

## Philippians 2:5-11 “The Hymn of Messiah”

“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Messiah Yeshua, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Yeshua EVERY KNEE WILL BOW [Isaiah 45:23], of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Yeshua the Messiah is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

The statements and claims made of Yeshua the Messiah in Philippians 2:5-11, are agreed upon by all major examiners of Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians, to constitute the most significant part of the letter.<sup>1</sup> There is also a broad consensus that Philippians 2:5-11 was either an early credal hymn of the First Century Believers and/or a hymn originally composed by the Apostle Paul himself.<sup>2</sup> In many theological works, Philippians 2:5-11 is designated by the Latin *Carmen Christi* or Hymn of Christ.

The original purpose of the insertion of this hymn, within Paul’s letter to the Philippians, was for the Apostle to see the members of his audience properly motivated and directed to serve one another selflessly, placing others’ interests before their own (Philippians 2:4). While theologically significant for sure, Paul’s actual intention of either quoting from a hymn or credal formula, or developing such an exclaim on his own, was to admonish the Philippians to live properly as mature Believers. Yeshua the Messiah is the ultimate example of humility and service (cf. Matthew 11:29; John 13:12-17), which His followers are to surely emulate. In order for human beings to best approach the humility and sacrifice of Yeshua, some statements regarding Yeshua’s nature and origins understandably have to be made, **highlighting the gravity of what He has accomplished**. J.A. Motyer points out, “Verse 7 says he *emptied himself*, and verse 8, *he humbled himself*. In each case the reflexive expression points to personal decision and action,”<sup>3</sup> indicating how the activities involving Yeshua also involved decisions made by Yeshua, when other figures or actors may not have made such decisions.

Within the history of interpretation of Philippians 2:5-11, different approaches are witnessed between those who hold to either a high Christology or a low Christology. Much of this does concern the evaluation of different terms, verb tenses, and intertextual citations from the Tanach (Old Testament) applied to Yeshua of Nazareth. Properly approaching Philippians 2:5-11 also concerns what some may consider to be limited, or even rather poor, translations of different words, seen across a spectrum of English Bible versions (including Messianic versions). It should hardly be a surprise, given the significance of the *Carmen Christi* hymn for our understanding of the nature and purpose of the Messiah, that this does not tend to be an easy passage for Bible readers and students to evaluate.

Having just implored his Philippian audience to be humble (Philippians 2:3), the Apostle Paul portrays Yeshua the Messiah as the ultimate example of what it means to be humble and to serve. Truly, as anyone examines Philippians 2:5-11, you see that Yeshua the Messiah’s humility toward humankind is absolutely unmatched in history. Paul tells the Philippians, “Let

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<sup>1</sup> This entry has been adapted and expanded from the author’s commentary *Philippians for the Practical Messianic*.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Peter T. O’Brien, “A Closer Look: The Christ Hymn in Recent Discussion,” *New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Epistle to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), pp 186-203; G. Walter Hansen, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letter to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), pp 122-133; Ben Witherington III, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians: A Socio Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), pp 132-136.

<sup>3</sup> J.A. Motyer, *The Message of Philippians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1984), 109.

your bearing towards one another arise out of your life in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5, NEB), employing the verb *phroneō* (φρονέω), “to think, to have understanding, to be sage, wise, prudent” (LS).<sup>4</sup> Understanding Yeshua’s humility in His actions toward the human race is the true “mindset” that Believers are to have.

Paul uses very interesting language in describing the total humility and servanthood of the Messiah, which Believers in turn are to try to emulate—obviously to some small degree—in their own walks of faith. With Paul likely having imported a hymn into his letter to the Philippians, Gerald F. Hawthorne notes, “The hymn...presents Christ as the ultimate model for moral action.”<sup>5</sup> **It presents a matchless example that no human being can ever hope to fully reach.** And, the *Carmen Christi* hymn certainly presents some rather deep and probing claims made about Yeshua the Messiah, which invite us to further study and inquiry. Gordon D. Fee summarizes that this “narrative about Christ...[is] one of the most exalted, most beloved, and most discussed and debated passages in the Pauline corpus.”<sup>6</sup>

If indeed Philippians 2:6-11 originally made up a hymn adapted for the letter to the Philippians, then it should be noted that there is a wide variance of speculation as to where it originated. Peter T. O’Brien points out, “Little scholarly consensus has emerged in relation to the origin and authorship of the passage...the conceptual background of the passage...or key exegetical and theological issues.”<sup>7</sup> Across both the conservative and liberal theological spectrums are those who advocate that the hymn was originally a product of Jewish mysticism, Gnosticism, Jewish-Maccabean martyrology, but most significantly something that was probably used in worship by the Jerusalem Messianic Believers.<sup>8</sup>

The default position for many readers is to consider the widespread conservative perspective: that this was a common hymn that Paul imported into his letter to make a key point. There are many who think that the *Carmen Christi* was pre-Pauline, and that it originated in Jerusalem. Still, there are others who think that Paul was its author, and that it was possibly sung or recited in the congregations established by him. For many examiners, including this writer, this hymn certainly represents the emerging high Christology of the First Century *ekklēsia*. Fee makes the interesting point, “if originally a hymn, it has no correspondence of any kind with Greek hymnody or poetry; therefore, it would have to be Semitic in origin,”<sup>9</sup> even though others do suggest that the hymn is consistent with some forms of Greek writing.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps most significant are the parallels that can be seen between Philippians 2:6-11 and the actions of Yeshua described in John 13:13-17:<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> LS, 872.

<sup>5</sup> Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Word Biblical Commentary: Philippians*, Vol. 43 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 79.

<sup>6</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: Paul’s Letter to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 192.

<sup>7</sup> O’Brien, *Philippians*, 188.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 193-197.

<sup>9</sup> Fee, *Philippians*, 41.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 560.

<sup>11</sup> This chart has been adapted from Hawthorne, 78.

