

Born to Win

About the Messiah

by Ronald L. Dart

What did the First Christians believe about Jesus? He was the Messiah, of course, but more than that. Jesus himself laid the question out before the Pharisees one day. It's in Matthew 22, verse 41.

Matthew 22

AKJV

⁴¹ While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them,

⁴² Saying, What think you of Christ? whose son is he? [...]

Now, I think everyone knows that the term “Christ” basically means “the Messiah”, “the Anointed One”. He asked, “Whose son is he?” Now, the question is really loaded, in this environment at this time, because messianic expectations had been running fever high for some time now. There was a clear expectation that the Messiah was coming soon. So he asked them, “Whose son is he?”

Matthew 22

AKJV

⁴² [...] They say to him, The son of David.

⁴³ He said to them, How then does David in spirit call him Lord, saying,

⁴⁴ The LORD said to my Lord, Sit you on my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool?

⁴⁵ If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?

⁴⁶ And no man was able to answer him a word, neither dared any man from that day forth ask him any more questions.

It was just getting a little bit too uncomfortable.

Now, Matthew tells us about this encounter in the midst of quite a series of challenges that had been presented by the Sadducees, the Pharisees. They were just *popping* Jesus with what they thought was a zinger every time he turned around. This one was a show-stopper, because the Jewish theologians understood this psalm of David to be messianic—which happens to be the same way the First Christians all understood it. They understood this psalm to be about the Messiah. But while the Pharisees and Sadducees *expected* the Messiah, they expected him to be merely a *man*—born normally of the union of a man and a woman; and who would be, as a *descendant* of David, lower in the chain of expectations. He would certainly not call his son (David would not) “Lord”.

Now, it's hard for me to imagine that none of the men who were questioning Jesus on this day had ever struggled with that psalm. Of course they had. Here's the psalm in question; it's the 110th Psalm. You should always think of a psalm like this as performance art, You have a singer—a man standing up (perhaps...my guess would be a tenor would do this), and he will sing this. Now, the Jews firmly believed that David wrote these words, and they in their mind's eye could see him performing the psalm.

¹ The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.

Now, I've got to pause here to explain something: If you're looking at this in your Bible, you will see that the first LORD is all caps (small caps), which is the way most Bibles present the word "Yahweh" or "Jehovah" in the Old Testament. It is the name of God. So "Jehovah said to my Lord (Adonai), 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.'"

Psalm 110

AKJV

² The LORD [*Jehovah*] shall send the rod of your strength out of Zion: rule you in the middle of your enemies.

³ Your people shall be willing in the day of your power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: you have the dew of your youth.

⁴ The LORD has sworn, and will not repent, You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.

Now, I don't have any idea how the Jews interpreted that—how the Pharisees would have looked at that particular thing; because up until this point in time the office of the king and the office of the high priest were two separate and distinct offices. And they really should be that way, because the priests...you know, they were actually in a way a counterbalance against one another—kept each other honest, as it were. *Now* we have one that has been put in office and God has sworn and will not repent; he is not only a king, he is a *priest* as well. The writer of Hebrews will actually identify this Melchizedek as the order of priesthood of which Jesus Christ would be a member [**Hebrews 7**].

Psalm 110

AKJV

⁵ The Lord at your right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath.

⁶ He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill the places with the dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries.

⁷ He shall drink of the brook in the way: therefore shall he lift up the head.

Now, like any piece of poetry this psalm is *rich* in imagery—some of which we just don't get. It's lost in the mists of history. I have very little idea/doubt that for the people who heard it the very first time it was very meaningful. But we have to take that linguistic note: In the psalm, the name of God is used alongside the descriptive "Adonai" [יְהוָה, Strong's H113], or "Lord". "Jehovah said to my Lord..."

Now, what Jesus said in citing this psalm we only have in the Greek language. I don't think the encounter between Jesus and the Pharisees *took place* in Greek, but Matthew renders it in Greek. And in Greek it reads: "*Kurios* said to my *kurios* [κύριος, Strong's G2962]." "The Lord said unto my Lord." At the time, it was considered improper to speak the holy name in public, and Jesus obviously did not. So he said, "Adonai spoke to my Adonai." And so it went. But the Pharisees *immediately* saw the problem with the psalm in that David referred to the Messiah as his *Lord*, which implies divinity.

