

“FOR US AND FOR OUR SALVATION”: THE PLAN OF SALVATION SEEN IN THE INCARNATION

*τὸν δι’ ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ διὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν σωτηρίαν
κατελθόντα καὶ σαρκωθέντα καὶ ἐνανθρωπήσαντα...*

*Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was
incarnate and was made man...*

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At the center of the Nicene Creed is the doctrine of the Incarnation—God becoming Man. This article argues that the Incarnation is properly located within the eternal plan of God for salvation. Thus it is seen in several New Testament texts that refer to the Incarnation as “foreknown from before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4; 1 Pet 1:20; Rev 13:8), as well as in the very first prophecy, Genesis 3:15. Moreover, pro-Nicene Trinitarian categories (such as the person/essence distinction) allow other texts in the Old Testament to be understood in light of the Incarnation. Such texts include those that refer to the appointment of the Son as the mediator (e.g., Ps 110; Zech 12:10), as well as by the existence of typology in the Old Testament. Considered as a whole, the Scriptures present the Incarnation as something planned by God before time, prophesied throughout the Old Testament, revealed in Jesus, and a reality that remains for all eternity.

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Introduction

In many ways, our lives revolve around Christmas. December 25 both bridges our calendar year and splits our academic year. Christmas creates traditions, and kids look forward to it months in advance. Even adults grow nostalgic for how the holidays used to be when children were in the home.

The centrality of Christmas is evident not just in our Western world, but it is seen in the Nicene Creed as well. The Creed is essentially a series of declarations,

centering on the Son. And in the middle of the Creed is this statement regarding the Son: “*Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man...*” (emphasis added). If the Son provides the Creed’s primary structure, the Incarnation provides its heart and soul. As the Christian celebrates Christmas, he celebrates the Incarnation, and he celebrates the orthodoxy that Nicaea affirmed. In fact, the word “for,” repeated twice in both English and Greek (δι’ and διὸ) is the Creed’s very first purpose clause. The first time the First Council of Nicaea chose to say *why* the Son did *what* the Son did in the Incarnation, it was a dual declaration—*for us, and for our salvation*. But what exactly is meant in that the incarnate Son of God was “for us” and “for our salvation”?

The Incarnation—What It Is Not

The Creed’s central claim is that the Son, described in the first half, “came down” and was “incarnate.” The *who* of the Incarnation is the Son. Specifically, the “Only Begotten Son of God” who is “born of the Father before all ages.” The *what* of the Incarnation is “became man.” What does it mean that the *who* (the Only Begotten Son of God) *became* man? It certainly cannot mean that the Son of God experienced change. After all, the Creed already established that he is “God from true God,” and true God does not change (Ps 102:26–28). God is what He is, what He always was, and what He always will be (Jas 1:17). This is the classic doctrine of divine immutability, drawn from such texts as:

- “They will perish, but you will remain … you are the same, and your years have no end” (Ps 102:26–27),
- “I Yahweh do not change” (Mal 3:6) and,
- “the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change…” (Jas 1:17).

Taken together, these texts teach that God Himself is not subject to alteration, change, or variation.¹ Given the eternal generation of the Son, it follows that if immutability is true of the Father, it must likewise be true of the Son. And of course that is exactly what the Scripture declares in Hebrews 13:8: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”²

Because of texts like Psalm 102:26–27, Malachi 3:6, Hebrews 13:8, and James 1:17, it is wrong to see the birth of Jesus as a change in God. But it is a change nevertheless. In the Creed, the change *is not* within God, but rather *is within* the world as God “came down from heaven” for us (κατελθόντα ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν). Contrary to

¹ While James teaches the divine immutability of God (1:17), he also connects this doctrine to the practical benefit for believers—that the Father provides for His children. Being immutable, God shows no variation with this gracious disposition toward us. Craig L. Blomberg and Mariam J. Kamell, *James*, ZECNT (Grands Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 74.

² Calvin argues that “yesterday” refers to God’s immutability in the OT, “today” speaks of the time of the “promulgation of the Gospel,” while “forever” extends to eternity. The point is that the Son is, “truly and properly” immutable. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Apostle to the Hebrews*, trans. John Owen (Bellingham, WA: Logos, 2010), 345.

the Arians, there never was a time when the Son was not.³ The unchangeable and unchanging Son has always existed. Yet, something did change in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago. The Son was born as Jesus.

The Incarnation's Definition: ἐνανθρωπήσαντα

God is Spirit, and has no body (John 4:24). As Jesus said, “A spirit does not have flesh and bones” (Luke 24:39). Simply put, God is invisible (ἀόρατον; 1 Tim 1:17; Heb 11:27).⁴ Further compounding the problem, God is outside of time (Deut 33:27; Job 36:26; Isa 40:28). God has no beginning, no succession of moments, and no end.⁵ For God to visibly and personally reveal Himself to creatures, He (by logical necessity) must enter time.

Hence the Incarnation. The invisible God took on physicality. The eternal God entered time. He came down from heaven for us men, and for our salvation, and the means by which He came down was the assumption of a human nature.⁶ Or, to say it as the creed does: He “was incarnate and was made man” (κατελθόντα καὶ σαρκωθέντα καὶ ἐνανθρωπήσαντα). This word, κατελθόντα, describes the Son’s assumption of a new nature, a second nature, a human nature. The result is stated in one Greek word but with an infinite mystery behind it: ἐνανθρωπήσαντα—He “was made man”—or, simply put, *the Incarnation*.

The humanity of Christ is on practically every page of the New Testament.⁷ Jesus was, for example, *born* (Luke 2:1–20). He was *named* and *circumcised* (Luke 2:21). He *hungered* and *thirsted* (Mark 11:12; John 19:28). And, not to put too fine a point on it, He *died* (Matt 27:50; Mark 15:37; Luke 23:46; John 19:30; Rom 8:34; 1 Thess 4:10).

The Incarnation does not simply indicate that Jesus experienced human things like humans do. It was not a mere show, and He was no trite actor. Rather, He was truly made (for a little while, anyway) lower than the angels (Heb 2:9; cf. Ps 8:2, 5). He took on a human mind and soul, with all their attendant limitations (Luke 2:52; Mark 13:32). The one who made all things became subject to all kinds of things—the one who made nature became subject to it, the one who ordained all law was arrested, the one who gave speech was silent, and the one who appoints death, died.

³ The Arian view is laid out by Athanasius in *De Synodis*, 8, Greek Text of the 4th Creed of Sirmium (also called the “Dated Creed”). It can be found in Hahn, *Bibliothek der Symbole und Glaubensregeln der Alten Kirche* (Breslau: E. Morgenstern, 1897), 204–205.

⁴ For a discussion of how ἀόρατον functions in Heb particularly in relationship to Moses “seeing” God, see: Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 616–17.

⁵ Mark Jones, *God Is* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 51–57.

⁶ The common way this was described in the early church was that “He remained what He was; what He was not, He assumed.” This kind of language is seen in Cyril of Alexandria as well as Gregory of Nyssa, but probably has its origin with Gregory of Nazianzus, in *On God and Christ: the Five Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius*, trans. Frederick Williams and Lionel R. Wickham, Popular Patristics 23 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002), 39.13.

