

NAME  
*Above All*  
NAMES

*Jesus Christ*  
*Our Savior and Lord*

DAN HAYDEN

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# NOT LIKE ANY OTHER

## *The Uniqueness of Christ in a Pluralistic World*

*For a child will be born to us,  
a son will be given to us . . .*

ISAIAH 9:6

Can two mutually exclusive things both be right at the same time?

“Well, what kind of a question is that?” you might ask. “Of course not—especially if the things are truly mutually exclusive. Black, if it is really black, cannot at the same time also be white—that would be a confusion of logic. It would also be a confusion of reality because that’s not the way things are. Our world is full of contrasts and opposites: Men are not women, and women are not men. That’s what makes life so interesting.”

Today, though, that bit of logic is being challenged by our postmodern culture. *Postmodern* simply means that the rules of communication have been changed. The modern world of reason and logic has given way to a whole new age of flux and flow. Things aren’t always what they seem, and mutually exclusive ideas can now both be considered true. No longer is truth “*the*

truth.” Truth can be whatever you want it to be. So you can have your truth, and I can have my truth; and even though we have opposite ideas, we can both be right. Isn’t that nice?

#### THE FANTASY WORLD OF PLURALISM

Well, the idea that a plurality of ideas can all be right at the same time is called pluralism; and pluralism is the monster child of postmodern thinking. Pluralism has reduced life to an experience in which we really don’t think anymore. Dracula is alive and well in our western culture—only he now goes by the name of Pluralism. This philosophy is a monstrous evil that is sucking the very lifeblood of reality out of our system. Our culture has become delusional, so that it is no longer strange to think that black is white and women are men. It’s an upside-down world, and we’ve begun to see it as normal.

This is especially true in the area of religion. Mathematics and the hard sciences are still having a difficult time adjusting to pluralism as a worldview. You see, you can’t put a man on the moon or cure cancer with pluralism. But when it comes to religion and spiritual matters, pluralism is the postmodern answer to the ideas and beliefs that divide us. If we can all be right, so the reasoning goes, then nobody can get upset, and we can all live happily ever after. It’s the ultimate solution to peace in our world.

In September 1993 religious leaders from around the world converged on Chicago at the Parliament of the World’s Religions. They met with a threefold purpose: to promote cooperation among the world’s religious institutions, to renew the role of the religions of the world in relation to personal spiritual growth, and to develop interfaith programs that would continue religious cooperation into the twenty-first century. Attending the event, which was held one hundred years after the first parlia-

ment (also in Chicago), were Baha'is, Buddhists, Confucianists, Hindus, Jains, Jews, Muslims, Native Americans, Shintos, Sikhs, Taoists, Unitarians, Zoroastrians, as well as Protestants and Roman Catholics.<sup>1</sup>

Behind all the activities and meetings was a single major theme: religious pluralism, which says that the religions of the world may appear diverse on the surface, but if you boil them down to the basics, they are all really saying the same thing. It reminds me of *I'm OK, You're OK*, that seventies-era book of self-help psychology that said that despite all the surface differences between individuals, we are all basically the same, and we are all basically OK.<sup>2</sup> Religious pluralism says much the same thing—that when it comes to “God,” we are all OK because, one way or another, all religious roads eventually lead to “God.”

A year earlier, in June 1992, an international group of eighty-five evangelical theologians from twenty-eight countries met in Manila, Philippines, with the World Evangelical Fellowship to discuss the above-mentioned upcoming parliament. Their theme was entirely different, however, as they met to discuss “The Unique Christ in Our Pluralistic World.” In 1995 Baker Book House published their work in a book with the same title. “Evangelical leaders are alarmed by the increasing religious pluralism and syncretistic influence within and outside the church,” said Bong Rin Ro, the WEF Theological Commission Director, in the book’s Foreword. “Moreover, this religious pluralism has crept into the evangelical church in a subtle way in recent years to cause divisions among evangelical Christians and to arouse theologians to be concerned.”<sup>3</sup>

