One of the most significant issues which directly affects the broad Messianic community—to which no congregation, fellowship, family, or individual is entirely immune—is how to approach the nature of Yeshua (Jesus). Is Yeshua the Messiah God, or is He a created being? While many affirm Yeshua of Nazareth to be the eternal, uncreated Son of God who is indeed God—there are many others who express various levels of doubt about this, and then others who think that Yeshua is a created being and not God. There are those who will affirm that Yeshua is a supernatural being to be sure—perhaps even the first created being in the cosmic order, pre-existent of our known universe—but nevertheless created and not God.

This publication, *Salvation on the Line: The Nature of Yeshua and His Divinity*, affirms a high Christology. Not only does it affirm a high Christology of Yeshua being God, it very much defends the view that while understanding all of the intricacies of Yeshua being God is not required for salvation, recognizing Yeshua as the Lord (YHWH/YHVH) of the Tanach Scriptures (Old Testament) most certainly is required for salvation (Romans 10:9, 13; cf. Joel 2:32).

The considerable bulk of *Salvation on the Line*, while defending a high Christology, is necessarily spent going to the text of the Holy Scriptures (Genesis-Revelation). This is not only because the Holy Scriptures are to be decisively regarded by God's people to be the Word of Life, but also because this is the venue where the rise and fall of theological concepts are to be found. None of us wants to be found holding to a view of Yeshua being God simply because of some kind of fundamentalist dogma. We want to be found holding to a view of Yeshua being God, precisely because that is where the witness of Scripture directs us, it is the genuine testimony of the Messiah and His early followers, and because it is required for our redemption from sins as fallen human beings. The author firmly believes that such a principled case can be made in going to the text of Scripture, and that those who hold to a low Christology are decisively lacking in many areas.

SALVATION ON THE LINE
THE NATURE OF YESHUA AND HIS DIVINITY

SALVATION ON THE LINE

The Nature of Yeshua and His Divinity

J.K. McKee

MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS
messianicapologetics.blog

SALVATION ON THE LINE
The Nature of Yeshua and His Divinity

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Abbreviations and Special Terms

The following is a list of abbreviations for reference works and special terms which are used in publications by Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics. Please familiarize yourself with them as the text may reference a Bible version, i.e., RSV for the Revised Standard Version, or a source such as *TWOT* for the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, solely by its abbreviation. Detailed listings of these sources are provided in the Bibliography.

ABD: *Anchor Bible Dictionary*
AMG: *Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament*
ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament
Ara: Aramaic
ASV: American Standard Version (1901)
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)
b. Babylonian Talmud (*Talmud Bavli*)
B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.
BDAG: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)
BDB: *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.
CGEDNT: *Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Barclay M. Newman)
CGL: *Cambridge Greek Lexicon* (2021)
CHALOT: *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Holladay)
CJB: Complete Jewish Bible (1998)
CJSB: Complete Jewish Study Bible (2016)
DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition
DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls
ECB: *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*
EDB: *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*
EJ: *Encylopaedia Judaica*
ESV: English Standard Version (2001)
Ger: German
GNT: Greek New Testament
Grk: Greek
HALOT: *Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Koehler and Baumgartner)
HCSB: Holman Christian Standard Bible (2004)
Heb: Hebrew
HNV: Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible
IDB: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*
IDBSup: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement*
ISBE: *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*
IVPBBC: *IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old & New Testament)*
Jastrow: *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature* (Marcus Jastrow)
JBK: New Jerusalem Bible-Koren (2000)
JETS: *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
KJV: King James Version
Lattimore: The New Testament by Richmond Lattimore (1996)
LITV: *Literal Translation of the Holy Bible* by Jay P. Green (1986)
LES: *Lexham English Septuagint* (2019)
LS: *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell-Scott)
LSJM: *Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell-Scott-Jones-McKenzie)
LXE: *Septuagint with Apocrypha* by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)
LXX: Septuagint
m. Mishnah
MARV: Messianic Apologetics Revised Version*
MT: Masoretic Text
NASB: New American Standard Bible (1977)
NASU: New American Standard Update (1995)
NBCR: *New Bible Commentary: Revised*
NEB: New English Bible (1970)
Nelson: *Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words*
NETS: New English Translation of the Septuagint (2007)
NIB: *New Interpreter's Bible*
NIDB: *New International Dictionary of the Bible*
NIV: New International Version (1984)
NJB: New Jerusalem Bible-Catholic (1985)
NJPS: Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1999)

* This is a modified and adapted edition of the public domain World Messianic Bible (WMB).