⁷ Macleod notes that the humanity of Christ is so evident, “this scarcely requires argument.” Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, Contours of Christian Theology (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1998), 161.

It is in this way that Jesus was the true and better Adam (Rom 5:12–21). There are simply so many examples of the theological importance of the Incarnation that any attempt to list them could be absurd. But a key one to note: the devil tempted Jesus (Matt 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13). Given that God cannot be tempted (Jas 1:13), it is both reasonable and necessary to deduce that Jesus was tempted according to His humanity; thus, the reality of the temptation affirms the veracity of the Incarnation (Heb 2:18; 4:15).⁸

The temptation is just one example of the Incarnation’s theological significance. In His temptation, Jesus succeeded where Adam failed. While Jesus was not tempted *geographically* where Adam was, he was certainly tempted *spiritually* where Adam was. Both Adam and Jesus were sinless. Both Adam and Jesus were in some sense federal (or covenantal) representatives. Both Adam and Jesus were attacked by the Devil. Adam failed, bringing death to all of mankind who came from him and through him. Jesus succeeded, bringing righteousness and life to all who are under Him (Rom 5:12–21).⁹ Of course, Jesus could have defeated the Devil specifically by virtue of His *authority as God*; but that is different than defeating the Devil by virtue of His *obedience to God* (Heb 2:14–18; 5:7–9). The latter validates Jesus as the incarnate redeemer.

The Nicene Creed was correct in giving the Incarnation center stage. There are basic tensions in the Bible that require a savior with two natures to resolve—e.g., the Savior must be God to be holy as God is holy, and He must be man to be put to death as an atonement for sins.¹⁰ It was Calvin who wrote: “It was the greatest importance for us that the he who was to be our Mediator be both true God and true man.”¹¹ When pressed on why it was so important, Calvin responded: “If someone asks why this is necessary … it has stemmed from a heavenly decree, on which men’s salvation is depended.”¹²

The Incarnation’s Origin: The Eternal Christmas Story

There are many recent works that give excellent exegetical explanations and defenses of Jesus’ humanity.¹³ The rest of this article will take a narrower approach

⁸ Of course, one can go too far in this logic and end up bifurcating the work of Jesus. It is best to say that Jesus, the God-man, was tempted. It was the person who was tempted, not the nature. So when I say he was tempted “according to his humanity,” I do not intend to imply that only his humanity was sinless, or that only his humanity mediates for us. For more on this careful distinction, see Mark Jones, *Knowing Christ* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2015), 28–29.

⁹ Augustine covered the importance of Christ’s humanity in the temptation accounts in *De Trinitate*, 4.3.5; 4.13.17. cf. Aquinas, *ST3*, Q41, A1–3.

¹⁰ Augustine was one of the first to make this point. See *City of God*, 9.13. Cf. Charnock, “The Existence and Attributes of God,” in *Works*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2010), 60.

¹¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1 & 2.*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, The Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 1:2.12.1.

¹² Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:2.12.1.

¹³ R. B. Jamieson, *The Paradox of Sonship: Christology in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 2021), 76–98; Brandon D. Crowe, *The Lord Jesus Christ: The Biblical Doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ*, vol. 3, We Believe (Bellingham: Lexham Academic, 2023), 219–320; John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 255–77; Robert A. Peterson, *Salvation Accomplished by the Son: The Work of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 27–40.

by picking up Calvin's assertion that the Incarnation was essential because of "a heavenly decree." This so-called "decree" reveals how the Incarnation was *for us, and for our salvation*.

Ephesians refers to the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and the sending of the Spirit as a "plan for the fullness of time" (Eph 1:10; 3:9). In Ephesians 1 this plan is inclusive of election (v. 4), the sending of the Son (v. 5), His death (v. 7), and both the saint's regeneration and sealing (v. 13). Note that the "plan" inherently involves the Son's humanity, as it entails the "redemption through his blood" (v. 7).

Calvin said the Incarnation came from a "decree," and Ephesians describes it as "a plan for the fullness of time." Peter personalizes it as "God's plan" (Acts 4:8). Elsewhere Peter says that Jesus' death by crucifixion happened according "to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23).

In other words, this plan did not originate on the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Rather, the Scriptures describe it as a plan with origins "before all time" (Jude 25). In fact, three key passages describe it as a plan "foreknown before the foundation of the world" (Eph 1:4; 1 Pet 1:20; Rev 13:8).

1 Peter 1:20

First Peter 1:20 reads: "He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you." Verse 19 indicates that it was "Christ ... a lamb without spot or blemish" who was foreknown. Peter particularly mentions that the lamb's atonement is what is in view ("you were ransomed ... with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb ...").

The *when* of the foreknowing is "before the foundation of the world" ($\pi\varphi\circ\kappa\alpha\beta\circ\lambda\eta\varsigma\kappa\circ\sigma\mu\circ\nu$). This expression indicates that the history of the Incarnation "begins before the world began in the intra-trinitarian plan."¹⁴ Thomas Schreiner writes that 1 Peter 1:20 confirms that "God determined before history ever began that the Christ would appear" as a man.¹⁵

Revelation 13:8

Revelation 13:8 reads: "everyone whose name has not been written *before the foundation of the world* ($\grave{\alpha}\pi\circ\kappa\alpha\beta\circ\lambda\eta\varsigma\kappa\circ\sigma\mu\circ\nu$) in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain"¹⁶ (emphasis added). The italicized text is nearly the identical expression used in 1 Peter 1:20, except that Peter describes the plan of redemption as "before ($\pi\varphi\circ$) the foundation of the world," while Revelation 13:8 says "from ($\grave{\alpha}\pi\circ$) the foundation of the world."

There is debate regarding what John describes as existing "before the foundation of the world." Two options are:

¹⁴ Andreas J. Köstenberger and Scott R. Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit*, NTSBT 24 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 166.

¹⁵ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, vol. 37, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 88.

¹⁶ Osborne is one of many commentators who notes the connection between 1 Pet 1:8 and Rev 13:8. See Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 503–504.

1. The writing of the book of life (“everyone whose name has not been written from before the foundation of the world”; e.g., ESV and LSB), or
2. the knowledge of the Lamb who was slain (“the lamb slain before the foundation of the world”; e.g., KJV, NIV).¹⁷

The argument for reading “the book of life written before the foundation of the world” in Revelation 13:8 is the connection to Revelation 17:8, where the same phrase is used (“the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life *from the foundation of the world*”; emphasis added). If that connection is followed, Revelation 13:8 refers to election as occurring before the foundation of time.¹⁸ The argument against seeing a connection between Revelation 13:8 and 17:8 is simply word order; κόσμου is the last word in 13:8, while γέγραπται is twelve words earlier. If the connection between the two verses is minimized, then Revelation 13:8 is understood to declare that the Lamb’s death was planned before time.¹⁹ In both views, the germane point is the same: the Incarnation is assumed before time.