Now, our question is: How did the *First Christians* understand it? Well, take Mark as a case in point. As Mark tells the story, he records Jesus' last words to his disciples. "And then after he had spoken to them..." (This is Mark 16:19):

Mark 16

AKJV

¹⁹ So then after the Lord had spoken to them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the

right hand of God.

Now, this knowledge had to come from Jesus to Mark or he wouldn't have known it. That Jesus ascended and sat on the right hand of God is in accord with the psalm. Mark understood it that way. Then there's Peter's *great* sermon on the Day of Pentecost—you remember that day when the Holy Spirit fell on the disciples *with power*. Peter gives a long sermon, and he comes to the point in Acts 2, verse 32, where he says this:

Acts 2

KJ2000

³² This Jesus has God raised up, of which we all are witnesses.

³³ Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured forth this, which you now see and hear.

³⁴ For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he said himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit on my right hand,

³⁵ Until I make your foes your footstool.

³⁶ Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God has made that same Jesus, whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ.

Now, that's how Peter understood the Christ. He said, note it well, "*both* Lord and Messiah". Now, there seems to be rather *more* than just a Messiah as an identity of Jesus.

What about Paul? What did he believe about the Messiah? Well, it's hard to break into the middle of a letter of Paul, but sometimes you have to break a sentence if you don't want to read the whole letter. What I want to read to you comes from the book of Ephesians, chapter 1, verse 15. Paul writes:

Ephesians 1

KJ2000

¹⁵ Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints,

¹⁶ Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers;

¹⁷ That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:

¹⁸ The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of his calling, and what is the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,

Now you know, you stop and realize "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ" who is "the Father of glory"... this is the one that Jesus said, "When you pray, say, 'Our Father...'" That's who you pray to. He is one whom, if we understand Christ correctly, people in the Old Testament *never even knew of* in that period of time. Christ came to *reveal* him for the first time. But it is our *Lord* Jesus Christ that's involved in this, not merely a Messiah.

Ephesians 1

KJ2000

¹⁹ And what is the exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his mighty power,

²⁰ Which he performed in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him [*Where?*] at his own right hand in the heavenly places,

Now listen to this carefully as to what he describes that God wrought in Christ—where he is, who he is, what he stands for, and what his *power* is. He...

Ephesians 1

KJ2000

²⁰ [...] set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places,

²¹ Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come:

²² And has put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church,

²³ Which is his body, the fullness of him that fills all in all.

Now, the wording varies in this particular letter from the 110th Psalm, but the allusions to it are *right there*. He is sitting at the right hand of God, above all, and with *all things*—including his enemies—under his feet. Just how *great* did the First Christians think that Jesus was? How much power did they imagine that he had? Well, obviously they believed he had it all, and that he was seated at the right hand of God.

I want us to understand that I'm not here arguing dogma or doctrine, or trying to establish this or that dogma or support it. What I'm interested in solely is what did the *First Christians* believe. Because, in fact, church dogma, creeds, and what have you *do vary* from what the First Christians believed. They have to, because they've all gone off in a hundred different directions; so you know they must do that. But that's not my concern. My concern is: What did these people believe? They've been called "Primitive Christians", but I don't much like that because it implies that we're more advanced than they were. Well, we may be; but being advanced isn't necessarily always the best thing. The question is: What did they believe? And only when we understand what they believed can we ask ourselves the question: Well, were they right, or can we figure out something that they didn't know (which is problematic)?

