

not, actually, depict the example of a pre-existent Messiah¹—something apparently only present in John—and that from the Synoptics it would be best to view Yeshua of Nazareth as a supernatural figure in a special relationship with God, such as the figure of Wisdom, but probably not God. Other studies have specifically and rightfully challenged much of this.² Evangelical Christians who hold to a high Christology of Yeshua or Jesus being God—and who strive to hold all of Scripture in high regard—would not, in fact, consider there to be a difference of approach to the nature of the Messiah seen in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts and the Gospel of John. Indeed, the Synoptic Gospels contain charges of blasphemy against Yeshua (Mark 2:7; 14:62-64; Matthew 9:2-3; 26:64-65; Luke 5:21) because of statements He made about His nature. And indeed, other significant actions and statements do appear which concern the Messiah’s nature in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts.

Today’s Messianic people, who hold to a high Christology of Yeshua being God, should recognize the need for us to weigh all of the major data presented to us in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts, then to be followed by a consideration of what the Fourth Gospel says. For surely, those whom we have encountered, who hold to a low Christology of Yeshua being a supernatural yet created being, have probably caught many of us off guard by referencing statements and passages from the Synoptic Gospels and Acts—when much of our attention has been (almost exclusively) focused on the Gospel of John. This section of *Salvation on the Line*, “**The Nature of Yeshua in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts**,” intends to focus our attention on what is indeed the largest quotient of material involving the actions, words, and teachings of the Messiah—from which significant conclusions about His nature can be derived and deduced.³

Luke 1:26-38

“The Child as Son of the Most High God”

“Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary. And coming in, he said to her, ‘Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.’ But she was very perplexed at *this* statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. The angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Yeshua. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.’ Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I am a virgin?’ The angel answered and said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God. And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. ‘For nothing will be impossible with God.’ And Mary said, ‘Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word.’ And the angel departed from her.”

Proponents of both a high Christology of Yeshua the Messiah being the uncreated, eternal Son of God, and of a low Christology of Yeshua the Messiah being a created agent of God—

¹ Cf. Dunn, *Christology in the Making*, 47.

² Simon J. Gathercole, *The Pre-existent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

³ The order employed for the Synoptic Gospels in this module is Mark, Matthew, and Luke. Passages are listed, however, in the basic chronological order that is provided in John R Kohlenberger III, ed., *The NIV Integrated Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013).

The Nature of Yeshua in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts

have to recognize, in some significant way, that Yeshua was supernaturally conceived in order to be born. The announcement, by the angel Gabriel to the betrothed Mary, gives some testimony to the unique origins of the Messiah. Unlike the Tanach figure of “the messenger/angel of the LORD” or *malakh YHWH*, there is no room for maneuver, in that the human Mary recognizes Gabriel to be a supernatural agent sent from God (Luke 1:28-30). She is informed by him of the significant truth, “Behold, you will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you shall call His name Yeshua” (Luke 1:31, TLV). When she later inquires as to how this will take place, as she says she is a virgin or “since I do not know a man” (Luke 1:34, NKJV), Gabriel informs her that the Holy Spirit will come upon her (Luke 1:35). That this activity is to be regarded as being from God, is to be recognized from how Mary’s older relative Elizabeth had recently conceived (Luke 1:36-37), and so Mary consents (Luke 1:38).

Some important words are issued about the son which will be born. The first statement made concerns how this Yeshua is going to be given the throne of David: “He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David” (Luke 1:32, NRSV). This first statement involves how Mary’s son to be born will fulfill various Messianic prophecies and expectations as they concern the Davidic Kingdom (i.e., 2 Samuel 7:13, 16; Psalm 89:4, 29; 132:12; Isaiah 9:7) and Israel’s intended restoration. In this regard, it is possible that the title *huios hupsitou* (υἱὸς ὑψίστου) or “Son of the Most High,” has some kind of regal quality to it, although it should be considered as implying something much more, in light of further remarks.

Indeed, the second statement involving the son to be born, and what is to result from His entry onto the stage of human history, raises some important questions: “He will rule over Jacob’s house forever, and there will be no end to his kingdom” (Luke 1:33, Common English Bible). Far be it for just a long line of descendants continuing to rule over Israel, it is this son to be born whose reign will be *eis tous aiōnas* (εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας) or “for all eternity” (TLV), further solidified with the exclaim *kai tēs basileias autou ouk estai telos* (καὶ τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἔσται τέλος), “and of his kingdom there will be no end” (RSV). Readers of the balance of the Apostolic Scriptures or New Testament, surely know that the reign of the Messiah, while rooted in the promises and prophecies of the perpetuity of David’s throne and Israel’s Kingdom being restored—is something that extends beyond Planet Earth and this dimension and into the Eternal State. Leon Morris raises the following important points in his commentary on Luke:

“...Jesus will be called the Son of the Most High. This sets him apart from all others and makes him Son of God in a special sense. Gabriel goes on to speak of him as the recipient of the throne of his father David. The Messiah was expected to be of David’s line (cf. 2 Sa. 7:12ff.; Ps. 89:29) and it is clearly this that is in mind. It is further brought out in the reference to his kingdom as never-ending. In current Messianic speculations the Messianic kingdom was often seen as of limited duration. It was God’s final kingdom that would have no end and it is this kingdom to which Jesus is now related. It is not a temporal kingdom, an earthly realm, but God’s kingly rule. In due time Jesus would make this clear.”⁵

The significant theophany of the Son of Man of Daniel 7:13-14⁶ (discussed previously), should be kept in mind, per the statement of Luke 1:33 and the reign of the Messiah lasting

⁴ Grk. *epei andra ou ginōskō* (ἐπεὶ ἄνδρα οὐ γινώσκω); “since I am not intimate with a man” (TLV).

⁵ Leon Morris, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 81.

⁶ “I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed” (Daniel 7:13-14).

“forever” or “for all eternity.” While there is to be a human child born to Mary of supernatural origins, **what constitutes such supernatural origins?** Should we honestly expect an entity which is ultimately created to have a sovereign rule that will never end *beyond our present universe?*

Some adherents of a low Christology draw attention to the statement made by the angel Gabriel in Luke 1:35, as he explained the conception of the son to be born to Mary: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God” (NIV). Proponents of a low Christology of Yeshua being created may claim that the Messiah’s conception via the Holy Spirit, is what merits Him bearing the title Son of God or *huios Theou* (υἱὸς θεοῦ). Yeshua was conceived of God, and from this logic He is thus to be regarded as God’s literal “offspring,” making Yeshua the “Son of God.”

It is, of course, to be recognized that Yeshua possessing the title “Son of God,” can indeed be indicative of His supernatural origins. But to *only* assert that “Son of God” means that Yeshua is God’s literal “offspring,” and thus we are forced to conclude that the Messiah is a created human, later supernaturally exalted, is either dismissive or stands ignorant of what has just been stated in Luke 1:32-33—as **what is more important** is that Yeshua will reign on the throne of David, and have a Kingdom that will last not just in perpetuity, but forever. The statement of Luke 1:35 is best taken as a secondary remark, given the Greek construction: *dio kai to gennōmenon hagion klēthēsetai huios Theou* (διὸ καὶ τὸ γεννώμενον ἅγιον κληθήσεται υἱὸς θεοῦ), “therefore also the one being born will be called-holy, [the] son of God” (Brown and Comfort).⁷ This means that *another reason* Yeshua will be called “Son of God” is because of His conception by the Holy Spirit. And, it hardly rules out other reasons to be provided in other Biblical passages.

In his resource *The Pre-existent Son*, Simon J. Gathercole makes light of how the titles “Son of the Most High” and “Son of God” are used as synonyms in the Dead Sea Scrolls: “He will be called the Son of God, they will call him the son of the Most High” (4Q246 2.1).⁸ Yeshua the Messiah, being conceived of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35), is not the only reason why He is to be regarded as the “Son of God”; He is to be first regarded as “Son of the Most High” on the basis of Him receiving not just a terrestrial Davidic throne, but a Davidic throne which will extend beyond this dimension and into the New Creation (Luke 1:32-33). Gathercole astutely concludes how the nature of Yeshua’s Kingdom lasting without end, necessarily affects His identity as the Son of God as being something far from mortal:

“...The Davidic promises in the OT generally envisaged an everlasting throne for David and his descendants, but the only really explicit statement of a kind of ‘immortal’ Messiah is Ezek. 37:25: ‘David my servant shall be their prince forever.’ This is also the clear sense of Luke 1.33: not only will Jesus guarantee the everlasting endurance of the Davidic throne, but *he himself* will be its sole occupant: ‘he will reign over the house of Jacob forever.’ This cannot simply be understood as a reign that will be extremely long, as is made explicit by the final clarification: ‘of his kingdom there will be *no end*.’ Clearly in Luke 1.33 the *indestructibility* of Jesus is a crucial part of his identity as Son....[He is] portrayed as one who is superhuman and belongs in the divine sphere of reality.”⁹

⁷ Robert K. Brown and Philip W. Comfort, trans., *The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1990), 196.

Also: “therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God” (NKJV).

⁸ Michael Wise, Martin Abegg, Jr., and Edward Cook, trans., *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), 269.

⁹ Gathercole, pp 281-282.