

Dr. Robert A. Peterson, Christology, Session 9, Systematics, Preexistence of Christ Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Peterson, Christology, Session 9, Systematics, Preexistence of Christ, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Robert Peterson's Christology Session 9 focuses on the pre-existence of Christ, arguing through Old Testament Christophanies and New Testament texts. The lecture aims to establish that Jesus, as the Eternal Son, existed before his incarnation. Peterson clarifies that while the Father and Holy Spirit are also eternal, the term pre-existence specifically applies to the Son's transition to human form. He examines passages like John 1, Philippians 2, and Colossians 1 to support this doctrine, highlighting Christ's role in creation. The session also touches on early church practices, noting that worship of Jesus predated the full articulation of this theological understanding. Ultimately, the lecture lays the groundwork for a subsequent discussion on the incarnation.

**2. 9 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Peterson, Christology, Session 9 – Double click icon to play
in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org
[BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Theology →
Theology, Peterson → Christology).**



Peterson_Christology_Session09.mp3

3. Briefing Document: Peterson, Salvation, Session 9, Systematics, Preexistence of Christ

Briefing Document: The Pre-existence of Christ

Overview:

This briefing document summarizes the main themes and key arguments presented by Dr. Robert A. Peterson in Session 9 of his Christology series, focusing specifically on the doctrine of the pre-existence of Christ. Peterson establishes the importance of this doctrine as the first category in a systematic understanding of Christology, building upon previous discussions of patristic and modern Christology. He argues that the biblical text clearly teaches that the Eternal Son of God existed before his incarnation as Jesus of Nazareth.

Main Themes and Important Ideas:

1. **Defining Pre-existence:** Peterson clarifies that the pre-existence of Christ means that the "life of the Eternal Son did not begin in Bethlehem. As a matter of fact, it never had a beginning." He emphasizes that while the name "Jesus" pertains to his humanity, the second person of the Trinity, the Son, the Word, the Light, existed before taking on human form.
2. **Pre-existence as a Christological Category:** He distinguishes the pre-existence of the Son from the eternality of the Father and the Holy Spirit. While all three persons of the Trinity are eternal, "to have a pre-existence implies a subsequent existence, and only the Son became incarnate." The Father and the Spirit have always existed in the same mode, whereas the Son experienced a change in his mode of existence through the incarnation.
3. **Biblical Proofs of Pre-existence:** Peterson outlines two primary ways to demonstrate the Son's pre-existence from the Bible:

- **Appearances of the Pre-incarnate Son in the Old Testament (Christophanies):** He argues that certain theophanies, or visible appearances of the invisible God in the Old Testament, are actually Christophanies, pre-incarnate appearances of the Son. He uses the example of Isaiah's vision in Isaiah 6, which John in John 12:41 identifies as seeing the glory of Jesus: "Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him." Peterson connects the "glory" Isaiah saw to the "glory of Yahweh" sung by the seraphim in Isaiah 6:3, asserting that "John says Yahweh, in this context, is the pre-incarnate son. John would tell us we should call him the pre-incarnate word, light, son. Christian theology calls him the second person of the Trinity."
- **Direct Teachings in the New Testament:** The New Testament explicitly teaches the pre-existence of the Son. Peterson cites several key passages:
- **John 1:1-3:** "'In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, and the Word was God.'" Peterson highlights that this "Word," who became flesh in verse 14, existed "in the beginning," before his incarnation.
- **John 1:15:** John the Baptist's statement, "'He who comes after me ranks before me because he was before me,'" is interpreted as a confession of the Messiah's pre-existence, implying that Jesus existed before John in time, despite being born later.
- **John 8:58:** Jesus' powerful declaration, "'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am,'" is presented as a direct claim to the "I am" of Old Testament prophecy, particularly referencing the "I am" statements in Isaiah (e.g., Isaiah 45:5-6, 22). Peterson emphasizes that Jesus is claiming to be the one who spoke those divine pronouncements, thus existing before Abraham.
- **Philippians 2:6-7:** This passage, describing Christ who "although he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant," is interpreted as indicating Christ's pre-existent divine form before his incarnation as a servant (human).
- **Colossians 1:15-16:** Paul's assertion that "for by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth... all things were created through him and for him" demonstrates Christ's role as the Father's agent in creation, necessitating his pre-existence.
- **Hebrews 1:2, 10:** The author states that God "through whom also he created the world" and quotes Psalm 102:25-27 applying it to the Son: "'You, Lord, laid the

foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands.'" This again establishes the Son as the Creator, existing before the creation.