NKJV: New King James Version (1982)
NRSV: New Revised Standard Version (1989)
NLT: New Living Translation (1996)
NT: New Testament
OT: Old Testament
REB: Revised English Bible (1989)
RSV: Revised Standard Version (1952)
t. Tosefta
Tanach (Tanakh): the Old Testament
Thayer: *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*
TDNT: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*
TLV: Messianic Jewish Family Bible—Tree of Life Version (2014)
TNIV: Today's New International Version (2005)
TWOT: *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*
UBSHNT: United Bible Societies' 1991 Hebrew New Testament revised edition
v(s). verse(s)
Vine: *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*
Vul: Latin Vulgate
YLT: Young's Literal Translation (1862/1898)
WMB: World Messianic Bible (2020)

Introduction

One of the biggest issues which is staring right at the broad Messianic movement—to which no congregation, fellowship, family, or individual are entirely immune—is how to approach the nature of Yeshua (Jesus). **Is Yeshua the Messiah God, or is He a created being?** While many affirm Yeshua of Nazareth to be the eternal, uncreated Son of God who is indeed God—there are many others who express various levels of doubt about this, and then others who think that Yeshua is a created being and not God. There are those who will affirm that Yeshua is a supernatural being to be sure—perhaps even the first created being in the cosmic order, pre-existent of our known universe—but nevertheless created and not God.

In our family's experience with Outreach Israel Ministries, we recognized how very early on in 2003, that while we encountered a few people here or there who denied Yeshua as God, there was enough of a guard or governor, of sorts, present—in how many knew that to deny Yeshua as God was to cross a very dangerous red line. *Hearing that a particular person denied Yeshua as God, was something which largely remained on the fringes.* But as the 2000s progressed, and new social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube really began to take hold—combined with the greater prevalence of an online bookseller like Amazon.com and the emergence of the eBook—ideas about the nature of the Messiah which would have stayed on someone's obscure personal website or blog, could now be promoted rather easily. Individual people, in what would be considered the more mainstream of the Messianic community, would be found expressing opinions and perspectives which were not affirming of Yeshua as God. Many of these opinions and perspectives can circulate unknown to congregational leaders and teachers.

While we have surely been involved in our fair share of controversies over the years among people in the Messianic movement, and there have been issues which we are in disagreement about with various personalities[i]—no one has ever been able to accuse Outreach Israel Ministries of holding to a low Christology,[ii] or the view that Yeshua of Nazareth is a created being. It might be said, instead, that our ministry holds to **some of the highest Christology witnessed in the Messianic movement.** Our ministry Statement of Faith forthrightly asserts,

> We fully affirm the complete Divinity of Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ), that Yeshua pre-existed the universe and created the universe (John 1:1-3; Philippians 2:5-7; Colossians 1:15-17; Hebrews 1:2-3), that Yeshua is to be worshipped (Mark 5:6-7; Matthew 2:2, 8, 11; Matthew 14:32-33; 28:9, 17; Luke 24:52; John 9:38; Hebrews 1:6), and even though in Yeshua's human Incarnation the Father is greater than the Son (John 14:28), that the Son is genuinely God (John 20:28; Romans 9:5; Titus 2:13;

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[i] A number of these are evaluated in the author's book *Confronting Critical Issues: An Analysis of Subjects that Affects the Growth and Stability of the Emerging Messianic Movement*.

[ii] **Christology** is a theological term usually applied to the study of the Messiah's nature and origin. An excellent definition of "Christology" is provided by Stanley J. Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 25:

> "Christology is the theological study devoted to answering two main questions: Who is Jesus? (the question of his identity) and What is the nature and significance of what Jesus accomplished in the incarnation? (the question of his work)."

2 Peter 1:1). We believe that acknowledging Yeshua as LORD, meaning YHWH/YHVH, is mandatory for salvation (Romans 10:9; Philippians 2:10-11). We believe that He was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18, 20, 23, 25; Luke 1:26-33), and that He is the prophesied Messiah of Israel (John 1:45).

This publication, *Salvation on the Line: The Nature of Yeshua and His Divinity* affirms a high Christology. Not only does it affirm a high Christology of Yeshua being God, it very much defends the view that while understanding all of the intricacies of Yeshua being God is not required of human beings for salvation, recognizing Yeshua as the Lord (YHWH/YHVH) of the Tanach Scriptures **most certainly is required for salvation** (Romans 10:9, 13; cf. Joel 2:32).

This project has been an open file for Outreach Israel Ministries since 2003, as we first directly encountered a number of people denying Yeshua as God. Certainly we have written many things defending Yeshua the Messiah as God. I have certainly also written about the nature of Yeshua in our *for the Practical Messianic* commentary series, when passages of importance have been encountered. Yet, I have known for quite some time that a lengthy and voluminous examination, of a high Christology for today's Messianic people, was in store for the future.

This resource has consulted and engaged with a wide array of resources and perspectives across the Messianic movement, into the more independent sectors of the Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement, the views expressed by various Christians labeling themselves as "Biblical Unitarians," and even those few theologians of note who hold to a low Christology. This involves an array of articles, books, commentaries, and even a few Bible versions. Most importantly, would be some of the excellent, thorough, and readable resources defending a high Christology, seen within the realm of broadly evangelical Christian theology.

The considerable bulk of this resource, while defending a high Christology, is necessarily spent going to the text of the Holy Scriptures (Genesis-Revelation). This is not only because the Holy Scriptures are to be regarded by God's people to be the Word of Life, but also because this is the venue where the rise and fall of theological concepts are to be found. None of us wants to be found holding to a view of Yeshua being God simply because of some kind of fundamentalist dogma—where if we hold to a different view our name will somehow end up on a list or in a white paper as being stigmatized as some kind of "cultists." We want to be found holding to a view of Yeshua being God, precisely because that is where the witness of Scripture directs us, it is the genuine testimony of the Messiah and His early followers, **and because it is required for our redemption from sins as fallen human beings.** I firmly believe that such a principled case can be made in going to the text of Scripture, and that those who hold to a low Christology are decisively lacking in many areas.

