



Zarah & Pharez



Part XV Questions & Answers

In this writing, we'll return to the topic which we began to address in Part 14 of our series, and that is,

** Is the message of sonship built upon the doctrine of the Preexistence of spirits (or souls)?*

Let's continue by examining a few more passages of Scripture.

JOB 38:4-7

Of the verses upon which the doctrine of Preexistence has relied, none has been so frequented as has Job 38, verses 4-7. In this section of scripture, God puts forth a series of questions to Job, including these:

"...Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? Or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? Or who laid the cornerstone thereof; when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?"

From these few lines, three primary deductions can be made. During the process of discovery, we'll want to look for answers to the questions, WHO, WHAT WHEN, WHERE and WHY, and to see whether or not there is sufficient evidence to justify the claims of the Preexistencists.

The first deduction involves God's calling to mind certain prolific acts which occurred at or around the time of the founding of the earth. It was during this time that the measure was taken, the line was stretched, the foundations were fastened, and the cornerstone was laid, all of which resulted in the morning stars singing together, and all the sons of God shouting for joy.

Now, most would agree that the language employed regarding the earth's formation is figurative. Few would contend that the Lord had to employ a tape measure, framing square, mortar box or plumb line in the laying of the earth's foundations. We would also find little resistance to the idea that the references to the morning stars and the sons of God are to be viewed as being two expressions which basically describe the same thing (this is what's known theologically as Hebrew parallelism.) Therefore, these two points

need not be addressed here. But one thing that is to be noted about this passage is that when God began the foundational work on planet Earth, there were *witnesses* there to observe it. This first deduction is both fair and valid, and one with which most would agree.

The second deduction is where we first run into dispute. It has to do with the identity of these sons of God who were present when all these things took place. Given the timing of the event, the options are limited. We know that man had not yet been created and made, so we can safely exclude him from the list of possibilities (some might suggest the possibility of a pre-Adamic race of man, but, since that belief is on the peripheral, we'll not take up the time to address it here). This leaves only two others. Either the reference is directed toward the angelic host, or else we must allow for the idea that it's made to the preexistent spirits of men. Let's consider the arguments for both of these views.

(Please bear with us while we examine these competing positions. Our treatment of the subject may seem a bit lengthy, but we assure the reader that, in the end, it will all prove relevant to our presentation. Thanks in advance for your patience.)

Those who make the case for the angels begin by pointing out the fact that while angels are created beings (Psa. 148:2, 5), the exact time of their creation is not overtly given in Scripture. If we accept Psalm 33:6 as making reference to them, then we at least know the manner in which they were created. "*By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.*" But while this gives us assurance of the *fact* of their creation, it still gives us nothing regarding the precise *time* of it. However, there are a few things that can be determined by way of inference. First of all, Genesis 1:1 provides us with a broad, general statement regarding God's creative works, when it says, "*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*" The rest of the chapter details the development of the earth, as well as the creation of the earth's inhabitants. Chapter two begins by stating, "*Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.*" So, while details may not be given about the actual formation of the heavens, or of the heavenly host who occupy them, we can most assuredly conclude that they had to have been created and completed at some point within this timeframe. That being the case, then, it seems very likely that the host of heaven were created during the time between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2... at a time which was within the framework of God's acts of creation as described in Genesis, but which still preceded the earth's formation. Thus, they would have been the only created beings who were actually in existence at the time.

Another strength upon which they rely is tradition. Indeed, the earliest extant Greek translation of the Old Testament from the original Hebrew, the Septuagint, renders the phrase "sons of God" as "the angels of Elohim." This rendering is supported by a broad consensus of Hebrew authorities, who, to the best of our knowledge, unanimously agree that this is the way in which this reference has been understood down through the ages.

Finally, their belief is bolstered by comparing Job 1:6 and 38:7 (assuming that the sons of God mentioned in 1:6 are the same as those mentioned in 38:7) with parallel passages, such as I Kings 22:19-23. In this particular passage of Scripture, those who are gathered on the right hand and of the left of the Lord are specifically said to be the host of heaven. (The fact that one of these spirits volunteers to be a lying spirit in the mouths of all of Ahab's prophets shows that it could not have been a human spirit.) Isaiah 6:1-3 also lends itself to this interpretation, with its reference to the seraphim gathered around the Throne of God, crying, "*Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory.*" These, as well as other

similar verses, assist in providing a likely identity for the sons of God in Job.

