the results of human disobedience which had begun to trouble life in this world. The actual words are these:

“Then the LORD God said to the woman, [he was addressing Eve after she’d eaten the forbidden fruit] “What is this you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.” So the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, “Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” (Genesis 3:13-15 NIV)

And so, at the very beginning, God promised that a human descendent of Eve would crush our enemy, the Devil. The promised human descendent was described as the offspring, or seed, of the woman. Here we find, in these words, the Bible’s first prophecy of the deliverer, or messiah, who was coming. The answer to what we now experience as the human condition, with all its difficulty and trouble, had been worked out by God in advance. The solution was obviously going to be costly. That much was clear from the mention of the hostility between descendants of Eve who would try to give allegiance to God on the one hand, and on the other hand, those who would end up fulfilling the evil desires of the Devil.

The Old Testament is divided into three sections: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. All three predict Jesus, and now, we’ll look at the Old Testament Prophets. Perhaps the best thing we can do is to try to see it from the perspective of an outsider looking in. I’m thinking of someone who fits that category whose story is told in the Bible itself:

“... there was an Ethiopian ... and he had come to Jerusalem to worship. And he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the [Old Testament, Bible] prophet Isaiah. And the Spirit said to Philip, “Go up and join this chariot.” And when Philip had run up, he heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, “Do you understand what you are reading?” And he said, “Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this: “He was led as a sheep to slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so He does not open His mouth. In humiliation His judgment was taken away; who shall relate His generation? For His life is removed from the earth.” And the [man] answered Philip and said, “Please tell me of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?” And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him.” (Acts 8:27-35)

Maybe we can identify in some ways with this traveller. Although he was from another culture, with possibly a very different religious background, he did, however, want to know more about the God of the Old Testament, the God of the Bible. He’d even travelled all the way to Jerusalem to worship God there as best he knew how.

He might have been worshipping out of considerable ignorance, but he was genuinely seeking to find the truth. God helped him in a wonderful way, and he’ll help you, too, if you’re also a true searcher after truth. Our Ethiopian friend in the story was on a spiritual journey as well as travelling through the desert.

But he'd not found the answers he was looking for in Jerusalem. He'd come away, still unclear about many things. But at least he was looking in the right place. By that I mean that he was reading his Bible – reading from the prophets – as he travelled homewards again. Parts of the Bible are definitely not easy to understand, and he was struggling with the Prophets – especially the part in the writings of the prophet, Isaiah, where the prophet wrote about someone about to be slaughtered, just like the way people slaughter sheep.

Why should he have been reading that section? I don't know, but perhaps they'd been reading it at Jerusalem while he'd been there. Maybe he'd asked Jews at Jerusalem about what this meant – this part about a man being led to the slaughter. No wonder he was confused! Most Jews in Jerusalem wouldn't have been able to answer his question: whether the Bible prophet was speaking about himself or, if not, who else? I suggest that the Jews at Jerusalem didn't know the answer either, because if they had known it, they'd never have crucified Jesus Christ. In fact, as the Ethiopian was about to find out, Jesus Christ was the very person whose violent death or '*slaughter*' Isaiah had been predicting hundreds of years earlier!

This Ethiopian was soon to receive more enlightenment than many Jews at that time – or even since. How could that be possible? How could the Jews themselves have missed the meaning of God's message which had been directed to them in the first instance? Yet, how often we, too, hear only what we want to hear, and see only what we want to see. Jews had been conditioned to understand that the Bible predicted the coming of a great deliverer or 'messiah'; not so much a spiritual deliverer, but a heroic political and military figure. They missed completely Isaiah's distinctive picture of the messiah.

Peter said about Jesus (1 Peter 2:22-25): *"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats ... He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray.*" (NIV)

I have no doubt that this matches very closely what Philip must have said to the Ethiopian, because Peter too was using the same Bible text in Isaiah chapter 53 as his starting point. Peter tells us that we've all wandered away from God; irrespective of who and where we are, we've gone astray like sheep. Choosing to go our own way, and not God's way, has made us to be like wandering sheep as far as God in heaven is concerned. That's Peter explaining what he means by 'our sins'. That's why Israel's long-awaited messiah, Jesus, God's very own Son, had to be sacrificed. Jesus was the perfect sacrifice, for his was a perfect life: *"he committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth"*. It was all in God's plan that our terrible disease of sin might be healed by his wounds. What a wonderfully loving God! He's offering each of us a free pardon which was paid for by his own Son. So what do we need to do? Let's refer again to Peter: *"everyone who believes in [Jesus] receives forgiveness of sins"* (Acts 10:43).