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<b>JOHN 13:3-11</b>	<b>PHILIPPIANS 2:6-11</b>
<p><b>Yeshua arises from the table and lays aside His outer garments:</b> “<i>Yeshua</i>, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself” (13:3-4).</p>	<p><b>Yeshua empties Himself of His exalted glory in Heaven:</b> “but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men” (2:7, RSV).</p>
<p><b>Yeshua takes a towel and wraps it around Himself, puts water in a basin, and begins to wash His Disciples’ feet:</b><sup>12</sup> “Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded” (13:5).</p>	<p><b>Yeshua humbled Himself as a slave</b> (2:7).</p>
<p><b>When Yeshua finishes, He once again takes His outer garments and puts them on, and again sits down at the table from which He got up:</b> “So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined <i>at the table</i> again, He said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you?’” (13:12).</p>	<p><b>God, His Father, exalted Yeshua to the highest place possible, giving Him the supreme name or authority which all must acknowledge:</b> “Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name” (2:9, NIV).</p>
<p><b>Finally, Yeshua says,</b> “You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am” (13:13)</p>	<p><b>Every one must acknowledge Yeshua the Messiah as Lord:</b> “every tongue will confess that Yeshua the Messiah is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (2:11).</p>

This is a useful way for Bible readers to approach what Philippians 2:6-11 represents. Regardless of whether or not it was a hymn, or first appears in Paul’s letter to the Philippians, there are actions witnessed which bear importance as a literary unit within the wider scope of the Apostolic Writings.

Philippians 2:6 appears in many Bible versions, along the lines of, “though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped” (RSV). This claim of Yeshua the Messiah has been responsible for some rather divergent positions in recent days. However, quite frequently among Christian examiners, to be sure, it is deduced that Philippians 2:6 testifies to the pre-existence and Divinity of the Son. “God,” per Paul’s previous reference in Philippians 1:2 to “God our Father” (and also Philippians 2:11 following), forces readers to perceive Yeshua as being intimately connected and intertwined with Him.

Those who hold to a high Christology understandably see Philippians 2:6 as a claim to pre-existence, especially given other statements made of Yeshua in the Apostolic Scriptures (John 1:1; 17:5, 24; Colossians 1:5; Hebrews 1:3). Noting that Yeshua was “in the form of God,” F.F.

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<sup>12</sup> This was a menial task often assigned to slaves: 1 Samuel 25:41; cf. Mark 1:7; Acts 13:25.

Bruce asserts, "Possession of the form implies participation in the essence. It seems fruitless to argue that these words do not assume the pre-existence of Christ,"<sup>13</sup> drawing attention to Yeshua being present at Creation (1 Corinthians 8:6; Colossians 1:16-17). Robert P. Lightner asserts a more forthright conclusion, "His complete and absolute deity is here carefully stressed by the apostle. The Savior's actions demonstrating His equality infuriated the Jewish leaders (John 5:18) and caused them to accuse Him of blasphemy (John 10:33)."<sup>14</sup>

As it appears in the NASU, Yeshua "existed in the form of God" (Philippians 2:6a), which does affirm Yeshua's participation in the Godhead. However, this and many other English versions (i.e., RSV, NRSV, ESV, CJB) poorly render the clause *en morphē Theou huparchōn* (ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων) with the past-tense "was," when *huparchōn* (ὑπάρχων) is a present active participle, "existing" (Brown and Comfort).<sup>15</sup> Philippians 2:6a is more correctly translated as "existing in the form of God" (American Standard Version, HCSB, TLV).

In past examination of Philippians 2:6a and its claim that Yeshua was existing in the *morphē Theou* or "form of God," attention was focused heavily on the term *morphē* (μορφή) or "form." As is seen in an older commentary, such as that of Homer A. Kent, Jr., "The term *morphē* denotes the outward manifestation that corresponds to the essence, in contrast to the noun *schēma* (2:7), which refers to the outward appearance, which may be temporary."<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the NIV renders *morphē* as "nature," and the NEB goes further using "divine nature." AMG communicates, "Morphē in Phil. 2:6-8 assumes an objective reality. No one could be in the form (*morphē*) of God who was not God."<sup>17</sup>

These perspectives of *morphē Theou* are appreciable, to be sure, but those who hold to a low Christology of Yeshua not being God, will often claim that Yeshua "existing in the form of God" is a reference to Yeshua as the Second Adam. They will commonly conclude that the First Adam was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27), and that by eating the forbidden fruit that he grasped out at trying to acquire equality with God (Genesis 3:5). Yeshua, contrary to this, existed in the form of God, but instead did not grasp out, trying to acquire equality with God.<sup>18</sup>

In response to this perspective of *morphē Theou*, it has been rightly emphasized that if Adam being created in the image of God were in view in Philippians 2:6a, then the Greek *eikōn* (εἰκών) or "image," translating the Hebrew *tzelem* (תְּצֵלֶם) in the Septuagint of Genesis 1:26, should have been unambiguously employed. (The term *eikōn* is certainly witnessed throughout the Pauline Epistles.)<sup>19</sup> While there has been past discussion on Philippians 2:6a involving the term *morphē* or "form," more present examiners do not think it is too important, and instead that the usage of the term *morphē* within Philippians 2:6 and 7 is what needs to be more significantly evaluated. The real issue is seeing Yeshua existing in "the form of God" (*morphē Theou*), and later the contrasting "form of a servant/slave" (*morphēn doulou*, μορφὴν δούλου). All interpreters of Philippians 2:5-11 are agreed that Yeshua existing in "the form of a servant" (Philippians 2:7, RSV) speaks of Yeshua being genuinely human. So, why would Yeshua existing in "the form of

<sup>13</sup> F.F. Bruce, *New International Biblical Commentary: Philippians* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989), 68.

<sup>14</sup> Robert P. Lightner, "Philippians," in *BKCNT*, 654.

<sup>15</sup> Brown and Comfort, 688.

<sup>16</sup> Homer A. Kent, "Philippians," in Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. et. al., *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 11:123.

<sup>17</sup> Zodhiates, *Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, 997.

<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, this is a perspective broadly represented by the annotations in Barry Rubin, gen. ed., *The Complete Jewish Study Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2016), 1689.

<sup>19</sup> Romans 1:23; 8:29; 1 Corinthians 11:7; 15:49; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 4:4; Colossians 1:15; 3:10.