These evangelical leaders also drafted a document titled “The World Evangelical Fellowship Manila Declaration,” and I would like to highlight a statement from it. Pluralists “claim that all religious beliefs are more-or-less equally valid and equally

true. . . . Against such pluralism, we affirm that God has acted decisively, supremely, and normatively in the historical Jesus of Nazareth. In his person and work, Jesus is unique such that no one comes to the Father except through him. All salvation in the biblical sense of eternal life, life in the Kingdom, reconciliation with God and forgiveness of sins come solely from the person and work of Jesus Christ.”<sup>4</sup>

So why talk about a pluralistic parliament from years ago? Because in my view this event helps us focus on what really is important *today*. This is the crucial issue, perhaps more crucial than any other religious issue of our times. “Christology,” wrote Bruce Nicholls in the Introduction to the book from the Manila conference, is at “the centre of the storm. The central theological issue of our times is the Christological one.”<sup>5</sup>

In the early 1980s I saw this trend toward pluralism beginning to take hold. So my wife, Karilee, and I established an organization called Christolized Ministries to share studies and present seminars that would draw attention to the importance of keeping Christ central in life and ministry. Because of the New Age emphasis on crystals, that name has fallen on hard times now; but the importance of the centrality and preeminence of Christ as the unique Savior is no less crucial in the twenty-first century than it was when we first founded Christolized Ministries. It is precisely during these pluralistic times that we must be strong on the basic elements of the Gospel: salvation by Christ alone, salvation by grace alone, and salvation by faith alone.

It is because of my concern for our understanding of the uniqueness of Christ during this moment in history that I have decided to publish these studies, which were first delivered as a seven-part sermon series during a Christmas season several years ago.

The Scripture we will be using is Isaiah 9:6, that favorite Christmas passage which reads:

*For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;  
And the government will rest on His shoulders;  
And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.*

These seven studies come primarily from this one verse. We will take it phrase by phrase. We will look at it name by name. My approach to this endeavor is taken from Isaiah 28:10: “For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little” (ESV). So let’s examine Isaiah and his times, and then make application to some of the challenges we face in our modern world.

#### WE ARE LIVING IN A CRITICAL TIME OF HISTORY

As we look for answers to the world’s problems, it should be obvious that we will not find them by following the rabbit down the hole into Alice’s Wonderland. There everything is surreal and topsy-turvy—not at all like things in the real world. Answers can be whatever you want them to be in Wonderland, but they will not at all fix things in the land of reality.

Pluralism may say that all answers are equally valid and that no truth is “true” truth; but even Alice knows that this is craziness and not at all the way it was meant to be. In the real world things are right and wrong, and true and false, and wise and stupid, and up and down, and on and off. There are laws and rules that must be followed, and there are consequences when we mess up. Now that’s the way it *really* is. And in the *real* world Christ is unique, and pluralism is a figment of the imagination.

As we begin looking at Isaiah’s prophecy we discover that this prophecy, like all others, is set in a real-life situation. You will notice that Isaiah 9:6 begins with the little word “for”—“*For* a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us.” This word “for” is a translation of the Hebrew conjunction *chi*, which is a connective word linking what is about to be said with what has already been said. In other words, we are invited to back up and see Isaiah’s great prophecy about Christ in the *general context* of Isaiah’s prophetic writings, and then specifically in light of the *immediate context* of chapter 9.

So we go back to the beginning. The book of Isaiah was written around 700-680 B.C. and was addressed to the people of the southern tribe of Judah during the time when God’s people were divided into two separate governmental spheres, the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom. Addressing the southern kingdom of Judah, Isaiah begins with some unflattering remarks for his audience:

*1 The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, concerning Judah and Jerusalem which he saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Abaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. 2 Listen, O heavens, and hear, O earth; for the LORD speaks, “Sons I have reared and brought up, but they have revolted against Me. 3 An ox knows its owner, and a donkey its master’s manger, but Israel does not know, My people do not understand.” 4 Alas, sinful nation, people weighed down with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, sons who act corruptly! They have abandoned the LORD, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away from Him.*

—ISAIAH 1:1-4

These scathing words give us a picture of the spiritual state of the people of Judah during Isaiah’s ministry, and it was very

bad. The people had revolted against God, had shown less sense than the ox and donkey, and were a sinful, corrupt people who despised “the Holy One of Israel.”

