

Understanding Theology in 15 Minutes A Day for 40 Days

Day 20

What Has Jesus Christ Done?

In previous chapters we have considered the work of God in creation and providence. Now we answer the question “What is the work of God’s Son, more specifically?”

Before the Incarnation

Since the Son of God is eternal, we begin with noting his work before the incarnation, before Christ took upon himself a human nature. With the Father and the Spirit, Christ was involved in creation (**John 1:3; Colossians 1:16–17; Hebrews 1:2**). More on this in chapter 22, where we consider his lordship.

Another important aspect of Christ’s Old Testament work was delivering God’s messages. The “angel [messenger] of the LORD [*Yahweh*]” normally is understood to be Christ himself, and the technical term for these occurrences is *theophany* (appearance of God). These are pre-incarnation manifestations of the Son of God in human form—Christ took upon himself human appearance to accomplish something specific before taking upon himself a permanent human nature (in the incarnation).

This “angel” is no ordinary angel. For example, when Hagar fled into the desert after conceiving Abram’s son, the angel of the LORD told her to name her son Ishmael and to return to the household of Abram (**Genesis 16:7–14**). **Verse 13 says**, “*She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: ‘You are the God who sees me,’ for she said, ‘I have now seen the One who sees me.’*” Hagar understood this individual to be God himself. Similarly, in **Judges 6:11–22**, the angel of the LORD came to Gideon to declare that God was with him (**v. 11**); in **verse 14**, he is simply referred to as “*the LORD*” (*Yahweh*).

After the Incarnation

The Son’s primary work, however, was after the incarnation, specifically to die in the place of sinful humanity. This is so significant that we will devote an entire chapter to it (chapter 26) when we address the doctrine of salvation.

A common way of thinking about Jesus' post-incarnation work is in terms of three biblical offices. All human prophets, priests, and kings among God's people were anticipations or symbols of the ultimate prophet-priest-king: Jesus Christ. The great prophet Moses anticipated a greater prophet (**Deuteronomy 18:15**). Jesus did do what prophets do: deliver God's message to God's people (**Matthew 21:11; Luke 13:33; John 17:8**). Not only did he deliver the message, he *is* the message; he is the Word of God (**John 1:1**).

Jesus is also our high priest, like Aaron and his sons initially were. He did what priests do: represent God's people in God's presence by bringing their sacrifices and offerings. Not only did he bring the sacrifice to God, he *is* the sacrifice (**Hebrews 7:27; 10:10**), and unlike Aaron and his sons, Jesus' priesthood is in the order of Melchizedek (**Genesis 14:18–20; Hebrews 5:6–10; 6:20–7:17**). Jesus was not a descendant of Aaron and so was not qualified for that priesthood. But the priesthood of Melchizedek united two offices—priest and king (**Genesis 14:18; Zechariah 6:13**)—which brings us to the third.

As a descendant of David, Jesus was qualified to be king on David's throne (**Luke 1:32–33**). Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would be a king (**Isaiah 9:7**). Jesus acknowledged before Pilate that he was indeed king of the Jews (**Matthew 27:11**), as the crowds at his triumphal entry recognized (**John 12:13**). When Jesus returns, he will reign on earth (**Revelation 17:14; 19:16**) in fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant, which promised David an eternal throne (**2 Samuel 7:16**).

Here is another question often considered in connection with Christ's earthly life and work: Even though Jesus did not sin (**Hebrews 4:15; 1 John 3:5**), *could* he have sinned (hypothetically)? Some believe he could have, (the peccability of Christ); others believe it was impossible for him to have sinned (the impeccability of Christ). There are strong arguments on both sides.

Those who believe he could have sinned argue that a part of being truly human is the freedom to rebel against God. Jesus, being truly human, should also have this freedom. Another argument for Christ's peccability is from **Hebrews 4:15**, which says he "*is [able] to empathize with our weaknesses*" because he "*has been tempted in every way, just as we are.*" How could he sympathize with our weaknesses and our experience of temptation if it was impossible for him to ever yield to it? That would be a tremendous advantage we do not have. So for him to be truly empathetic with our struggle, it seems there must have been at least the possibility of his yielding to temptation.

Those who argue for Christ's impeccability point out that he is fully God. God is holy and cannot sin—his divine nature makes sin impossible for him. In regard to the contention (above) from **Hebrews 4:15**, it is suggested that feeling the force of temptation and yielding to temptation are different. Jesus could have felt the temptation to sin even if he could not possibly have yielded to it. And if this is true, then he felt the force of temptation to a degree that no other human would feel it, for the very reason that he never gave in to it.

Maybe the best conclusion is that in his human nature alone, Jesus was able to sin like any other human, but when his humanity was united to his deity—as the one person of the God-man—he was not able to sin. But it also seems likely that he did not rely on this impeccability when he dealt with temptation. Rather, he relied upon the Holy Spirit's power. And in this way, he truly is our model in dealing with temptation. We do not have divine natures to keep us from sin (like he did), but we do have the divine resident within us through the Holy Spirit, whose limitless power is available to help us in our fight against sin (**Galatians 5:16–25**). This is what Jesus modeled for us.

After the Ascension

Next, we need to consider Christ's work in the present. Succinctly stated, as the head of his church (**Ephesians 1:22–23; Colossians 1:18**)—all those who have believed in him as Savior—he is lovingly working to bring it to individual and corporate maturity. He is doing all that is necessary to make Christians a worthy bride for himself forever (**Ephesians 5:25–29**). As noted above, a part of that work is to act as our high priest in the presence of his Father (**Hebrews 4:14–16**). In that role, he is also interceding for us (**Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25**) and defending us as our advocate (**1 John 2:1**).

With regard to Christ's work in the future, we have seen that he will return to earth, defeat his enemies, establish his kingdom, rule and reign over that kingdom, and judge all people to determine their eternal destiny (more on this in the closing chapters).

INTERESTING FACT

More than half of the four Gospels are comprised of the words of Jesus (the red letters, in some versions). Those writers truly grasped the importance of Christ's teaching in terms of his work on earth.