1. **Implications and Connections:** Peterson touches on several related theological concepts:
 - **The Trinity:** He reiterates the doctrine of one God in three co-eternal persons, emphasizing the distinct roles and experiences of the Son in the incarnation.
 - **The Incarnation:** The pre-existence of the Son is foundational to understanding the incarnation as the Eternal Son taking on human nature. He clarifies that it was not a pre-existent human being but the Son who became incarnate.
 - **The Deity and Humanity of Christ:** While the primary focus is pre-existence, Peterson notes that the New Testament clearly teaches Christ's deity, often implied by the discussion of his pre-existence and his role in creation. He also mentions Christ's true humanity, which began in Bethlehem.
 - **Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility:** Peterson briefly discusses the tension between these concepts, noting that the incarnation doesn't resolve it but rather highlights the dual nature of Christ.
 - **Early Church Understanding:** He points out that the early church's worship practices (singing hymns to Jesus, baptizing in his name) preceded and informed their theological understanding of Christ's pre-existence and deity.

Key Quotes:

- "The life of the Eternal Son did not begin in Bethlehem. As a matter of fact, it never had a beginning."
- "To have a pre-existence implies a subsequent existence, and only the Son became incarnate."
- "Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him." (referring to John 12:41 and Isaiah 6)
- "'In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, and the Word was God.'" (John 1:1)
- "'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.'" (John 8:58)

- "[Christ] although he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant." (Philippians 2:6-7)
- "For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth... all things were created through him and for him." (Colossians 1:16)
- "'You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands.'" (Hebrews 1:10, quoting Psalm 102:25)

Conclusion:

Dr. Peterson's Session 9 provides a robust biblical case for the pre-existence of Christ. By examining Old Testament Christophanies and key New Testament texts, he argues convincingly that the Eternal Son of God existed as a divine being before his incarnation as Jesus of Nazareth. This doctrine is presented as a crucial foundation for a systematic understanding of Christology and has significant implications for comprehending the person and work of Jesus Christ. The session also highlights the early church's intuitive recognition of Christ's divine nature through their worship, which later informed their theological formulations.

4. Study Guide: Peterson, Salvation, Session 9, Systematics, Preexistence of Christ

Study Guide: The Preexistence of Christ

Quiz

1. Explain the concept of Christ's preexistence in 2-3 sentences.
2. Why is "Jesus" not the most accurate term to use when referring to the eternal second person of the Trinity?
3. Why is preexistence considered a Christological category only, and not applicable to the Father or the Holy Spirit, even though all three are eternal?
4. What are the two primary ways Dr. Peterson argues for the preexistence of the Son from the Bible?
5. Explain the significance of John 12:41 in relation to Isaiah 6 and the preexistence of Christ.
6. According to the lecture, what does Jesus' statement "Before Abraham was, I am" in John 8 indicate about his existence?
7. How does John the Baptist's statement in John 1:15 ("He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me") support the doctrine of Christ's preexistence?
8. Briefly describe how Philippians 2:6-7 ("who, though he was in the form of God...") supports the idea that Christ existed before his incarnation.
9. How does Colossians 1:15-16, which describes Christ as the creator of all things, demonstrate his preexistence?
10. How did the early church's practices, such as singing hymns to Jesus, point towards their belief in his preexistence and deity?

Answer Key

1. Christ's preexistence means that the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, existed as a divine being before he became incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth. His life did not begin in Bethlehem; rather, he existed eternally with the Father and the Holy Spirit before taking on human nature.