Ephesians 1:4

This same expression—“πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου”—is also found in Ephesians 1:4: “he chose us in him *before the foundation of the world*, that we should be holy and blameless before him” (emphasis added). As it relates to the Incarnation, Ephesians 1:4 explicitly teaches that redemption through the blood of Christ is determined from “before the foundation of the world.”

By NT standards, Ephesians 1:3–14 is an exceptionally long sentence.²⁰ It encompasses the spiritual blessings of salvation that are from the Father, through the Son, and by the Spirit, with a sequential focus on election (vv. 3–6), redemption (7–12), and regeneration (13–14). In other words, it covers the whole breadth of salvation—hence the long sentence!

By progressing from Father to Son to Spirit, Ephesians 1:3–14 reveals a Trinitarian unity to the plan for the Incarnation. Verse 4 attributes election to the Father, but Paul says He chose us “in him,” the “him” referring to Christ. Further, the use of καθώς indicates that the benefits that come to a believer through redemption only come through the Incarnation of Christ. Of course, the sentence will go on to more fully develop the plan of the Incarnation, inclusive of the Son’s substitutionary death. But note when Paul understands that God purposed these blessings: “before the foundation of the world.” Paul locates this plan for the Incarnation (with its attendant blessings) in heaven, before time.

¹⁷ For an overview of these two views, see: Osborne, *Revelation*, 503–504.

¹⁸ This is the view followed by Craig Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 38a, AYBC (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 575; Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 166.

¹⁹ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 702; Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, TNTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1987), 164; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 252; Osborne, *Revelation*, 503–504.

²⁰ Charles J. Robbins, “The Composition of Eph 1:3–14,” *JBL* 105 (1986): 677.

Together, Ephesians 1:4, 1 Peter 1:20, and Revelation 13:8 reveal that “the second person of the Trinity was identified as the Christ before the foundation of the world, not merely in history.”²¹ In other words, the Incarnation was a pre-temporal plan.

The Incarnation's Company: Planned by Three, Experienced by One

Everything God does, He does as Trinity. So, the Incarnation is a Trinitarian plan. While the Incarnation itself is proper only for the second person of the Trinity, the Bible makes clear that all three Trinitarian persons planned it.

There are nearly a dozen passages that imply this, but deducing it requires a pro-Nicene framework which grants a conceptual distinction between God's essence and the Triune persons.²² In the pro-Nicene understanding, omniscience is an attribute of God, but knowledge itself is resident in the divine persons. So, consider again 1 Peter 1:20: “[Christ] was foreknown before the foundation of the world.” God is doing the foreknowing, and Christ is the one foreknown. If Christ was foreknown as the mediator, then He was foreknown by the Father. And if the Father eternally shares all of his knowledge with the Son, then Christ is foreknown as the mediator by both the Father and the Son (and likewise by the Spirit). Divine foreknowledge is itself intra-Trinitarian, as “coinherence in power leads to coinherence in knowledge.”²³

Another example makes a similar point concerning the Incarnation: Romans 3:25 (“... whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith”). There, Paul describes “God's eternal purpose” as putting Jesus forward to die.²⁴ Note that God is the actor, and “Christ Jesus”—in light of the Incarnation—is the object of His action, and thus this “putting forward” must be an intra-Trinitarian event.

That does not imply all three persons were necessarily involved in the same way (as we already saw in Eph 1). For example, one writer suggests that the putting forward of the Savior “can simultaneously be a work of the entire Trinity (with respect to the principle of the action) and a work of the Father alone (with respect to the subject of the action).”²⁵ More specifically, it could be said that the plan for the Incarnation was from the Father (as all things are; John 10:18). The Son's body was prepared by the Spirit (Luke 1:35). And the Son, of course, was the one to “take on

²¹ J. V. Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption* (Ross-Shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2016), 110–11.

²² Lewis Ayres, *Nicæa and Its Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 6–7. Duby notes that the distinction between person and essence may be frowned upon in exegesis (he grants that some find it “overly clever”), but the fact remains that this distinction is essential to understand who God is, so it is essential in interpreting passages that have a focus on Christ, such as the ones in this section. While some might consider this kind of pro-Nicene category extraneous to exegesis, Duby writes, “if ‘exegesis’ simply means an unfolding and setting forth of what is already there in the biblical text ... dogmatic theology's use of certain metaphysical concepts is an exegetical move.” Establishing “intra-Trinitarian” planning is going to, by necessity, involve utilization of a Trinitarian metaphysic in the form of the person/essence distinction. Steven J. Duby, *Jesus and the God of Classical Theism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022), 47–48.

²³ Vern S. Poythress, *Knowing and the Trinity* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2018), 58–59.

²⁴ Colin Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 186.

²⁵ Kyle Claunch, “What God Hath Done Together: Defending the Historic Doctrine of the Inseparable Operations of the Trinity,” *JETS* 56, no. 4 (2013): 798.

flesh” (John 1:14). Yet this still indicates that when God puts forward His Son for the Incarnation, it is an intra-Trinitarian “putting forward.”

The Incarnation’s Appointment: The Son as Mediator

The plan of salvation enters time in Genesis 3:15, which is often referred to as the *protoevangelium*, as it provides the Bible’s first prophecy of the Incarnation.²⁶ John Sailhamer refers to this text as “programmatic and foundational to the plot” of the Bible, as it unfolds the plan of redemption.²⁷ Walt Kaiser calls Genesis 3:15 the Bible’s “mother prophecy,” because it gives birth to the rest of Messianic expectation, while also leading to the literal birth of the Savior to a woman.²⁸ God’s response to the first earthly sin was judgment mixed with hope in Eve’s seed who would defeat the Devil, yet be wounded by the same.²⁹ This pattern (judgment with Messianic hope) will be God’s *modus operandi* for the rest of Scripture.

If the *protoevangelium* is understood as the “kernel of the gospel,” what exactly is contained within the kernel?³⁰ Genesis 3:15 hints that from the very beginning, God’s plan would involve a human offspring who brings mercy in the midst of judgment, who will crush (קָרַשׁ) the Devil, and yet that human would be wounded in the process.³¹

After Genesis 3:15, Scripture uses prophecy to unfold more details of God’s plan for the Savior. The prophesied seed will be from the people of Israel (Gen 17:1–16), from Judah (49:10), and from David (2 Sam 7:11–17). In addition to being David’s descendant, He will also be David’s Lord (Ps 110:1; Matt 22:43–45). He will be born in Bethlehem (Mic 5:2), yet dwell in Egypt (Hos 11:1) and launch His ministry in Galilee (Isa 9:1–2). Gentiles would come to Him (Isa 11:10), and He would minister to them (Isa 42:1–4, 61:1). He would move from the Gentiles to the Jews, entering Jerusalem on a donkey where He would be met with songs of praise (Zech 9:9). Despite all this, He would still be despised and rejected (Isa 53:3), betrayed for thirty pieces of silver (Zech 11:12–13), His clothes would be stripped (Ps 22:18). He would

²⁶ Gordon J. Wenham, “Genesis,” in *NBC*, ed. D. A. Carson, R. T. France, and Alec J. Motyer, 4th ed. (Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 1994), 63.