Rebellion against God has consequences, and several chapters later Isaiah warns Judah and Jerusalem of coming disaster: “The LORD will bring on you, on your people, and on your father’s house such days as have never come since the day that Ephraim separated from Judah, the king of Assyria” (7:17). Here Isaiah recalls the rebellion described in 1 Kings 12 that resulted in the nation being divided into the kingdom of Israel (also known as Ephraim) in the north and the kingdom of Judah in the south. Eventually this division spelled disaster for the northern kingdom of Ephraim.

So here’s Israel’s plight: Isaiah is writing to the southern kingdom of Judah, reminding them that their northern brethren had become so bad that God had separated them out, the nation of Assyria had come down and taken them captive, and they were scattered throughout the world. That had happened in 721 B.C. (the destruction of Samaria and Israel), and now Isaiah’s warning to Judah and Jerusalem is simply this: “Listen—if you keep going the way you’re going, if you keep behaving as badly as your brothers behaved, the same thing is going to happen to you. Dark days, troubling days, are going to come upon you, just like Ephraim to the north.”

Moving beyond chapter 7, Isaiah continues to relate the plight of God’s people in chapter 9. He describes the “gloom” of a people who are “in anguish” (v. 1) and depicts the Israelites as a “people who walk in darkness” and who “live in a dark land” (v. 2) while under “the yoke of their burden” and subject to “the rod of their oppressor” (v. 4). Grievous affliction! Darkness, gloom, and anguish—truly difficult times. Wow! What a time God is predicting for these people!

It reminds me of that quartet on the old *Hee Haw* TV program. With downcast faces they would sing, “Gloom, despair, and agony on me! Deep, dark depression—excessive misery. If it weren’t for bad luck I’d have no luck at all. Gloom, despair, and agony on me!” Well, that could have been Israel’s song. In effect the people sang those lyrics for hundreds of years throughout centuries of dominion by the Gentile nations.

Now what was God’s answer to this gloom and agony? As we read on, we see that the answer is *a great light*: “The light will shine on them” (v. 2). Gloom and despair will not have the final word because a great light will dispel the gloom and shine through the darkness. This was the hope of Israel.

The important question then is, *what or who is this great light*? Well, Matthew in his Gospel tells us that Jesus is that light. Quoting from this prophecy in Isaiah 9, Matthew applies it to Jesus at the beginning of His ministry:

*12 Now when He heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee; 13 and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. 14 This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying, 15 “THE LAND OF ZEBULUN AND THE LAND OF NAPHTALI, BY THE WAY OF THE SEA, BEYOND THE JORDAN, GALILEE OF THE GENTILES— 16 THE PEOPLE WHO WERE SITTING IN DARKNESS SAW A GREAT LIGHT, AND TO THOSE WHO WERE SITTING IN THE LAND AND SHADOW OF DEATH, UPON THEM A LIGHT DAWNED.” 17 From that time Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*

— MATTHEW 4:12-17

Matthew is making the point that Jesus grew up in the town

of Nazareth, which was in Zebulun; and the center of His Galilean ministry was in the city of Capernaum, which was in Naphtali. As Jesus lived and ministered in these areas of Israel, He presented himself as the Messiah who would bring deliverance and hope to the people. *He* was the light of Isaiah's prophecy, the One who would dispel the darkness and inaugurate a new age for the nation.

Unfortunately, the nation of Israel rejected Jesus as their Messiah, and so the time of deliverance was delayed. Nevertheless Jesus predicted that He would return again in great power and glory (Matt. 24:29-31), and at *that* time Isaiah's prophecy will find its ultimate fulfillment. The "government" will finally be placed upon the shoulder of the Child who was born (Isa. 9:6), and peace will finally come to Israel (Isa. 9:7).