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God” not speak of Yeshua being genuinely God as well? Noting the different clauses of importance, Hawthorne directs,

“[W]hen the hymn says that Christ took the ‘form of a slave’ after his *kenōsis* (v 7), it is not likely that its author had in mind that Christ merely looked like or had the external appearance of a slave. Thus these two expressions, ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ [*en morphē Theou*] and μορφῇ δούλου [*morphēn doulou*], together demand a new and fresh meaning for μορφῇ [*morphē*] ...And this new meaning must be one that will apply equally well to both phrases, since μορφῇ θεοῦ [*morphē Theou*] was obviously coined in antithesis to μορφῇ δούλου [*morphē doulou*].”<sup>20</sup>

Following the assertion that Yeshua was “existing in the form of God” (*en morphē Theou huparchōn*), is the claim that appears in many contemporary English versions as, “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped” (Philippians 2:6b, RSV), *ouch harpagmon hēgēsato to einai isa Theō* (οὐχ ἀρπαγμὸν ἠγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ). F. Foulkes fairly mentions how “A thing to be grasped translated a single word that occurs only here in the NT, and the varied translations indicate the difficulty of rendering it.”<sup>21</sup> Those who hold to a low Christology of Yeshua as a created being or entity, commonly conclude from “did not consider being equal to God a thing to be grasped” (TLV), that the Messiah did not try to seek equality with God, because He apparently was not God. Yet, given how a variety of newer translations render Philippians 2:6b, and significant discussions surrounding the term *harpagmos* (ἀρπαγμός), it is quite safe to conclude that the rendering “a thing to be grasped” is a poor and inadequate translation which can communicate something else.

In the past, the term *harpagmos* was approached from the perspective of the First Adam trying to reach out and attain to God-status. Contrary to this, Yeshua willingly laid aside His equality with the Father, and instead received the humility of the Incarnation. In more recent examination, the term *harpagmos*, while literally translated as “a thing to be grasped,” instead has become associated with exploitation. In His human Incarnation, Yeshua did not misuse or abuse His equality with God. As the *BDAG* lexicon notes, *harpagmos* can notably mean “**something to which one can claim or assert title by gripping or grasping**” (*BDAG*),<sup>22</sup> often with some degree of violence or abuse. *AMG* surprisingly describes, “The Lord did not esteem being equal with God as identical with the coming forth or action of a robber (*hárpax*...)....He esteemed not His equality with God as something requiring an act of force against the world or a thing to be forced upon the world.”<sup>23</sup> If while literally *harpagmos* means “something to be grasped,” idiomatically it would mean “something to be abused/exploited/used to one’s advantage.” A variety of modern English versions reflect this approach for Philippians 2:6b:

- “did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited” (NRSV)
- “did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage” (TNIV)
- “did not consider equality with God as something to be used for His own advantage” (HCSB)
- “he did not consider being equal with God something to exploit” (Common English Bible)

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<sup>20</sup> Hawthorne, 82.

<sup>21</sup> F. Foulkes, “Philippians,” in D. Guthrie and J.A. Motyer, eds. *The New Bible Commentary Revised* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 1132.

He specifically makes mention of the renderings seen in the Phillips New Testament, “did not cling to his privileges as God’s equal,” and the NEB, “yet he did not think to snatch at equality with God.”

<sup>22</sup> *BDAG*, 133.

<sup>23</sup> Zodhiates, *Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, pp 256, 257.

- “did not regard his equality with God as something he ought to exploit” (Kingdom New Testament)

There is considerable academic support today in favor of *harpagmos* representing the Messiah not exploiting or abusing His equality with God, being present in both conservative and liberal study Bibles, as well as technical commentaries. In the 2003 *New Interpreter’s Study Bible*, Jouette Bassler indicates, “The passage...declares that godlike status does not involve *harpagmos*, a Greek word that suggests either the activity of grasping or something to exploit.”<sup>24</sup> The 2008 *ESV Study Bible* notes for Philippians by Sean M. McDonough also describe, “It was not something to be **grasped**, to be kept and exploited for his own benefit or advantage.”<sup>25</sup>

In his Philippians commentary, Bruce forthrightly asserts how the issue involving *harpagmos* is not Yeshua the Messiah trying to claim a God-status that He already possessed, but instead Yeshua the Messiah not using His God-status as a means for self-advantage:

“[T]here is [no] question of Christ’s trying to snatch or seize equality with God: that was already his because he was **in very nature God**. Neither is there any question of his trying to retain it by force. The point is rather that he did not treat his equality with God as an excuse for self-assertion or self-aggrandizement; on the contrary, he treated it as an occasion for renouncing every advantage or privilege that might have accrued to him thereby, as an opportunity for self-improvement and unreserved self-sacrifice.”<sup>26</sup>

Ben Witherington III, in his Philippians commentary, seemingly takes on the KJV/NKJV rendering of “robbery” for *harpagmos*, focusing the attention of readers on what the issue in Philippians 2:6b actually is:

“This phrase...is not about Christ grasping after or attempting to grab or steal something. *Harpagmos* in other contexts and with other verbs can refer to robbery or to what is obtained by robbery or rape. The term was also used of human rulers trying to usurp the divinity or power of the gods. But here is it about Christ not taking advantage of or using what he already has.”<sup>27</sup>

A more technical approach to *harpagmos* is offered by O’Brien:

“Jesus did not regard his equality with God as something to be used for his own advantage. ἀρπαγμός [*harpagmos*] is here an active, abstract word, with the idiom clearly assuming that equality with God (τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῶ [to einai isa Theō]) is already possessed...The expression οὐχ ἀρπαγμὸν ἠγάσαστο [*ouch harpagmon hēgēsato*] emphasizes that Jesus refused to use for his own gain the glory that he had from the beginning. Unlike many oriental despots who regarded their position for their own advantage Jesus understood that equality with God did not mean ‘getting’ but ‘giving’...”<sup>28</sup>

N.T. Wright can actually be accredited as providing some of the significant research sitting behind *harpagmos* involving Yeshua the Messiah not exploiting His God-status. As he details in his book *The Climax of the Covenant*,

“The sense of οὐχ ἀρπαγμὸν ἠγάσαστο [*ouch harpagmon hēgēsato*] will then be that Christ, in contrast to what one might have expected...refused to take advantage of his position....The emphasis of v.7 shows that the refusal described by the phrase was a refusal to use for his own advantage the glory that he had from the beginning...Over against the standard picture of oriental despots, who understood their position as something to be used for their own advantage, Jesus

<sup>24</sup> Jouette Bassler, “The Letter of Paul to the Philippians,” in Walter J. Harrelson, ed., et. al., *New Interpreter’s Study Bible*, NRSV (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 2103.