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The State of Christology in the Contemporary Messianic Movement

Evaluating the nature of the Messiah—and how people in today's Messianic movement can have some fair, readable, thorough, and reasonable answers to their questions—has been a personal burden which I have carried since 2003. As I entered into full-time Messianic ministry, I encountered my first people who denied Yeshua as God. I was horrified, flabbergasted, but above all presented with a challenge. *What was to be done?* At the time, the *Jewish Objections to Jesus* series by Michael L. Brown had just started being released, understandably tied to the issues which would arise in the context of Jewish evangelism and the Messiahship of Yeshua of Nazareth. But, Jewish and non-Jewish Believers in the broad Messianic community, thinking that Yeshua was the Messiah—*but not God*—was for me a more complicated issue. **The most difficult thing, for certain, was to let other people have "their say," before I could be primed to work on this lengthy analysis.**

One of the things which you have to quickly learn, in the field of Biblical Studies, is that nothing is sacred. Liberal theologians and examiners, whether they be Christian *or* Jewish, have at one time or another taken a belief you cherish dearly, and have done their best to rip it to shreds. An excellent example of this is demonstrated by higher criticism and the JEDP Documentary Hypothesis, where the Torah or Pentateuch is largely thought to not be the product of a real historical figure named Moses, but rather various literary sources and mythologies strewn together after the Babylonian exile in the Sixth Century B.C.E.[1] For certain, this would relegate materials such as Genesis chs. 1-11 as being Israelite or Jewish retellings of Mesopotamian creation and flood myths, but it would also involve pseudo-historical embellishments of a group of ancient slaves having escaped the clutches of the Egyptian Empire. And, to be certain, the Bible on the whole is to be treated as almost entirely a human philosophical work, one of many varied ideologies where people have tried to evaluate the nature of the Divine Being. There have been people who have attempted to make compelling arguments against Yeshua being God, in the same spirit as those who have attempted to make compelling arguments against the reliability of the Holy Scriptures.

In my many years of full-time ministry service, I have been no stranger to addressing the controversial issues of the day, with the specific intention of facilitating resolution to them. Today, yes even in the mid-2020s, the broad Messianic movement has a dirty little secret: **many people deny that Yeshua the Messiah is God.** If this shocks you to some extent, because when you attend

[1] For an analysis and refutation of this, from one of the premier Jewish Bible scholars of the Twentieth Century, consult Umberto Cassuto, *The Documentary Hypothesis and the Composition of the Pentateuch* (Jerusalem: Shalem Press, 2006).

your *Shabbat* service or various Bible studies or other teachings at your assembly—your congregational leadership and/or denominational affiliation may affirm Yeshua as God—note that the issue in view is *many* ***people.*** Many Messianic leaders and teachers and organizations rightly and properly affirm that Yeshua the Messiah is God. Our issue in this publication, *Salvation on the Line: The Nature of Yeshua and His Divinity*, is to deal with what has happened regarding many individual people and families, sitting in Messianic congregations and synagogues, who deny, **on some significant level,** Yeshua the Messiah as God.[2] These people, and those who they may affect, need substantial answers to the questions which they have been asking, the doubts they have been entertaining, and the issues and sub-issues which have been brought to our collective attention.

Why do you believe Yeshua is God? Dogma or Doctrine?

What would happen if your Messianic congregational leader, or rabbi, asked the congregational constituents why they believe that Yeshua the Messiah is God? What would be some of the reasons given? *Would they encounter dogma or doctrine?* Would people express a principled set of reasons for affirming Yeshua's Divinity, *or* would they only express a dogmatic "you have to believe" reason, without any real substance? Many might indeed affirm something having to do with only God being able to redeem human beings from their sins (Psalm 49:7, 15), or explicit claims made by Yeshua (i.e., John 8:58). But, how many people would not really know what to say? Do we even want to know some of the reasons why people might believe that Yeshua is God?

In my many years of experience, interacting with people across the broad Messianic community, I have not seen too many developed, principled cases made by individuals who believe that Yeshua the Messiah is God. While I have seen various under-developed, principled cases for people believing that Yeshua is God, what I have mostly witnessed are people who hold on to Yeshua being God, on the basis of some very flimsy reasons, which can easily be shown to have various flaws. As such unsubstantial and unsustainable reasons are shown to have errors, the dogmatic foundation of sand can give way to tides of doubt, and many people can be swept away by the thinking that Yeshua the Messiah might not be God, but instead some sort of created, supernatural being. I have seen the following take place too many times:

1. "You must believe that Yeshua the Messiah is God!"