As for those who argue for Preexistence, their interpretation of Job 38 has no lengthy history upon which to rest. Theirs is of a more recent origin. Furthermore, there is no textual support for their interpretation. Nothing that is said in the surrounding text lends its endorsement to the idea. In their defense of it, they make the assumption that whenever the Scriptures speak of sons (Heb. *benei*) in any sense, it must necessarily be speaking of *literal* offspring. Since God is said to be the Father of spirits (Heb. 12:9), they conclude that this means that He is the Father of *human* spirits, and of them alone, since they are uniquely made in His image and likeness. And thus, this explanation is offered as support for the idea that the sons of God must be the preexistent spirits of men. However, those who hold to this interpretation feel that the greatest defense for their claim is a strong offense... and so they challenge the credibility of the majority view. To be sure, if they were actually able to rule out the angels as being viable possibilities, it would do a great deal toward buttressing their case. Theirs would basically be the only view left standing. So how is this challenge presented? It comes through the citation of Hebrews 1:6. As you may recall, it says,

“For unto which of the angels said He at any time, thou art My son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to Me a son?”

It's true that a cursory reading of this verse does seem to establish grounds for reasonable doubt. But is it enough to eliminate the possibility that the sons of God referred to in Job 38:7 were angels? That is the pivotal question, and one about which we should deliberate long and hard. However, in the course of that deliberation, there are a few facts that must be taken into account.

When we consider the term “son(s) of God,” it's important to acknowledge that there are various senses in which it's used throughout Scripture. As is borne out in an entry in the International Jewish Encyclopedia, the Hebrew phrase *Benei Elohim* is used to describe angels (with particular references to Job 1:6 and 38:7) or immensely powerful human beings, for example: judges or rulers (Psa. 82:6, “children of the Most High”); King David, as well as those who carried on his dynasty (II Sam. 7:14; Psa. 89:26-28); and Israel in a collective sense, referred to in the singular form, “God's son” (Exodus 4:22; Hosea 11:1). It goes on to state, *“In the Tanakh the term itself does not connote any form of physical descent from, or unity of essence with, God. The Hebrew idiom conveys an expression of holiness (to be special) or great power.”* In other words, the term is used in a figurative sense, and is applied either to an individual or to a group who is uniquely set apart for a holy purpose of God. This could certainly apply to men or angels.

Of course, when we come to the New Testament, the concept of the Son of God takes on an entirely different connotation. When Jesus identified Himself as being God's Son, He was not using the terminology in the traditional sense. The Pharisees understood exactly what He was claiming. He was not just declaring Himself to be a special messenger sent from God; He was professing Himself to be the *“monogenes huios,”* the only begotten Son of the Father, who was made in the image of, and was essentially one with God. Although they were familiar with the various ways in which the term had been employed in the Tanakh, it had never been used the way in which Jesus was suggesting. It was precisely because of this declaration that they considered His words to be blasphemous; and it was for this reason that they sought an opportunity to put Him to death. He had brought an entirely new meaning to the expression “Son of God.” It was not used in the abstract, as it had been prior to that.

As we look to the Book of Hebrews, we see that the writer goes to great lengths to establish the

distinctiveness and exclusivity of Jesus' Sonship. He was *not* a Son in the typical sense; that is, in the previous sense with which the Hebrews had been commonly acquainted. He was the only begotten Son, in whom the Father was well pleased. In this regard, there were none like Him. He was the first of His kind. He, who is the brightness of God's glory, and the express image of His person, was made so much better than the angels, in that He obtained a more excellent name than they. You see, the angels may well have been spoken of as *benei Elohim*, by virtue of the fact that they were a special part of God's creation, and were specifically set apart for the purpose of divine ministry. They would easily fit the profile in the Old Testament sense of the term, as did so many of the sons of Adam in Old Testament times. But what could *not* be said of any one of them is that they had been *begotten* of God. "*For unto which of the angels said He at any time, thou art My son, this day have I begotten thee?*" Therefore, the distinction lies, not so much in whether or not an angel might be referred to as a son of God (speaking in a figurative, abstract sense), but whether or not he might be referred to as a son *who has been begotten of the Father*. No one other than Christ (and, by extension, those who are in Christ by way of new birth) may make such a claim. Therefore, it is not so much the TERM "son of God" that is at issue in Hebrews 1:6, but the SENSE in which it is used.