<sup>25</sup> Sean M. McDonough, “The Letter of Paul to the Philippians,” in Wayne Grudem, ed., *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 2283.

<sup>26</sup> Bruce, *Philippians*, 69.

<sup>27</sup> Witherington, *Philippians*, pp 141-142.

<sup>28</sup> O’Brien, *Philippians*, pp 215-216.

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understood his position to *mean* self-negation, the vocation described in vv.7-8....The pre-existent son regarded equality with God not as excusing him from the task of (redemptive) suffering and death, but actually qualifying him for that vocation...The real humiliation of the incarnation and the cross is that one who was himself God, and who never during the whole process stopped being God, could embrace such a vocation."<sup>29</sup>

The great advantage of taking *harpagmos* in Philippians 2:6b to mean “something to be exploited” (NRSV) or “something to be used to his own advantage” (TNIV), is that rather than coming to Earth to abuse human beings—Yeshua the Messiah came to serve human beings via His humiliation and death. The term *harpagmos*, while literally “something to be grasped,” can be approached from the perspective of a king or despot *grasping at his scepter*, idiomatically representative of an abuse of power. Even today, when any of us drive on the road, we may encounter other drivers and say something along the lines of, “He/she is really grasping at the wheel,” noting a case of road rage.

Yeshua the Messiah, rather than coming to Earth, and using His equality with God for His own self-serving purposes—came to the Earth to offer the ultimate service via His willful sacrifice for human sins. As the term *harpagmos* is summarized by the *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*,

“In the Christ-hymn of Phil 2:6-11 it is said of the preexistent one (who ‘was in the form [μορφή {*morphē*}] of God’) that he did not ἀρπαγμὸν ἠγήσατο [*harpagmon hēgēsato*] ‘equality with God.’ The phrase under discussion must be taken as an unceremonious expression, even as a kind of slogan: take advantage of (or seek to take advantage of) something for oneself...But in what sense does this apply to ‘equality with God’ — as something which seductively offers itself as booty (*res rapienda*) or as something which the preexistent one already possesses (*res rapta*)? The better arguments favor the latter interpretation, esp. in view of the antithesis in v. 7. This would yield the most likely sense: The heavenly Christ did not believe that he should regard his position of honor, i.e., his ‘equality with God,’ as something to *take advantage of for himself, to grasp, to treat as booty.*”<sup>30</sup>

Philippians 2:6, “who, existing in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited” (PME), not only highlights the gravity and severity of the salvation provided by Yeshua’s sacrifice—but was greatly subversive in a First Century Greco-Roman context. Any cursory understanding of either Greco-Roman or Ancient Near Eastern mythology, should quickly demonstrate that when the gods or goddesses came down from the sky to the Earth, it would most always be with the intention of abusing their powers, dictating their will to mortals, and using humans as their pawns in some manipulative scheme. The idea of a Divine figure becoming human was not foreign to pagans; the idea of a Divine figure becoming human and being humiliated for humans was foreign to pagans. Witherington correctly highlights this:

“It would not have been shocking to Gentiles to hear that their God had chosen to take on human form. They had heard such stories about Zeus and Hermes, among others. But to be told that their God had chosen to become a slave among humans—that was a very different story, a shocking story because it deconstructed everything they thought was written in stone about the hierarchical nature of reality and relationships and about all their honor and shame codes.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), pp 83-84.

<sup>30</sup> *BibleWorks 9.0: Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*. MS Windows 7 Release. Norfolk: BibleWorks, LLC, 2011. DVD-ROM.

<sup>31</sup> Witherington, *Philippians*, 148.

To be sure, abuse of power was hardly limited to the gods of Olympus—abuse of power was something affluent throughout the world of antiquity, and the Roman Empire of the First Century was hardly an exception! G. Walter Hansen astutely observes,

“The great rulers, heroes, and gods of the citizens of Philippi were famous for exploiting their positions of power. When did the emperors Caligula and Nero, the great conqueror Alexander the Great, or the gods Apollo and Zeus ever not regard their positions as advantages to exploit? But the one existing in the form of God said No to selfish exploitation of his position in the form of God and said Yes to the form of a servant.”<sup>32</sup>

Rather than abuse, exploit, or take advantage of His equality with God as the Son (Philippians 2:6b), Yeshua the Messiah “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness” (Philippians 2:7, NRSV). What Yeshua “emptied” Himself of, is something that can be debated—and often remains at the forefront of the tension for people trying to understand the Messiah’s Divinity and humanity. The verb *kenoō* (κενόω) simply means “to empty out, drain” (LS).<sup>33</sup> What is often termed the “kenosis theory” among a number of theologians is the view that Yeshua emptied Himself of the metaphysical attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. The textual claim of Philippians 2:7 is that Yeshua emptying Himself means that He took on the form of a servant or a slave: *heauton ekenōsen morphēn doulou labōn* (ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν μορφὴν δούλου λαβών), “he poured out-himself, [the] form of a slave taking” (Brown and Comfort).<sup>34</sup>

Elsewhere in Paul’s letters, the Apostle will assert, “For you know the grace of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9). For the Philippians, many of whom were retired Roman soldiers, the idea that the Savior they had professed allegiance and worship to—would actually exist as a servant or slave—would have been quite confounding. Witherington expresses his opinion,

“The text does not tell us *directly* what Christ emptied himself of, but clearly some kind of self-imposed limitations are implied. The position of ‘himself’ gives the word emphasis, anticipating that the audience will find this surprising. In a world full of grabbers, social climbers, and robbers, someone who stripped or emptied himself of something valuable would be seen as strange at best.”<sup>35</sup>

*Yeshua’s emptying of His self-interests as One “in the form of God” (Philippians 2:6a), resulted in Him taking on “the form of a servant/slave” (Philippians 2:7).* While it is incorrect to conclude that Yeshua emptied Himself of His metaphysical abilities—given the fact in the Gospels the Messiah is represented as possessing a unique knowledge of situations, He performed significant miracles, and was recognized as supernatural by demonic entities, among other things (discussed previously)—taking on servanthood or slave status definitely meant **that Yeshua emptied Himself of His exalted glory in Heaven** (John 17:5), while still maintaining Divine qualities while on Earth.

