

The Willful Rejection of the Testimony of Christ Deity Pt. 3 John 5:30-40

John 5:30–6:1 (NKJV)

³⁰ I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.

Witness of John the Baptist

³¹ “If I bear witness of Myself, My witness is not true.
³² There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the witness which He witnesses of Me is true. ³³ You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. ³⁴ Yet I do not receive testimony from man, but I say these things that you may be saved. ³⁵ He was the burning and shining lamp, and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light.

Witness of the Works of Christ

³⁶ But I have a greater witness than John’s; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish—the very works that I do—bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me.

Witness of the Father

³⁷ And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form. ³⁸ But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe.

Witness of the Scriptures

³⁹ You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. ⁴⁰ But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.

Introduction

What would things look like if Satan really took control of a city? Over a half century ago, Presbyterian minister Donald Grey Barnhouse offered his own scenario in his weekly sermon that was also broadcast nationwide on CBS radio. Barnhouse speculated that if Satan took over Philadelphia, all of the bars would be closed, pornography banished, and pristine streets would be filled with tidy pedestrians who smiled at each other. There would be no swearing. The children would say, “Yes, sir” and “No, ma’am,” and the churches would be full every Sunday . . . where Christ is not preached.

It is easy to become distracted from Christ as the only hope for sinners. Where everything is measured by our happiness rather than by God’s holiness, the sense of our being sinners becomes secondary, if not offensive. If we are good people who have lost our way but with the proper instructions and motivation can become a better person, we need only a life coach, not a redeemer. We can still give our assent to a high view of Christ and the centrality of his person and work, but in actual practice we are being distracted from “looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:2). A lot of the things that distract us from Christ these days are even good things. In order to push us offpoint, all that Satan has to do is throw several spiritual fads, moral and political crusades, and other “relevance” operations into our field of vision. Focusing

the conversation on us—our desires, needs, feelings, experience, activity, and aspirations—energizes us. At last, now we're talking about something practical and relevant.

As provocative as Barnhouse's illustration remains, it is simply an elaboration of a point made throughout the history of redemption. Wherever Christ is truly and clearly being proclaimed, Satan is most actively present in opposition. The wars between the nations and enmity within families and neighborhoods is but the wake of the serpent's tail as he seeks to devour the church. Yet even in this pursuit, he is more subtle than we imagine. He lulls us to sleep as we trim our message to the banality of popular culture and invoke Christ's name for anything and everything but salvation from the coming judgment. While undoubtedly stirring his earthly disciples to persecute and kill followers of Christ (with more martyrdoms worldwide in an average year now than in any previous era), Satan knows from experience that sowing heresy and schism is far more effective. While the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church, the assimilation of the church to the world silences the witness.

I think that the church in America today is so obsessed with being practical, relevant, helpful, successful, and perhaps even well-liked that it nearly mirrors the world itself. Aside from the packaging, there is nothing that cannot be found in most churches today that could not be satisfied by any number of secular programs and self-help groups.

Christless Christianity.

Sounds a bit harsh, doesn't it? A little shallow, sometimes distracted, even a little human-centered rather than Christ-centered from time to time, but Christless? Let me be a little more precise about what I am assuming to be the regular diet in many churches across America today: "do more, try harder."

I think that this is the pervasive message across the spectrum today. It can be exhibited in an older, more conservative form, with a recurring emphasis on moral absolutes and warnings about falling into the pit of worldliness that can often make one wonder whether we are saved through fear rather than faith. Heaven and hell still figure prominently in this version. Especially on the “high holy days” of the American church calendar (that is, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Father’s Day, and Mother’s Day), often complete with giant American flags, a color guard, and patriotic songs, this sterner version of “do more, try harder” helped get the culture wars off the ground. At the same time, more liberal bodies could be just as shrill with their “do more, try harder” list on the left and their weekly calls to action rather than clear proclamation of Christ. Reacting against this extreme version of fundamentalist and liberal judgmentalism, another generation arose that wanted to soft-pedal the rigor, but the “do more, try harder” message has still dominated—this time in the softer pastels of Al Franken’s “Stuart Smalley” than in the censorious tone of Dana Carvey’s “Church Lady,” both of Saturday Night Live fame. In this version, God isn’t upset if you fail to pull it off. The stakes aren’t as high: success or failure in this life, not heaven or hell. No longer commands, the content of these sermons, songs, and best-selling books are helpful suggestions. If you can’t get people to be better with sticks, use carrots.