²⁷ John H. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” in *Genesis–Leviticus*, rev. ed., vol. 1, EBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 89–91.

²⁸ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “The Blessing of David: The Charter for Humanity,” in *The Law and the Prophets*, ed. John H. Skilton (Nutley, NJ: P&R, 1974), 38.

²⁹ Johnston reviews the different proposals for understanding if the “seed” is singular or collective: Gordon H. Johnston, “Promises of a King,” in *Jesus the Messiah: Tracing the Promises, Expectations, and Coming of Israel’s King* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2012), 39–40.

³⁰ Junod describes three interpretive options for the *protoevangelium*. First, that there is no victory in sight, but it just points to warfare between people and the devil. Second, that it points to Mary and the immaculate conception (Junod describes how the Catholic Church has since abandoned even the pretense of exegetically defending this view). Third is the view taken here, that the *protoevangelium* points to the gospel through the Savior’s death. See Eric Junod, “Protevangelium,” in *EC*, vol. 4 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2005), s.v.

³¹ James M. Hamilton, “The Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman: Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Genesis 3:15,” *SBJT* 10, no. 2 (2006): 31; Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament, Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 39.

be beaten (Isa 53:5), stabbed (Zech 13:7), pierced in His hands and feet (Ps 22:16;³² Isa 53:5; Zech 12:10). This affliction would result in His physical death (Isa 53:7–8; Dan 9:26), His burial (Isa 53:9), and His resurrection (Ps 16:10).

Two notes about a list like that: first, there are methodological questions about each of those prophecies (e.g., Were they understood as prophetic in their original context? Does the NT note them as fulfilments? Are they fulfilled in the same way as they were prophesied?).³³ The point here is not to get lost in the details of evaluating individual prophecy, as much as it is to establish that the Savior's Incarnation was prophesied in the OT. These prophecies outline a plan for redemption according to which God was directing history toward the Incarnation.

The Incarnation's Typology—The Savior Fits a Pattern

Beyond specific prophecies, there are entire thematic elements in the OT that point to the mission of the Messiah in the Incarnation. James Hamilton calls this “promise-shaped typology,” by which he means that there are promises God makes that form the outlines that are filled in as history progresses toward Christ.³⁴ While a study of typology is outside the scope of this article, the very existence of typology is a strong argument for including the Incarnation in our understanding of God's eternal plan of redemption. Typology demonstrates that there is a fixed goal in God's mind—namely redemption through the Incarnation—and God then directs history toward that goal through patterns and promises that approximate the outline of Jesus.³⁵ While there are many of these types, especially in the Torah, this analysis will briefly consider two: the Passover lamb and Melchizedek.

First, the image of the Passover lamb, established in Exodus 12, demonstrated that in the midst of judgment, God would spare His people at His own initiative, through a sacrifice of blood. In so doing, God would authenticate Himself as the deliverer by providing His own substitute (namely, a lamb).³⁶ As it pertains to redemption, the declaration that Christ is the Lamb of God reveals that it had always been God's plan for His Son to take on a human nature in order to die (John 1:29, 36; 1 Cor 5:7; Rev 5:6; 7:17).³⁷

³² There are numerous difficulties with the Hebrew in Ps 22:16 (Heb. v. 17). It is clear enough that David has in mind some affliction of the hands and feet, but the exact nature of that affliction is obscured. Possibilities range from “encircled my hands and feet like a lion” (so Keil and Delitzsch, 5:199–200) to “my hands and feet wither” (NRSV). For a brief summary of these options, see Tremper Longman III, *Psalms: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014), 131.

³³ Kaiser explains the methodology behind a study of Messianic prophecies, ultimately concluding that the point of such a list is that there is “an eternal plan” of God, and these prophecies reveal God's enactment of that plan. See Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, 28–34.

³⁴ James M. Hamilton, *Typology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2022), 3–6. He calls these “promised shaped patterns,” and he gives scores of examples of these, using the categories of persons, events, and institutions.

³⁵ Scott R. Swain, *The Trinity and the Bible: On Theological Interpretation* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2021), 7.

³⁶ Derek Tidball, *The Message of the Cross: Wisdom Unsearchable, Love Indestructible*, BST (Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 2001), 51–67.

³⁷ T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem* (Nottingham, England: InterVarsity, 2008), 128–31; Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 33–34.

Second, Jesus’ mission as a high priest in the line of Melchizedek implies that the Torah’s typology of priesthood was part of a plan that would be fulfilled by Christ. At the very least, it is notable that Melchizedek is a man—albeit without genealogy. It may seem like Melchizedek came onto the pages of Scripture out of the blue, so to speak (Heb 7:3), but there is more that makes Melchizedek unusual than his lack of pedigree—namely, he is a priest who is also a king. Apart from the prophesied branch in Zechariah 6, there really is no other priest/king ruler to grace Israel’s history. Yet God had purposed to have a savior who would fulfill this type—who would be a reigning human king who would also mediate between both people and God as priest. This makes Melchizedek “the human archetype of the ideal priest-king of Jerusalem.”³⁸ That type was in God’s mind and plan before Abraham (Gen 14:18), and thus before Israel.

In Craig Koester’s study of Melchizedek, he notes that Hebrews describes him as one who existed before the world was created, and who will endure after it is ended. He is said to “resemble” the Son of God. Koester is not arguing that Melchizedek literally had no parents. Rather, he is describing how Hebrews paints him. Koester suggests that Hebrews uses this kind of language to tie the pattern of Melchizedek to the Son of God, thus confirming God’s eternal plan for redemption through an Incarnation—that Son becoming man.³⁹

Taken together, the Passover lamb indicates God’s plan was for the Savior to die—requiring a human nature and an Incarnation. The Melchizedekian priesthood indicates it was the plan for the Savior to have two offices (both priest and king), again implying the Incarnation.

When the use of typology (such as the Passover lamb or the Melchizedekian priesthood) is considered with other Messianic prophecies listed above, a well-developed picture emerges of a descendant of Eve who will be a human priest by dying as a human substitute. Kaiser concludes, “By now it should be clear that the messianic prophecies came in a series of predictions that belonged together as a single plan of God”—the plan for the Incarnation.⁴⁰

The Incarnation’s Natures: Man (Gen 3:15) and God (Ps 110)

Not all messianic prophecies are explicitly contained within the *protoevangelium*. Yet at least one feature is clear from Genesis 3:15: the one who will crush the serpent and redeem mankind will be a human being.⁴¹ Yet, the characteristics of the redeemer described in the OT nullify any notion of a purely human mediator, and in turn require a mediator who is also divine. There are simply

³⁸ Michael C. Astour, “Melchizedek (Person),” in *AYBD* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 4:685. Astour goes on to describe him as “the eternal priest of Yahweh, a supernatural being engendered by Yahweh.”

³⁹ For Koester’s study of Melchizedek, see: Craig Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 36, *AYBC* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 342–52. See also Daniel Stevens, *The Theme of Promise in the Epistle to the Hebrews: A Promise Remains*, Library of New Testament Studies 706 (London: T & T Clark, 2025), 59–61.

⁴⁰ Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, 30. In fact, he says it is right to call the plan “the eternal covenant.”