Some think that Paul’s reference to Yeshua emptying Himself is rooted, or at least connected, to the themes of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53:8, 12, where it is witnessed: “By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke *was due*?...Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He will divide the

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<sup>32</sup> Hansen, 146.

<sup>33</sup> LS, 427.

<sup>34</sup> Brown and Comfort, 688.

<sup>35</sup> Witherington, *Philippians*, 143.

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booty with the strong; because He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors.” There are those, however, who raise some opposition to the themes of Isaiah’s Suffering Servant being involved here, instead thinking that only Greco-Roman servant or slave themes are in view. Hansen addresses how indeed, for many of the Philippians, when first hearing about Yeshua taking “the form of a servant/slave” (*morphēn doulou*), they would have thought of slaves in their contemporary context, that this should have led to some further reflection and consideration of the themes of Isaiah 53:

“An objection raised against the identification of the Servant in Isaiah with the slave in Philippians 2:7 is based on the contrast between the honor associated with the title ‘Servant of the Lord’ in Isaiah and the humiliation associated with the form of the slave in the hymn of Christ. But this objection overlooks the graphic portrayal of the humiliation endured by the servant of the Lord in Isaiah 53. The Philippian readers were probably first reminded of the humiliation of slaves in their own contemporary Roman context when they heard the hymn about the humiliation and death of a slave. But their understanding of the suffering of Christ depicted by the hymn would have been deepened by hearing the song of the suffering of the ‘man of sorrows’ in Isaiah 53.”<sup>36</sup>

Hansen draws attention to the deep humiliation associated with the Suffering Servant, by quoting Isaiah 53:2-4:

“For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground; He has no *stately* form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.”

While there have surely been significant studies of Isaiah 53 conducted, affirming Yeshua’s Messianic fulfillment of these prophecies<sup>37</sup>—a simple survey of the Gospels will show the reader that Yeshua’s ministry was not an easy one, and that He performed actions and had associations which were considered abnormal for many of His contemporaries. A significant act of Yeshua’s service toward His own was witnessed in His washing of the Disciples’ feet:

“*Yeshua*, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself. Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded” (John 13:3-5).

Hawthorne describes not only the importance of Yeshua washing the Disciples’ feet, but also how this activity may have played a role in the formation of the *Carmen Christi* hymn:

“If the incident from the life of Jesus, where Jesus puts himself in the place of the slave and washes his disciples’ feet (John 13) played any part in shaping this hymn, if the context in which the hymn is inserted presents a call to serve one another, then δούλος [*doulos*] emphasizes the fact that in the incarnation Christ entered the stream of human life as a slave, that is, as a person

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<sup>36</sup> Hansen, 150.

<sup>37</sup> These include, but are not limited to: Mitch Glaser, *Isaiah 53 Explained* (New York: Chosen People Productions, 2010); Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser, *The Gospel According to Isaiah 53: Encountering the Suffering Servant in Jewish and Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2012); Herbert W. Bateman IV, Darrell L. Bock, and Gordon H. Johnston, *Jesus the Messiah: Tracing the Promises, Expectations, and Coming of Israel’s King* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2012).

without advantage, with no rights or privileges of his own for the express purpose of placing himself completely at the service of all mankind.”<sup>38</sup>

Washing feet was a dirty chore that only a household servant would have performed—yet Yeshua did it at the Last Supper or Last Seder to make an important point to His followers. Yeshua identified Himself with humanity (Matthew 20:28), and as a servant epitomized the example that others should have when relating to the Father (Mark 10:43-44; Luke 22:42; Luke 19:10; John 4:34; Hebrews 10:8). The significant difference that we see between Yeshua as a human, and other humans, is that He lacked the fallen sin nature that *all of us have inherited from Adam*. Kent explains, “Paul implies that even though Christ became a genuine man, there were certain respects in which he was not absolutely like other men.”<sup>39</sup> Yeshua took on the characteristics of a human being, as the Apostle John says, “the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Paul writes that God “condemned sin in the flesh by sending His own Son in flesh like ours under sin’s domain, and as a sin offering” (Romans 8:3, HCSB). The author of Hebrews says, “He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people” (Hebrews 2:17).

Yeshua first possesses *morphē Theou* (μορφῆ θεοῦ; Philippians 2:6), and upon emptying Himself of glory, takes on *morphēn doulou* (μορφὴν δούλου; Philippians 2:7). These are two contrasting conditions. If Yeshua may be regarded as authentically God by existing in “the form of God”—something which He notably did not give up—He may also be regarded as authentically human by existing in “the form of a servant/slave.” As is communicated in Philippians 2:7, *en homoiōmati anthrōpōn genomenos* (ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος), “being born in human likeness” (NRSV). Fee describes, “he came in the ‘likeness’ of human beings, because on the one hand he has fully identified with us, and because on the other hand in becoming human he was not ‘human’ only. He was God living out a truly human life, all of which is safeguarded by this expression.”<sup>40</sup>

Detailing the supreme servanthood of Yeshua, it is stated, “being found in appearance as a human being, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!” (Philippians 2:8, TNIV). While on Earth, Yeshua died as someone who was utterly cursed. As Paul told the Galatians, “Messiah redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, ‘CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE’” (Galatians 3:13), a reaffirmation of Deuteronomy 21:23: “his corpse shall not hang all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is accursed of God), so that you do not defile your land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance.” Crucifixion on a wooden scaffold (Grk. *stauros*, σταυρός) was the First Century’s most humiliating form of execution, and for His time, Yeshua died in the most violent, accursed way.

Examiners are keen to point out that while crucifixion was not something that the Romans invented, it was something that the Romans perfected—and as such it brought with it a great stigma. The Roman Senator Cicero would say, “It is a crime to bind a Roman citizen; to scourge him is a wickedness; to put him to death is almost parricide. What shall I say of crucifying him? So guilty an action cannot by any possibility be adequately expressed by any name bad enough for it” (*Against Verres* 2.5.170).<sup>41</sup> Describing some of the shame of First Century crucifixion, *IDB*

<sup>38</sup> Hawthorne, 87.

<sup>39</sup> Kent, in *EXP*, 11:124.

<sup>40</sup> Fee, *Philippians*, 213.

<sup>41</sup> M. Tullius Cicero. *The Orations of Marcus Tullius Cicero*, literally translated by C. D. Yonge (London: George Bell & Sons, 1903). Accessible online at <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Cic.+Ver.+2.5.170&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0018>>.