Increasingly, a younger generation is taking leadership that was raised on hype and hypocrisy and is weary of the narcissistic (i.e., “me-centered”) orientation of their parents’ generation. They are attracted to visions of salvation larger than the legalistic individualism of salvation-as-fire-insurance. Yet they are also fed up with the consumeristic individualism of salvation-as- personal-improvement. Instead, they are

desperately craving authenticity and genuine transformation that produces true community, exhibiting loving acts that address the wider social and global crises of our day rather than the narrow jeremiads of yesteryear.

Despite significant differences across these generations and types of church ministry, crucial similarities remain. The focus still seems to be on us and our activity rather than on God and his work in Jesus Christ. In all of these approaches, there is the tendency to make God a supporting character in our own life movie rather than to be rewritten as new characters in God's drama of redemption. Assimilating the disruptive, surprising, and disorienting power of the gospel to the felt needs, moral crises, and socio-political headlines of our passing age, we end up saying very little that the world could not hear from Dr. Phil, Dr. Laura, or Oprah.

Besides the preaching, our practices reveal that we are focused on ourselves and our activity more than on God and his saving work among us. Across the board, from conservative to liberal, Roman Catholic to Anabaptist, New Age to Southern Baptist, the "search for the sacred" in America is largely oriented to what happens inside of us, in our own personal experience, rather than in what God has done for us in history. Even baptism and the Supper are described as "means of commitment" rather than "means of grace" in a host of contemporary systematic theologies by conservative as well as progressive evangelicals. Rather than letting "the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Col. 3:16), the purpose of singing (the "worship time") seems today more focused on our opportunity to express our own individual piety, experience, and commitment. We come to church, it seems,

less to be transformed by the Good News than to celebrate our own transformation and to receive fresh marching orders for transforming ourselves and our world. Rather than being swept into God's new world, we come to church to find out how we can make God relevant to the "real world" that the New Testament identifies as the one that is actually fading away. Most Americans believe in God, affirm that Jesus Christ is in some sense divine, and believe that the Bible is the Word of God. Evangelical pollster George Barna found that 86 percent of American adults describe their religious orientation as Christian, while only 6 percent describe themselves as atheist or agnostic.¹ Judging by its commercial, political, and media success, the evangelical movement seems to be booming. But is it still Christian?

I am not asking that question glibly or simply to provoke a reaction. My concern is that we are getting dangerously close to the place in everyday American church life where the Bible is mined for "relevant" quotes but is largely irrelevant on its own terms; God is used as a personal resource rather than known, worshiped, and trusted; Jesus Christ is a coach with a good game plan for our victory rather than a Savior who has already achieved it for us; salvation is more a matter of having our best life now than being saved from God's judgment by God himself; and the Holy Spirit is an electrical outlet we can plug into for the power we need to be all that we can be. As this new gospel becomes more obviously American than Christian, we all have to take a step back and ask ourselves whether evangelicalism is increasingly a cultural and political movement with a sentimental attachment to the image of Jesus more than a witness to "Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). We have not shown in recent decades that we have much stomach for this message that the apostle Paul called "a stone of

stumbling, and a rock of offense,” “folly to Gentiles” (Rom. 9:33; 1 Cor. 1:23). Far from clashing with the culture of consumerism, American religion appears to be not only at peace with our narcissism but gives it a spiritual legitimacy.

Before I launch this protest, I should carefully state up front what I am not saying. First, I acknowledge that there are many churches, pastors, missionaries, evangelists, and distinguished Christian laypeople around the world proclaiming Christ and fulfilling their vocations with integrity. I apologize in advance for not telling this other side of the story, with its truly remarkable exceptions. However, I doubt that they will mind, since many of them register similar worries about the state of Christianity in America.

Second, I am not arguing in this book that we have arrived at Christless Christianity but that we are well on our way. There need not be explicit abandonment of any key Christian teaching, just a series of subtle distortions and not-so-subtle distractions. Even good things can cause us to look away from Christ and to take the gospel for granted as something we needed for conversion but which now can be safely assumed and put in the background. Center stage, however, is someone or something else. I will refer to recent studies demonstrating that it does not really matter any longer whether one has been raised in an evangelical family and church—understanding the basic plot of the biblical drama and its lead character is as unlikely for churched as for unchurched young people. God and Jesus are still important, but more as part of the supporting cast in our own show. More interested in our own thin plots, we are losing our confidence in what English playwright Dorothy Sayers called “the greatest story ever told.” So much of what I am calling “Christless Christianity” is not profound enough to constitute heresy. Like the easy-listening Muzak that plays

ubiquitously in the background in other shopping venues, the message of American Christianity has simply become trivial, sentimental, affirming, and irrelevant. Third, I am not questioning American Christianity at the level of zeal. The call of Christian leaders to “deeds, not creeds” is doubtless motivated by a serious concern to be witnesses to Christ in a broken world. I do not question the sincerity of those who say that we have the correct doctrine but are not living it out. Rather, I simply do not agree with their assessment.

