

## The Nature of Yeshua in the Pauline Epistles and Hebrews

resides. While God's residence is by no means excluded, Victor Paul Furnish points out, "it is also a realm where the powers of darkness and evil are still active (3:10; 6:12)."<sup>4</sup> Witherington considers that here in Ephesians 1:3 it is akin to "the invisible spirit realm,"<sup>5</sup> which includes both good and evil.

Some have thought that Paul's emphasis of God's blessing originating in the (general) Heavens are delivered to combat Gnostic thoughts of a multi-leveled Heaven, yet are still largely blessings which are unattainable in the present world. Peter T. O'Brien, however, would emphasize "The blessings of salvation which believers have received from God link them with the heavenly realms. These gracious gifts are not simply future benefits but are a present reality for us, since they have already been won for us by God's saving action in Christ."<sup>6</sup>

While those of us who affirm a high Christology of Yeshua being integrated into the Divine Identity, may find some strong support from the greeting of Ephesians 1:2, the praise issued to the work of the Father in Ephesians 1:3, realized via the work of His Son, does demonstrate that the Son is the Father's agent. The only way that mortals can realize "every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies" (LITV) is to be "in Messiah" or "in Christ."<sup>7</sup> At the very least, as proponents of a low Christology of Yeshua being a created agent of the Father would widely conclude, this requires Yeshua to be uniquely supernatural and multi-dimensional. Proponents of a high Christology, would conclude on the basis of a wide number of statements and assertions seen throughout the Apostolic Writings or New Testament, that while the Son is indeed the Father's agent in His mediation of redemption to human beings—that the Son has authority, can perform activities, and has a nature that points to Him being far, far more than just a created, supernatural entity.

### Ephesians 1:17-23

#### "He who fills all in all"

"that the God of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. *These are* in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Messiah, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the [assembly], which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."

What Paul specifically prays for concerning his audience in Asia Minor, is, "I never stop giving thanks for you as I mention you in my prayers—that the God of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, our glorious Father, may give you spiritual wisdom and revelation in knowing Him" (Ephesians 1:16-17, TLV).<sup>9</sup> Proponents of both a low Christology of Yeshua being a created supernatural agent sent from God, and of a high Christology of Yeshua being integrated into

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<sup>4</sup> Victor Paul Furnish, "The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians," in Charles M. Laymon, ed., *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), 836.

<sup>5</sup> Ben Witherington III, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 232.

<sup>6</sup> Peter T. O'Brien, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 97.

<sup>7</sup> Grk. *pasē eulogia pneumatikē en tois epouranois* (πάση εὐλογία πνευματικῆ ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις)

<sup>8</sup> Grk. *en Christō* (ἐν Χριστῷ).

<sup>9</sup> This entry has been adapted from the author's commentary *Ephesians for the Practical Messianic*.

the Divine Identity, both affirm how Yeshua has a distinct relationship as Son to God the Father, which no other being or entity in the cosmic order has. Some, when seeing God proper emphasized as the Father of Yeshua, have concluded that Yeshua has a relationship quantitatively indifferent from human beings and mortals at large. When the details of Ephesians 1:17-23 are evaluated, that Yeshua is a supernatural being for sure is unavoidable. Those who hold to a high Christology would stress that when the relationship of the Father and Son is evaluated throughout the testimony provided in the Apostolic Writings or New Testament, that Yeshua is integrated into the Divine Identity.

When seeing the statement, “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him” (Ephesians 1:17, ESV), S.M. Baugh draws out how “To name **the Father of glory as the God of our Lord Jesus Christ** is not to deny Christ’s deity but to affirm his true incarnate humanity.”<sup>10</sup> God is the Father which Yeshua served during His time on Earth, to the point of Him praying in the Garden of Gethsemane “yet not as I will, but as You will” (Matthew 26:39), as He sacrificed Himself for humanity’s sin (Ephesians 1:7). Believers in Yeshua are to emulate His great example of service toward His Father. In emulating the Messiah, Paul elaborates to his audience in Asia Minor that they be among those,

“[H]aving the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his great might” (Ephesians 1:18-19, RSV).

Notable to consider—in Paul saying, “I pray that he will give light to the eyes of your hearts” (CJB)—is how the Messiah was prophesied to open the eyes of the blind, shedding in God’s light, as Isaiah declares “The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them” (Isaiah 9:2; cf. 35:5; 42:6; 49:6; 60:1, 19), something that Yeshua the Messiah is accredited with doing in the Gospels (Matthew 4:16; Luke 1:79; John 1:9; 8:12). As Paul himself says in 2 Corinthians 4:6, “For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Messiah.” The power of God the Father, can only truly be accessed by what has been accomplished in the sacrificial work of His Son Yeshua.