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describes, “Partly as a warning to other potential offenders, the condemned man was made to carry his cross, or the transverse part, along the public roads and to the execution ground, which itself was nearly always in a public place. There he was stripped of all his clothing. Affixed to the cross, he could not care for his bodily needs, and was the object of taunts and indignities from passers-by.”<sup>42</sup> Bruce further adds, “In polite Roman society the word ‘cross’ was an obscenity, not to be uttered in conversation.”<sup>43</sup>

Today’s Messianic community struggles, at times, over the English word “cross” (derived from the Latin *crux*)—usually not because of First Century issues involving Roman crucifixion, but instead post-Second Temple issues involving Christian persecution of the Jewish people using the symbol of the cross. And so, it is entirely appropriate, given this post-Biblical history, for today’s Messianic community to widely employ alternatives such as “tree” (Acts 10:39; *xulon*, ζύλον), “execution-stake” (as widely seen in the Complete Jewish Bible), or even “wooden scaffold(ing).”<sup>44</sup> Regardless of what term one uses to describe the execution venue of the Messiah, the *stauros* was not an elaborate or ornate symbol, as has been witnessed in centuries of Christian architecture and artwork. Witherington raises the critical point, “No one was likely to be turning crosses into jewelry in the first century any more than American jewelers today make little electric chair replicas to wear around one’s neck. The cross had an entirely negative and horrific connotation and did not suggest salvation or redemption at all.”<sup>45</sup>

How many of us in our faith experience and reflection on the Scriptures consistently fail to consider the humiliation and agony that Yeshua endured for us? Yeshua emptied Himself of His exaltedness in Heaven, came to Earth in human form, took our sin upon Himself, and died in a most horrific manner (Philippians 2:6-8). **His humility and what He put aside to endure are almost unbelievable.** When we strive to be humble servants in the community of faith, we must consider that none of us must empty ourselves of the glory that Yeshua had in Heaven to enter into the world of mortals. While we have to give things up to enter into the community of faith—these things are never that severe.

In His teachings, Yeshua the Messiah calls His followers to be ultimate servants to one another. In applying this to our lives today, we surely see that the economy of the Bible is completely reversed from that of the world (Matthew 5:3-11). While none of us may be God in the flesh, as Believers we certainly have the responsibility to uphold the ethic that Yeshua demonstrated while on Earth of service toward one another. Compared to what Yeshua had to put aside to be among us, we have very little to give up as human beings who have been called to follow Him. By Him emptying Himself of glory for a season, we have the opportunity to be reconciled to the Father and inherit eternal life (2 Corinthians 8:9).

It is ultimately impossible for any of us to adequately explain the mystery of Yeshua’s Divinity and humanity co-existing together, and **Philippians 2:5-8 does not attempt to explain it as much as affirm it.** However, as Hawthorne comments, “the Philippian text does not say that Christ gave up anything. Rather it says that he added to himself that which he did not have before—‘the form of a servant,’ ‘the likeness of a man.’ Thus the implication is that at the incarnation Christ became more than God, if this is conceivable, not less than God.”<sup>46</sup> We might be able to describe Yeshua’s coming into the world as a child and growing to be an adult, as God “shrinking Himself” and participating in humanity as one of us, whereas before He looked

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<sup>42</sup> Pierson Parker, “Crucifixion,” in *IDB*, 1:747.

<sup>43</sup> Bruce, *Philippians*, 71.

<sup>44</sup> Consult the FAQ, “Crucifixion.”

<sup>45</sup> Witherington, *Philippians*, 150.

<sup>46</sup> Hawthorne, 88.

at Planet Earth from afar as Creator. What Yeshua gained as God was the experience of having participated as a member of the human race.

The mystery of how Yeshua participated in our same human experiences is something that will boggle each of us until we enter into eternity. Unfortunately, there are some in today's Messianic community, who have opted solely to consider Yeshua a human, and not God in the flesh. And then, in response to this, there are a few Messianics who unknowingly advocate some kind of docetism, denying His essential humanity. The Scriptures do affirm that while on Earth Yeshua the Messiah was fully human (Romans 8:3; Galatians 4:4), and we have the responsibility as able interpreters of the Word to affirm *both* His Divinity and humanity—even though we have no way as mortals to fully understand their intricacies.

Paul's reference to Yeshua the Messiah emptying Himself of His exaltedness, only to enter into the realm of mortals to die a humiliating death on a cross, tree, or execution-stake—would have been completely contrary to the Philippian ethos of a Roman soldier. Many in Paul's Philippian audience would have striven for glory and fame in their lives, and would not have voluntarily set them aside in order to serve others. Yet for Paul himself, as he would exclaim to the Galatians, "But as for me, Heaven forbid that I should boast about anything except the execution-stake of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah! Through him, as far as I am concerned, the world has been put to death on the stake; and through him, as far as the world is concerned, I have been put to death on the stake" (Galatians 6:14, CJB/CJSB).

Yeshua surrendered His ability to be fully manifested as God Himself while on Earth, save His Transfiguration before Peter, John, and James (Luke 9:32). The great mystery of the Godhead is how Yeshua can be both human and Divine—and all at the same time. How do you understand it? More to apply it for yourself as a mortal: what would you empty yourself of in order to serve others? Keep in mind that whatever you have to give up is a far cry from the Divine glory that Yeshua put aside to die for you and me.

Because of Yeshua's emptying of Himself, the fact that He did not at all abuse His equality with the Father while on Earth (Philippians 2:6), and how Yeshua emptied Himself unto death (Philippians 2:7-8)—Paul is able to tell the Philippians, "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name" (Philippians 2:9, NIV). Yeshua the Messiah is given the ultimate authority by His Father over Heaven and Earth, and all will acknowledge Him by either choice—or by force. As Paul later writes, "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" (Ephesians 1:20-22). The Apostle John sees the ultimate manifestation of this in the Book of Revelation:

"And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, 'To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, *be* blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever'" (Revelation 5:13).

The Greek verb employed in Philippians 2:9 to describe Yeshua's exaltation is *huperupsoō* (ὑπερῦψώω), meaning "to exalt exceedingly" (LS),<sup>47</sup> and is seen rendered as "highly exalted Him" (NASU), "raised him to the highest place" (CJB/CJSB), and "elevated him to the place of highest honor" (NLT). The verb *huperupsoō* appears in some significant places in the Septuagint to refer to the One God of Israel:

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<sup>47</sup> LS, 838.