I think our doctrine has been forgotten, assumed, ignored, and even misshaped and distorted by the habits and rituals of daily life in a narcissistic culture. We are assimilating the disrupting and disorienting news from heaven to the banality of our own immediate felt needs, which interpret God as a personal shopper for the props of our life movie: happiness as entertainment, salvation as therapeutic well-being, and mission as pragmatic success measured solely in terms of numbers.

So, in my view, we are living out our creed, but that creed is closer to the American Dream than it is to the Christian faith. The claim I am laying out in this book is that the most dominant form of Christianity today reflects “a zeal for God” that is nevertheless without knowledge—particularly, as Paul himself specifies, the knowledge of God’s justification of the wicked by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, apart from works (Rom. 10:2, see vv. 1–15). Fourth, there are a lot of issues I would like to address about our American captivity that will not be taken up here. Most of these issues I have treated elsewhere, especially in *Made in America*, *Power Religion*, and *Beyond Culture Wars*.² The idols that identify the Christian cause with left-wing or right-wing political ideology are merely symptoms that Christ is not being regarded as sufficient for the

church's faith and practice today. As the media follows the growing shift among many younger evangelicals from more conservative to more progressive politics, the real headline should be that the movement is going back to church to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ rather than becoming a demographic block in the culture wars. So my focus in this book is on whether Christ is even being widely proclaimed in the nation where half the population claims to be evangelical.

Where the gospel is not taken for granted, it is often a means to an end, like personal or social transformation, love and service to our neighbors, and other things that in themselves are marvelous effects of the gospel. However, the Good News concerning Christ is not a stepping-stone to something greater and more relevant. Whether we realize it or not, there is nothing in the universe more relevant to us as guilty image-bearers of God than the news that he has found a way to be "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26). It is "the power of God for salvation" (Rom. 1:16), not only for the beginning, but for the middle and end as well—the only thing that creates the kind of new world to which our new obedience corresponds as a reasonable response.

In the following chapters I offer statistics supporting the remarkable conclusion that those who are raised in "Bible-believing" churches know as little of the Bible's actual content as their unchurched neighbors. Christ is ubiquitous in this subculture, but more as an adjective (Christian) than as a proper name. While we swim in a sea of "Christian" things, Christ is increasingly reduced to a mascot or symbol of a subculture and the industries that feed it. Just as you don't really need Jesus Christ in order to have T-shirts and coffee mugs, it is unclear to me why he is necessary for most of the things I hear a lot of pastors and Christians talking about in

church these days. I do not think we realize the extent of our schizophrenia: annually decrying the commercialization of Christmas by the culture while we assume a consumer-product-sales approach in our own churches every week. We lament the growing secularization of American society while we ensure that the generations currently under our care will know even less than their parents and be less shaped by the covenantal nurture that sustains life in Christ over generations. While calling our capitulation to a narcissistic culture mission and relevance, we charge secularists with emptying public discourse of beliefs and values that transcend our instant gratification.

While we take Christ's name in vain for our own causes and positions, trivializing his Word in all sorts of ways, we express outrage when a movie trivializes Christ or depicts Christians in a negative light. Although professing Christians are in the majority, we often like to pretend we are a persecuted flock being prepared for an imminent slaughter through the combined energies of Hollywood and the Democratic Party. But if we ever were really persecuted, would it be because of our offensive posturing and self-righteousness or because we would not weaken the offense

of the cross? In my experience, substantiated by countless stories of others, believers who challenge the human-centered process of trivializing the faith are more likely to be persecuted—or at least viewed as troublesome—by their church. My concern is not that God is treated so lightly in American culture but that he is not taken seriously in our own faith and practice.

Killing Us Softly

My argument in this book is not that evangelicalism is becoming theologically liberal but that it is becoming theologically vacuous. Far from engendering a smug

complacency, core evangelical convictions—centering on “Christ and him crucified”—drove three centuries of evangelical missions. The ministry of John Stott, a key leader of this postwar consensus, has embodied this integration of Christ-centered proclamation with missional passion. Yet when asked in a recent issue of *Christianity Today* how he evaluates this worldwide movement, Stott could only reply, “The answer is ‘growth without depth.’” There certainly are signs that the movement’s theological boundaries are widening—and I will touch on a few examples in this book. Furthermore, vacuity and liberalism have typically gone hand-in-hand when it comes to the church’s faith and practice. Liberalism started off by downplaying doctrine in favor of moralism and inner experience, losing Christ by degrees.