Whether or not one accepts this as being the intention behind Heb. 1:6, intellectual honesty compels us to admit that it does stand as a very reasonable explanation, and one that is consistent with biblical rationale. Therefore, unless there is a stronger argument that can contradict it (and we are presently unaware of any that have been offered), the explanation that the sons of God mentioned in Job 38:7 are angels remains on the table as the most defensible and practical interpretation. Understandably, this is not good news for those whose chief proof rests on the process of elimination. It definitely weakens their case. (Of course, there are always those who would argue that angels are nothing more than men, so the distinction that we've just made is really an untenable one. We won't go into a lengthy debate over this issue right now, but suffice it to say that if this were true, then we would have to totally disregard the meaning behind Heb. 1:6. If angels cannot be called begotten sons, and angels are just men, then that would mean that no man could ever hope of becoming begotten of God. Wouldn't that be so? And yet, I Peter 1:3 says that God has begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead! Do you see the problem that would be created here?)

Before we move on to the third deduction, we should briefly review the claim that the use of the term "sons" always implies literal offspring. There are two prime examples that show otherwise: one of them is from the Old Testament, and the other one is from the New. I Kings 20:35 speaks of "*the sons of the prophets.*" Clearly, these were not the literal offspring of the prophets, but were simply their disciples and followers. Also, Galatians 3:7 says, "*Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.*" In this passage, we see that faith is the determining factor that establishes one as being a son of Abraham, and not physical lineage. So the argument offered for Preexistence cannot be sustained in this way.

So far, we've explored two primary deductions from Job 38:7. The first of these pertained to the issues of WHAT, WHEN and WHERE. During our excavation of facts in these fields, nothing turned up which provided any genuine support for the doctrine of Preexistence. Next, we examined two exegetical arguments regarding WHO it is that was identified in the text; the traditional view of angels, and its main challenger, the preexistent spirits of men. As we've just seen, this examination also failed to provide the proof needed to justify the teaching. Now, we'll consider a third deduction, which has to do with the issue of WHY. Why did God ask these questions of Job? What was the purpose behind them? And were they

actually designed to promote a belief in a preexistent state of the human spirit?

Preexistencists say that God's intention for asking Job about his whereabouts while the morning stars were singing, and the sons of God were shouting for joy at the foundation of the earth was to jog his memory. They believe that Job should have responded to God's question, "*Where wast thou...*" by saying, "I WAS THERE!" But they offer no real reason for making this assumption, and none can be offered for them, other than the fact that it's based on their doctrinal presupposition.

We should keep in mind that the Lord had already stated that Job was darkening His counsel with words which were devoid of knowledge (chapter 38, verses 1 and 2). Hence, it appears obvious that the questions asked by God were designed to drive that point home.

The truth of the matter is, God's questions were *rhetorical*, which means that they were *not intended* to produce a response. Instead, they were meant to make a statement---that any response given by Job would have only reinforced the point God was making. Job was clearly faced with questions which were beyond his ability to answer knowledgably. Any answer that he might possibly have spoken would have proceeded from complete presumption and speculation on his part. Therefore, he did the wisest thing he could have done in that situation, and he placed his hand over his mouth!

We need to be perfectly honest with ourselves about the purpose behind God's line of questioning. Was it to stir up memories of events from preexistent days? Was God saying, in effect, "*Job, don't you remember when...?*" It hardly seems likely. Remember, He was pointing out to Job things of which he had no knowledge; not things which had been known to him, but had simply been lost, as he passed through some sort of Platonic "veil of forgetfulness." So unless God just decided to change the entire tenor of His words, or to redirect His line of questioning midstream into the course of His dialogue with Job, we must discount this view as being unjustifiable.

(Some have said that the fact that God asked Job *where* he was at the time of the earth's founding suggests that he must have been *somewhere*. But the implication seems more likely to have been that he was *nowhere* rather than *somewhere*. Besides, where else *could* he have been, if not there? Think about that very carefully before you answer.)