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“Because you are the Lord most high over all the earth, you were exalted far above [*huperupsoō*] all the gods” (Psalm 96:9, NETS).

“Blessed art thou, O Lord, God of our fathers, and to be praised and highly exalted [*huperupsoō*] for ever...Blessed art thou upon the throne of thy kingdom and to be extolled and highly exalted [*huperupsoō*] for ever (Prayer of Azariah 1:29, 33).

The claim of Philippians 2:9, “God highly exalted Him and gave Him the name that is above every name” (TLV), involves Yeshua the Messiah being highly exalted in the same way that God of Israel proper is exalted. Yeshua’s exaltation, as noted by Fee, “asserts the divine vindication of Christ’s emptying himself and humbling himself in obedience by dying on a cross.”<sup>48</sup> Yeshua’s exaltation does not come as a “reward” of Him entering into the world of mortals and suffering, but as the ultimate stamp of approval on this completed work, and a certain acknowledgement of what is to transpire subsequent to the Eternal State. *And let us not quickly forget how Yeshua is first described as One “existing in the form of God” (Philippians 2:6, TLV).*

The exaltation that the Messiah is given is that “at the name of Yeshua EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth” (Philippians 2:10). This is an all-encompassing veneration, as Paul actually lists the various categories of powers that to some degree were worshipped in Greco-Roman pantheon: the sky, the Earth/ground, and the underworld. This is important for us to consider because to some degree the Greco-Roman gods were “real”; they represented demonic forces that were allowed to tempt mortals and carry them away by deception. As Kent summarizes, “Paul’s statement was intended to include all of creation, animate and inanimate.”<sup>49</sup> **The entire universe will acknowledge the supremacy of Yeshua the Messiah.**

It is imperative, however, that readers recognize that in claiming that “EVERY KNEE WILL BOW,” the *Carmen Christi* hymn is not just making an idle statement about Yeshua. Philippians 2:10 appropriates a very real concept from **Isaiah 45:21-25**<sup>50</sup> (addressed previously in **Volume I**), where some significant claims are made by the LORD God of Israel Himself—notably including the Lord being the only God and Savior, to which all must turn to find redemption:

“Declare and set forth *your case*; indeed, let them consult together. Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none except Me. Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. I have sworn by Myself, the word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness and will not turn back, **that to Me every knee will bow**, every tongue will swear *allegiance*. They will say of Me, ‘Only in the LORD are righteousness and strength.’ Men will come to Him, and all who were angry at Him will be put to shame. In the LORD all the offspring of Israel will be justified and will glory.”

Implicit in these words is the fact that the LORD God is the exclusive Savior: “there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me.<sup>51</sup> Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other” (Isaiah 45:25, NIV). Within

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<sup>48</sup> Fee, *Philippians*, 220.

<sup>49</sup> Kent, in *EXP*, 11:125.

<sup>50</sup> Erwin Nestle and Kurt Aland, eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece, Nestle-Aland 27th Edition* (New York: American Bible Society, 1993), 518; Kurt Aland, et. al., *The Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/United Bible Societies, 1998), 675; Barbara and Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger, eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece, 28th Revised Edition* (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft: Stuttgart, 2012), 606.

<sup>51</sup> Heb. *Elohim m'bal'aday El-tzadiq u'moshi'ya ayin zulati* (אֱלֹהִים מִבְּלִעְדֵי אֱלֹהִים צַדִּיק וּמוֹשִׁיעַ אֵין זִלְתִּי), “And there is no other god besides Me, A God righteous and saving” (YLT).

Philippians 2:10, “at the name of Yeshua EVERY KNEE WILL BOW [Isaiah 45:23], in Heaven and on Earth and under the Earth” (PME), Isaiah 45:23 is specifically invoked: “By myself I have sworn, from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word that shall not return: ‘To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear’” (RSV). Severe questions about the nature of Yeshua are necessarily piqued from this, as declaring allegiance to the Messiah is the initiator of this bowing. Bruce summarizes some of the significant parallels witnessed elsewhere in the Apostolic Scriptures:

“In Isaiah 45:23 the God of Israel, who has already declared that he will not share his name or his glory with another, swears solemnly by his own life, ‘before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear.’ Here this language is repeated, but now it is **at the name of Jesus** that everyone kneels. There are parallels to this in other places in the NT: in John 5:22, 23 the Father makes the Son the universal judge ‘that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father,’ and in the vision of heaven in Revelation 5:6-14 the celestial beings around the throne of God fall down before the victorious Lamb at his appearance, and their song in celebration of his worthiness is taken up and echoed by all creation.”<sup>52</sup>

Hansen, indicating the importance of the Second Commandment prohibiting idolatry (Exodus 20:4-5; Deuteronomy 5:8-9), highlights how the allegiance due only to the One God of Israel, is something which is to be given to Yeshua the Messiah as well:

“The second commandment in the Decalogue explicitly prohibits bowing down before anything in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth because the Lord God is a jealous God (Exod 20:4-5; Deut 5:8-9). Only the Lord God exercises universal sovereignty over all of creation; only to the Sovereign Creator will every knee bow (Isa 45:23). By giving Jesus the name *Lord*, God gave Jesus divine sovereignty over all creation so that every knee in all of creation would bow to him.”<sup>53</sup>

Would a supernatural, yet ultimately created being, be expected to be afforded the celestial honor presented in Isaiah 45:23? The answer to this question comes as the hymn of Philippians 2:5-11 ends with the exclaim, “and every tongue profess that Yeshua the Messiah is Lord—to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:11, TLV). A person declaring “Yeshua is Lord” is absolutely essential to one truly believing in Him and being redeemed by Him (Romans 10:9). As Paul put it to the Corinthians, “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” (1 Corinthians 12:3).

With the intertextuality of Isaiah 45:21-25 in view, however, the two statements “at the name of Yeshua EVERY KNEE WILL BOW [Isaiah 45:23]” and “every tongue will confess that Yeshua the Messiah is Lord” (Philippians 2:10, 11, PME) are quite imperative for recognizing that Yeshua is God, integrated into the Divine Identity.