Nevertheless, it is not heresy as much as silliness that is killing us softly. God is not denied but trivialized—used for our life programs rather than received, worshiped, and enjoyed. Christ is a source of empowerment, but is he widely regarded among us today as the source of redemption for the powerless? He helps the morally sensitive to become better, but does he save the ungodly—including Christians? He heals broken lives, but does he raise those who are “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1 NKJV)? Does Christ come merely to improve our existence in Adam or to end it, sweeping us into his new creation? Is Christianity all about spiritual and moral makeovers or about death and resurrection—radical judgment and radical grace? Is the Word of God a resource for what we have already decided we want and need, or is it God’s living and active criticism of our religion, morality, and pious experience? In other words, is the Bible God’s story, centering on Christ’s redeeming work, that rewrites our stories, or is it something we

use to make our stories a little more exciting and interesting? Conservatives and liberals moralize, minimize, and trivialize Christ in different ways, of course, with different political and social agendas, showing their allegiance either to elite culture or popular culture, but it is still moralism. According to Methodist bishop William Willimon,

Lacking confidence in the power of our story to effect that of which it speaks, to evoke a new people out of nothing, our communication loses its nerve. Nothing is said that could not be heard elsewhere. . . . In conservative contexts, gospel speech is traded for dogmatic assertion and moralism, for self-help psychologies and narcotic mantras. In more liberal speech, talk tiptoes around the outrage of Christian discourse and ends up as an innocuous, though urbane, affirmation of the ruling order. Unable to preach Christ and him crucified, we preach humanity and it improved.

Liberals may have pioneered the theory that there is salvation in other names than Jesus Christ, but no group in modern history has wanted the general public to pray nonsectarian prayers—that is, with or without Jesus Christ—as much as the conservative evangelicals. When it comes to getting God back into our schools, we can even leave Jesus behind. Jesus has been dressed up as a corporate CEO, life coach, culture-warrior, political revolutionary, philosopher, copilot, cosufferer, moral example, and partner in fulfilling our personal and social dreams. But in all of these ways, are we reducing the central character in the drama of redemption to a prop for our own play?

Like the liberals of yesteryear, a growing number of evangelical leaders are fond of setting Jesus's teaching on the kingdom—especially the Sermon on the Mount—over against the more

doctrinal emphasis found especially in Paul's epistles. Many celebrate this emphasis on Christ-as-example rather than Christ-as- Redeemer as the harbinger of a new kind of Christian, but is it really an old kind of moralist? Regardless of whether Christ's death is regarded as a vicarious sacrifice, discipleship—our crossbearing—becomes the more interesting topic. Never mind that disciples are people who learn something before they set out to make a splash by their zealous activity. Again, I'm not saying that these brothers and sisters are liberals but that there is no discernable difference for our witness whether we ignore or deny the message of Christ and his cross. When the focus becomes "What would Jesus do?" instead of "What has Jesus done?" the labels no longer matter. Conservatives have been just as prone to focus on the former rather than the latter in recent decades.

Religion, spirituality, and moral earnestness—what Paul called "the appearance of godliness but denying its power" (2 Tim.3:5)—can continue to thrive in our environment precisely because they avoid the scandal of Christ. Nobody will raise a fuss if you find Jesus helpful for your personal well-being and relationships, or even if you think he was the greatest person in history—a model worthy of devotion and emulation. But start talking about the real crisis—where our best efforts are filthy rags and Jesus came to bear the condemnation of helpless sinners who place their confidence in him rather than in themselves—and people begin shifting in their seats, even in churches. Discipleship, spiritual disciplines, life transformation, culture-transformation, relationships, marriage and family, stress, the spiritual gifts, financial gifts, radical experiences of conversion, end-times curiosities that seem to have less to do with Christ's bodily return than with matching verses to newspaper headlines, and accounts of overcoming significant

obstacles through the power of faith. This is the steady diet we're getting today, and it is bound to burn us out because it's all about us and our work rather than about Christ and his work. Even important biblical exhortations and commands become

dislocated from their indicative, gospel habitat. Instead of the gospel giving us new thoughts, experiences, and a motivation for grateful obedience, we lodge the power of God in our own piety and programs.

I do not expect to get everything right. Some of my judgments may turn out to be too sweeping or ill-informed. I hope not, because these issues are too important to be treated casually. Readers will certainly find a lot of good news interspersed between the bad news in this book, but I admit from the outset that on balance it is not a cheerful missive. I'm counting on the indulgence of readers to wait for this book's more constructive sequel. If this book will have only raised questions that provoke us to deeper analysis of our witness in the world today, it will be sufficient.

My aim is not to target any particular wing, movement, person, or group. We are all victims as well as accomplices in our captivity. In fact, my sense of urgency is motivated by my impression that "Christless Christianity" is pervasive, crossing the conservative-liberal spectrum and all denominational lines. In fact, when I wrote up some of the thoughts in this book for an article in a magazine recently, a Catholic editor exclaimed, "He's writing about us!"