I'll have to leave you to research the Writings for yourself – but I suggest you begin with Psalm 22 which is an amazing poetic description of the cross which we've arrived at in our

consideration of Philip's preaching. And so, the Law, the Prophets, and also the Writings (the 3 parts of the Old Testament as the Jews regarded it) prophesied Jesus.

As we've been exploring our current theme of Jesus as the prophesied Jesus – as triggered by those references to Judah and David in the titles given to him in the book of Revelation, we might conclude by observing that Jesus also describes himself as the '*root and the offspring of David*' (22:16b). This is a very significant description. Obviously, the root is the source from which a plant springs. The term is used metaphorically for the fact that Jesus was the 'origin and strength of the Messianic line' (Hiebert 1975, 172). On the other hand, Jesus' lineage from David is established both **legally** in Matthew (1:1ff) and **biologically** in Luke (3:23ff) by means of their New Testament genealogical records. Bringing both of these facts together, we might say: in his **divine** capacity, Christ was David's '*root*'; and in his **human** role, he was David's '*offspring*' (McClintock and Strong 1970, 124; cf. Matthew 22:43). This was the Christ who was prophesied: David's Lord and David's Son that he might become our saviour.

Questions:

1. Which is your favourite prophecy of Christ from each of the 3 sections of the Jewish Old Testament?
2. What do you think it means that 'the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy' (Rev.19:10)?
3. Which imagery in Revelation brings together the humanity and the deity of the Lord Jesus?

10. The victorious Christ

One of the concluding visions of the Apocalypse pictures Jesus as the victorious '*King of kings, and Lord of Lords.*' We glimpse him – by means of the vision given to John - as riding triumphantly on a white horse (19:11-16):

And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war.

His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself.

He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.

And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses.

From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.

And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."

Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, "Come, assemble for the great supper of God,

so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great."

And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army.

And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone.

And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.

As we begin to comment on those words we've just read from Revelation chapter 19, the most obvious thing to say is: this is war! Now that immediately brings to mind the smear campaign with which atheists gleefully like to taunt Christians. You know what I mean – they like to claim that more blood has been spilled in the name of religion than for any other cause. I doubt it. In fact, I'd venture that, historically, that's a lie. Try telling that to the countless victims of the gas ovens of Auschwitz and the killing fields of Kampuchea, not to mention the gulag of the Soviets and the prisons of China.

President Obama's 2015 US National Prayer Breakfast speech was more than a little skewed as it tried to bring a counter-perspective to Islamic atrocities today. There's a difference between killings which are a logical result of one's beliefs and killings which are an illogical result of them.

That's not to say that it can be argued biblically that all bloodshed is wrong. Did God sanction war at times in the Old Testament? Yes, he did – indisputably. And as we've seen, he will do so again in the future. It's at this point that UK celebrity personalities like Richard Dawkins and Stephen Fry weigh in and rage against God describing him as a blood-thirsty monster. Have they got it wrong? Absolutely.

A more measured view in the west tries to defend the concept of a so-called 'just war.' The end has to justify the means. The means have to be proportionate. And so on. Now we return to the vision in our text from the 19th chapter of the book of Revelation. Jesus is pictured at the head of the armies of heaven. This is the victorious Jesus.

How is the victorious Jesus presented? He's described as faithful and true. Why is that title inserted here to further describe Jesus as he returns to this sad earth to conquer his enemies and all who've rebelled against him? Is it not so we can be sure that it's totally in keeping with his holy character that he'll 'judge' and 'make war'? It's this that silences our doubts – or should do. For this is discriminate judging: judging, that is, which discriminates between the godly and the ungodly. And the war described here – which some may refer to as the battle of Armageddon – this war signifies the punishment which is due to be inflicted upon those who are rebellious. If ever there was a just war, this is it!

It's certainly just, but it's also fearful. Jesus' garment is pictured as red with the blood of his enemies. This imagery is borrowed from one of the Old Testament predictions of Jesus – which we should now turn to and read, from:

Who is this who comes from Edom, With garments of glowing colors from Bozrah, This One who is majestic in His apparel, Marching in the greatness of His strength? "It is I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save."