Those who have a fundamentalist orientation of the issues will just forthrightly assert—perhaps without having personally reasoned through anything too deeply—that Yeshua the Messiah must be God. Among the English Bible passages they will quote, may rightly be John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (MARV). However, if it can be proven with some doubt that a verse like John 1:1 can be read from a different vantage point, then what happens? What do you do when you see a rendering like, "The Word existed in the beginning, and the Word was with God, and God was the Word" (The Messianic Writings), or "When all things began, the Word already was. The Word dwelt with God, and what God was, the

[2] While I could mention many examples of this, a member at my local congregation, Eitz Chaim of Plano, TX, actually wrote a small book for her previous assembly (Elisa Norman, *Is Yeshua God?* [Author, 2011]), which apparently split up and later dissolved over the issue of Yeshua's Divinity. Many who denied Yeshua as God, later denied Yeshua as Messiah.

Word was" (NEB), or "The Logos existed in the very beginning, the Logos was with God, the Logos was divine" (Moffatt New Testament)? A *Strong's Concordance* dictionary can only go so far in evaluating the meanings of terms,[3] as grammar and perspective issues also need to be evaluated for a verse like John 1:1, and certainly many others (discussed further).

2. Yeshua the Messiah is the Alef and the Tav.

For a great number of Messianic people, Yeshua the Messiah being associated as the Alef and the Tav, is no different than how Christians see Jesus Christ as the Alpha and the Omega. The first and last Hebrew letters are *alef* and *tav*, just as the first and last Greek letters are *alpha* and *ōmĕga*. In a publication like the Word Messianic Bible, the rendering "I am the Alef and the Tav" employed in Revelation 1:8; 21:6; 22:13.[4] The purpose of this is to serve as an appropriate counterpart to "I am the first and the last" (Revelation 1:17; cf. 2:8; 22:13). That the LORD God is the only first and the last is something affirmed in Isaiah 41:4; 44:6; 48:12. Yeshua as the Divine Savior, being God the Son, is something realized in that He too is to be considered the first and the last.

It is not uncommon in various Messianic circles to hear that there might be some kind of a connection between Yeshua being the Alef and the Tav, and what is witnessed in the Hebrew of Genesis 1:1. "In the beginning, God created the Heavens and the Earth" (MARV). in Hebrew reads as *b'reisheet bara Elohim et ha'shamayim v'et ha'aretz*. A non-translatable particle word, *et*, appears in the Hebrew text, relating to the action of creation. Many of today's Messianics, who rightly hold to a high Christology of Yeshua the Messiah being God, see this small word composed of *alef* and *tav*, and conclude that this is an indication of Yeshua being present at the Creation of the universe.

Does the presence of the *et* in Genesis 1:1 indicate that Yeshua the Messiah is intended to be identified as the Alef and the Tav/the Alpha and Omega/the A and the Z in this verse? The identification of Yeshua as the *et* in Genesis 1:1 can indeed be disputed. This is because *et* in Hebrew grammar serves as the marker of a definite direct object, and it is used all throughout the Hebrew Tanach—in places which often have absolutely no direct or indirect Messianic significance. *A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew* by C.L. Seow informs us what the purpose of the *et* actually is:

> "Almost always in Hebrew prose, and less commonly in poetry, an untranslatable particle [*et*], is used to mark the definite object of the verb. A noun is said to be definite when it is a proper name, a noun with a definite article, or a noun with a suffixed pronoun" (*A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew*).[5]

The examples given to explain this are *sholeiach et-Moshe*, "sending Moses"; *sholeiach et-ha'eved*, "sending the servant"; *sholeiach et-avdi*, "sending my servant."[6] Passages or verses in the Tanach which tend to have Messianic significance, usually have things

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[3] Consult the author's article "Getting Beyond Strong's Concordance" (appearing in *Confronting Critical Issues*).

[4] Surprisingly, though, the 1998 Complete Jewish Bible by David H. Stern actually has "I am the 'A' and the 'Z'" in these verses. The 2016 Complete Jewish Study Bible has modified Revelation 1:8; 21:6; 22:13 to more Hebraic terminology, "I am the (*Alef*) and the (*Tav*)" (Revelation 1:8, CJSB).

[5] C.L. Seow, *A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew*, revised edition (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 98.

[6] Ibid.

detectable via connections made by the actions or sayings of particular Tanach figures, and things witnessed in the ministry and service of Yeshua in the Gospels.

It can be appreciated, on some level, for Messianic Believers today wanting to make a connection between the presence of the *et* in Genesis 1:1, in an effort to affirm the pre-existence and Divinity of Yeshua. However, what has surely not been probed enough are definite and explicit claims in the Apostolic Scriptures of Yeshua's pre-existence, and His role in creating and sustaining the universe (i.e., John 1:1-3; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Philippians 2:6; Colossians 1:16-17; Hebrews 1:2-3). Unfortunately, it has been witnessed that too much attention has been given to the so-called significance of *et* by Messianic people, and not enough attention at all to clear statements which directly affect the nature of Yeshua.

3. "Yeshua of Nazareth, King of the Jews" spelled out the Divine Name YHWH/YHVH above the cross.