Actually, I am writing about "us"—all of us who profess the name of Christ both as ministers and witnesses. It would be easier if we could identify one particular writer, circle of writers, or movement as an isolated nemesis. However, no tradition is free of this captivity, including my own, and no person,

including myself. There is therefore no position of antiseptic purity that I can pretend to occupy, from which I can mop up the rest of the floor. The most that any of us can do is to say with Isaiah, as he beheld a vision of God in his holiness, “Woe is me! For I

am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” (Isa. 6:5).

–Michael Horton, [Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), chapter 1.

Review

I. The Superior Witness

II. The Supernatural Witness

III. The Sovereigns Witness

IV. The Scriptures Witness

Lesson

III. The Sovereigns Witness

³⁷ And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form. ³⁸ But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe.

Jesus' statement, **You have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His form**, was a further rebuke to the unbelieving Jews. No one can see God in the full glory of His infinitely holy essence (Ex. 33:20; John 1:18; 1 Tim. 6:16; 1 John 4:12). However there were times, throughout Israel's history, when God audibly or visibly interacted with His people. For example, He spoke to Moses (Ex. 33:11; Num. 12:8), the Israelites of the exodus (Deut. 4:12, 15; 5:5), and the prophets (Heb. 1:1). He also appeared, in some physical manifestation of His presence, to Jacob (Gen. 32:30), Gideon (Judg. 6:22), Manoah (Judg. 13:20), and others (Gen. 16:13; Ex. 24:9–11; Isa. 6:5). Yet the unbelieving Jews of Jesus' day, who had both the Old Testament Scriptures and the full revelation of God in Jesus Christ (1:18; 14:9; cf. Col. 2:9; Heb. 1:3), **did not have God's word abiding in them, for they did not believe Him whom God sent**. They refused to listen to Jesus, God's final revelation to mankind (Heb. 1:2). And, in so doing, they displayed their total ignorance of God, since those

who reject Jesus cannot know the Father (cf. 5:23; 8:19; 14:6; 15:23).

On the other hand, those who love the Son have the internal witness of God in their hearts as to who Jesus is

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2006). *John 1–11* (p. 212). Chicago: Moody Press.

John 8:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸ I am One who bears witness of Myself, and the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me.”

Matthew 3:13–4:1 (NKJV)

Baptism of Jesus

Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–23

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ And John *tried to* prevent Him, saying, “I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?”

¹⁵ But Jesus answered and said to him, “**Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.**” Then he allowed Him.

¹⁶ When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. ¹⁷ And suddenly a voice *came* from heaven, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

John 12:28–30 (NKJV)

²⁸ **Father, glorify Your name.”**

Then a voice came from heaven, *saying*, “I have both glorified *it* and will glorify *it* again.”

²⁹ Therefore the people who stood by and heard *it* said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to Him.”

³⁰ Jesus answered and said, **“This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake.**

Matthew 17:5–6 (NKJV)

⁵ While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!” ⁶ And when the disciples heard *it*, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid.

Most likely Jesus was referring to the inner work of God in which He impresses on people’s consciences that Jesus is the Truth (6:45; 1 John 5:9–12). Jesus’ opponents are ignorant of God. They have no vision of God and no communication with Him. **His Word** is His message of salvation. This message had not been received by them (does not **dwell** [*menonta*, from *menō*, “remain, abide”] **in** them) because they had rejected Jesus.

Blum, E. A. (1985). John. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 292). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

perfect active indicative of μαρτυρεω [*martureō*], the direct witness of the Father, besides the indirect witness of the works. Jesus is not speaking of the voice of the Father at his

baptism (Mark 1:11), the transfiguration (Mark 9:7), nor even at the time of the visit of the Greeks (John 12:28). This last voice was heard by many who thought it was thunder or an angel. The language of Jesus refers to the witness of the Father in the heart of the believers as is made plain in 1 John 5:9 and 10. God's witness does not come by audible "voice" (φωνήν [*phōnēn*]) nor visible "form" (εἶδος [*eidōs*]). Cf. 1:18; 6:46; 1 John 4:12. Ἀκηκοατε [*Akēkoate*] is perfect active indicative of ἀκούω [*akouō*], to hear, and ἑώρακατε [*heōrakate*] is perfect active indicative of ὄρω [*horaō*], to see. It is a permanent state of failure to hear and see God.

Robertson, A. T. (1933). *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Jn 5:37). Nashville, TN: Broadman Press.

John 6:44–45 (NKJV)

⁴⁴ No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.