⁴¹ Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*, 105–7; Jack Collins, “A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3:15): Is the Woman’s Seed Singular or Plural?,” *TynBul* 48, no. 1 (1997): 145–46.

too many properties of the prophesied mediator that cannot agree with an exclusively human nature of Christ—not the least of which is that David calls the redeemer “my Lord” in Psalm 110:1.

Psalm 110 has been understood by many Jewish interpreters to point to the Davidic King *par excellence*, or “the perfect priest-king.”⁴² This psalm preserves the “high theology of Judean kingship,” as it describes the anointed king in terms evocative of a global conqueror.⁴³

Of course, no OT Judean king reached the fulfillment of this psalm, and so the psalm would have been received with mixed emotions. Every reading would remind Israel that her kings have disappointed them.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, there is an anchor in this psalm: divine communication between Yahweh and “my Lord.” This communication is difficult to locate chronologically. It has future implications (“until” in v. 1, “the people will offer” in v. 3), yet it is spoken of in the past (“Yahweh has sworn” in v. 4). The present sense of verse 5 only compounds the problem, as there the Messiah is *already* at God’s right hand. Psalm 110 is thus a notoriously difficult psalm to interpret.⁴⁵ It falls to the NT to locate this decree, and when it does, it does not locate it at a recurring enthronement ceremony in Jerusalem, but rather in the throne room of heaven.⁴⁶

The NT helps by repeatedly identifying Jesus as the subject of Psalm 110 (cf. Matt 26:64; Luke 22:69; Acts 2:34–35; Heb 5:6, 7:17–21, 10:13). In particular, the author of Hebrews emphasizes the Incarnational nature of Psalm 110, applying it directly to the “Christ” (5:5) whom he identifies as “Jesus” (5:7). Thus, Psalm 110 seems to have the two natures of Christ in view. The Messiah will be a king reigning on a throne, but will also be divine. Bateman concurs, noting that the divinity of the messianic Lord is “the traditional view, supported by older and contemporary scholars alike.”⁴⁷ The divine identity view has Hebrews 1:13 on its side, noting that the speaker (identified in Ps 110:1 as Yahweh) was addressing the Son; in fact, the author of Hebrews argues for both the Son’s pre-existence and deity from that very point.⁴⁸

⁴² Alec J. Motyer, “The Psalms,” in *The New Bible Commentary*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 560; Herman Gunkel, *Introduction to the Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel*, trans. James Nogalski (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 67, 119. Certainly this was not the only way Jews viewed the psalm. Others identified David’s Lord with Solomon, or Hezekiah. For a survey, see Herbert W. Bateman, “Psalm 110:1 and the New Testament,” *BibSac* 149, no. 596 (December 1992): 438–53.

⁴³ Leslie Allen, *Psalms 100–50*, WBC 21 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 118.

⁴⁴ Robert Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 368.

⁴⁵ Bühner writes: “The complicated and sometimes frustratingly inconsistent way Jews in antiquity read and interpreted holy Scripture is even more relevant with regard to the history of interpretation of Psalm 110.” Ruben A. Bühner, *Messianic High Christology: New Testament Variants of Second Temple Judaism* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2021), 85.

⁴⁶ Madison N. Pierce, “Hebrews 1 and the Son Begotten ‘Today,’” in *Retrieving Eternal Generation*, ed. Fred Sanders and Scott R. Swain (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 121.

⁴⁷ Bateman, “Psalm 110:1 and the New Testament,” 445. Bateman himself argues that the psalm was spoken by David to his physical offspring (Solomon, and by extension the line of David), but he grants that it is fulfilled in Jesus as the “ultimate referent,” and who of course is the Son of God (pp. 448, 452).

⁴⁸ Gathercole raises concerns about putting too much emphasis on Ps 110 as an actual dialogue. He prefers the concept of a “dramatic script.” However, I believe Bates satisfactorily responds to Gathercole’s

Finally, if this is understood as discourse in heaven between Yahweh and the pre-existent Messiah, when did that take place? The psalm itself identifies the “day of [the king’s] power” as occurring at “the womb of the dawn” (רֶשֶׁת מִתְּבָרָךְ; v. 3). Hamilton defines the expression as “the place where light gestates, from which it broke forth in the beginning,” and concludes that the phrase attaches “eternal connotations” to the divine dialogue.⁴⁹ Murray Smith notes that because the LXX reads ἐκ γαστρὸς πρὸ ἐωσφόρου ἐξεγέννησά σε (“from the womb before the morning star I have begotten you”) that “patristic writers commonly appeal to this text to support Christ’s pre-existence as the eternally begotten ‘Son of God.’”⁵⁰ Bühner gives the LXX rendering of this verse as evidence that the messianic king was understood to be “divinely begotten.”⁵¹ He goes on to argue that “before the morning star [was created] I have begotten you” is a legitimate and likely rendering of the text, and represents the most natural reading of the Hebrew.⁵² Motyer understands that phrase to give “a picturesque allusion to the supernatural origin of the king.”⁵³

Fortunately, we are not left with only “a picturesque allusion” to the conversation’s chronology, because in Matthew 22:43–45 Jesus leverages the timing of this conversation to argue for His own pre-existence. He asked the Pharisees, “How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord … if then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?” Jesus’ use of the present tense is noticeable (“calls him Lord” καλεῖ), and so His logic is clear: the conversation between Yahweh and the Messiah took place prior to the Incarnation.

Gathercole makes a compelling case (through the Marcan account of this exchange) that Jesus was clearly advocating for His own pre-existence. He explains: “since David hails the Messiah as Lord, the former cannot be regarded as the forefather of the latter. The clear implication here is that Jesus is not so much son of David as Son of God.”⁵⁴ Some might argue that the Messiah of Psalm 110 is merely a descendant of David, who by virtue of his divinely-aided victories will be adopted as God’s Son and then identified as David’s Lord.⁵⁵ However, Jesus dismisses that perspective as logically contradictory. The Messiah cannot be David’s Lord, Jesus implies, if he is only David’s son.

Read retrospectively and in light of Psalm 110, the humanity of the Savior in Genesis 3:15 provokes an obvious question: when Psalm 110 (or Matt 22:43–45; Heb 1:15) identifies the Messiah using language fitting of deity, was it an intentional

concerns: Simon J. Gathercole, *The Preexistent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 43–45; Matthew W. Bates, *The Birth of the Trinity: Jesus, God, and Spirit in New Testament and Early Christian Interpretations of the Old Testament*, Reprint edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 164–66.

⁴⁹ James M. Hamilton, *Psalms*, vol. 2, EBTC (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2021), 293.

⁵⁰ Murray J. Smith, “Jesus, the Son of Man, and the Final Coming of God: The Origin of Early Christian ‘Second Coming’ Expectation in Jesus’ Eschatological Vision” (Ph.D. diss., Macquarie University, 2022), 136n777. See also Quentin F. Wesselschmidt and Thomas C. Oden, eds., *Psalms 51–150*, vol. 8, ACCSOT (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 265–67.

⁵¹ Bühner, *Messianic High Christology*, 89.