Gospel passages which are often provided to support the view that the Divine Name of God, YHWH/YHVH was spelled out above the cross or execution-stake of the Messiah, include Matthew 27:37, "And above His head they put up the charge against Him which read, 'THIS IS YESHUA THE KING OF THE JEWS'" (NASU), and John 19:19, "Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It was written, 'YESHUA THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS'" (NASU; cf. Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38). What readers know for certain from the Gospels is that Hebrew was not the only language in which this superscription was written. John 19:20 makes the important remark, "many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Yeshua was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Latin *and* in Greek" (NASU). At the very least, this indicates that there were more than just Hebrew-speaking Jews present in Jerusalem at the time of Yeshua's execution, but also probably indicates that the Greeks and Romans present at this event needed to know that Yeshua was indeed King of the Jews.

Some have made light of the record in John 19:21-22, where "The chief priests of the Jews then said to Pilate, 'Do not write, "The King of the Jews," but, that He said, 'I am King of the Jews.'"' Pilate answered, 'What I have written, I have written'" (MARV). This claim is made to support the belief that the Divine Name YHWH was somehow spelled out in the Hebrew superscription above the Messiah as He was dying. Some conclude that the Sadducees wanted the name YHWH pulled down and the words be re-written. But notice that this is not what the text states. They wanted it torn down because they wanted Pilate to write the mocking statement "I am King of the Jews." History reveals that Pontius Pilate was no friend of the Jewish people in Israel, and that he was censored by the authorities in Rome for how he treated them. Varied traditions indicate that he was either executed, committed suicide, or was exiled because of his poor administration.[7] If indeed antagonistic toward the Jews, Pilate would have wanted Yeshua's cross to say something to the effect that the king of the Jews was a "dead man," and that Rome had prevailed over them.

There is no substantial evidence to support the conclusion that the name YHWH was spelled above the cross in the words "Yeshua the Nazarene, the King of the Jews." Many

[7] Cf. Lorman M. Petersen, "Pilate," in Merrill C. Tenney, ed., *The New International Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), pp 789-790.

who make this assumption claim that the Hebrew would have read *Yeshua haNatzri v'melech haYehudim*, beginning with the first four letters of God's Divine Name: YHVH or YHWH. The problem with this is that the statement actually translates as "Yeshua the Nazarene **and** king of the Jews," notably including the Hebrew conjunction *vav*, generally meaning "and." If this were an accurate rendering it would be reflected in John's Greek transcription with the conjunction *kai*, also generally meaning "and." But all John 19:19 reads with is *Iēsous ho Nazōraios ho basileus tōn Ioudaiōn*, with no *kai* present in the text.

The conjunction *vav* or "and" is also not present in modern Hebrew translations of the Greek Apostolic Scriptures in John 19:19. The Salkinson-Ginsburg and Delitzsch translations read with *Yeshua haNatzri melech haYehudim*, meaning "Yeshua the Nazarene, king of the Jews." The 1991 UBSHNT reads with *Yeshua m'Natzerat melech haYehudim*, "Yeshua from Nazareth, king of the Jews." While it may sound interesting, and tickle some ears, the Hebrew that would have appeared above Yeshua's cross/execution-stake did not spell out the Divine Name YHWH.[8]

If Bible readers really want to see Yeshua the Messiah portrayed as YHWH, then it would be much more beneficial for them to investigate the many intertexual references from the Tanach (OT), quoted in the Apostolic Scriptures (NT)—where passages directly applying to the LORD **are applied to Yeshua,** with Him integrated into the Divine Identity.

When your view of Yeshua the Messiah being God might be based on some kind of fundamentalist reading of John 1:1 solely in English, the thought that Yeshua as the Alef and the Tav is seen all throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, and that the Divine Name YHWH/YHVH was spelled above the cross/execution-stake—**what happens when some of these things get challenged?** What happens when it is demonstrated that the Hebrew particle word *et* has no meaning other than designating the direct object, or that *Yeshua haNatzri v'melech haYehudim* was not the Hebrew written above the Messiah at Golgotha? What happens when you are informed that there are some different views of John 1:1 out there in English editions of the Apostolic Scriptures?

Some Messianic people, when they conduct an individual inventory of why they believe that Yeshua the Messiah is God, come to the conclusion that they definitely need some help! *These are people who will properly avail themselves of a detailed examination of Bible passages which speak to the nature of the Messiah, and they will seek out materials and teachings which affirm Yeshua as God on a much more academic level.* Others, however innocently it may seem at first, might begin to think that as "truthseekers" they can digest a variety of perspectives on whether Yeshua the Messiah is God *or* whether Yeshua the Messiah is a supernatural yet ultimately created being. Many of these people are not as discerning as they may think they are, and they can later find themselves denying Yeshua as God. They can then influence many other people, sometimes with—but also without—the knowledge of various leaders inside a Messianic congregation or synagogue.

[8] Douglas Hamp, *Discovering the Language of Jesus* (Santa Ana, CA: Calvary Chapel Publishing, 2005), 77 concurs.

Where does the broad Messianic community stand?

When each of us considers the theological and spiritual condition of today's broad Messianic movement, we often need to recognize that each Messianic congregation, synagogue, ministry, and organization needs to be evaluated on its own merits. As what many would consider "the end-time move of God,"[9] there are many different dynamics which are in motion, involving a wide variety of theological issues—which can either unite *or* divide us. A huge issue is undeniably **Christology** or the study of the nature of the Messiah. Unlike some of the issues which have divided or fractured us in the past, often associated with ecclesiology or Torah validity or Torah application for the people of God in the post-resurrection era, Christology can directly relate to our salvation.