1 John 5:9–12 (NKJV)

⁹ If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son. ¹⁰ He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made

Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son. ¹¹ And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. ¹² He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

³⁷ And the Father Himself, who sent Me, **has testified of Me.** You have neither **heard His voice** at any time, **nor seen His form.** ³⁸ But you do not have His word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not believe.

3140 [e]

memartyrēken

μεμαρτύρηκεν

has borne witness

V-RIA-3S Perfect Active Indict.

191 [e]

akēkoate

ἀκηκόατε ,

have you heard

V-RIA-2P Perfect Active Indict.

191 ακούω – properly, to hear (listen); (figuratively) to hear God's voice which prompts Him to birth faith within (cf. Ro 10:17). See 189 (akoē).

[191 (ακούω) is the root of the English term, "acoustics."]

3708 [e]
heōrakate

ἑώρακατε .

have you seen

V-RIA-2P Perfect Active Indict.

Definition: I see, look upon, experience, perceive, discern, beware.

3708 *horáō* – properly, see, often with *metaphorical* meaning: "to see with the mind" (i.e. spiritually see), i.e. perceive (with inward spiritual perception).

IV. The Scriptures Witness

³⁹ You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. ⁴⁰ But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.

You search the Scriptures

ereunaó: search.

Original Word: ἐρευνάω

Part of Speech: Verb

Transliteration: ereunaó

Phonetic Spelling: (er-yoo-nah'-o)

Definition: I search diligently, examine.

which testify of Me

3140 [e]
martyrouesai

μαρτυροῦσαι

bearing witness

V-PPA-NFP Pres Act Participle

The Jewish religious leaders studied the Old Testament with great diligence. They believed that if one could comprehend the words of the text, he would gain a share in the world to come. They considered those ignorant of the Law to be under a curse (7:49). Similarly many people today think Bible study is an end in itself rather than a function leading to the knowledge of God and godliness. Somehow a veil was over the minds of these Jewish scholars (2 Cor. 3:15), and they failed to see that Jesus is the Promised One. He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrificial system, the true righteous Servant of Yahweh, the coming Prophet, the Son of Man, the Davidic King, and the promised Son of God and great High Priest. In spite of the clarity of the revelation, they **refused to come to Him for life** (cf. John 3:19–20).

Blum, E. A. (1985). John. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 292). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Merely knowing the facts of Scripture, without fully embracing them in the heart (Josh. 1:8; Pss. 1:2; 119:11, 15, 97) and acting on them, will not bring the blessings of salvation. In the words of Aelfric, a tenth-century English theologian, “Happy is he, then, who reads the Scriptures, if he convert the words into actions.”

Though the Greek verb translated **you search** could be either imperative or indicative in form, it is best understood in the latter sense. Jesus was not commanding them to **search the Scriptures**, but noting that they were already doing so in a desperate and futile search for the key to **eternal life** (cf. Matt. 19:16; Luke 10:25). Ironically, with all their fastidious effort they utterly failed to grasp that **it is** those very Scriptures **that testify about** Jesus (1:45; Luke 24:27, 44; Rev. 19:10). The Pharisees in particular were fanatical in their preoccupation with Scripture, studying every line, every word, and even the letters in an empty effort to understand the truth.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2006). *John 1–11* (p. 213). Chicago: Moody Press.

Matthew 22:29 (NKJV)

²⁹ Jesus answered and said to them, “**You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God.**”

John 20:9 (NKJV)

⁹ For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead.

Jesus in the Old Testament

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There is no finer teacher on whether Jesus is to be found in the pages of the Old Testament than the teaching of our Lord Jesus himself.

He it was who said in John 5:39, “You [Jewish people] diligently study the Scriptures [which at that time were the 39

books of the Tanak/Old Testament].... These are the Scriptures that testify about me.” That should settle the question.

But even more famously, Jesus rebuked Cleopas, and that other unnamed disciple, as they walked along the road to Emmaus on that first Easter Sunday, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, [Jesus] explained to them what was said in all the [Old Testament] Scriptures concerning himself” (Luke 24:25-27).

Even King David predicted the resurrection of Jesus back in 1000 B.C. as he, too, saw what was ahead, namely, that Jesus would not be “abandon[ed] ... to the grave, nor [would he] let his Holy One see decay” (Ps 16:8-11; Acts 2:30-31). Therefore, it is not unexpected that we, too, should find Jesus present in the events and the predictions found in the Old Testament.

It is only right that we should find that Jesus was both actually present in the Old Testament and accurately predicted, and that he would come first as our Savior, and then in a later second coming, would appear as the King supreme over all the earth. Such an unusual state of affairs is possible because he was, he is and he is the One to come. But sad to say, all too many miss both his real presence in the Old Testament narrative and the numerous predictions of both his first and second advents/comings. To remedy this, let us turn first to those places where he appeared in a Christophany in the Old Testament times. Then we will sample some of the numerous predictions of his comings.

