

Matthew 28:16-20

“Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”

“But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Yeshua had designated. When they saw Him, they worshiped *Him*; but some were doubtful. And Yeshua came up and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’”

Matthew 28:16-20 does have an important place in discussions involving the nature of the Messiah, but these verses hardly give us a full picture as it concerns the composition of God. Matthew 28:16-20 is commonly quoted to emphasize that immediately before His ascension into Heaven, Yeshua the Messiah issued His Disciples a Great Commission to go out into the world, and both declare the good news or gospel and disciple or train new Believers. Thematically, what is witnessed in Matthew 28:16-20 is a stress on how an acknowledgment of Yeshua, as the Messiah and Savior, is to necessarily lead to a spiritual experience of being engulfed in the reality of who and what God is, and the surety of knowing that Yeshua is One who is to be trusted “to the close of the age” (Matthew 28:20, RSV) and His Second Coming.

Not all were sure of what to make of the newly resurrected Yeshua, but those who recognized Yeshua as the Messiah were surely not just in awe of their Master, but demonstrated significant veneration toward Him. Matthew 28:17 records, *kai idontes auton prosekunēsan* (καὶ ἰδόντες αὐτὸν προσεκύνησαν). Matthew 28:17 includes a definite employment of the verb *proskuneō* (προσκυνέω) or “worship.” However, it is to be witnessed that various versions which are employed in either Messianic Judaism and/or the Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement, indicate that their translators or publishers are unsure about the kind of honor or veneration issued:

- “When they saw him, they prostrated themselves before him” (CJB/CJSB).
- “and when they saw Him they paid homage to Him” (Power New Testament).
- “And when they saw Him, the bowed to Him” (ISR Scriptures-2009).
- “When they saw him, the bowed down to him” (The Messianic Writings).

It might be lexically acceptable to render *proskuneō* in Matthew 28:17 as either “prostrated” (CJB/CJSB) or “bowed” (ISR Scriptures-2009), but is it theologically acceptable? This is the same Yeshua who will proceed to say in Matthew 28:18, “All authority has been given to Me in Heaven and on Earth” (PME). Would a supernatural but created agent of God be able to make such a stark claim? It is not unimportant that such authority involves far more than just Yeshua’s relationship to be with His Disciples until the end of the age. The claim of Colossians 1:17 is that “He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together,” as such authority over Heaven and Earth must necessarily involve sustaining the multiple dimensions of being, and overseeing how the various laws of time, space, and physics all work together to uphold the universe(s). Indeed, these are powers that only God intrinsically possesses or could possess, and to translate *proskuneō* as anything other than “worship” in Matthew 28:18 is to do an extreme disservice. A Messianic version like the TLV has the much appreciated, “When they saw Him, they worshiped,” for its rendering of Matthew 28:17.

No verse in this passage perhaps gets more attention than the statement of Matthew 28:19, which appears in a Messianic version like the CJB/CJSB as, “Therefore, go and make people from all nations into *talmidim*, immersing them into the reality of the Father, the Son and the *Ruach HaKodesh*.”²⁰⁹ Among the Bible versions that are found to circulate in the broad Messianic

²⁰⁹ The TLV offers the similar, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, immersing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the *Ruach ha-Kodesh*.”

movement, a number have noted publishers' doubts on the authenticity of Matthew 28:19.²¹⁰ And, this most probably has to do with their questioning, on some significant level, the nature of the Godhead, and in particular the Son's integration into the Divine Identity. It is to be recognized that among two major sources in New Testament textual criticism, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* by Bruce M. Metzger²¹¹ and *New Testament Text and Translation Commentary* by Philip W. Comfort,²¹² there is no discussion on the authenticity of Matthew 28:19. In fact, the statements of Matthew 28:19 are repeated in the late First-early Second Century C.E. Christian document of the *Didache*: "Now concerning baptism, baptize as follows: after you have reviewed all these things, baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in running water" (7:1).²¹³