You see, it was a crucial time in Israel's history when Isaiah penned these words. But the answer to Israel's dilemma was in a Child who would be born; and that is our hope as well. As one thinks about it, *we* are living at a critical time of history too. Those who know anything about prophetic events and the biblical chronology of the end-times know that the last days of this age are very likely upon us.

Terrorism at home and abroad has become a major concern as multinational armies police the hot spots of the world. As a result, the geopolitical structure of the world seems to be in a major state of flux as nations struggle for survival on one hand and for supremacy on the other. For instance, Europe is emerging as a shooting star among the nations, while America is becoming increasingly isolated and marginalized in the arena of world affairs. Israel continues to be in the spotlight with very few friends and an enormous weight of pressure to conform to world opinion. The moral infrastructure of the western world continues to decline, and potential environmental disasters

remain hot topics of concern. Looking at the big picture, prophetically significant things are happening. Actually it is all quite mind-boggling, and the thing most people want after watching the evening news is an aspirin for their headache.

So how do we find our way out of all this gloom and darkness? Well, the answer is not in some abstract theory, governmental philosophy, or outworking of events on the world stage. The answer for us is the same as it was for Israel in the prophecy of Isaiah. The answer is in a Person. The answer is in a Deliverer. The answer is in a Child who is born and a Son who is given. The answer is in Jesus Christ, the unique Savior of the world. We are living in a critical time of history, and the answer is a Person.

#### WE ARE LOOKING FOR A SPECIAL PERSON TO SAVE US

Isaiah is very specific. What will save us is a special Person: a Child, a Son. Salvation will not come in the form of a great idea, nor will it be found in some new philosophy of government. Our only hope is in a Person—*that* is what Isaiah is saying in Isaiah 9:6.

Our world seems to understand this. In her book *The Hidden Dangers of the Rainbow*, Constance Cumbey tells of a New Age claim that the person who would save the world had been found. In the preface of her book she tells the story:

Millions around the globe awoke to a great surprise on April 25, 1982. They opened their newspapers only to be greeted with full-page display ads brazenly proclaiming, “THE CHRIST IS NOW HERE.”

From Rome to Jerusalem, from Kuwait to Karachi and from New York to Los Angeles—in more than 20 major cities—newspaper readers blinked in shocked disbelief as they tried to digest this particular piece of “news” along with their breakfast.

The \$500,000-plus ad campaign featured the following copy:

THE WORLD HAS HAD ENOUGH . . .  
OF HUNGER, INJUSTICE, WAR.  
IN ANSWER TO OUR CALL FOR HELP,  
AS WORLD TEACHER FOR ALL HUMANITY,  
THE CHRIST IS NOW HERE.<sup>6</sup>

So who was that ad talking about? Actually, it was talking about a man called Lord Maitreya. Maitreya is said to be the fifth reincarnation of Buddha, and New-Agers presented him as “The Christ.” Texe Marrs in his book *Dark Secrets of the New Age* said, “Lord Maitreya, avatar and world teacher, is now claimed to be living in London, preparing himself for his eventual reign at the world’s helm.”<sup>7</sup>

The point I am making is that members of the New Age Movement are looking for a special person who will save them. What they fail to realize, however, is the basic dilemma of man—namely, that we have sinned against the living God and this means no mere human can save us, whether he is an Eastern guru, a Western religionist, or a secular humanist. Who, then, *can* save us? Only the Person of Isaiah’s prophecy, only the Child who is born and the Son who is given, only Jesus Christ, the eternal Savior.

#### THIS PERSON IS JESUS CHRIST

According to Isaiah 9:6, Jesus Christ is qualified to be our Savior for two reasons. First, He is the unique man, unlike any other who has ever lived on Planet Earth; and second, He is the only God-man, the only One who alone can pay the price to free mankind from bondage to sin. Let’s look at each of these in turn.

