

***Psalm 89:20-28 (Opening)***

- 20**    *I have found David, my servant;  
              with my holy oil I have anointed him,*
- 21**    *so that my hand shall be established with him;  
              my arm also shall strengthen him.*
- 22**    *The enemy shall not outwit him;  
              the wicked shall not humble him.*
- 23**    *I will crush his foes before him  
              and strike down those who hate him.*
- 24**    *My faithfulness and my steadfast love shall be with him,  
              and in my name shall his horn be exalted.*
- 25**    *I will set his hand on the sea  
              and his right hand on the rivers.*
- 26**    *He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father,  
              my God, and the Rock of my salvation.'*
- 27**    *And I will make him the firstborn,  
              the highest of the kings of the earth.*
- 28**    *My steadfast love I will keep for him forever,  
              and my covenant will stand firm for him.*

I've always been a music person for as long as I remember. Some of my first memories are of listening to music, either on the radio or the record player (that's an old-fashioned CD player for those of you too young to remember).

Every morning when I wake up, I have a song running through my head. Sometimes it helps me through the day, sometimes it just stays as my daily "earworm" song that won't go away, but is somewhat encouraging most of the day.

When Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he tells them in

### ***Ephesians 5:18-21***

*<sup>18</sup> And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup> addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, <sup>20</sup> giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.*

I don't think it's a coincidence that just a few verses earlier, verse 14 to be exact, it seems like he may be quoting a hymn that was probably popular in that day, and well known to the readers of the letter.

### ***Ephesians 5:14***

*<sup>14</sup> for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,  
"Awake, O sleeper,  
and arise from the dead,  
and Christ will shine on you."*

There are a few other places in Paul's letters that it seems like he's either quoting or composing a hymn, specifically a hymn to Christ. For example, take a look at Philippians 2:6-11.

### ***Philippians 2:6-11***

- <sup>6</sup> *who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,  
<sup>7</sup> but emptied himself,  
by taking the form of a servant,  
being born in the likeness of men.*
- <sup>8</sup> *And being found in human form,  
he humbled himself  
by becoming obedient to the point of death,  
even death on a cross.*
- <sup>9</sup> *Therefore God has highly exalted him  
and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,  
<sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
<sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory  
of God the Father.*

And again, in Paul's first letter to Timothy.

### **1 Timothy 3:16**

- <sup>16</sup> *Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness:*

*He was manifested in the flesh,  
vindicated by the Spirit,  
seen by angels,  
proclaimed among the nations,  
believed on in the world,  
taken up in glory.*

And it's not just Paul who seems to do this, but Peter as well, in 1 Peter 2:22-25.

### **1 Peter 2:22-25**

- <sup>22</sup> *He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.  
<sup>23</sup> When he was reviled, he did not revile in return;*

*when he suffered, he did not threaten,  
but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.  
24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree,  
that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.  
By his wounds you have been healed.  
25 For you were straying like sheep,  
but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

All these seem to be hymns or spiritual songs of some sort. That brings us to the verses in Colossians I want to talk about today, chapter 1 verses 15-20.

### ***Colossians 1:15-20***

*15 He<sup>1</sup> is the image of<sup>2</sup>the invisible God, <sup>3</sup>the firstborn of all creation.  
16 For by him all things were created, <sup>4</sup>in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. <sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

Paul seems to be either quoting or composing a hymn to Christ here, too. It's easy to find a poetic-like structure in these verses. There seems to be an initial stanza, verses 15 and 16; then a bridge in verses 17 and the first half of 18; then a final stanza in the last half of 18 through 20.

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor 4:4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Tim 1:17 To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 89:27 And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth. And Rom 8:29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

<sup>4</sup> Eph 1:0 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

The basic structure that jumps out at this point is that both the stanzas and the bridge start with “He is”; both the stanzas talk about Christ being firstborn; the first stanza talking about creation, the second talking about the new creation.

The bridge verses talk about Christ holding everything together, and the bridge in fact holds the two stanzas together.

Let’s take a look at some of the details in what scholars call “The Colossian Hymn” or “The Christ Hymn of Colossians”.

Verse 15 says that Jesus is the “image” of the invisible God. The Greek word here translated “image” is **εἰκών** (icon). An icon is a physical representation of something you may or may not have seen. Like a painting or a photograph or a digital image of something we put on our walls at home, or carry around in our wallet, purse, or phone. So, Jesus is the earthly representation of God. John 1:18 says

### ***John 1:18***

*<sup>18</sup> No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.*

Jesus was (and is) the perfect image of God, and throughout His life here on earth He didn’t sin. He continued (and continues) as the perfect image of God.