For many people you will encounter in today's Messianic movement—which most especially includes non-Jews from various fundamentalist backgrounds—the view that Yeshua the Messiah must be God is based on a small handful of verses, such as Matthew 28:19, traditionally employed in many Christian liturgies. Even though there is no textual evidence to dismiss the authenticity of Matthew 28:19, for many, once the authenticity of Matthew 28:19 comes into question, then with it so does the idea that Yeshua the Messiah must be God. *None of us should be so simplistic to think that the idea that Yeshua the Messiah is God is based mainly on Matthew 28:19.* Furthermore, none of us should be so simplistic to think that only if "Father, Son, and Spirit" are listed in such a sequence, that there are not other places where the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are present. Throughout the many centuries of Christian examination of the Apostolic Writings, it needs to be fairly recognized how Matthew 28:19 is not the only place which has needed to be considered to deduce that there is some kind of tri-unity, or at least revealed tri-unity, of God's being. Other passages which have surely been considered may include: 1 Corinthians 12:3-4²¹⁴; 2 Corinthians 13:14²¹⁵; Ephesians 4:4-6²¹⁶; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14²¹⁷; 1 Peter 1:1-2²¹⁸; Revelation 1:4-6²¹⁹.

²¹⁰ William J. Morford, trans., *The Power New Testament: Revealing Jewish Roots*, third edition (Lexington, SC: Shalom Ministries, 2003), pp 385-386; *The Scriptures*, third edition (Northriding, South Africa: Institute for Scripture Research, 2009), 956.

Two versions which are unambiguously produced from a perspective of a low Christology of Yeshua not being God, but which do not question the authenticity of Matthew 28:19, include: Raymond C. Faircloth, *The Kingdom of God Version: The New Testament* (Author, 2013), 60; Anthony F. Buzzard, trans., *The One God, the Father, One Man Messiah Translation* (Atlanta: Restoration Fellowship, 2014), 112.

²¹¹ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London and New York: United Bible Societies, 1975).

²¹² Philip W. Comfort, *New Testament Text and Translation Commentary* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008).

²¹³ Michael W. Holmes, ed. and trans., *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, third edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 355.

²¹⁴ "Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Yeshua is accursed'; and no one can say, 'Yeshua is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit. Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3-4).

²¹⁵ "The grace of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all" (2 Corinthians 13:14).

²¹⁶ "There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:4-6).

²¹⁷ "But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah" (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14).

²¹⁸ "Peter, an apostle of Yeshua the Messiah, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Yeshua the Messiah and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure" (1 Peter 1:1-2).

²¹⁹ "John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Yeshua the Messiah, the faithful witness, the

The Nature of Yeshua in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts

Sometimes, readers of Matthew 28:19 need to be reminded that the direction given by the Messiah was to “make disciples of all the nations, immersing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (PME). For Bowman and Komoszewski, in their book *Putting Jesus in His Place*—which forthrightly promotes a high Christology of Yeshua being God—there is not actually that much stated on Matthew 28:19. For some, whose understanding of the nature of Yeshua might rise and fall on this passage—such should highlight how *there are other passages of greater importance than Matthew 28:19*, which inform us about the nature of Yeshua. Bowman and Komoszewski offer the general conclusion, “the focus of disciple making is commitment to Jesus Christ. Hence, in Matthew 28:18-20 those who believe are to recognize his universal authority (v. 18), become Jesus’ disciples (v. 19a), be baptized in the Son’s name as well as the Father’s and the Holy Spirit’s (v. 19b), observe all that Jesus taught (v. 20a), and live in the awareness of his presence (v. 20b).”²²⁰ This is a quick summary of how those who are immersed or baptized are to be engulfed into a multi-faceted spiritual experience, involving the Father, Son, and Spirit.

Of course, while Matthew 28:19 should probably not be one of the first places to which Bible readers turn, in order to understand the origins and nature of Yeshua—it is indeed true that Matthew 28:19 does indicate something crucial about the composition of God. The statement of Matthew 28:19 specifically directs immersion or baptism *eis to onoma* (εἰς τὸ ὄνομα) or “into the name.” In his resource *The Pre-existent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, Gathercole makes light of how the name of an entity can go far beyond just its function, but also very much involves its identity. In the case of activity involving Yeshua or Jesus, there are definitely places where He assumes the identity of the LORD or YHWH. Gathercole directs,