Old Testament Appearances of Christ

Jesus is first seen in the Old Testament as the person who appeared as “the Angel of the Lord” in his sudden confrontation with Sarah’s maidser- vant, Hagar (Gen 16:7). Thereafter, he continued to appear intermittently throughout the earlier books of the Old Testament. These real occurrences, initiated by God, were characterized by the fact that they were convincing revelations of his person and work, as much as they were also transitory, fleeting, but audible and clearly visible appearances. He came temporally in the form of a human, much before his final incarnation as a babe in Bethlehem, yet this same “Angel of the LORD” is called and is addressed often as “the LORD/Yahweh” himself (Gen 12:7; 17:1; 19:1; etc.). This “Angel of the LORD” was a title that stood for his office, but it did not describe his nature. The Hebrew word for “angel” (mal’ak) had the basic idea of one who was “sent,” a “messenger.” Of the 214 usages of the Hebrew term used for “angel,” about one-third of them refer to what is labeled by theologians as a “Christophany,” a temporary appearance of Christ in the Old Testament. It is certain, however, that this special angel of the Lord is divine, for Hagar “...gave this name to the LORD, who spoke with her [as the Angel of the LORD]: ‘You are the God who sees me,’ as she observed, ‘I have now seen the One who sees me’” (Gen 16:13). 1

Other instances of Jesus’ appearances in the Old Testament can be seen representatively in Genesis 22:11, 15, where it was the Angel of Yahweh who spoke from heaven to Abraham when Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac, and stopped him from proceeding. Again, it was the Angel of Yahweh who appeared to Moses in the flame of fire in Exodus 3:2. Throughout the dialogue at that burning bush, it was also

declared that he was no one less than “Yah- weh,” who spoke at that time, causing Moses to hide his face from him (Ex 3:6). Later, it was the same Angel of the Lord who appeared to the wife of Manoah (Judg 13:2-25), mother of Samson, whom she reported to her husband was indeed a “man of God” that had appeared to her. When Manoah asked for the “Angel of the LORD” to also appear to him as he had appeared to his wife, the Angel repeated the appearances and his conversations to him, after which he ascended in the flame of the altar (Judg 13:20), implying the sacrifice was in worship of the Lord himself! Moreover, this “An- gel” is regarded as a “Redeemer,” who saves Israel from evil (Isa 63:9).

How can readers of the Old Testament doubt that these sample instances, along with a host of other such descriptions in the earlier Scriptures, were anything less than pre-incarnate appearances of our Lord Jesus in real flesh, even if it was in those days only a temporary in-flesh-ment/ incarnation for the immediate needs of the people until he would come and take on flesh permanently? Oftentimes Jesus came to earth to help his people in their distress and their need for direction. The only examples of the Angel of Yahweh turning against Israel occur in 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21, where the Angel is the agent of God’s punishment of David, because he disobeyed God and conducted a national census.

Old Testament Predictions of the Coming Messiah

In addition to the real presence of Jesus as the Angel of the Lord/God, J. Barton Payne² listed some 574 verses in the Old Testament that had direct personal messianic foretellings. Payne found 127 personal messianic predictions involving some, 348 verses that had any or all types of real and typological prophecies of Jesus’ first or second coming. This

number was exceeded only by Alfred Edersheim,³ who noted that in some 558 rabbinic writings in pre-Christian times, there were some 456 separate Old Testament/Tanak passages used to refer to the Messiah or to messianic times!

In my own book, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*,⁴ I was able to identify 65 direct predictions of Jesus' com- ings in the Old Testament. Few will dispute that there are at least six direct Messianic predictions in the Pentateuch: Genesis 3:15; 9:27; 12:2-3; 49:8-12; Numbers 24:15-19; and Deuteronomy 18:15-18.

Eve was promised in Genesis 3:15 that a male descen- dant from her line would crush the head of the serpent, i.e., the Devil himself, and win completely over evil, as the prince of evil, Satan, would be finally vanquished. Then in Genesis 9:27, God would come and live/dwell in the tents of Shem, the Semitic peoples. But which one of the Semites did God intend: the Arabs or the Jewish people? Abraham settled that question, for God called him to go from Ur of Mesopotamia to Israel, and he was to be a blessing for all the nations on earth in Genesis 12:3.

This promise could be narrowed down even further for the tribe of Judah. Son number four of Jacob would be the one God would invest with the scepter of ruling and the one from whom the line of Messiah would descend (Gen 49:8-12). In fact, this coming one from Judah would be "A star [that would] come out of Jacob, a scepter [that would] rise out of Israel" (Num 24:17). Moreover, the Messiah who would come would also be a "prophet" (Deut 18:15) as well as a "king" (Ps 72).