*Jesus Christ Is the Unique Man*

*For a child will be born to us.*

ISAIAH 9:6

The first thing we learn about this Child is that it will be a male child. The Savior of Isaiah's prophecy will be a man. The word for *child* in the Hebrew text is a masculine word; so the Child will be a boy. Now that immediately eliminates half of the population as potential candidates. The special Person who will come as the light to penetrate the darkness will not be a woman. As we come to the New Testament we discover that this Person is Jesus, a truly unique man.

Yet throughout the history of the church much has been made of Mary, the mother of Jesus, as the person of enlightenment and salvation. Even though the Bible doesn't exalt her in that way, the Church of Rome has proceeded to eclipse the glory of Christ by focusing on the glory of Mary. The attributes of her son are attributed to her—i.e., she was born sinless, she lived a sinless life, she ascended to heaven without experiencing the pain of death, and she is really the go-to person for the forgiveness of sins. Now let me be quick to say that Mary was a very special woman and greatly blessed of God, but nowhere in the Bible are these things said of her. Isaiah makes it clear: The special Person who will save us will not be a woman; He will be a man.

A second thing we learn from an earlier prophecy of Isaiah is that this Child will have a unique birth. All men are born of a woman, of course—even gurus. What makes Jesus stand out above every other person is that He was born of a *virgin* woman. This is what Isaiah tells us in 7:14: "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel."

This is an unusual prophecy because it predicts something unprecedented in the course of human history. We all know that a virgin can't have a baby (without being artificially inseminated). It is impossible. If there is no male sperm, then fertilization doesn't take place. It's as simple as that. Yet Isaiah predicts that a virgin will conceive a child and give birth to a son. Now, that's amazing!

The word translated "virgin" here is from the Hebrew word *almah*, which can mean "virgin" or "young woman." The Revised Standard Version and the New English Version translate it as "young woman," but the motive behind that translation seems to be a liberal bias against the whole idea of a virgin giving birth to a child. There are strong reasons to favor translating the word *almah* as "virgin," however. Let me share a few of them with you.

(1) Every other use of the word *almah* in the Old Testament (used seven times<sup>8</sup>) is a definite reference to a virgin woman or unmarried maiden. The first time this word is used (in Genesis 24:43), Rebekah is called an *almah* before she even meets her future husband, Isaac. Earlier in the chapter (verse 16), her virginity is clarified: "And the girl was very beautiful, a virgin, and no man had had relations with her." How much clearer could it be? She is an *almah*—a virgin. Every other occurrence of *almah* in the Old Testament is like that. Clearly *almah* refers to a virgin woman, and Isaiah 7:14 is no exception.

(2) There is a Greek translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint. It was translated by Hebrew scholars who were experts in the Hebrew language but also knew Greek. When they translated the word *almah* in Isaiah 7:14, they used the Greek word *parthenos*, which is the explicit word in the Greek language for a virgin woman.

(3) Finally, for those who have any remaining doubt,

Scripture itself gives us the key to interpreting Isaiah 7:14. The Gospel of Matthew (1:23), under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, quotes Isaiah 7:14: “Behold, the virgin shall be with child . . .”; and Matthew also uses the word *parthenos*, the specific Greek word for virgin. There is no room for doubt that this is exactly what Isaiah meant when he said that this special Child would be born of a virgin woman.

Isaiah predicted that this Child would be born in a manner different from every other person in the world. He would be the Child of a virgin, and no other person in history can truthfully make that assertion. From the beginning of His earthly existence the Messiah would be singled out as a unique man: He was born of a virgin, led a sinless life, died a vicarious death, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven. Who is like Him? What guru, what Maitreya, what celebrity, what political or religious leader is like Jesus?

*Jesus Christ Is the Only God-man*

*For . . . a son will be given to us.*

ISAIAH 9:6

There is something else that uniquely sets Christ apart and qualifies Him alone to be the Savior. Not only is Jesus Christ unique by being virgin-born—He is also unique by virtue of His nature: He alone is the God-man. It is intriguing to note Isaiah’s language here. He tells us that the Child will be *born*, but that the Son will be *given*. Now this appears to be more than stylistic variation. The difference between being *born* and being *given* is crucial. Isaiah is saying that the Son will be given for the express reason that *the Son* was never born. As the eternal Son of God, He had always existed. According to Scripture He is the eternally existent second member of the triune Godhead.