“[A] majority of the discussion [can be] concerned with Jesus’ exercise of divine functions. Some of these could conceivably be interpreted simply as Jesus acting *on God’s behalf*...[T]his runs into difficulty when the functions are specifically predicated in the OT as *uniquely* God’s. Reinforcing the close identity of Jesus with God in the Synoptic Gospels is the material on Jesus’ ‘name,’ particularly where Jesus’ name is used in a strikingly similar way to the use of the name of Yahweh in the OT. Since a ‘name’ is a matter of identity and not merely function, this perhaps provides particularly helpful evidence with our purposes...[Of particular importance is] the wider use of the name of Jesus in such a way that it stands in for the name of Yahweh.”²²¹

Gathercole makes the extrapolation of how “28.19 can only be understood as referring to an explanation or ‘trifurcation’ of the single divine name which has been revealed by the risen Jesus.”²²²

In his book *Jesus and the God of Israel*, Bauckham goes further, actually drawing the conclusion that not only is the makeup of God uniquely shown to be Father, Son, and Spirit in Matthew 28:19—but that this passage should be considered a Gospel equivalent of the *Carmen Christi* hymn of Philippians 2:

“Though unique, this text is a significant one and deserves attention to its context. To a Gospel in which God has, of course, repeatedly been identified as the God of Israel, but in which the inclusion of Jesus in this divine identity has also repeatedly been indicated, the last five verses

firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood—and He has made us *to be* a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him *be* the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen” (Revelation 1:4-6).

²²⁰ Bowman and Komoszewski, 303.

²²¹ Gathercole, 65.

²²² *Ibid.*, 68.

form a climax. The risen Jesus receives worship and declares his exaltation to exercise of the divine sovereignty over all things (Matt. 28:18: 'all authority in heaven and earth'). His inclusion in the divine identity is now unequivocal. The scene is a Gospel equivalent to the last part of the christological passage in Philippians 2:6-11. But, whereas in that passage it is the Old Testament divine name, YHWH, that the exalted Christ receives, here the disciples are to baptize 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' (v. 19). The formula, as in the phrase 'calling on the name of the Lord' which New Testament usage takes up from the Old with reference to baptism and profession...requires precisely a divine name. 'The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit' names the newly disclosed identity of God, revealed in the story of Jesus the Gospel has told."²²³

Luke 24:44-53

"The Resurrected Yeshua is Worshipped"

"Now He said to them, 'These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.' Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Messiah would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.' And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they, after worshipping Him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising God."

The ascension of Yeshua into Heaven was surely an important day in the lives of His followers who witnessed it, as they anticipated significant things to come with the work that He entrusted them to perform. As Yeshua was blessing His followers, He was being taken up into Heaven (Luke 24:51), and some kind of honor or veneration was being directed toward Him. The source text of Luke 24:52 states, *kai autoi proskunēsantes auton* (καὶ αὐτοὶ προσκυνήσαντες αὐτόν). Luke 24:52 includes a definite employment of the verb *proskuneō* (προσκυνέω) or "worship." However, it is to be witnessed that various versions which are employed in either Messianic Judaism and/or the Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement, indicate that their translators or publishers, are unsure about the kind of honor or veneration issued:

- "And after they paid homage to Him" (Power New Testament).
- "And they, having bowed to Him" (ISR Scriptures-2009).
- "They bowed to him" (The Messianic Writings).

It might be lexically acceptable to render *proskuneō* in Luke 24:52 as either "paid homage" (Power New Testament) or "bowed" (The Messianic Writings), but is it theologically acceptable? A Messianic version like the TLV has the much appreciated, "After worshipping Him, they returned to Jerusalem with great joy."²²⁴

No usage of *proskuneō* in association with Yeshua the Messiah is isolated on its own, and so Luke 24:52 has to be considered in association with other passages in the Apostolic Writings. One significant cue, to be taken from Luke 24:53, is that after worshipping Yeshua as He was being taken into Heaven, the narrative further states that His followers returned to Jerusalem, "And they were continually in the temple complex praising God" (Luke 24:53, HCSB). Here, the verb *eulogeō* (εὐλογέω) means, "to say someth. commendatory, speak well of, praise, extol"

²²³ Bauckham, pp 56-57.

²²⁴ The CJB/CJSB has, "They bowed in worship to him, then returned to Yerushalayim, overflowing with joy."