⁵² Bühner, 90–91.

⁵³ Motyer, “The Psalms,” 560.

⁵⁴ Gathercole, *The Preexistent Son*, 236–38.

⁵⁵ This view (sometimes described as adoptionism) is defined and critiqued by Macleod; see Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, 83–86.

broadening of Genesis 3:15?⁵⁶ This is an important question, because if it is answered in the affirmative, it would be strong evidence that the plan of redemption included a Savior with two natures—the divine nature of the eternal Son and the incarnate human nature of a descendant of Eve.

Richard Hays has developed a matrix of seven criteria to help judge the intertextuality of passages, and these criteria are helpful to discern the likelihood that the later author wrote with an intentional connection with the earlier passage in mind. Those seven criteria are: availability, volume, recurrence, thematic coherence, historical plausibility, history, and satisfaction.⁵⁷ Elsewhere, Hays describes these criteria as “modestly useful rules of thumb.”⁵⁸ Iosif Zhakevich renders these in the form of questions:⁵⁹

1. Did the second author have access to the first, and is it reasonable to assume he would have been familiar with it?
2. Is the connection linguistically, syntactically, and structurally clear?
3. Is the connection limited to one verse, or is it repeated throughout the rest of the book (or Psalm)?
4. Do the two passages have “thematic coherence”? Are they about the same theme?
5. Would the second author’s readers have picked up the allusion?
6. Did other authors (i.e., Jewish interpreters, NT authors, church fathers etc.) see the connection?
7. Does the allusion to the first passage strengthen the message of the second passage?

In the case of Psalm 110:1 and Genesis 3:15, these questions all strongly indicate intertextuality of the two passages. The author of Psalm 110 (presumably David) would have had access to Genesis 3:15 and would have assumed his readers were familiar with it. Both passages are about judgment in the midst of sin, and yet God promises to squash the power of sin through the provision of a mediator. In both cases, the language used implies the battle between sin and the mediator “transcends the domain of human combat.”⁶⁰

Both passages have stylistic overlap: direct discourse from Yahweh to the representative head—Satan as head over evil, or the Son as head over righteousness.

⁵⁶ Howard writes “The term ‘intertextuality’ has recently come into favor in discussions of the use of Scripture by other scriptural writers.” For a discussion on this term and its usefulness, see I. Marshall Howard, “Acts,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Nottingham, England: Baker Academic, 2007), 526.

⁵⁷ Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 132.

⁵⁸ Richard B. Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel’s Scripture* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2005), 34.

⁵⁹ Iosif J. Zhakevich, “Reverse of the Curse: An Allusion to Genesis 3:15 in Psalm 110:1,” *TMSJ* 33, no. 2 (Fall 2022): 240.

⁶⁰ Zhakevich, “Reverse of the Curse,” 239.

Beale draws attention to their thematic overlap, noting they both contain “the implicit reversal of the work that introduced death.”⁶¹

While Hays’ criteria are useful, not all seven are equal. Abner Chou argues that more weight should be given to demonstrating “linguistic distinctiveness,” or how a term (or terms) in a later passage is unique enough to point to an earlier passage, “but at the same time does not point to other texts.”⁶² As an example, Genesis 3:15 and Psalm 110:1 “are the only two passages in the Old Testament in which the root אִיבָּא אַשְׁתָּה (“enemy, enmity”) appears as the object of the verb אָשַׁת (“put”).⁶³

Finally, the connection between the two passages is affirmed in the NT (1 Cor 15:25–28 and Rom 16:20 both meld Gen 3:15 and Ps 110:1).⁶⁴ When the evidence is considered as a whole, it is reasonable to conclude that Psalm 110 has in view the *protoevangelium*. This connection confirms that the plan of redemption included a Savior who would be both David’s Lord (Ps 110:1) and Eve’s son (Gen 3:15). It falls to the NT to bring clarity to how one person could fulfill both prophecies. Nevertheless, “full messianic potential” is embedded in both of these passages, and that potential culminates in the Incarnation.⁶⁵

The Incarnation’s Unlikely Murder: Isaiah 53 and Zechariah 12:10

For a second example of how intertextual connections demonstrate God’s plan for the Incarnation, consider Zechariah 12:10 in light of Isaiah 53. Isaiah 53 is often referred to as the final of “The Suffering Servant Songs,” so named because they describe an unnamed “servant” of Yahweh and develop the nature of his suffering and ultimate exaltation by God. While all four songs share the same themes, the final song (52:13–53:12) is more particular in its descriptions of the servant’s trials, and connects his suffering to God’s plan of salvation.⁶⁶ At the heart of this description of the servant is his appointed death, which will provide atonement for sin.⁶⁷

There are numerous interpretive options to identify the servant—everything from the people of Israel collectively to Isaiah himself.⁶⁸ While it is outside our scope here to develop the evidence for each view, it is best to conclude that the four servant songs of Isaiah either are direct prophecies of the Messiah, or typologically point

⁶¹ G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 228.

⁶² Abner Chou, *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers: Learning to Interpret Scripture from the Prophets and Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2018), 39–40.

⁶³ Zhakevich, “Reverse of the Curse,” 241.

⁶⁴ F. F. Bruce, *Romans*, vol. 6, TNTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1985), 277; James Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, WBC 38b (Dallas: Word, 1988), 905; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 932–33; Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. Eckhard J. Schnabel, vol. 7, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: InterVarsity, 2018), 314–15; Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1232–35.

⁶⁵ Johnston, “Promises of a King,” 100.

⁶⁶ J. Daniel Hays, *The Message of the Prophets*, ed. Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 128–32.

⁶⁷ John L. McKenzie, *Second Isaiah*, AB (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1967), 132.

⁶⁸ For a comprehensive overview of different interpretive options for the “servant,” see McKenzie, XLIII–LV.

forward to Jesus.⁶⁹ In this interpretation, Isaiah 53:10 takes on particular importance: “It was Yahweh’s will to crush him; he has put him to grief.”

There are at least four other details in Isaiah 53 that relate to the Incarnation. First, note the passive voice in the descriptions of the Savior’s death: “he was wounded for our transgressions,” and “he was crushed for our iniquities” (emphasis added; Isa 53:5).⁷⁰ Together with verse 10, this reinforces that it was God’s will that the Savior be afflicted—the Savior would be acted upon.

Second, the means of the servant’s death are variously described with imagery evocative of an animal sacrifice—he will be “marred” (Isa 52:14), his blood will “sprinkle” (v. 15), and his death will be “for our transgressions” (53:5).⁷¹ Ultimately, his death will be “an offering for sin” (v. 10). This language is picked up by Jesus in the NT as He describes Himself as coming to pay “a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). This points to the foreordained nature of the Incarnation manifest in redemption.⁷²

Third, the means of death by which Jesus pays the ransom is that of “wounding” or “crushing” (Isa 53:5). The verb the ESV translates as “wounded” (חָלַל) has various concepts in its semantic domain, including “to slay” (cf. Ezek 28:9) and “to cut into pieces” (cf. Isa 51:9). Perhaps most significantly, it includes the concept of “to pierce” (cf. Job 26:13).⁷³ The concept of “to pierce” is supported by the use of both the cognate adjective and noun, which “often refers to the bodies of those who have been fatally pierced by a sword or other weapon (e.g., Isa 22:2; Jer 14:18; 41:9; Ezek 6:13; 9:7).”⁷⁴ In Isaiah 53:5, חָלַל is both *Poal* and passive, giving the meaning of “impaled” or “pierced.”⁷⁵

Finally, Isaiah 53:5 not only describes the *how* of the servant’s death, but it also describes the *why*: “he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities.” This confirms that Yahweh’s plan is for the Savior to die a substitutionary and atoning death.