As we wind up our observations into Job 38:4-7, there's one last thing that we'd like to briefly address. It goes right to the heart of the matter as to whether or not these sons of God could have been preexistent spirits of men. Let's direct our attention to John 1:10-13, with particular emphasis on verse 12.

*"He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to **become** the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name, which are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."*

What, some may ask, is the relevance of this passage to our subject? Simply this. *The only possible way in which preexistent human spirits could have been the sons of God spoken of in Job is if the doctrine of Universal Fatherhood is true.* But the scripture quoted above flies in the face of such a theory. If all men are *already* the children of God, then why would John say that those who receive Christ are given the power or ability to *become* God's sons (more accurately rendered children)? And why would Jesus

emphasize that we all must be born from above? Indeed, the questions beg to be asked: how can one become what he already is? And why would such an offer be made, if the thing being offered is something we already possess? Since we've addressed the issue of Universal Fatherhood in other writings, we'll not burden the reader with a challenge to it here. But in light of our subject, and in view of our text, this much must be said. Even though men may be called, chosen and elected from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God, the opportunity to become a member of the family of God avails itself *only after* one has been born into this world, not before (and that, only after one has received Christ into his heart.). This is scripturally sound, and in all good fidelity.

EPHESIANS 2:1, 5; JOHN 5:24; I JOHN 3:14

*“And you hath He quickened, who **were dead** in trespasses and sins...even when we **were dead** in sins, hath (He) quickened us together with Christ...”*

*“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but **is passed from death unto life.**”*

*“We know that **we have passed from death unto life**, because we love the brethren.”*

It's been said that while the doctrine of Preexistence of spirits may not be plainly stated in the New Testament, it is clearly implied in these verses. If it's true that we were all born into this world in a state of death, and, through Christ, we were able to pass from death unto life, then it naturally suggests that we were once alive prior to this. The reason for this is because the word *death*, according to Webster, simply means *the end of life*. Therefore, it's believed that the only way in which mankind could possibly be spiritually stillborn is if he first possessed life in a previous state.

Not only is Preexistence thought to be implied in these verses, but also in verses which speak of our alienation from God, and our subsequent redemption and reconciliation to Him (Col. 1:21; II Cor. 5:18-20). In lieu of these, the same type of questions is asked, how could we have been alienated from God, if we had not had a previous relationship with Him? And how could we be reconciled to God, unless there had been a prior conscious affiliation with Him in the first place? These are all good questions, and ones that deserve answers.

The simplest, and most direct response to every one of these questions is found in our understanding of I Corinth. 15:22... *“For as **in Adam all die**, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”* It's common knowledge that the state of death in which all are born is due to the sin which Adam committed while in the Garden. But we should also remember that there was a time prior to the Fall when Adam walked with God in a very vital and intimate relationship. Because of his transgression, sin passed over all men, and death by sin, by virtue of the fact that all men were seminally present in Adam. But mankind's presence in the first man also means that we shared in the life that was experienced beforehand, in the same way that Levi paid tithes in Abraham. Therefore, it is to be understood in a corporate sense, and not an individual one, that life preceded death, relationship preceded alienation, and possession preceded redemption.

Anticipating this response, and acknowledging the rightness of it, some have argued that what is true in

the corporate sense also applies to the individual. And so they continue to claim that in order to be revived from death, and to be reconciled to God, each of us must have lived and known Him before our natural birth. We recognize that, as individuals, we *do* suffer the consequences, or enjoy the benefits that come down to us all corporately. This is a commonly understood principle. However, there is absolutely no reason why we should believe that the life which Adam partook of prior to the Fall, and we through him, may be freely translated to mean that individually, each of us had lived before as preexistent spirits. This is an intolerable stretch of the imagination, and totally outside the realm of responsible interpretive practices. Hypothetically speaking, it would be the equivalent of saying that because we are current shareholders in Ford Motor Company, and Henry Ford experienced life before his company actually came into existence, we, too, must have lived before the foundation of the company. That just doesn't make sense.

PSALM 90:1-3

“Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God. Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men.”