In any case, the Book of Hebrews (which tradition tells us was written by Paul) deals with the same issue. In chapter 12, for example, after that long and beautiful 11th chapter of Hebrews which we call "the faith chapter" with all these examples of faith, he says:

Hebrews 12

KJ2000

¹ Therefore seeing we also are surrounded with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which does so easily ensnare us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

² Looking unto Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

There it is again: "seated at the right hand", in the words of the Psalms, and in the words that Jesus cited to those Pharisees on this day which they couldn't answer; because for the Messiah to be a son of David and yet be exalted *above* David was completely beyond any frame of reference they had. Peter will come back to this in his first letter. First Peter, chapter 3, verse 21:

1 Peter 3

AKJV

²¹ The like figure whereunto even baptism does also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) [*Why?*] by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

²² Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject to him.

So here again this belief of the church is pretty thoroughly expressed all the way through the New Testament. The First Christians believed that Jesus was Lord. They believed he was seated at the right hand of God. They believed he had *all* power in heaven and in earth—over angels, over authorities, over powers, over you name it. It is a clear expression of the *divinity* of Christ.

And then, if you take a look at the book of Hebrews again beginning in the first chapter, you find a *remarkable* advance in the way the church thought about these things and looked at these things. It gets laid out fairly clearly. I think it must have been written the way it is because of a problem or some confusion that had arisen among these people. Hebrews, chapter 1, verse 1; he begins by saying:

Hebrews 1

AKJV

¹ God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets,

² Has in these last days spoken to us by his Son, [...]

Now, I'm going to pause right here just for a moment. In the gospel accounts, where Jesus in the presence of the Pharisees, the scribes, and so forth referred to himself as the *Son of God*, they understood that to be making himself equal with God. In other words, to be a true Son of God is to *be like God*. So he has...

Hebrews 1

AKJV

² [...] spoken to us by his Son, whom he has appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;

Now, the First Christians obviously, and the writer of Hebrews obviously, believed that Jesus Christ pre-existed his human birth—that he had been there *from the beginning*. As John said, right in the opening part of his gospel:

John 1

AKJV

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

And later he said:

John 1

AKJV

¹⁴ And the Word was made flesh, and dwelled among us[....]

So what are we going to make of that? Well, what the early Christians—the First Christians—believed was: Christ created the worlds. He was *there* at the beginning.

Hebrews 1

AKJV

³ Who being the brightness of his glory, [...]

Whose glory? The Father's glory.

Hebrews 1

AKJV

³ [...] and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down [*Where?*] on the right hand of the Majesty on high:

So it's pretty clear that the author of Hebrews (traditionally Paul) understands that Jesus is Messiah, but much more than that. He is the creator and the heir of all things, and thus the divinity of Jesus is established.

Hebrews 1

AKJV

⁴ Being made so much better than the angels, as he has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

⁵ For to which of the angels said he at any time, You are my Son, this day have I begotten you? [...]

Obviously, the answer is none.

Hebrews 1

AKJV

⁵ [...] And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?

You know, I don't know if you caught that, but it was not possible for Jesus to have been an angel who was exalted to become the Son of God; because he never said to any of the angels "at any time", "You are my son. This day have I begotten you." So Jesus was and is the *Son* of God; not a messenger, nothing of the kind.

Hebrews 1

AKJV

⁶ And again, when he brings in the first-begotten into the world, he said, And let all the angels of God worship him.

⁷ And of the angels he said, Who makes his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire.

⁸ But to the Son [...]

Notice how he keeps on going back and forth on this.

Hebrews 1

AKJV

⁸ But to the Son he said, [...]

Who's speaking? Apparently, God is speaking—the Father. To the Son he says:

Hebrews 1

AKJV

⁸ [...] Your throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of your kingdom.

⁹ You have loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your fellows.

Now, when you read something like this, it's easy to understand why the Jews had a problem with Christ as Messiah; because Christ did not *merely* see himself as a Messiah, and the First Christians didn't either. They saw him as God, indeed; because we have here God speaking to God and addressing him as God. And there are two Gods here: one God who has anointed the other with gladness above his companions. As for his companions, that's a subject for another day. But there it is. This is what the First Christians believed.

