

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Appendix H

The Eternal Preexistence of Jesus' Divine Nature

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On the one hand, the human nature of Jesus—in fact, the very person known as Jesus of Nazareth—had a beginning. Strictly speaking, Jesus the Christ did not exist prior to his virginal conception. But on the other hand, the divine nature of Jesus did not have a beginning; it is in fact eternal. As the Logos or second person of the Trinity, he has existed forever. This is usually called the *preexistence of Jesus Christ*, even though the quality of preexistence applies only to the divine being who *became* Jesus Christ.

On many occasions Jesus declared or implied that he existed before he came into this world. He said that he “came down out of heaven” (John 6:41; see 3:31; 6:38) or “descended from heaven” (John 3:13), and he spoke of being sent by the Father (John 8:16; see Matt 15:24; John 3:34). “I came forth from the Father and have come into the world” (John 16:28). John the Baptist, who in fact was conceived about six months prior to Jesus’ miraculous conception (Luke 1:24–36), declared that Jesus existed before him (John 1:15,30).

Not only did Jesus exist prior to his birth; he existed prior to the creation of the world. Jesus speaks of existing in glory with the Father “before the world was” (John 17:5; see v. 24). Jesus is described as having existed “from the beginning” (1 John 1:1; Heb. 1:10). Indeed, Jesus himself (specifically, the Logos) was active in the very creation of the world (John 1:3; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:16; Heb 1:2,10).

To say that Jesus Christ was preexistent does not in itself imply that he was divine. Even the Arians’ Jesus existed prior to his incarnation and prior to the world since he was the first being created by the Father. The only kind of preexistence that is consistent with true deity is *eternal* preexistence, and Scripture does in fact attribute eternal preexistence to Jesus (as the Logos).

In John 1:1–2 the Logos who became Jesus Christ is described as having been “in the beginning with God.” In whatever sense God was “in the beginning,” so also was the Logos. Then John 1:3 says, “All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him

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nothing came into being that has come into being.” Here the Logos not only is named as the Creator of all things, but is carefully -distinguished from the category of things that have themselves been created or have “come into being” (see also Rev 5:13). The Logos himself is uncreated, beginningless, eternal. Similarly Col 1:17 says that God the Son “is before all things,” i.e., he exists (present tense) prior to all created things. George Lawlor (39) says,

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The One through whom everything was called into existence necessarily existed before all else was created. Prior to this creative work, Christ filled all the unmeasured periods of an unbeginning eternity. He preexisted all matter and material things. Everything is posterior to Him. All created things celebrate a point of origin. Christ does not, in terms of His divine existence.¹

In a remarkable testimony to his eternal preexistence Jesus said, “Before Abraham was born, I am” (John 8:58). Jesus is obviously claiming that he existed *before* Abraham was born, but the language he uses implies more. The word used for Abraham (*ginomai*) refers to his coming into existence as a past event; but the word Jesus used for himself was the simple word “to be” in an emphatic present tense, *ego eimi*, “I am.” Such a use of the present tense implies that even prior to Abraham he was existing in an eternal, continuing existence. In other words, Abraham had a beginning, but Jesus did not. Also, the use of the present tense where we would have expected the past tense seems to be a deliberate echo of the divine name in Exod 3:14.

Other texts basically affirm the eternality of Jesus. Micah 5:2 prophesies of the Messiah, “His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity.” He is “Eternal Father” (Isa 9:6). Hebrews 1:10–12 applies Ps 102:25–27 to Jesus, and thus attributes eternal immutability to him: “You are the same” (Heb 1:12). “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb 13:8). Jesus declares, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Rev 22:13).

The eternal preexistence of Jesus Christ in the person of the divine Logos is consistent with the OT “angel of Yahweh” phenomena,² and with the NT’s application of OT statements about Yahweh to Jesus.³

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¹ Lawlor, George L. (1978). *When God Became Man*. (Chicago: Moody), 39.

² Lawlor, 42-44.

³ Cottrell, J. (2002). *The Faith Once for All: Bible Doctrine for Today*. (Joplin: College Press Pub.), 246-247.