



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

Phil. 2:10 talks about “Things under the earth”. “What are these things?”

This part of the Philippian letter is so important and soul-elevating that I feel obliged, in answering the question, to say something about the thoughts expressed in the context.

The Incarnate Christ

In Roman mythology particularly we read about the gods taking human and sometimes animal form and coming down to earth, but here Paul tells us quite specifically that the God of Heaven sent His Son, Jesus Christ, down to earth to live in human form. In His preincarnate state He was in ‘the form of God’, i.e., He possessed all the attributes of God; this is a clear expression by Paul of the deity of Christ. The scripture says that ‘He emptied Himself’ but it would seem not of His deity; He was Son of God and Son of Man. He was, says Paul, ‘made in the likeness of men’ and this was a real likeness, not a phantom human form as the Gnostics held. We realise that He had to leave the environment of glory and limit Himself to time and space

when He came to earth, but it is extremely difficult for me to believe that the same limitations applied to knowledge and conduct. He was 'made in the likeness of sinful flesh', but here it behoves us to restrain our thinking somewhat. We understand that every human being in the flesh was, and is, and will be a sinner; the propensity to sin is always there, but Jesus was in the flesh but **without** sin; this must have been the case else He could not have been the Saviour. Another phrase which Paul uses is 'being found in fashion as a man! W. E. Vine draws out the meaning of the three expressions, 'form of God', (MORPHE); 'likeness of men' (HOMOIOMA); and 'in fashion' (SCHEMA), and suggests that 'form of God' indicates what Jesus was in Himself as regards God, and 'in fashion as a man' indicates what He was in the eyes of men. Paul finds great wonder when he considers the voluntary humiliation of Christ, and urges such humility to the Christians at Philippi.

The Post-Incarnate Christ

We now come to a most interesting part of Paul's letter. Jesus has subjected Himself to that most despised of deaths, as a common criminal on the accursed cross. Paul envisages the return of Jesus to Heaven and says, "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name". The Greek word used here is HUPERUSOO (HUPER, above or beyond; HUPSOO, height), and this gives us the idea that Jesus was lifted beyond the glory which He had before His incarnation.

We now have to ask ourselves the question, "What higher place could Jesus have than He had before"? Well, the name which was to be above every name was obviously His earthly name of Jesus, and equally obviously, what He took **back** to Heaven which He did not have before He **left** Heaven was His experience of humanity. Jesus was the only Person of the Godhead who had actually had the experience of living on earth clothed in human form, and this is what He took back with Him to Heaven, and that is why He was highly exalted. Jesus knew well enough that He had to be crucified in order to achieve our salvation, but the actual **experience** of having nails driven into His feet and wrists, and feeling the excruciating pain, was not something which Deity was accustomed to.

A similar idea is presented to us by the Writer of the Hebrew letter when he says, "Though he were a Son (the indefinite article should be left out here; there is only one Son of God), yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered" (Heb. 5:8). Now it is very difficult for me to believe that Jesus did not know what obedience was in His pre-incarnate state; what is being said here is that Jesus had not **experienced** obedience in the **human** state. What Jesus **learned** was the suffering associated with obedience in the flesh; this idea, I suggest, is of considerable importance to we Christians when we sometimes have to suffer for **our** obedience to Christ.

The Cosmic Lordship

I use this heading confidently because of the revelation given by Paul of the universal application of the Lordship of Christ; in heaven, on earth, and under the earth. Many Christians refer to Jesus as Messiah, Saviour, Priest and King, but somehow the title 'Lord' seems, for some reason, to have fallen into disuse. Perhaps it is because 'Lordship' suggests control of our lives by someone else, in this case, Christ, and in these so-called enlightened days control of our lives is anathema to most people. The Bible, however, has no such inhibitions. Paul in his first letter to Corinth states, "For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many). But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him" (1 Cor. 8:5,6). He had seen the multitude of idols worshipped by many people, but he denied that these idols had any reality in existing gods; as a matter of fact he says, "What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered

in sacrifice to idols is any thing? But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils" (1 Cor. 10:19,20). We today should echo the dismissive condemnation made by Paul in respect of the worship of gods other than the True God, and his insistence that no one is worthy to exercise lordship over our lives other than the True Lord, Jesus Christ.

Under The Earth

We must now consider what Paul means when he uses the phrase 'under the earth'. In general when we use this phrase we mean somewhere under the surface of the earth; a cave, a mine, a grave, a subterranean passage, etc. Some commentators have said that this is a Homeric expression and means quite simply 'the subterranean place of the dead'.

However, there is another explanation which needs some consideration. In the eastern Mediterranean regions, particularly in Asia Minor, the worship of so-called fertility gods still persisted, even into Roman times. The most notable city was Ephesus where the goddess Diana was worshipped (so named by the Romans; earlier referred to as Artemis by the Greeks). It was a custom by the Romans to acknowledge the local gods wherever they went. It must be remembered that the purpose of the worship of fertility gods was so that the blood from sacrificed animals would fertilise the natural earth. Consequently, when the Roman Empire spread to Persia they encountered another fertility god called Mithras; they readily acknowledged this god and the ownership of him became popular; particularly among the Roman soldiery.

The legend associated with this god is quite interesting. Mithras was evidently, according to the legend, born in a cave. One day he went out of the cave into the forest, encountered a wild bull, took it back into the cave and slew it; the shedding of its blood spawned all living creatures. The interesting point is that the Mithraic temples were usually underground and the worship of this god was, of course, carried out in these underground temples (as were the sacrifices). Pictorial representation of this god is always accompanied by a dog, a snake, and a scorpion; the signs of the zodiac were also present. The sacrificed animal was a bull. (Star-gazers beware of the signs of the zodiac). Mithraism became so popular in the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D. that it rivalled Christianity in popularity. It flourished until Constantine, after which it decreased quite rapidly.

In view of what Paul taught with regard to the worship of gods that were no gods, it is reasonable to think that he would have these fertility cults in mind, and that he would wish to make the point quite forcibly that not only was Jesus Lord in Heaven and on earth, but also in respect of all the subterranean regions as well.

The truly great thought in all of this is that all of these cults are merely history now, but Jesus is still acknowledged throughout the world, and He is still Lord of Heaven, earth, and all things under the earth. It will ever remain so.

(All questions, to Alf Marsden,

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WHY?

When people go to a football game, they want a seat on the fifty yard line.

When they go to a basketball game, they want a seat at mid-court.

When they attend a play they want a seat about midway in the auditorium.

When they go to a boxing or wrestling match they want a ring- side seat.

When they go to a circus parade, they want to stand in the front line.

BUT — when they go to Church everyone wants a back seat.

Why — *Selected.*