Why is Your apparel red, And Your garments like the one who treads in the wine press? "I have trodden the wine trough alone, And from the peoples there was no man with Me. I also trod them in My anger And trampled them in My wrath; And their lifeblood is sprinkled on My garments, And I stained all My raiment. (Isaiah 63:1-3)

Some of Isaiah's book is difficult to place. It's sometimes hard to draw the line between what's happened already in history to God's ancient people Israel; and what's yet to happen to them and to their enemies. But it seems we can clearly place this passage in Isaiah 63 alongside our earlier reading from Revelation chapter 19, as ultimately applying to that future time of our Lord's return to this earth to liberate faithful Israelites surrounded on all sides in a Middle East which grows ever more turbulent as we head towards the end-times the Bible predicts in both Old and New Testaments.

Those who focus exclusively on the idea of 'gentle Jesus meek and mild' are left unprepared for the bloodbath described here in terms of the picture of the treading down of grapes in a winepress. We conveniently forget the Jesus whose eyes blazed with fire as he overturned the tables of the money-changers in the Jerusalem temple, not to mention his numerous graphic warnings of gehenna, the place of future torment.

It's interesting that Jesus is again referred to here by his title of the Word of God. It's the Apostle John who is the Bible writer who consistently writes of our Lord as the Word – whether as God the creator (John 1:1), or as God incarnate (John 1:14) or as God the judge (Rev.19).

Earlier in this book, we've considered him as both creator and incarnate, and it remains now in this final instalment to consider him as judge. He'll come at the head of the armies of heaven to judge and make war in the cause of truth. Earth's chequered history, laden with tragedy, only makes sense in the light of the fact that ultimate justice for all is coming. The opportunity to escape the justice we deserve according to our sins is now. All who repent today and acknowledge Jesus as their personal saviour will never have to face him as judge. Those who have served faithfully under his leadership are pictured in Revelation 19 as being on white horses and clothed in white garments, probably symbolising either their purity or victory or both. One thing is sure: it's only in Jesus that they've been made pure and been given the victory.

The victorious Jesus smites the rebel nations and breaks them with his rod of iron. Again this apocalyptic scene was foreseen in the Old Testament psalm. The second psalm describes a scene typical of human rebellion against God's rule which will reach its climax in rebel

humanity's last stand before Christ imposes his rightful rule over the nations of this earth – he whose right it is to reign – his previous life on earth showed that. Psalm 2:1-9 says:

*Why are the nations in an uproar
And the peoples devising a vain thing?
The kings of the earth take their stand
And the rulers take counsel together
Against the LORD and against His Anointed,
saying,
"Let us tear their fetters apart
And cast away their cords from us!"
He who sits in the heavens laughs,
The Lord scoffs at them.
Then He will speak to them in His anger
And terrify them in His fury, saying,
"But as for Me, I have installed My King
Upon Zion, My holy mountain."
"I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD:
He said to Me, 'You are My Son,
Today I have begotten You.
'Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations
as Your inheritance, And the very ends of the
earth as Your possession.
'You shall break them with a rod of iron,
You shall shatter them like earthenware.'"*

Some see the book of Revelation as nothing more than a figurative impression of the battle between good and evil. It's much more precise than that, as events are currently demonstrating. But one thing from that over-simplification is true: good will triumph! His enemies will feel the fierceness of his wrath and find no relief ever after (cf. 14:9-11).

It's been my privilege to share with you the most exalted theme that can engage our minds in any Bible study. Our minds have focused on Jesus, from John's Gospel, from Philippians, from Colossians, from Hebrews, and from Revelation. We now conclude this final section in our series of studies by saying again that clearly this final book of the New Testament is very much **about** Christ, as well as being conveyed **by** him. I trust we've enjoyed seeing him in its pages as the creator Jesus, eternal Jesus, sacrificed Jesus, worshiped Jesus, prophesied Jesus, and finally as the victorious Jesus.

Questions:

1. Do you sometimes get challenged by people on account of the bloodshed found in the Bible? How do you answer that point?
2. The Lord has sanctioned war in the past, and will do so again in the future – so is it right for believers to go to war in this present age? Why or why not?
3. What is the supreme difference with Christ that gives him this right?