If the book of Job is to be placed in the period of the patriarchs (c. 2100 – 1800), as we believe he is to be placed, then there are four texts in Job that should be added to the six

in the Pentateuch. There Messiah is called an “angel” and a “Mediator” (Job 33:23-28).

Add to these 10 direct Messianic prophecies another five from the times both prior to and during the Davidic period. He is seen as the “Anointed” one in 1 Samuel 2:1-10 and the “faithful Priest” in 1 Samuel 2:35-36. But the most outstanding text by far is the Davidic Covenant text found in 2 Samuel 7 (repeated in 1 Chron 17) and elaborated on in Psalm 132, which pointed to the dynasty/house of David as the place where God would originate his throne, dynasty and kingdom forever. The promise given to King David was so astounding that David cried out in 2 Samuel 7:19c that “This is the law/charter for [all] humanity.” In other words, God had just now conferred on David an enlargement of the promise he had originally made with the patriarchs.⁵

There is not enough space to relate how 11 Psalms celebrate the person and work of the coming Messiah, but even though he would be rejected (Ps 118), and betrayed (Pss 69, 109), die and be resurrected (Pss 22, 16), he would come as Conqueror and Enthroned Ruler (Pss 2, 110), as Planner and Groom (Pss 40, 45), and as Triumphant King (Pss 68, 72). In addition to the previous 15 direct references to the coming Messiah, there are some 39 predictions of the Messiah in the Old Testament prophets. A sample of these announcements before they happened would include these facts. First, it was predicted that Messiah would be born of a virgin (Isa 7:14; cf. Mt 1:33). His birthplace would be Bethlehem (Mic 5:2; cf. Mt 2:1, 6), and John the Baptist would be his forerunner (Isa 40:3-5; Mal 3:1; cf. Mt 3:3, Mk 1:3; Lk 3:4-6).

It was further announced ahead of time that Messiah would enter Jerusalem [what turned out to be Palm Sunday] in

Triumph as the crowd shouted “Hosanna” (Zech 9:9-10; Ps 118:25-26; cf. Mt 21:9; Mk 11:9; Lk 19:38; Jh 12:13). But in less than a week, he would be betrayed [by one of his own disciples, Judas, as it turned out] (Ps 69:25; cf. Acts 1:20). Messiah’s side would be pierced (Zech 12:10; cf. Jh 19:37), and he would suffer vicariously for the sins of the world (Isa 53:6, 9, 12; cf. I Pt 2:21-25; Rom 4:25). Even more dramatically accurate was the fact that Jesus would be killed with the “wicked” ones (Isa 53:9a, note the plural noun in Hebrew) [as he hung between two thieves], yet he would be buried with the rich one (Isa 53:9b, note its singular form in the Hebrew).

But that was not the end of the matter for the predictions about Jesus in the Old Testament, for Messiah would return to earth a second time (Daniel 7:13; cf Mk 13:26; Lk 21:27), and he would one day rule in the city of Jerusalem as King of kings, as the nations would go up to that city to be taught in his ways, never more to “train for war anymore” (Isa 2:3-4). As far as the case for the Messiah in the Old Testament is concerned, the relationship between the Old and New Testaments is one of strong continuity and a progressive revelation. The seminal seeds of the doctrine of the person and work of Jesus bloom and blossom in the New Testament even though the Old Testament often carried in seminal seed form much that eventually developed out of the Old. What a gracious, revealing God, and what a wonderful gift of a Savior who has come to earth once, but who is due to return once more in all his fullness and glory!

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2 Corinthians 3:7–18 (NKJV)

Glory of the New Covenant

⁷ But if the ministry of death, written *and* engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which *glory* was passing away, ⁸ how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? ⁹ For if the ministry of condemnation *had* glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. ¹⁰ For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. ¹¹ For if what is passing away *was* glorious, what remains *is* much more glorious.

¹² Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech—¹³ unlike Moses, *who* put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. ¹⁴ But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the *veil* is taken away in Christ. ¹⁵ But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. ¹⁶ Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord *is*, there *is* liberty. ¹⁸ But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Luke 24:27–32 (NKJV)

²⁷ And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

²⁸ Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther.

²⁹ But they constrained Him, saying, “Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent.” And He went in to stay with them.

³⁰ Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke *it*, and gave it to them.

³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight.

³² And they said to one another, “Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?”

Luke 24:44-48

⁴⁴ Then He said to them, “These *are* the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and *the* Prophets and *the* Psalms concerning Me.” ⁴⁵ And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.

⁴⁶ Then He said to them, “Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ And you are witnesses of these things.