If Yeshua the Messiah is indeed the Creator God incarnated in human flesh, then few of us should have any doubts about Him being the perfect sacrifice for sins, able to redeem fallen humans, and absolutely worthy of the worship due to the LORD God. If Yeshua the Messiah is a supernatural but ultimately created being, then there can be some doubts about Him being the perfect sacrifice for sins, but even more so regarding ascribed honor and worship to be given to Him.

While hardly extensive when compared and contrasted to what has been witnessed in much evangelical Protestant writing, there are analyses and writings accessible regarding Christology for today's Messianic people. These writings do represent a selection of approaches concerning the nature of the Messiah, and how the composition of God should be considered. A number of general analyses of Christology have been produced for the broad Messianic Jewish community, a movement which broadly does affirm Yeshua as God, but which also can have various streams of dissension from such a view.[10] A number of specific writings, however—many of which I have either encountered, been sent by ministry followers, or have made the intention of acquiring—testify to how there is a variance of thought present regarding the nature of Yeshua in the broad Messianic movement.

1. Traditional Christian Trinitarianism:[11] Among some of the older Messianic Jewish organizations, primarily geared toward missionary evangelism and often tied to older networks of evangelical Protestant support, are those who adhere to the traditional doctrine of the Trinity, "The Christian church's belief that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three Persons in one Godhead" (*Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*).[12]

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[9] Consult the useful observations in Mark Huey's article "An End-Time Move of the Holy Spirit," appearing in the December 2013 issue of Outreach Israel News.

[10] Such general analyses include, but are not limited to: John Fischer, "Yeshua: The Deity Debate" Mishkan Issue 39, 2003; "The Doctrine of God in Messianic Jewish Theology" and "Yeshua the Messiah: The Shaping of Messianic Jewish Theology," in Richard Harvey, *Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology: A Constructive Approach* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), pp 49-139; *The Borough Park Papers Symposium II (April 12-14, 2010): The Deity of Messiah and the Mystery of God* (Clarksville, MD: Lederer Books, 2012).

[11] This view would be witnessed in: "Recontextualization of the Doctrine of the Trinity as Formulated by the Council of Nicea," in Rich Robinson, ed., *God, Torah, Messiah: The Messianic Jewish Theology of Dr. Louis Goldberg* (San Francisco: Purple Pomegranate Productions, 2009), pp 125-148.

[12] Donald S. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 288.

2. A principled high Christology: More frequent to be found among today's Messianic people, congregations, and various ministries and teachers of note, would be some kind of principled high Christology. Such a principled high Christology would affirm that Yeshua the Messiah is God, although various writings should be considered more developed than others. Such a principled high Christology would often, although not exclusively, speak in terms of the makeup of God being a tri-unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, rather than a rigid "Trinity," as it would leave some room open for additional components of God to be revealed to humanity in the future Eternal State.

It is to be recognized that a principled high Christology of Yeshua being God is represented by various Messianic Jewish Bible versions,[13] introductory texts,[14] apologetic resources,[15] as well as popular books.[16] (Various writers of note within the One Law/One Torah sub-movement are certainly found to adhere to a principled high Christology of Yeshua being God.[17] And, perhaps surprisingly to some, various persons within the Two-House sub-movement,[18] as well as within the independent Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement affirm Yeshua as being God,[19] even if somewhat simplistically.)

3. A quasi-mystical Christology:[20] A quasi-mystical Christology would attempt to take some of the Jewish speculation about God from the Rabbinical writings and materials of the Middle Ages, and likely make some attempt to reconcile it with concepts appearing in the Apostolic Scriptures and their presentation of a high Christology of Yeshua being God. While a quasi-mystical Christology would rightly be considered anachronistic—given its reliance on Jewish writings which fall well outside of the broad Biblical period—its major intention is to provide a religious-philosophical framework for understanding that a plural Godhead or Divine Messiah is not incompatible with some historical Jewish

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[13] *Tree of Life Messianic Family Bible—New Covenant* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2011), pp 22-23.

[14] James Appel, Jonathan Bernis, and David Levine, *Messianic Judaism Class*, Student Book (Copenhagan, NY: Olive Press, 2011), pp 106-110; *Messianic Judaism Class*, Teacher Book (Copenhagen, NY: Olive Press, 2011), pp 134-140; Michael Schiffman, "Messianic Jews and the Tri-Unity of God," in John Fischer, ed., *The Enduring Paradox: Exploratory Essays in Messianic Judaism* (Baltimore: Lederer, 2000), pp 61-69.

[15] Michael L. Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus, Volume 2: Theological Objections* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), pp 3-60; "The Secret of the Invisible God Who Can Be Seen," in *The Real Kosher Jesus: Revealing the Mysteries of the Hidden Messiah* (Lake Mary, FL: Front Line, 2012), pp 125-138.

[16] Asher Intrater, *Who Ate Lunch With Abraham?: The appearances of God in the form of a Man in the Hebrew Scriptures* (Peoria, AZ: Intermedia Publishing Group, 2011).

