

CHAPTER THREE: GOD IN CHRIST

3.1 JESUS CHRIST AND ISRAEL

This section wants to emphasize Jesus' historical and cultural origins. To understand what Jesus says and does, we must understand where he comes from in his human ancestry.

3.1.1 – God's choices are motivated by a creative effort of love to rebuild a broken relationship. God and humanity is a broken relationship. And because it is broken, all other relationships are affected somehow – with other human beings, other life, and the earth. The biblical story from Genesis on, is a story of God's effort to re-establish a path toward communion, harmony, abundance and peace. God chooses to work with specific people. That's the way relationships are formed and restored.

Abraham and Sarah, and the people that emerge out of them become the way of God for all life in the world. The purpose of Abraham and the purpose of Israel from our Christian reading of the bible's point of view, is to become a light for all people.

3.1.2 – According to this section, the Old Testament is primarily a record of God's message and actions. God is gracious but God also makes judgements. God's message points to the One to come. God does mighty acts. What are these acts and judgements? Is it a matter of interpreting what happens? Are there other ways of interpreting what happens in life than God's judgements and acts?

3.1.3 – Now we get to Jesus and the New Testament. As Christians, we believe Jesus is God's answer of the Messiah (Saviour) to come. He is the light for all people. He is the fulfillment of what Abraham and Israel were destined to become.

3.2 JESUS CHRIST: TRULY GOD

This section is aimed at emphasizing the 'divinity' of Jesus the Christ (Messiah, Saviour). Jesus is not only equal to God, but 'very God or very God.' Jesus is not the father, yet Jesus is God as the father/mother is God. God is one even though Jesus and the father are different. What's the issue? In the ancient world of the church, there was the fear that if we talked of Jesus and the father as two different entities, people would confuse them as different gods, and even more so, Jesus would be thought of as subservient or less god than God the father. What's at stake? If Jesus is less god than God, than how can his death and resurrection be our effective salvation? Only God can save us, a full God, not less of one.

But is this our issue today? If we simply saw Jesus and God the father/mother as different, yet still part of the same force we call God, wouldn't that work just fine? Here we come to the confusing language of the Trinity again. One in three and three in one. It's one thing to say they are one in love and one in purpose and will. It's another to say they are 'one in substance and being' as the early creeds declare.

3.2.1 – Jesus comes straight from God to be among us. But Jesus also comes from Israel and from his human conception and birth.

3.2.2 – Here the emphasis is on how the father and Jesus are one. Do these statements speak to you? To be 'begotten' rather than 'made' means Jesus does not come into being like everything else in the world that is made. Jesus has always been as God has always been. Jesus is also our way into God. We know God as Jesus reveals to us God's truest nature. Does this speak to you?

3.2.3 – Jesus is connected not just with his birth at a particular time and place in history, but also with the creation of the world as the 'Word of God.' Jesus is a person and the 'Word.' This Word is associated with God speaking creation into being in Genesis. John chapter 1 speaks of Jesus as God's Word made flesh. These are lofty words to describe a human being, but this is what we are asking people to believe as Christians. Do you believe such statements about Jesus?

3.2.4 – This is a good Trinitarian statement. The Father and the Holy Spirit are one with Jesus. But once again, how do we understand 'oneness' today? Is it more oneness of love, spirit, mind and will, or oneness in substance? Is it like different persons of the same family or different parts of one brain?

3.3 JESUS CHRIST: TRULY HUMAN

3.3.1 – One reason Jesus became human was to share our life and go through all the vulnerability, limitations and suffering that are ours as human beings. But he also became an example for us and a light for what we can yet become as human beings. Jesus became the model for our humanity. But is there something missing in this statement? What about Jesus the humanity of God sharing our life and being with us through the doubt and suffering all the way to the hell of forsakenness, in order to 'save' us from within and raise us up toward wholeness with him? Jesus is more than an example. He represents us in the darkest parts in order to carry us through as God carrying us through by feeling in all his humanity our darkness and brokenness. What do you think?