Since Jesus has been in existence since before the beginning of time, He was with God during the creation of everything, and, as John says in John 1:2-3:

### ***John 1:2, 3***

*<sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.*

What does it mean to be the firstborn of all creation? Well, it's easy to look at this and say that Christ was created; hence He is the firstborn of the creation. But the Greek word that's translated here as firstborn, *pro-tot-ok'-os*, can actually carry with it the meaning of preexistence and superiority, not just being what humans would associate with being firstborn of a family, although it carries that connotation as well.

You see, according to John 3:16, Jesus is God's one-of-a-kind, unique, **ONLY** son that He had. That would make him more than just firstborn, but **ONLY-born**. A firstborn gets the largest share of the inheritance, but it would stand to reason that the **ONLY** born would get the entire inheritance, and would be the sole heir.

In the two stanzas we talked about, they both refer to Christ as being firstborn or *pro-tot-ok'-us*. The first stanza talks about firstborn of creation, or being preexistent and superior to creation, and the second talks about firstborn from the dead, "that in everything He might be preeminent" or *prote-yoo'-o*, supreme, having the highest place. So Paul compares the first creation to the new creation in these two stanzas, saying Christ has primacy in both.

Verse 16 seems to focus on trying to clear up some of the problems that the Colossian church may have been facing; dealing with spiritual realms and who's in charge of whom. Paul says that Christ is not just supreme in all creation, but was the very catalyst of creation of all things, including what we see and what we can't see (spiritual realms), thrones, dominions, rulers and authorities. In other words, whatever we may see as being in charge, Christ is above them. To quote one of the commentaries I read "The point is that the most powerful angel princes, like the rest of creation, are subject to Christ as the One in whom, through whom, and for whom they were created."

At the end of verse 16, it says "all things were created through him", which ties back in nicely with John 1:3.

I'll come back to the bridge in verses 17 and 18, but let's jump down to the second stanza in the second half of 18, starting again with "He is".

Again we see Paul using the term firstborn, but this time "from the dead", the new creation. Like Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:16-19

## **2 Corinthians 5:16-19**

*<sup>16</sup> From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; <sup>19</sup> that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.*

So, since Christ is the firstborn from the dead, if we are in Christ, we are and will be part of that new creation, we will be raised like Him. But Christ is our leader in this creation also, the first, the "preeminent" as Paul says.

Verse 19 from Second Corinthians 5 ties in nicely with verse 20 of Colossians 1; through Christ or "in" Christ, we, the world, are reconciled to God; all things are reconciled to God through the preeminent leader of the new creation, by way of the sacrifice of His blood on the cross. The blood provides the sacrifice for our sins, but His resurrection into the new creation makes it a permanent, "once, for all" sacrifice, like it says in Hebrews 10:10.

Let's jump back now and look at the section I've been calling the bridge, verses 17 and 18a. Here we see a review of the first stanza of the hymn, and some additional information. He is what holds all things together. Another way of saying this is that Christ, who was God's agent of creation, His Word that He spoke to create the universe, is also the very

thing that holds everything together, keeps everything going on course. He is the guiding principle of the entire universe.

Not only that, but in verse 18, Paul says that Christ is the head of the body. The term head here can be taken to mean several different things in this verse; it can mean the leader, it can also mean the most important part or the top part (like a keystone in an arch), but the word head can also mean life. We talk about capital punishment, capital being from the Latin word for head. Capital punishment involves taking someone's life. So Christ is the Capital of the Church; the leader, uppermost part, corner stone, and also the life. Without Christ, there is no life in the new creation.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews says almost the same thing in Hebrews 1:3-4.