**Yeshua is declared to be the “Lord” of Isaiah 45:21-25, and the only “Lord” of Isaiah 45:21-25 is the LORD God of Israel or YHWH.** The Greek title *Kurios* (κύριος) was used in the Septuagint to render the Divine Name YHWH/YHVH (יהוה), which by Second Temple times was only spoken aloud by the high priest on *Yom Kippur* or the Day of Atonement (m.*Yoma* 6:2). *Kurios* or “Lord” is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *Adonai* (אֲדֹנָי), which would be spoken when the Scriptures were read or in liturgical worship in place of the name YHWH. Frequently throughout the Greek Scriptures, the title *Kurios* is used as a direct reference to “the LORD,” meaning YHWH. “In Phil. 2:6ff. the name *kýrios* is given to Jesus as the response of God to his

<sup>52</sup> Bruce, *Philippians*, 73.

<sup>53</sup> Hansen, 166.

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obedient suffering. It implies a position equal to that of God" (TDNT).<sup>54</sup> This is why David H. Stern renders Philippians 2:11 in his Complete Jewish Bible with "every tongue will acknowledge that Yeshua the Messiah is *ADONAI*." Recognizing the gravity of the Isaiah 45:11-25 intertextuality applied to Yeshua, Fee correctly concludes,

"The significance of Paul's using the language of Isaiah in this way lies with his substituting 'at the name of Jesus' for the 'to me' of Isa 45:23, which refers to Yahweh, the God of Israel. In this stirring oracle (Isa 45:18-24a) Yahweh is declared to be God alone, over all that he has created and thus over all other gods and nations. And he is Israel's savior, whom they can thus fully trust. In vv. 22-24a Yahweh, while offering salvation to all but receiving obeisance in any case, declares that 'to me every knee shall bow.' Paul now asserts that through Christ's resurrection and at his ascension God has transferred this right to obeisance to the Son; he is the Lord to whom every knee shall eventually bow."<sup>55</sup>

Yeshua the Messiah was already Divine prior to, during, and after His Incarnation (Philippians 2:6a). Yeshua's exaltation as "Lord" is not merely a declaration of His Divinity; it is a declaration of His supreme authority over worldly powers, rooted within the application of Isaiah 45:21-25 to Him. *Only someone "existing in the form of God" (Philippians 2:6a) could be recognized as legitimately having such an exalted status.* It is notable, however, that even though Yeshua the Messiah is to be recognized as the LORD or YHWH, given the Tanach intertextuality present from Isaiah 45:23—the veneration which Yeshua receives in Philippians 2:11 is hardly isolated, given the inclusion of *eis doxan Theou patros* (εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ πατρὸς), "to the glory of God the Father." Within much of contemporary Christianity, it can be said that there is a practice of what can be labeled "Jesus-olatry," where worship and veneration of the Son are seemingly all that matter. In light of the claims of Isaiah 45:21-25 being applied to Yeshua as the LORD or YHWH, and glory issued to God the Father, the Father and Son are both presented as co-members of a plural Godhead defined along the lines of Jewish monotheism. Hawthorne's caution is well taken:

"[I]t is to be noted that although Jesus bears the name 'Lord' (κύριος), the name of God himself (κύριος translates the OT 'Yahweh'), and is thus obliquely declared to be God with all the rights and privileges of God...yet paradoxically Jesus does not in any way displace God, or even rival God."<sup>56</sup>

Yeshua the Messiah being recognized as *Kurios* or "Lord," also bore some importance for the Roman Philippians. Philippi was a place where the cult of Caesar was avidly practiced, and the emperor was acknowledged as "Lord," a god, by many. How difficult was it for Philippians, who had perhaps been Roman soldiers and fought under the banner of the divine emperor, to give this up and acknowledge a Jew from the "backward provinces" who had been horrifically tortured and crucified, as Lord? Only God Himself can reveal such an important truth to such people! As important as it is for us to recognize Yeshua the Messiah in Philippians 2:10-11 as the LORD or YHWH of Isaiah 45:21-25, Yeshua being Lord also had a substantial subversive character to it, as the Jewish Messiah was declared as superior to all worldly rulers. Hansen further explains,

"In a Roman colony, Philippians would hear the acclamation that Jesus is Lord as a shocking allusion to the declaration of the Roman imperial cult that Caesar is Lord. In the ideology of the imperial cult, Jupiter and the gods gave divine authority and divine names to Augustus Caesar. In the theology of the hymn of Christ, God gave the divine name to Jesus so

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<sup>54</sup> W. Foerster, "κύριος," in TDNT, 492.

<sup>55</sup> Fee, *Philippians*, 224.

<sup>56</sup> Hawthorne, 94.

that he will be the LORD acclaimed and worshipped by all. By quoting this hymn, Paul presents the exaltation of Jesus as Lord in language that reflects and subverts the Roman imperial cult.<sup>57</sup>

The *Carmen Christi* hymn of Philippians 2:5-11 declares how Yeshua “existing in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited” (Philippians 2:6, PME), meaning that He did not use His God-status as a means to take advantage of human beings, unlike the gods and goddesses of mythology. Instead, via the Incarnation, Yeshua “emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness” (Philippians 2:7, PME), which involved the service He would demonstrate via His ministry for sure, and the ridicule and rejected He frequently endured. Yeshua was humiliated like a common criminal, enduring the Roman Empire’s most heinous and contemptible form of death: “being found in appearance as a human being, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a wooden scaffold” (Philippians 2:8, PME).

In spite of the death of Yeshua, He was resurrected from the dead, and “God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name” (Philippians 2:9, PME). The veneration, allegiance, and loyalty due to Yeshua is the same as that required of the LORD God of Israel in Isaiah 45:21-25: “at the name of Yeshua EVERY KNEE WILL BOW [Isaiah 45:23], in Heaven and on Earth and under the Earth” (Philippians 2:10, PME). Yeshua is, in fact, declared to be the Lord or YHWH of Isaiah 45:21-25, being integrated as Son into the Divine Identity, alongside of the Father: “every tongue will confess that Yeshua the Messiah is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:11, PME).

The *Carmen Christi* hymn of Philippians 2:5-11 has much to say theologically about the nature of Yeshua—but it also communicates much about the great value of our salvation, and our service as brothers and sisters one to another!

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<sup>57</sup> Hansen, 163.