While this resource has many useful and appreciable perspectives, its author provides his own English translation of the Apostolic Scriptures from the UBS Hebrew New Testament, and subsequently is not engaged with any Greek language issues or debates relevant to a wide majority of the issues surrounding the nature of the Messiah.

Also broadly representative of a high Christology is Derek Leman, *Divine Messiah* (Stone Mountain, GA: Mount Olive Press, 2014). [eBook for Amazon Kindle].

[17] Tim Hegg, *The Messiah: An Introduction to Christology* (Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2006); (2007). *The Deity of Yeshua. Torah Resource.* Retrieved 19 Oct, 2015, from <http://torahresource.com>; Caleb Hegg. (2015). *Is Yeshua YHVH? Foundation or non issue?* Retrieved 02 November, 2015, from <http://calebhegg.com>.

[18] Batya Ruth Wootten, "Is the 'Greek' New Covenant Inspired? Is Yeshua Divine" House of David Herald Vol. 8, Bk. 6; "The I Am, His Son, And, the "Trinity" House of David Herald Vol. 8, Bk. 7.; "One Witness?" House of David Herald Vol. 8, Bk. 9; Mordecai Silver. (2001). *Is Yeshua God? Etz-Chayim-Tree of Life Messianic Ministries* Retrieved 19 October, 2015, from <http://etz-chayim.org>.

[19] Monte Judah. (2011). "Messiah Yeshua is God" Yavoh: He is coming! Vol. 17 No. 1, January 2011; (2015). "Why is This Even A Question?" Yavoh: He is coming! Vol. 21 No. 9, September 2015.

[20] This view would be present in: Itzhak Shapira, *The Return of the Kosher Pig: The Divine Messiah in Jewish Thought* (Clarksville, MD: Lederer Books, 2013).

thought. The intention of a quasi-mystical Christology is to convey to Jewish people skeptical of a Divine Messiah, that it is not un-Jewish to believe that the Messiah is Divine.[21]

4. An ambiguous Christology:[22] An ambiguous Christology is detectable among Messianic people who are either unsure about the nature of the Messiah and whether or not He is genuinely God, are internally divided as a ministry or congregational leadership team about the nature of the Messiah, or may actually hold to a low Christology of Yeshua not being God, but who do not wish to be too public about it. Those who adhere to an ambiguous Christology are likely to say that they only "speak in Biblical terms," and affirm what various Bible passages say about the Messiah. But, those who adhere to an ambiguous Christology will not expel any real effort to explain what they think various Bible passages about the Messiah actually mean.

5. A low Christology: A low Christology would deny that Yeshua the Messiah is God, and would instead advocate that He is some kind of supernatural yet created being less than the Creator God, or that He is a created being who was born in First Century Israel and then supernaturally exalted into Heaven. A low Christology can be witnessed in various, more independent, Messianic Jewish sectors[23]—but for sure will be witnessed in various streams of the Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement, where it is affirmed that Yeshua the Messiah, for certain, is not co-equal with the Father,[24] or just flat not God.[25]

While a low Christology is likely to be witnessed in increasing degrees throughout the Messianic sphere of influence, it is not at all isolated to the various sectors of our faith community. A low Christology is witnessed in various resources seen promoted by self-labeled "Biblical Unitarians," various independent Christians who deny that Jesus the Messiah is God and any sort of traditional Trinitarianism.[26] This also can include a variety of self-published individuals detailing their personal quest in once thinking that Yeshua or Jesus was God, and then denying it. Some of these individuals have some sort of formal theological credentials or studies behind them,[27] but most do not.[28] Far more substantial

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[21] Cf. Brown, *The Real Kosher Jesus*, pp 134-136.

[22] This view would be detectable in: (n.d.). *Unique and Incomprehensible: Comments and Approaches to Explaining the Nature of God*. *First Fruits of Zion.* Retrieved 04 April, 2011, from <http://ffoz.org>; Tsvi Sadan, *The Concealed Light: Names of Messiah in Jewish Sources* (Marshfield, MO: Vine of David, 2012).

[23] Uriel ben-Mordechai, *If? The End of a Messianic Lie* (Jerusalem, 2011).

[24] Russ Houck, *Epidemic: Examining the Infected Roots of Judaism and Christianity* (Corsicana, TX: Negev Publishing, 2009), pp 357-375; Brian T. Huie, *Here A Little, There A Little: Vol 1* (Author, 2010), pp 62-80.

[25] Theodore Meredith, *The Case for Echad: The Trinity or One* (Auckland Airport, New Zealand: No Mans Zone, 2012).

[26] Such views are widely represented by: Anthony Buzzard and Charles F. Hunting, *The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity's Self-Inflicted Wound* (Lanham, MD: International Scholars Publications, 1998); Anthony Buzzard, *Jesus Was Not a Trinitarian: A Call to Return to the Creed of Jesus* (Morrow, GA: Restoration Fellowship, 2007); Mark H. Graeser, John A. Lynn, and John W. Schoenheit, *One God & One Lord: Reconsiderting the Cornerstone of the Christian Faith* (Indianapolis: Christian Educational Services, 1999); *One God & One Lord: Reconsiderting the Cornerstone of the Christian Faith*, fifth edition (Indianapolis: The Living Truth Fellowship, 2011).