This prayer of Moses has also been thought to possess overtones of Preexistence. The idea might be presented this way. There are two Hebrew words that are commonly translated in the Old Testament as “generations.” The first of these is *toledaw* (Strong’s #8435), which means, “*descent, I.e. family; (fig.) history:---birth, generations.*” The second word is *dore* (#1755), and it means, “*prop. a revolution of time, I.e. an age or generation; also a dwelling:---age, generation, posterity.*” Its root word, *dure*, means, “*prop. to gyrate (or move in a circle), i.e. to remain:---dwell.*” The difference between these two words is that, while *toledaw* speaks primarily of posterity or descent, *dore* includes the concept of ages or epochs of time in its definition. Therefore, when Moses said that God has been our dwelling place in all generations (*dore*), he must have had a particular idea in mind that he wanted to express. Had he meant to limit his reference to the physical descendents of Adam, he would have simply used the word *toledaw* in this verse. The fact that he used the word *dore* shows that the prophet believed that God has been our habitation in all ages, including those which existed prior to the earth’s founding.

This would be a fairly reasonable argument, were it not for the fact that these two words are Hebraic synonyms for one another. As evidence of this, both words, *toledaw* and *dore*, are translated as the Greek collective noun *genea* in the Septuagint. *Genea*, according to Dr. Strong’s Greek Dictionary (#1074), means, “*a generation; by implying an age (the period or the persons):---age, generation, nation, time.*” Vine’s *Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* ties the two concepts together, and gives it’s concrete meaning as “*the period during which people live.*” And Gerhard Kittel’s *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* says that during the time of the writing of the LXX, *genea* simply meant “*the age of man, or generation, in the sense of contemporaries.*” So, out of the mouth of two or three witnesses, we see that there was no real significance in the fact that Moses used *dore* instead of *toledaw*. He could have used either word, and still conveyed the same idea. *Dore* just happened to be the more common of the two (it was used more than 160 times in the Old Testament). What is significant, however, is that, regardless of the word used, there is a direct correlation between the ages which are implicit in it, and the genealogical, or blood-bound descendents who lived during the course of these time periods. The connection between them is undeniable, and tends to limit the concept of “all generations” to the full term of man’s existence

in the earth. It speaks of all of the ages of mankind, past, present and future. But it says nothing about ages before which people lived. Now, let's go back to our text.

We should readily acknowledge that **the main subject in all three of these verses is God**. The presence of the word *Thou* in each line shows this to be true. **THOU** (God) has been an abiding place for men during the course of each and every generation (a declaration of His *provision*). **THOU** has existed from everlasting to everlasting, long before the forming of the earth and the bringing forth of the mountains (showing His *preeminence*). And **THOU** dost wield the power to turn man at His will, in the direction of Thy choosing (*omnipotence*). All of these things are independently true because **THOU ART GOD!** Collectively, they were meant to attest to His divine attributes! Therefore, we may accurately and honestly state that Preexistence *is* brought out in this passage. But it is *God's* preexistence that is established as fact here, and not ours! We would conclude, then, that for anyone to intrude on this, it could only be through an act of presumption .

The bottom line is this. If Moses had really intended to express a belief in the doctrine of the Preexistence of spirits, he could have easily done so here. Rather, he declares that, while God has been man's rightful dwelling place for as long as generations of men have existed, He predates, not only those generations, but all things (Col. 1:16-17).

Isaiah 40:21

*“Have ye not known? Have ye not heard? Hath it not been told you from the beginning? **Have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth?** It is He that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are like grasshoppers...”*

Although this verse isn't brought up nearly as often as the others at which we've looked, it does occasionally find its way into the evidence room for Preexistence. Those who are of this persuasion believe that it has God's fingerprints all over it.

The idea that's said to be conveyed here is that each of us must have been conscious beings from the beginning, and that we all must possess knowledge from premortal times, otherwise it would be impossible for us to know, hear or understand anything from the foundation of the earth. How else could we have been told anything from the beginning, unless we were actually there, existing as individuals, and possessing the ability to comprehend from that time onward?

Before we consider the question of how, we should discover the reason why the questions posed in verse 21 were asked in the first place. Let's look at the surrounding text for our answers.