The key, more than anything else—especially when the themes of Ephesians are considered along with those of Colossians—is the enlightenment for which Paul prays was to *only come* via the salvation offered in Yeshua the Messiah (as opposed to one joining one of the mystery religions or cults present in Asia Minor).

In Ephesians 1:19-20, Paul’s personal desire for his audience continues, because when they can understand the great calling that the Father has placed upon them, then they will begin to fathom how that same power that was not only able to raise Yeshua from the dead, but now enables Him to reign supreme over the universe. Paul expresses, “[...that you may know] his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms” (NIV). The power that brought about Yeshua’s resurrection is the same power that has inaugurated a new, transformed life in Believers, *and* the new order by the Messiah’s cosmic exaltation. Participating in that power, which is accessible via the Holy Spirit implanted within Believers (Ephesians 1:14), is also a guarantee of future resurrection (1 Corinthians 6:14; 15:43; Philippians 3:21) and entry into God’s restored Kingdom on Earth. The

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<sup>10</sup> S.M. Baugh, “The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians,” in Wayne Grudem, ed., *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 2263.

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power that Yeshua has been given by His Father is quite broad-sweeping, as it not only involves the eschaton, but the here and now.

Paul confidently says the power Yeshua possesses, as the Son of God the Father, is “far above all principality, and authority, and might, and lordship, and every name named, not only in this age, but also in the coming one” (Ephesians 1:21, YLT). *This necessarily invites some wonder about the nature of Yeshua*, and Bible readers inquiring whether or not a supernatural but ultimately created entity would be able to intrinsically have such power not only in the present cosmic order, but in the future coming order.

“This age and the age to come” was an ancient Rabbinic concept (4 Ezra 7:50), one which is expanded upon in the Apostolic Scriptures (Matthew 12:32; Luke 15:8; 20:34; Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 2:6; Hebrews 6:5). Often we have to be reminded, as Paul does, that the power of the Lord is not exclusively a futuristic concept where Yeshua returns in glory and majesty. As important as this is, that same power is accessible now to His people, and should be manifesting itself as they accomplish “the hope of His calling” (Ephesians 1:18). Yeshua has the supreme *onoma* (ὄνομα) or “name,” to be understood in a Semitic context where *shem* (שֵׁם) regards power, authority, fame, reputation, etc. (cf. Philippians 2:9).<sup>11</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln indicates that Ephesians 1:21 referring to this, ran contrary to “the calling of the names of deities and supernatural powers [which] was fundamental to the practice of magic, and therefore the term ὄνομα itself is pervasive as in magical papyri. It is significant for the writer’s view of Christ’s supremacy that in Phil 2:9-11 Paul could say that through his exaltation Christ had been given the name above every name.”<sup>12</sup> **It is Yeshua the Messiah to whom people are to look to find supreme authority.**

Yeshua the Messiah said to be “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come” (Ephesians 1:21, RSV), does draw Bible readers’ attention to wondering about the nature of Yeshua, and how to consider what are clearly supernatural capabilities. But more specific to the issues present in Asia Minor, which the corresponding letter to the Colossians had more to say about in terms of veneration of angels or other cosmic forces (cf. Colossians 2:18)—Yeshua being superior to all rule, authority, power, and having a name or “title” (NIV) which would span the present and into the future, was likely stated with the express purpose of firmly establishing the audience’s absolute loyalty to Him.

Francis Foulkes makes the observation, “The titles in [Ephesians 1:21] may have been taken as those of the spiritual powers venerated by the Gnostic teachers who were opposed by the apostle in Colossians.”<sup>13</sup> A. Skevington Wood further explains, “The titles no doubt reflect the various degrees of angels in the Jewish hierarchy. Angels were thought to control human destiny, but Paul sees Christ as controlling them with absolute authority because he is infinitely superior.”<sup>14</sup> Some of the Believers in Asia Minor might have been tempted, or had heard about, going beyond Yeshua the Messiah to access spiritual power. Yet according to Paul, if one can truly understand the call placed upon Believers (Ephesians 1:18), and has both wisdom and revelation in Him (Ephesians 1:17), one does not have to go beyond what God has plainly granted His people.

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Walter C. Kaiser, “שֵׁם,” in *TWOT*, 2:934-935.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary: Ephesians*, Vol. 42 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 65.

<sup>13</sup> Francis Foulkes, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians* (London: Tyndale Press, 1963), 64.

<sup>14</sup> A. Skevington Wood, “Ephesians,” in Frank E. Gaebelin., ed. et. al., *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 11:30.