As noted above, there are various interpretive options as to the identity of the servant (from Moses, to Isaiah, to the Savior), but regardless of *who* he is, the *what* is clear: the suffering servant will be a man.⁷⁶ Watts concludes that from this fourth

⁶⁹ If the reader wants to see the exegetical evidence pointing towards a Messianic understanding of the servant, see R. Reed Lessing, *Isaiah 40–55*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2011), 76–99; Menachem I. Kalisher, “Isaiah 52: The Identity and Ministry of the Servant of the Lord,” *TMSJ* 33, no. 2 (2022): 319–34.

⁷⁰ For a study on how the passive voice ended up influencing the NT portrayal of Jesus’ death, see Cilliers Breytenbach, “The Septuagint Version of Isa 53 and the Early Christian Formula ‘He Was Delivered for Our Trespasses,’” *Novum Testamentum* 51, no. 4 (2009): 343–49.

⁷¹ Schipper argues that the language in the fourth servant song is broadly evocative of animal sacrifice, and that it mirrors terms from Leviticus; specifically, Isaiah uses Levitical terms for a marred animal who is thus unfit for sacrifice. See Jeremy Schipper, “Interpreting the Lamb Imagery in Isaiah 53,” *JBL* 132, no. 2 (2013): 323–25.

⁷² Hamilton traces out patterns in the fourth servant song that point to a broader canonical theme of “the righteous sufferer.” Hamilton, *Typology*, 200–12.

⁷³ HALOT, s.v. חָלַל.

⁷⁴ Lessing, *Isaiah 40–55*, 591.

⁷⁵ Klaus Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, ed. Peter Machinist, trans. Margaret Kohl, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 410; John P. Brown, “Techniques of Imperial Control: The Background of the Gospel Event,” *Radical Religion* 2, no. 2–3 (1975): 74.

⁷⁶ Alec J. Motyer, “Stricken for the Transgression of My People,” in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 251.

suffering servant song “emerges a universal truth about God and his ways that is vital for the faith of Jew and Christian: the principle of substitutionary atonement, not only through animal sacrifice as in the day of atonement, but supremely through a willing person.”⁷⁷

This description of the Savior dying through piercing/impalement provides a connection to Zechariah 12:10, where again Yahweh prophesies of a future day when Israel will “look upon me, *on whom they have pierced*” (אָשַׁר־דָּקְרָו; emphasis added). The connection between Zechariah 12:10 and Isaiah 53:5 is often noted. It is not simply that they both come into English with the word “pierced” (חָלֵל/דָּקָר respectively) but the passages themselves have similar themes.⁷⁸ Like Isaiah, the book of Zechariah puts forth a future hope for the house of David. That hope is seen in the shoot that binds together chapters 1–8, who then becomes both a king and a shepherd in chapters 9–14.⁷⁹ Zechariah’s various descriptions of the “shoot” set the reader up for the height of hope in Zechariah 12, where “the House of David shall be like God, like Yahweh’s angel, going before him” (vv. 7–8). However, this hope comes with a cost—namely, the piercing of the one promised. The text reads as if the Israelites saw blood on their hands, then went looking for the body of the one whom they stabbed, and found God Himself.⁸⁰

Even before the Incarnation itself, the notion that it was God who was pierced was a common way of understanding the text.⁸¹ This has given rise to several theories in Judaism concerning the identity of the crucified one (a Messiah, a remnant from Jeroboam, a descendent of Abijah, the son cared for by Elijah in 1 Kgs 17, etc.).⁸² Theories are multiplied because there is an interpretive issue with the pronoun in 12:10—“the person pierced is identified by the first-person pronoun *me* (אִי) and the third-person pronoun *him* (עִלִּין).”⁸³

Yet the significance of the pronoun dispute is minimal because it is evident that “the shocking antecedent of both pronouns is Yahweh.”⁸⁴ This is “shocking” because, as Stuart dryly notes, “the concept of piercing God is difficult theologically.”⁸⁵ This is especially so since “to pierce is generally to put to death.”⁸⁶

⁷⁷ John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 34–56*, rev. ed., WBC 25 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 790.

⁷⁸ For more on דָּקָר, see: Thomas E. McComiskey, “Zechariah,” in *The Minor Prophets*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 1214. “The qal stem always connotes killing or wounding by piercing with some kind of instrument.”

⁷⁹ Anthony R. Petterson, *Behold Your King: The Hope for the House of David in the Book of Zechariah*, ed. Claudia V. Camp and Andrew Mein, LHBOTS 513 (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 1–10, 129, 159–212.

⁸⁰ Mark J. Boda, *The Book of Zechariah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 715.

⁸¹ Daniel E. Stuart, “Zechariah 12:10–13:1,” in *The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy*, ed. Rydelnik and Edwin Blum (Chicago: Moody, 2019), 1285–88.

⁸² A. Cohen, *The Twelve Prophets*, rev. 2nd ed., vol. 8, Soncino Books of the Bible (Jerusalem: Soncino, 1994), 321–22.

⁸³ Dean R. Ulrich, “Two Offices, Four Officers, or One Sordid Event in Zechariah 12:10–14?,” *WTJ* 72, no. 2 (2010): 251. Menken traces the history of the textual variations concerning the pronoun in this passage: Maarten J. J. Menken, “The Textual Form and the Meaning of the Quotation from Zechariah 12:10 in John 19:37,” *CBQ* 55, no. 3 (1993): 499–504.

⁸⁴ Ulrich, “Two Offices, Four Officers,” 251.

⁸⁵ Stuart, “Zechariah 12:10–13:1,” 1287.

⁸⁶ Hinckley G. Mitchell, John M. Powis Smith, and Julius A. Bewer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi and Jonah*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1912), 330.

For this to be true, there must be an Incarnation—God must take on a human nature and a human body capable of, at the very least, being stabbed.

The surprise of the passage is not limited to the divinity of the one pierced but extends to the one doing the piercing. The text identifies the murderer: it is none other than Israel herself (“*they* [the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem] will look … *they* will mourn … *they* will weep bitterly”; emphasis added; 12:10). The identity of Israel as God’s assailant is so surprising because it is the antithesis of Israel’s calling as a nation. Israel was supposed to produce the Messiah, not pierce him.

Yet the story will not end there: Zechariah points the reader to a time even further in the future when God would save Israel by turning their hearts back to Yahweh (12:10). When Israel repents, they will look upon Him whom they pierced, and they will mourn, and they will find grace and forgiveness through the pierced one. It is as if the murder happened like the Nicene Creed declares: “for them, and for their salvation.”