As is readily apparent, the main theme of Isaiah's prophetic utterance was idolatry. He was addressing the foolishness of men in general as they worship their dumb idols. The entire monologue centers around verse 18, where the question is asked, *“To whom will ye liken God? Or what likeness will ye compare unto Him?”* And again, in verse 25, it is repeated, *“To whom then will ye liken Me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One.”* The prophet then goes on to declare just how lop-sided any comparison with God would be.

In reading over the main body of this passage (vs.12-28), it would be difficult not to notice the fact that the

tone of the questions asked sounds very much like that in the Book of Job. God is clearly chiding those who would lean on the arm of the flesh, or look to the works of their own hands for answers. In effect, He is saying, “*Don’t you know? Haven’t you been listening? Haven’t you been paying attention to what’s been told you from the beginning?*” It’s very similar to the way a teacher would correct his students, or like the way a parent would discipline his children. But what is it that man should have learned from the beginning? From that time forward, he should have learned of the woeful inadequacy that exists between God and himself. Consider the following verse: “*It is He that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are like grasshoppers...*” (v.22a). With that in mind, the message is really simple. No matter how earnestly men aspire to lift themselves up in their own power and might, God views them as a bunch of grasshoppers...leaping, but never able to stay aloft. Indeed, He brings the princes to nothing, and makes the judges of the earth as vanity (v.23). Though they view themselves as being independently wise, and capable of deciding for themselves what is right or wrong, good or evil (based on the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life), they invariably fall to the earth. This was the lesson that the first man, Adam, learned in the beginning during the Garden experience, and mankind has had daily reminders of it ever since.

It was with this very issue in view that the apostle Paul wrote to the church in Rome, “*For God’s [holy] wrath and indignation are revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who in their wickedness repress and hinder the truth and make it inoperative. For that which is known about God is evident to them and made plain in their inner consciousness, because God [Himself] has shown it to them. For ever since the creation of the world His invisible nature and attributes, that is, His eternal power and divinity, have been made intelligible and clearly discernable **in and through the things that have been made** (His handiworks). So [men] are without excuse [altogether without defense or justification], [Psa. 19:1-4].” Rom. 1:19-20, Amplified.*

If we are prepared to receive it, the answer to our question lies right here. Ever since the creation of the world, God has made known His eternal power and divinity unto man (beginning with the first man, and continuing with all those who have been born in him). And the way in which it has historically been shown to him is in and through the things that God has made. The revelation of the greatness and grandeur of God has been embedded in man’s environment...and it remains there, even unto this day! Remember Psalm 19, “*The heavens declare the glory of God; the firmament sheweth His handiwork. Day unto day uttered speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world...*” Therefore, since the heavens and the earth preceded man in the order of creation, there has never been a time during man’s long existence that he could say that he didn’t know, or that he hadn’t been told. The elements have been shouting the message to mankind down through the ages...and his collective conscience, as a strong second witness, attests to the truth of it! (And note, it was never said, “Have ye not understood from before the foundation of the earth?”)

Well, these are the primary verses which are used to support the doctrine of the Preexistence of spirits. There may be a few other passages that are occasionally brought up, but, to our knowledge, every one of them relies upon the ones that we’ve just examined as a foundation. So, having given fair treatment to the arguments, we’ll go ahead and offer our concluding remarks. We’ll begin by speaking directly to our colleagues.

Our initial reason for delving into this subject was not to necessarily disprove any particular view of the

spirit's origin. We believe that there remains room and reason for debate, as long as it's done in a respectful way. However, regardless of the position we take, we must all be prepared to not only defend that position, but also to deal with the ramifications associated with it. And, as we see it, those who hold to Preexistence have the most to explain, and the least amount of Scripture with which to explain it.

As we said in our introduction, there are those among us who believe in Preexistence, but who merely present it as a possibility that deserves consideration. We have no problem with that. As the scriptures say, let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. However, there are others who refer to it as a rock solid fact, and as a foregone conclusion in the course of their presentation. As a result, they feel completely justified in tying in all kinds of fanciful ideas with it, which are totally outside of the parameters of Scripture (such as the idea that we were given the choice whether or not to come to earth; the idea that the conditions into which we were born were the results of transgressions which occurred in the premortal world; or the idea that all remembrance of that former life was withheld from our consciousness as we passed through a "veil of forgetfulness;" all of which ideas came from Plato's theories). It's precisely this kind of practice that we contest so strongly, simply because of its potential to lead so many astray.