Hebrews 1

AKJV

¹⁰ And, You, Lord [*Jesus*], in the beginning have laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of your hands:

Oh, really? Yeah, really. This is just as consistent as it can be. The First Christians understood Jesus as the Creator; not apart from the Father, but *with* the Father. The Father perhaps being the architect and Jesus the builder, or however you want to put it; the fact is they were both involved in it *right from the start*.

Hebrews 1

AKJV

¹¹ [The Heavens] shall perish; but you remain; and they all shall wax old as does a garment;

¹² And as a clothing shall you fold them up, and they shall be changed: but you are the same, and your years shall not fail.

¹³ But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool?

Bang! There's a reference right back to the 110th Psalm again. That 110th Psalm—spoken of by Jesus, cited by Jesus, brought forward by Jesus—*dominates* the view of the Christian church of who Jesus is and was.

So here having established who Jesus is and where he is, his permanence and his power, and that he is the one that has been sent to us, he begins the second chapter of Hebrews by saying, that being the case...

Hebrews 2

KJ2000

¹ Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.

² For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward;

³ How shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him[?]

And when you think about it, the identification of Jesus as Lord establishes his divinity in the eyes of the First Christians. He was the son of David, yes. But he was also David's Lord. Later in this second chapter, Paul will continue by saying in verse 14:

Hebrews 2

AKJV

¹⁴ For as much then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;

¹⁵ And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

¹⁶ For truly he took not on him the nature of angels; [...]

That's an interesting statement all by itself.

Hebrews 2

AKJV

¹⁶ [...] but he took on him the seed of Abraham.

By that he means he didn't take on himself the nature of angels, he took upon himself the nature of *human beings*, descended from Abraham.

Hebrews 2

KJ2000

¹⁷ Therefore in all things he had to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, [...]

And that's a great deal of the point of the Book of Hebrews. It's that Jesus is our high priest. He is our king, he is our Lord, and he is also the priest who makes intercession to God for us. He is...

Hebrews 2

KJ2000

¹⁷ [...] a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.

¹⁸ For in that he himself has suffered being tempted, he is able to help them that are tempted.

You know, the Christology of these First Christians is very high.

There's a statement that Jesus made in a confrontation with the Jews that John records. It's in chapter 8, verse 52.

John 8

KJ2000

⁵² Then said the Jews unto him, Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and you say, If a man keeps my saying, he shall never taste of death.

⁵³ Are you greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? and the prophets are dead: whom make you yourself?

⁵⁴ Jesus answered, If I honor myself, my honor is nothing: it is my Father that honors me; of whom you say, that he is your God:

⁵⁵ Yet you have not known him; but I know him: and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be a liar like unto you: but I know him, and keep his saying.

Now what he is about to say is going to really rock these men. He said:

John 8

KJ2000

⁵⁶ Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.

⁵⁷ Then said the Jews unto him, You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?

⁵⁸ Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.

⁵⁹ Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.

You see, he was present with Abraham. Jesus apparently sat down and had a meal with Abraham. Jesus stood and talked with Abraham about the judgment he was about to make on Sodom and Gomorrah before he went on down to do it [**Genesis 18**]. Jesus had no beginning. He already existed at *the very beginning*, and so the First Christians understood him.

One of the most *dramatic* illustrations of this comes at the very end of the Bible, in the Book of Revelation, where John (who was in the isle of Patmos for the testimony of God) was in vision; and he says in Revelation 1, verse 10:

Revelation 1

AKJV

¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet,
¹¹ Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What you see, write in a book, and send it [out...]
¹² And I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks;
¹³ And in the middle of the seven candlesticks one like to the Son of man, [...]

And I'll tell you, you trace that concept of the Son of Man back through the Gospels and you will see who it is. He was...

Revelation 1

AKJV

¹³ [...] clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the breasts with a golden girdle.
¹⁴ His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire;

And he spoke saying:

Revelation 1

AKJV

¹⁷ [...] Fear not; I am the first and the last:
¹⁸ I am he that lives, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for ever more, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.

This is Jesus and no one else. He is the Alpha and Omega, he is the beginning and the end, and this is what the First Christians believed. Actually, he has no end and he has no beginning; it was a manner of speaking. It was Jesus.

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