Here again we are taken back to a previous chapter in Isaiah, where the name of the virgin-born Child would be Immanuel (7:14). Today this is a popular name for boys, especially in the Hispanic community where it is common to give children biblical names. But in Isaiah's day it was not common. The name in Isaiah 7:14 is actually a phrase describing the special nature of the Child. It is a compound of the Hebrew preposition *im* (meaning "with"), the plural suffix *anu* (meaning "us"), and the word *El* (the shortened form of the Hebrew word *Elohim*, meaning "God"). So Immanu-el literally means "God with us." This is why Matthew, when quoting this verse, says in a parenthetical explanation, "THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US" (1:23).

Now the ramifications of this are astounding. *Elohim* is the name used for God in the first verse of the Bible, which says, "In the beginning God [*Elohim*] created the heavens and the earth." So Isaiah was declaring that the virgin-born Child would be the God of the universe, the God who created the world! As a matter of confirmation Isaiah later says (in the verse we are considering) that the Child's name would be called "Mighty God" (Isa. 9:6).

You see, no mortal man can be the savior of the world because all mortals are corrupted by sin, and all mortals are limited by their finite humanity. The only One who can save us is the God-man. That is why Jesus is unique. He is the one and only God-man. No eastern guru, Lord Maitreya, or aspiring world ruler can legitimately make that claim. In the words of Isaiah, pluralism is doomed. There is only one Savior, and He is the unique Jesus!

#### THIS PERSON WILL SAVE US

There is a practical side to Israel's prophecy found in the little phrase "to us," which occurs twice in Isaiah 9:6: "For a child

will be born *to us*, a son will be given *to us*” (emphasis added). This makes it all very personal—especially to Israel in the context, but also to all of God’s people by way of application. Here is God’s answer for our need. Here is real hope!

### *He Will Be a Real Man*

*For a child will be born to us.*

ISAIAH 9:6

When Isaiah said that the Child who would be born to the virgin would be Immanuel (“God with us,” Isa. 7:14), he was not saying that there would be some spiritual epiphany or mystical presence of God that would suddenly emerge in the world. Nor was he speaking of an extraterrestrial superhuman descending upon our planet like E.T. in the Spielberg movie. He was telling us that an actual Child would be born of a virgin woman and that this Child would bring ultimate peace to the world (Isa. 9:7). He would be a real human being who would be able to adequately represent the human race in providing an adequate solution to the human dilemma.

You see, the message of the Bible is that human beings have sinned against God and have therefore come under the judgment of God’s holy and just wrath. It’s not an animal problem or an angel problem—it’s a human problem. Now since humans are the ones guilty of this serious infraction of divine law, it is humans who must pay the penalty. That is why the writer to the Hebrews in the New Testament said, “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb. 10:4). Neither can an angel atone for our guilt, because angels are not human, and this is a problem caused by humans. Therefore, any savior of mankind must also be a true human being.

But there is a serious problem that must be resolved. All

human beings are born of other human beings, and so all are a part of the condemned race. Every eastern guru, every Maitreya, every aspiring politician, every world ruler has been born of another human being and is consequently a part of the problem rather than a part of the solution. There is only one human being who doesn't fit this category, and that person is Jesus Christ. Why? Because He was born of a virgin—and that has never been true of any other man.

The fact that Jesus did not have an earthly father, although Joseph was his adoptive father and the source of all of his legal rights, meant that He did not inherit the problem of sin that permeates the human race (Rom. 5:12). Yet because He did have a human mother, He qualifies as a true human being. In other words, the virgin birth was the only means by which an adequate Savior could be produced for us. Jesus Christ is a true human being; but He is also a *sinless* human being. He is the only man in the history of the world of whom that can be said. Therefore, as the only unique man, He is our only possible Savior.