This sets up Zechariah 13, where the one who brought deliverance is called “a man, my companion” (ESV: “the one who stands beside me;” *וְעַל-גָּבֵר עַמִּיתִי*). The word rendered “companion” or “the one who stands beside me” (*עַמִּיתִי*) is used in only one other biblical book—Leviticus—where it refers to members of similar covenantal standing within a community.⁸⁷ Thus Zechariah is implying that the deliverer stands in God’s presence by virtue of belonging to the same community as God Himself. This comports with the description of the Savior as “Yahweh” back in 12:10. Peterson concludes: “It is only the king who could be said to represent Yahweh, so that to pierce the king is to pierce Yahweh … there is a real sense in which Yahweh and his king are inseparable.”⁸⁸ This is why the synoptic writers, John (in Revelation), and the early church all understood Zechariah 12:10 as applying to Jesus by means of the Incarnation.⁸⁹ Brandon Smith summarizes the argument: “Somehow when Jesus the man is pierced, God is pierced—a description that communicates shared divine attributes.”⁹⁰

The intertextual connection between Zechariah 12:10 and Isaiah 53:5 strengthens this argument. The fourth suffering servant song established that the plan of salvation was for the Savior to be pierced as an atoning sacrifice for sin. However, in Isaiah 53 the Savior was to be a man, while in Zechariah he is God.

Applying Hayes’ seven criteria used earlier (availability, volume, recurrence, thematic coherence, historical plausibility, history, and satisfaction), one can reasonably conclude that Zechariah 12:10 deliberately connects to Isaiah 53:5. Zechariah would have had access to Isaiah, and there are at least a dozen other references to Isaiah in Zechariah.⁹¹ Although the words used for “pierce” are different in Isaiah and Zechariah (*חַלֵּל/קָרֵךְ*), the words themselves are unusual and overlap significantly in their semantic domain. With so many of Zechariah’s descriptions of

⁸⁷ Ulrich, “Two Offices, Four Officers,” 261.

⁸⁸ Petterson, *Behold Your King*, 238–39.

⁸⁹ For a survey of those uses, see Menken, “The Textual Form,” 509–10.

⁹⁰ Brandon D. Smith, *The Trinity in the Book of Revelation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2022), 93–94.

⁹¹ Petterson lists twelve descriptions of the Savior in Zechariah that are drawn from Isaiah. See Petterson, *Behold Your King*, 242–45.

“the branch” drawn from Isaiah, it is reasonable to conclude that the piercing in Zechariah 12:10 also represents a connection to Isaiah 53:5, despite the different word usage.⁹²

The humanity of the Savior is established from Isaiah 53, while his deity is confirmed in Zechariah 12. The plan of redemption includes a savior who is human, and yet identified as Yahweh. Yahweh designed this plan, and Yahweh will execute this plan, even though it entails God Himself, in human flesh, being executed on the cross in the Person of Jesus (compare Zech 12:10 with John 19:37; see Acts 20:28).

In other words, Jesus knew what He was signing up for. This is why Jesus spoke of His death and resurrection as events that “must” take place (Luke 9:22; 17:25). Marshall explains “that for Luke, the ‘must’ indicates the necessity to fulfill what was laid down in the Scriptures.”⁹³ Bock expands on this by noting that when Jesus described His humiliation as something “that must take place,” there were at least four components in view: he must suffer, be rejected, killed, and resurrect. Because all of these are prophesied in the OT, all four of these have “an inevitability” to them.⁹⁴

The Incarnation’s Agreement: A Charge

The connection between Isaiah 53 and Zechariah 12 teaches us that the Incarnation is not something that just *happened* to Jesus, but rather that it was a plan to which Jesus (in His deity) willingly consented. The voluntary nature of the Son’s participation in the Incarnation is stated paradoxically in John 10:18: “No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.” There are two truths in this passage, each pulling on the other: Jesus has authority over His life, death, and resurrection, and this authority comes in the form of a “charge” from the Father.

Germane to the plan of redemption is Jesus’ declaration that His death and resurrection is “of my own accord” (ἀπ’ ἑμαυτοῦ). In John 10:18a Jesus uses the first-person repeatedly in rapid succession—eleven words are in this verse, and five of them are first-person: ἔμοι, ἐγὼ (2xs), τίθημι, and ἑμαυτοῦ. By speaking this way, Jesus teaches that He went to His death the same way He went into His human life: “not as a victim of circumstance, but as one who was in control of his destiny.”⁹⁵ Mounce concludes his study of John 10:18 by noting, “It was by his own volition he laid his life down for the sheep.”⁹⁶ Jesus received a charge from His Father to lay His life down, but it is a charge which He received voluntarily. Jesus’ words, “no one

⁹² Stead covers questions of intertextuality in Zechariah 9–14. See Michael R. Stead, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi: Return and Restoration*, T & T Clark Study Guides to the Old Testament (London: T&T Clark, 2022), 67–78. There are numerous examples from church history (as well as the NT) linking these two passages. See Menken, “The Textual Form,” 508–10.

⁹³ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, NIGTC (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 369.

⁹⁴ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: 1:1–9:50*, vol. 1, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 847–48.

⁹⁵ Colin Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, 2nd ed., TNTC (London: InterVarsity, 2017), 235.

⁹⁶ Robert H. Mounce, “John,” in *Luke–Acts*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, Rev. ed., vol. 10, EBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 504.

takes my life from me, I lay it down of my own accord,” indicate that the Son of God was a willing participant in his Incarnation. He is, as Rhyne Putman says, “the Son who chose his own parents.”⁹⁷

The Incarnation’s Result: Eternal Worship

As a doctrine, the Incarnation teaches us that God came to earth. The Creator came to the creature. This means that while an unimaginable gulf remains between God and man, the gulf has been bridged by Jesus, so that we can truly worship God if we come to Him through Jesus Christ. In that sense, the Incarnation makes true worship of the true God possible.

For this reason, the Incarnation has to remain for all eternity. Jesus remains the God-Man in His resurrection, in His ascension, in His kingdom, and in eternal glory. If He shed one of His two natures, the avenue of true worship of the true God would be cut off (1 Tim 2:5). The Word *became* flesh, and with Jesus there is no unbecoming (John 1:14; Acts 1:9–11; Phil 3:20–21).

Instead of outgrowing His humanity, Jesus’ plan is for the Incarnation to be on full display at His Second Coming. “Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all the tribes of the earth will wail on account of him” (Rev 1:7; Zech 12:10). For all eternity God will be glorified because His glory was displayed from the mouth of an infant, and thus the Incarnation will eternally “still the enemy and the avenger” (Ps 8:2).

The Incarnation was the means of accomplishing our salvation. The preexistent and divine Son of God became the existent and human son of Mary. He was holy, sinless, and human. Thus, He could be the virgin-born Immanuel, achieving salvation for sinners, and this was all according to the eternal plan of God.

⁹⁷ Rhyne R. Putman, *Conceived by the Holy Spirit: The Virgin Birth in Scripture and Theology* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2024), 45.