2. While it is not incorrect to speak of the eternity of Jesus, the name "Jesus" pertains specifically to his humanity, the name given to him at his conception. Referring to the eternal second person of the Trinity, terms like the Son, the Word, or the Light are more accurate as they denote his pre-incarnate existence.
3. Preexistence implies a subsequent existence after a change in mode of being. Only the Son underwent incarnation, taking on human nature in addition to his divine nature. The Father and the Holy Spirit, while eternally existing with the Son, did not experience a similar transition in their mode of existence.
4. Dr. Peterson argues for Christ's preexistence through (1) appearances of the pre-incarnate Son (Christophanies) in the Old Testament, and (2) explicit teachings in the New Testament that describe his existence before his incarnation, such as his role in creation.
5. John 12:41 connects Isaiah's vision of glory in Isaiah 6 with Jesus. By stating that Isaiah "saw his glory and spoke of him," John identifies the Lord whom Isaiah saw on the throne as the pre-incarnate Christ, thus providing Old Testament evidence for Jesus' existence before his earthly ministry.
6. Jesus' declaration "Before Abraham was, I am" in John 8 asserts his preexistence by using the present tense "I am," which echoes divine self-identification. This statement indicates that his existence precedes that of Abraham, implying his eternal nature before his human birth.
7. John the Baptist, being born six months before Jesus according to human reckoning, stated that Jesus "ranks before me, because he was before me." This seemingly paradoxical statement points to Jesus' preexistence, indicating that his being existed prior to his human birth and thus holds a higher status.
8. Philippians 2:6-7 describes Christ as existing "in the form of God" before "emptying himself by taking the form of a servant." This passage suggests that Christ possessed the nature and glory of God prior to his incarnation and voluntary humbling to become human.
9. Colossians 1:15-16 states that Christ is the image of the invisible God and that "by him all things were created." As the agent through whom all creation came into being, Christ must have existed before the universe, thus demonstrating his preexistence.

10. The early church's practice of singing hymns to Jesus indicates their belief in his divine nature and preeminence. Worship, typically reserved for God, being directed towards Jesus from the earliest times, suggests that believers recognized his divine status and existence prior to his earthly life.

Essay Format Questions

1. Discuss the significance of the Old Testament theophanies, specifically Christophanies, as evidence for the preexistence of Christ. Analyze the hermeneutical considerations involved in identifying these appearances.
2. Explore the key New Testament passages (John 1:1-3, Philippians 2:5-8, Colossians 1:15-17, Hebrews 1:1-3) that teach the preexistence of Christ. Compare and contrast how each passage contributes to this doctrine.
3. Explain why the doctrine of Christ's preexistence is a foundational element of Christian theology. Discuss its implications for understanding the incarnation, atonement, and the Trinity.
4. Analyze the arguments presented against the preexistence of Christ throughout history. How do the biblical texts and traditional Christian theology respond to these challenges?
5. Discuss the relationship between Christ's preexistence and his two states (humiliation and exaltation). How does his eternal existence inform our understanding of his earthly ministry and his current glory?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Preexistence:** The doctrine that the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, existed as a divine being before his incarnation as Jesus Christ.
- **Incarnation:** The theological doctrine that the eternal Son of God took on a true human nature (body and soul) in the person of Jesus Christ, becoming both fully God and fully human.
- **Theophany:** A visible or otherwise sensory manifestation of God to humanity in the Old Testament.
- **Christophany:** A specific type of theophany in which the pre-incarnate Son of God (Christ) appears in the Old Testament.
- **Consubstantial:** A term used in the Nicene Creed and the Chalcedonian Definition to affirm that the Son is "of the same substance" or essence as the Father in his deity, and "of the same substance" as humanity in his humanity (apart from sin).
- **Hypostatic Union:** The theological term used to describe the union of the two natures (divine and human) in the one person of Jesus Christ, without confusion, change, division, or separation.
- **Kenosis:** A theological concept (derived from Philippians 2:7) that describes Christ's self-emptying or voluntary limitation of the independent exercise of his divine attributes during his incarnation.
- **Two States Doctrine:** The theological teaching that Jesus Christ experienced two chronological phases or conditions: the state of humiliation (from his incarnation to his burial) and the state of exaltation (from his resurrection to his second coming).
- **Trinity:** The Christian doctrine that there is one God who eternally exists as three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, co-equal and co-eternal.
- **Exegesis:** The critical interpretation and explanation of a biblical text.

5. FAQs on Peterson, Salvation, Salvation, Session 9, Systematics, Preexistence of Christ, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions: The Pre-existence of Christ

1. What does the pre-existence of Christ mean, and why is it significant? The pre-existence of Christ signifies that the Son of God, who became Jesus of Nazareth, existed as a divine being before his incarnation (his coming in human flesh) in Bethlehem. It means his life did not begin with his birth; rather, the eternal Son took on human nature. This doctrine is significant because it underscores Jesus' divine identity and his role as the eternal Son, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Holy Spirit. It also highlights the miraculous nature of the incarnation, where the pre-existent Son added humanity to his divine being.