This is why no human ruler has ever been able to bring peace to the world. Many have tried, but none have succeeded. Hitler was a sinful man. So was Napoleon and Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar and Genghis Khan. Corruption cannot produce perfection, and no sinful human being can produce a righteous kingdom.

The Child of Isaiah's prophecy is the *one exception*, and He is the only hope for mankind. According to Matthew's Gospel (1:21-23; 4:12-17), Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. He is a real person, and He had a real physical presence among us. Isaiah is careful to tell us that the "child will be born *to us*" (emphasis added). This means that He will be our human benefactor—our Savior.

*He Will Be the True God**For . . . a son will be given to us.*

ISAIAH 9:6

The Savior of mankind must not only be a true man—He must also actually be God. The task of atoning for man’s sin and establishing a utopian kingdom where the pristine environment of the Garden of Eden is restored to Planet Earth is beyond any human endeavor. Only God could accomplish these things.

I am sure you have noticed that the gurus claim a divine nature, and New Agers aspire to personal deity. But when we take a closer look, it’s a madness easily dispelled. The lies, the lust, the greed, the self-centeredness of those who are claiming such things belie their claims. Just look once, just cut through the religious rhetoric, just observe the pious charade. It is not God. It is simply man in all of his sinfulness wanting to be God—pretending to be God. The New Age ideology is not an enlightenment; it is an evasion of responsibility before the holiness of God. Man does not want to be accountable to God; so he pretends to be God. That way he can make up his own rules and liberate himself from eternal damnation.

Listen, there is no divine presence in our world apart from the Son who was given to us. When Jesus the Son of God was born of a virgin, He was born sinless, and He remained sinless throughout the course of His life. But the other thing to realize is that He was also Immanuel—“God with us.” This was absolutely essential to His role as our Redeemer. Matthew made this connection when he described the birth of Christ:

*“She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins.”*

*Now all this took place that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying,*

*“BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD, AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL,” which translated means, “GOD WITH US.”*

— MATTHEW 1:21-23

The name Jesus means “one who saves,” and the idea according to Matthew is that He will save His people from their sins. Now “people” is a reference to a lot of people—in fact, all the people who will ever believe in Jesus as their Savior. So if Jesus is going to die for more than one person, He has to be infinite. You see, if He were only human, then after He had died for the first person, He’d be dead and of no use to anyone else in their sinful predicament. As a perfect, sinless substitute He could still only pay the penalty for one person’s sin if He were merely one human being. The only way the Son could save more than one (in fact, millions) is if there were an infinite quality about Him. And only God is infinite.

That is why Matthew adds the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 as an explanation of how Jesus could save His people (plural) from their sin. The only way is if He were what Isaiah said He would be—Immanuel, “God with us.” In other words, the true Messiah-Savior of mankind has to be more than a mere man with good ideas and a winsome personality. He has to be God—or more specifically, He has to be the God-man.

Now Jesus *did* die for the sins of the world, and that is what the gospel message of the New Testament is all about. He accomplished the first stage of redemption—the liberation of the human soul from bondage to sin and eternal death by His sacrificial death on the cross. After rising from the dead, He then left this earth, promising to return. When He does return,

He will complete the redemption process by destroying those who perpetuate evil in the world and by lifting the curse upon creation. He will inaugurate the Kingdom Age and bring universal peace to the world. That is what the Bible says the Messiah will do. And that is what Jesus will do—because He is the God-man.

### SO, WHY DON'T MORE PEOPLE BELIEVE IN JESUS?

Despite His uniqueness, many in our world dismiss Jesus as irrelevant. How can this be? Well, I can think of two possible reasons. One is indicated by 2 Corinthians 4:4, which says, “the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” “The light of the gospel” is the same light that Isaiah described in Isaiah 9:2, but Scripture says that Satan has the ability to cause spiritual blindness in unbelievers. This is one reason people dismiss Jesus as irrelevant.