We do find a bit of irony here. For years, many of those who profess to promote sonship have charged the mainstream church with employing "cunningly devised fables" in their presentation of the gospel. Many of them have even mocked those who have set forth doctrinal beliefs which were based primarily upon the imaginations of men. One particular teaching that's been the subject of a great deal of mockery has to do with the states and conditions associated with the afterlife. It's been pointed out (and accurately so) that many of the current ideas regarding heaven and hell came from Greek philosophy and mythology. This is true. However, it's our persuasion that were we to entertain some of the notions that are being circulated regarding Preexistence, we would fall under the same category of carnal mindedness!

Need we resort to vain imaginations in our presentation of sonship? Need we rely on what might have been, or what could have been? There are enough facts that we can declare with certainty from the Scriptures. So why should we risk walking on this thin ice for something that can neither edify us or bring us one whit closer to Christ?

Brethren, if we desire to have credibility amongst honest, truth-seeking theologians, we will present our message on a solid foundation of Scripture. That which requires us to go out on a limb, and to make proclamations based on biblical uncertainties, must be laid aside. The same goes for that which exceeds the proper bounds of reason. There is a philosophical rule known as the Law of Parsimony, which states that we are to use economy in assuming too much through reasoning. If we knowingly and intentionally violate that rule, then how can we expect to be taken seriously by the community of our peers?

One verse that seems apropos here is Ecclesiastes 3:11. It says, "*He hath made everything beautiful in His time: also He hath set **the world** in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.*" In order to fully appreciate the meaning of this verse, we need to look at a couple of words in particular. The first is the word translated as "world." It is *olam* in Hebrew, and is more commonly translated as eternity. However, the meaning assigned to it by Dr. Strong and other noted Hebrew authorities is "*concealed, i.e. the vanishing point; gen. time out of mind (past or future), i.e. (practically) eternity.*" The second word worth noting is "heart". The fact that it's used as a singular noun tells us that the author wants us to view all hearts as one (that is, as sharing a collective condition). Now, with these points in mind, let's revisit our text. In His original design, God set *olam* in the heart of

mankind. And what was the purpose for His doing so? It was “***so that** no man can find out the work that God maketh from beginning to end.*” This, dear friend, is God’s own explanation. He has purposefully set a concept of eternity within us, a keen sense of awareness that there is time (both past and future) *beyond which* our minds are able to comprehend...a point wherein time just seems to vanish. By virtue of this condition, *man is unable to find out any more of God’s works than God has been willing to reveal to him.* We are certainly grateful to Him for allowing us to see into the past, and to know the order in which all things in the material realm were brought into existence. We are likewise delighted to have been given insight into those things which God hath prepared for those who love Him. It’s a fantastic vision, breathtaking both for its beauty and for its expansiveness. Its breadth, its length, its depth and its height are all almost more than we can take in! But we should acknowledge the fact that there are some things regarding what God will do in the eons to come that are absolutely beyond our comprehension, things which are exceeding abundantly above all that we might ask or even think at this time. Therefore, as Ireneus argued in his day, we should content ourselves in the knowledge that God has revealed all that need concern us, and not attempt to surpass that. To do so only invites information from outside sources... sources which are extremely unreliable and, in many cases, detrimental to a sound Biblical worldview.

In conclusion, then, our answer to the original question is really quite simple. *Is the teaching of sonship built upon the doctrine of the preexistence of spirits?* The answer is **NO**. Personally speaking, we think it best to err on the side of caution when it comes to the origin of the spirit. Since there is no clear statement on the subject in Scripture, we should be careful not go beyond that which is written, or say more than is needed. But even if we privately held to the doctrine of Preexistence of spirits, we would have to acknowledge that Jesus never mentioned it while presenting the message of sonship (other than that of His own). The same is true of Paul, who undisputably expounded on sonship more than any other writer in the New Testament. Therefore, if they left off the teaching of the Preexistence of all spirits in their presentation, why should anyone else feel it necessary to include it?

To be continued...

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