The powers of the age to come are accessible in the present age, as Paul explains how God the Father “‘put all *things* under His feet’ and gave Him *to be* Head over all *things* to the assembly” (Ephesians 1:22, LITV). The uniqueness of Ephesians 1:22 is not necessarily its clear parallel with Psalm 110:1, “The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet,’” one of the most frequently quoted concepts in the New Testament (cf. Matthew 26:64; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:41-44). Paul’s words in Ephesians 1:22 are unique because in emphasizing Yeshua’s exaltation, he also could have Psalm 8:4-6 in mind, where it is said of humanity at large, “what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet” (NRSV). In view of Ephesians 1:23 following, and the Messiah’s association to the *ekklēsia*, we can see a possible connection with what the author of Hebrews will later attest concerning the Messiah: “But we see Him who has been set for a little while lower than the angels, *namely* Yeshua, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor” (Hebrews 2:9, PME). Yeshua is exalted, yet those who are *in Yeshua* are to surely benefit from His exaltation.

**All dominion over the universe and of things is found in the rulership of Yeshua.** Yeshua’s being seated at the right hand of His Father gives Him the same authority as His Father, having validated His ministry on Earth. While Yeshua is indeed Divinely exalted, Ephesians 1:22 like Hebrews 2:9 may also be seen to emphasize His identification with humanity, whereby the power He possesses in Heaven can be accessible to the human people who are to rule and reign with Him—as they are second only to God in Creation.

The significance of Paul’s assertion is enhanced when understanding that all people must partake of Yeshua in order to be redeemed, against a background where it was thought “Jewish people commonly believed that the heavenly powers ruled all the nations except Israel...Paul says that those united with Christ had...been raised above those powers” (IVPBBC).<sup>15</sup> Looking to Yeshua as the supreme authority was important not only for Paul’s largely non-Jewish audience, but perhaps even some of the Jews in his audience as well. Lincoln reminds us, “Monotheistic Jews denied the deity of pagan gods but not their existence and influence, which were linked to the existence of rebellious, fallen angels or demonic powers (cf. Deut 32:17).”<sup>16</sup>

While Yeshua has supreme authority over the universe via His exaltation, Paul is also keen to tell his audience in Ephesians 1:22, *kai auton edōken kephalēn huper panta tē ekklēsia* (καὶ αὐτὸν ἔδωκεν κεφαλὴν ὑπὲρ πάντα τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ), “and did give him—head over all things to the assembly” (YLT). Yeshua’s universal reign is something which Believers on Earth, making up His *ekklēsia*, are directly affected by. It is not as though Yeshua reigns over all of the billions of galaxies and stars, and the little tiny blip called Earth with a small community of people who trust in Him means nothing. On the contrary to Paul, Yeshua’s Lordship over the cosmos, entitles Him to be recognized as the *kephalē* (κεφαλὴ) or *rosh* (רֹשׁ) of the assembly—the Source from which all power and life is to originate: “And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as source over all things to the assembly” (Ephesians 1:22, PME). Intensified for us today in the Twenty-First Century—who know a few more things about the vastness of the universe compared to the ancients—is that God Himself actually does care for us among that great vastness! As Paul will specifically tell the Colossians, “Therefore if you have been raised up with Messiah, keep seeking the things above, where Messiah is, seated at the right hand of God” (Colossians 3:1).

<sup>15</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 543.

<sup>16</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 63.

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The *ekklēsia* has a significant connection to Yeshua the Messiah, as Paul says that it is “His body, the fullness of the One who fills all things in every way” (Ephesians 1:22, HCSB). Fullness or *plērōma* (πλήρωμα) was a significant Gnostic term in ancient times, so Paul could be confronting some possible error circulating in the assemblies of Asia Minor. But the Apostle surely does not intend to view Yeshua being the fullness of His Body in a Gnostic sense at all, but more so with what has been spoken in the Tanach in the context of God’s power and glory:

“And the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house... Then He brought me by way of the north gate to the front of the house; and I looked, and behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD, and I fell on my face” (Ezekiel 43:5; 44:4).

“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners” (Isaiah 6:1).

“‘Can a man hide himself in hiding places so I do not see him?’ declares the LORD. ‘Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?’ declares the LORD” (Jeremiah 23:24).

“‘I will shake all the nations; and they will come with the wealth of all nations, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the LORD of hosts” (Haggai 2:7).

Colossians 1:19 expounds upon this more fully, describing how the very essence of the Father is found in His Son: “For it was the *Father’s* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him.” Yeshua the Messiah is undeniably portrayed as being Divine (cf. Colossians 2:9), yet He is described as such by using Tabernacle/Temple language, demonstrating God’s desire to dwell among His people. Yeshua is not Divine solely because He is the Son of God; He is Divine because of specific salvific purposes that He is to fulfill on the part of the *ekklēsia*—which includes His being the Head of the assembly and the cosmic redemptive purposes He has beyond His sacrifice! Yeshua the Messiah is *to plērōma tou ta panta en pasin plēroumenou* (τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν πληρουμένου), “the fulness of Him who is filling the all in all” (Ephesians 1:23, YLT). This runs in stark contrast to the gods of mythology ruling from on high, subjecting the people to their every whim.