A second reason is what I would call insipid Christianity. Many people who reject Jesus are not rejecting Jesus *per se*. Rather, they are rejecting our portrayal of Jesus. As Christians, the way we represent Jesus in our daily lives is often inconsistent with the way He truly is. For instance, He is loving and righteous—and we are often perceived as being quite different than that. The difference that Jesus should make in our lives as the unique Christ is not seen by others; so they simply conclude that Jesus is irrelevant.

To a large extent we have turned Christianity into a religion. We dutifully go to church and speak our platitudes of praise and perform our rituals, but in the real world we live just like everybody else. We don't live the life of Christ, and so people do not

see His uniqueness in us. This is why those who watch us simply see Christianity as another religion in the world.

I remember hearing a conversation years ago between two college students in which a Christian student was telling an unbeliever about Jesus. The unbelieving student said to the Christian, “Listen, if one-tenth of what you say about Jesus is true, then you ought to be ten times as excited.” Wow! What an indictment on our apathy and casual approach to Jesus! No wonder people are not attracted to Him.

The truth of the matter is, though, that regardless of how we may misrepresent Him, Jesus is the unique Savior who is both a perfect man and the true God. The little Child in the Bethlehem manger grew to live a sinless life, taught us the truth about God, died on the cross for our sins, rose again from the dead, and is coming again in great power and glory as the King of kings and Lord of lords. There is no one like Him. And that’s something to get excited about!

## CONCLUSION

The uniqueness of Christ is seen in the fact that there has never been anyone else like Him. Many have claimed to be the ultimate savior of the world, but apart from Jesus Christ, none has been able to substantiate that claim. All great leaders have struggled with their own faults, and all would-be world conquerors have ended their lives in eventual failure and infamy. Only Jesus Christ has offered a solution to mankind’s most pressing need—the problem of sin and pervasive selfishness—by dying on the cross as the full and final payment for man’s guilt before God. Jesus alone has the qualifications of perfect humanity blended with absolute deity—the qualifications necessary to redeem and renovate our worn-out planet. Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

So as we come to the end of this first chapter, let me ask you a question. Have *you* recognized the uniqueness of Christ to be your Savior? Only He can forgive your sins, and He alone can give you the hope of eternal life. According to the Bible, all He requires is that you put your faith in Him, trusting that His sacrificial death on the cross was for you too. Acknowledge your sinful condition, and reach out to the Savior. The Bible says that “WHOEVER WILL CALL UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED” (Rom. 10:13). It’s as simple, and at the same time as profound, as that.

# NOTES

## CHAPTER ONE NOT LIKE ANY OTHER

1. Bruce J. Nicholls, ed., *The Unique Christ in Our Pluralistic World* (Carlisle, UK and Grand Rapids, MI: Paternoster Press/Baker Book House, 1994), p. 7.
2. Thomas A. Harris, M.D., *I'm OK, You're OK* (New York: Avon Books, 1973).
3. Nicholls, *The Unique Christ in Our Pluralistic World*, p. 7.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
6. Constance E. Cumbey, *The Hidden Dangers of the Rainbow* (Shreveport, LA: Huntington House, 1983), p. 13.
7. Texe Marrs, *Dark Secrets of the New Age* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1987), p. 59.
8. Genesis 24:43; Exodus 2:8; Psalm 68:25; Proverbs 30:19; Song of Solomon 1:3; 6:8; Isaiah 7:14.

## CHAPTER TWO THE ULTIMATE RULER OF THE WORLD

1. John Steinbeck, in eds. Susan Shillinglaw and Jackson J. Benson, *America and Americans and Selected Nonfiction* (New York: Penguin Putnam, 2002), p. 403.

Now we face the danger which in the past has been most destructive to the human: success—plenty, comfort, and ever-increasing leisure. No dynamic people has ever survived these dangers.
2. *The International Thesaurus of Quotations*, comp. Eugene Ehrlich and Marshall DeBruhl (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1996), p. 528.
3. George Orwell, *Animal Farm* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993).
4. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 88.