### ***Hebrews 1:3-4***

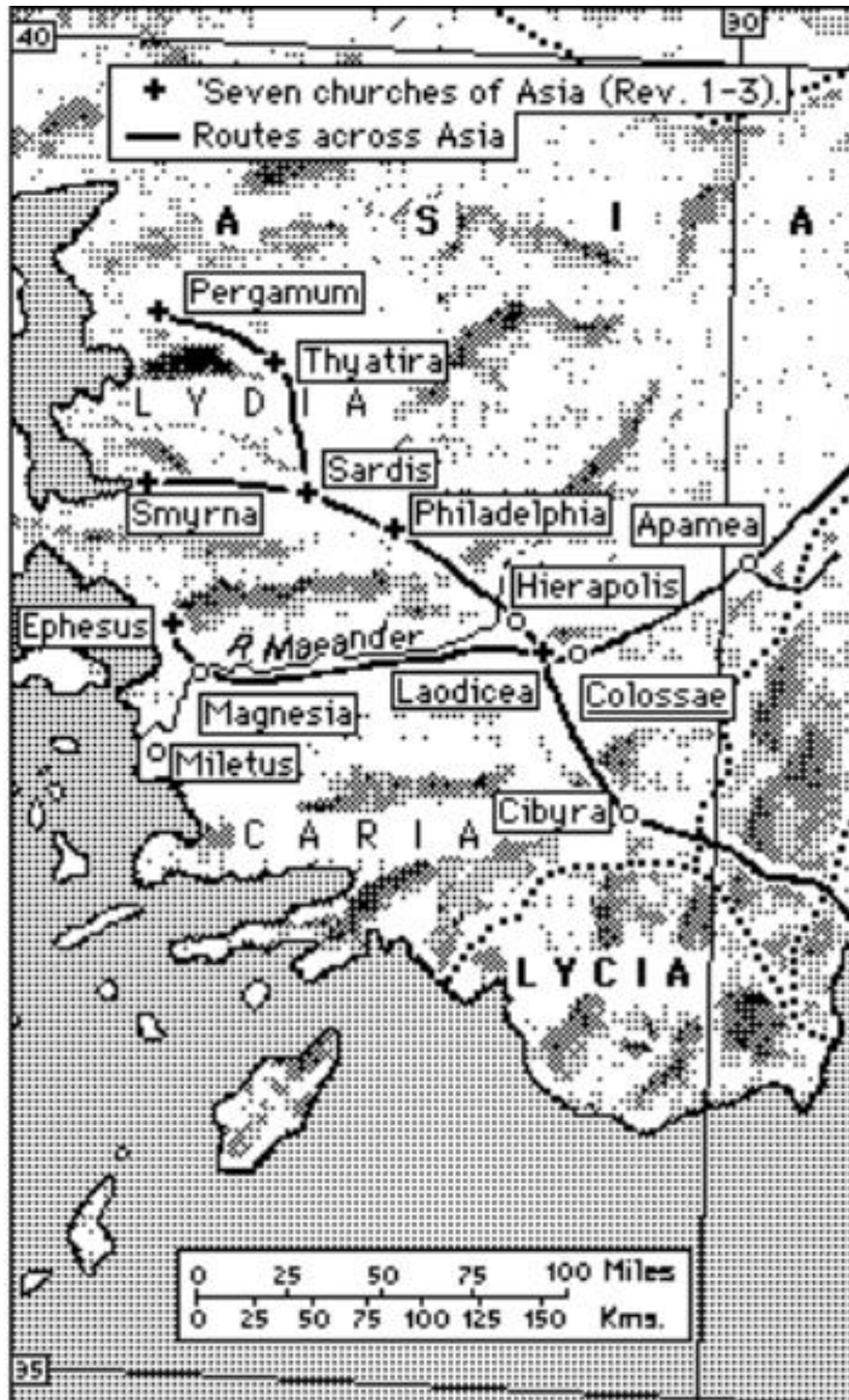
*<sup>3</sup> He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, <sup>4</sup> having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.*

So, this hymn to Christ in Colossians 1:15-20 explains to us all about Christ; who He was, is, and will be; why He is important to us; and why believing in Him is important.

Friday night, September 13, at sundown until Saturday night at sundown is the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippor, or in English, the Day of Atonement. Yom Kippor is the day when the sacrifice was made for the High Priest to be able to enter the Holy of Holies, and atone for the sins of all of Israel. Atonement is another word for reconciliation or making peace, like it says in verse 20. Next week, we'll look at the last section



of chapter 1 in Paul's letter to the church in Colossae, which focuses on reconciliation and redemption.



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***Colossians 1:15-20 (in verse form)***

*<sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God,  
the firstborn of all creation.*

*<sup>16</sup> For by him all things were created,  
in heaven and on earth,  
visible and invisible,  
whether thrones or dominions  
or rulers or authorities  
—all things were created through him and for him.*

*<sup>17</sup> And he is before all things,  
and in him all things hold together.*

*<sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church.*

*He is the beginning,  
the firstborn from the dead,  
that in everything he might be preeminent.*

*<sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,*

*<sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things,  
whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his  
cross.*

Questions:

1. What does the phrase “Image of the invisible God” make you think of?
2. Why is it important that Christ is preeminent (superior to all others)?
3. What does it mean in verse 19 “the fullness of God was pleased to dwell”?

### ***1 Thessalonians 3:11-13***

*<sup>11</sup> Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, <sup>12</sup> and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, <sup>13</sup> so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.*