Paul appropriates the term *plērōma*, perhaps confronting the beliefs of any Gnostics or proto-Gnostics in Asia Minor, expanded upon more significantly in Colossians 2:9-10. In both Colossians and Ephesians, the term *plērōma* is a term used for his own ends, as Lincoln explains, “ecclesiastical and cosmic perspectives are juxtaposed in a way that underlines the Church’s special status, for although Christ is in the process of filling the cosmos, at present it is only the Church which can actually be called his fullness. The Church appears, then, to be the focus for and medium of Christ’s presence and rule in the cosmos.”<sup>17</sup> While Yeshua undoubtedly rules over the cosmos, it is still presently filled with the forces of evil, so only the *ekklēsia* or His Body can be said to possess His fullness. This is realized by His words to the Apostle Paul, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (Acts 9:4)—as opposed to “why are you persecuting My *ekklēsia*?” By Paul previously having persecuted the *ekklēsia*, He was in actuality persecuting the One who fills it, Yeshua the Messiah. Witherington tells us,

“[T]he point would be that the church is the extension of Christ on earth—being filled with God’s presence and Spirit—and thus is where the world can find the divine presence... The real

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<sup>17</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 77.

benefit of this reign of Christ is that Christ's power and knowledge are available to the believer to aid his or her growth."<sup>18</sup>

Participating in the fullness of God requires one to be a part of the Messiah's Body. The fullness of Yeshua is intended to be represented in the world by those who know Him, being a conduit of His grace (Ephesians 4:7; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11). This fullness to be something realized in the lives of His people today who are empowered to fulfill His tasks in the world, as opposed to being something ethereal and intangible. I. Howard Marshall observes, "However the difficult language be understood, it enhances the omnipotent position and influence of Christ through whom God's power is at work in the lives of believers."<sup>19</sup> This power is something that is to enable God's people to fulfill His mandate of being a holy and separated people.

## **Ephesians 2:18**

### **"The Son, the Spirit, and Father"**

**"for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father."**

In writing to the Believers in Asia Minor, Paul stresses how Jewish and non-Jewish Believers have been joined together as "one new man" (Ephesians 2:15) or "one new humanity" (NRSV) by the sacrificial work of Yeshua the Messiah.<sup>20</sup> He says that this was with the intention, that "[He] might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR [Isaiah 57:19; 52:7; Zechariah 9:10]" (Ephesians 2:16-17). Paul associates Jewish and non-Jewish Believers in Israel's Messiah as participating together in the restoration of Israel's Kingdom realm.

Paul's priority on all people believing in Yeshua the Messiah is very clear. He says, "through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father" (Ephesians 2:18). Believers in Yeshua have *prosaḡōgē* (προσαγωγή), to the Father, via the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. In a classical sense, *prosaḡōgē* was "approach, access to a person, esp. to a king's presence" (LS), but it can also notably be "a bringing to or up to, a bringing up" (LS).<sup>21</sup> Some have thought that the kind of "access" to which Paul is referring would be similar to how the Torah instructs people to bring specific offerings before the Lord (i.e., Leviticus 1:3; 3:3; 4:14) in either entreating His mercy, or perhaps also in thanksgiving. Hebrews 4:16 tells us, "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." And, the eschatological expectation regarding the restoration of Israel includes the nations swarming to God's Temple and knowing Him (Isaiah 56:6-8; Zechariah 8:20-23; cf. 1 Kings 8:41-43).

What need not escape readers of Ephesians 2:18 is that what is intended is that "for through Him," *hoti di' autou* (ὅτι δι' αὐτοῦ), "we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father." The first personal pronoun is intended to be Yeshua or Jesus, noted by a number of paraphrased versions: "Now all of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us" (NLT); "We both have access to the Father through Christ by the one Spirit" (Common English Bible). It is unavoidable that within Ephesians 2:18, spiritual and supernatural activity is present which involves the Son, the Spirit, and the Father.

<sup>18</sup> Witherington, *Colossians-Philemon-Ephesians*, 246.

<sup>19</sup> I. Howard Marshall, "Ephesians," in James D.G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson, eds., *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), pp 1385-1393., 1387.

<sup>20</sup> This entry has been adapted from the author's commentary *Ephesians for the Practical Messianic*.

<sup>21</sup> LS, 685.