2. How does the Bible support the doctrine of Christ's pre-existence? The Bible supports Christ's pre-existence in two main ways. First, the New Testament explicitly teaches it, describing the Son's involvement in creation (John 1:1-3, Colossians 1:15-16, Hebrews 1:2, 10), indicating his existence before he became human. Second, the Old Testament contains appearances of the pre-incarnate Son, known as Christophanies. For example, John 12:41 identifies the glory Isaiah saw in Isaiah 6 as the glory of Jesus, implying Jesus' pre-incarnate existence. Jesus' own statement in John 8:58, "Before Abraham was, I am," also strongly suggests his pre-existence and divine identity, echoing the "I am" statements associated with Yahweh in the Old Testament (Isaiah 45).

3. Is it accurate to speak of the pre-existence of the Father and the Holy Spirit? While the Father and the Holy Spirit are also eternal beings, it is not technically correct to speak of their "pre-existence." The term "pre-existence" implies a subsequent existence in a different form. Only the Son underwent a change in his mode of existence through the incarnation. The Father and the Holy Spirit have always existed in the same divine mode, co-eternally with the Son. Therefore, "pre-existence" is a specifically Christological category that applies uniquely to the Son's existence before and after his incarnation.

4. What is the relationship between Christ's pre-existence and the incarnation? Christ's pre-existence is the foundational reality upon which the incarnation occurred. The incarnation is the miraculous event where the eternal Son of God took on a true human body and soul, becoming the God-Man. It was not that God came to indwell a pre-existing human, but that the pre-existent Son took human nature to himself. From that point forward, Jesus is forever the God-Man, with both divine and human natures united in one person.

5. What is the significance of the Old Testament theophanies and Christophanies in relation to Christ's pre-existence? Theophanies are appearances of God in the Old Testament to human senses. When the New Testament identifies a specific theophany as an appearance of the pre-incarnate Son, it is called a Christophany. These Christophanies serve as evidence of Christ's pre-existence, demonstrating that the Son existed and interacted with humanity in some form before his incarnation. John's identification of the "glory" seen by Isaiah in Isaiah 6 with Jesus in John 12:41 is a key example of how the New Testament interprets Old Testament theophanies as Christophanies.

6. How does Jesus' statement "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58) support his pre-existence and deity? Jesus' statement "Before Abraham was, I am" is a powerful declaration of his pre-existence and deity. The phrase "I am" echoes the divine name revealed to Moses in Exodus 3:14, signifying eternal existence. By using this language, Jesus is claiming to be the eternal Yahweh who existed before Abraham. This statement directly implies his pre-existence and was understood by his Jewish listeners as a claim to divinity, which is why they attempted to stone him. Furthermore, the consensus of Johannine scholarship suggests Jesus is also aligning himself with the "I am" statements in Isaiah, where Yahweh declares his unique divinity.

7. How do passages like Philippians 2:6-7, Colossians 1:15-16, and Hebrews 1:2, 10 contribute to the understanding of Christ's pre-existence? These New Testament passages are crucial for understanding Christ's pre-existence. Philippians 2:6-7 describes Jesus as existing "in the form of God" before he "emptied himself" to take the "form of a servant," implying his pre-incarnate glory and divine status. Colossians 1:15-16 states that Christ is the "image of the invisible God" and that "by him all things were created," establishing his priority over and agency in creation, which necessitates his pre-existence. Hebrews 1:2 and 10 affirms that God created the world "through his Son" and directly addresses the Son as the one who "laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning," again highlighting his pre-existent role as Creator.

8. How did the early church's practices relate to their understanding of Christ's pre-existence and deity?

The early church's practices, such as singing hymns to Jesus, believing in him for salvation, being baptized in his name, and partaking in the Lord's Supper in spiritual union with him, preceded their full theological articulation of his pre-existence and deity. These acts of worship and devotion treated Jesus as God, even before the church fully developed the doctrines through councils and theological reflection. The fact that early Christians worshipped Jesus indicates their implicit belief in his divine nature and pre-existence, demonstrating that their lived faith informed their theological understanding.