[27] Eric H.H. Chang. *The Only True God: A Study of Biblical Monotheism* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2009); *The Only Perfect Man: The Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ* (Charleston, SC: CreateSpace, 2014); Greg S. Deuble, *They never told me this in Church!* (McDonough, GA: Restoration Fellowship, 2010).

[28] Robert L. George, *The Trinity's Weak Links Revealed* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2007); Jason Kerrigan, *Restoring the Biblical Christ: Is Jesus God?* (Denver, CO: Outskirts Press, 2007); P.R. Lackey, *The Tyranny of the Trinity: The Orthodox Cover-up* (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2011); Patrick Navas, *Divine Truth or Human Tradition? A Reconsideration of the Orthodox*

and concerning, to be certain, is academic literature by scholars teaching at the collegiate level, which will promote a low Christology.[29]

The people of today's Messianic movement have often lacked the resources and tools which they have needed on Christology or the study of the nature of the Messiah. While it is most commendable that there are congregation and ministry leaders who affirm Yeshua the Messiah as God, this Biblical truth needs to be explained much better to Messianic people who are seeking answers. There has not been a huge amount of engagement with the issues involving the nature of the Messiah, by going to the Biblical text and evaluating the critical perspectives brought out via different terms, clauses, or verb tenses. In the vacuum, various voices and resources promoting a low Christology have been able to step in. They have, for example, been able to run roughshod over many people, per words such as, "for the Father is greater than I" (John 14:28). Almost no one has really cross-examined and simply asked whether this is speaking of Yeshua in His pre-incarnate glory (John 17:5), or Yeshua in His human Incarnation. Many other examples of Christological issues which have fallen through the cracks, include the correct approach to *harpagmos* in Philippians 2:6. **For sure, the only way we will have a proper handling on the nature of Yeshua, is by going to the Biblical text, and examining relevant passages.**

A Low Christology, a High Christology?

When approaching the nature of the Messiah, while it can be very true that Yeshua being our Savior is indeed a salvation issue, each of us needs to demonstrate a fair degree of humility, but also sobriety and reverence—precisely because each of us is a human being, a mortal, who is trying to understand an Eternal God relating to us in terms which we can *somewhat* comprehend. As the Gospel of John concludes, "but these have been written that you may believe that Yeshua is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31, MARV). While as Bible readers and interpreters we each have to conduct some examination of the Holy Writ, in order to evaluate who the Messiah is—we should each stand in awe of our God, as a Being who understands different dimensions of existence, issues of time and space, and doubtlessly computations of mathematics and scientific theory, which are all far beyond our abilities. In the person of Yeshua of Nazareth, our Creator God has made Himself known (John 1:18) to His human creations.

In my experience, a number of the significant Christian resources, discussing the nature of God and traditional doctrines such as the Trinity, tend to deal with various philosophical and metaphysical components of speculating about God.[30] These resources take for granted the idea that Yeshua or Jesus is God, and they often proceed to explain it via classical Greek philosophical terms rather than in Biblical terms, not really using materials germane to Second Temple Judaism. Yet, people at large who have accepted Genesis-Revelation as inspired of our Creator, and who

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Doctrine of the Trinity in Light of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2011); Michael A. Barber, *Should the Trinity be Abandoned?* (Author, 2014).

[29] This includes, but is not limited to: James D.G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry Into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1980); *Did the First Christians Worship Jesus? The New Testament Evidence* (Louisville: Westminister John Knox, 2010); James F. McGrath, *The Only True God: Early Christian Monotheism in Its Jewish Context* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

[30] This includes, but is hardly limited to: Alister E. McGrath, *Understanding the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988); Richard Swinburne, *Was Jesus God?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Perhaps also Jason S. Sexton, gen. ed., *Two Views on the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014).

want to honestly understand who Yeshua of Nazareth is, are not too interested in hearing the nature of the Messiah explained along the lines of classical philosophy. People today are instead interested in hearing about the nature of the Messiah from the Jewish and Hebraic worldview of the Biblical authors, and how if anything, the nature of Yeshua of Nazareth is subversive to classical philosophy. Truth seekers today want to see how they can better understand and appreciate the nature of the Messiah from the text of the Holy Scriptures, and enhance their abilities to communicate truth to others.

What truly born again Believer does not, for example, want to see his or her nominal Christian neighbors, Muslims who claim belief in the God of Abraham, and Jewish people from whom the Messiah came forth (cf. Romans 9:5), come to a truly saving knowledge of Yeshua or Jesus? *We all do!* And, this involves recognizing some of the limitations that various groups have had, when it comes to Yeshua of Nazareth, and being able to better communicate to them (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:19-23). Yet, throughout religious history there have been patterns and fads when critical Biblical truths have been compromised away, and some less-than-reliable and less-than-appreciable perspectives introduced, surrounding the nature of the Messiah, in order for some kind of a wider hearing to be facilitated. *This is especially true in the Information Age.* One book promoting a low Christology of Yeshua the Messiah not being God forthrightly states,

> "[E]vangelizing the world is made much more difficult by centering the Christian Gospel on a 'God-man,' who is basically a mythological figure and one who does not harmonize with common sense. It is our contention that children, Jews, Muslims and thoughtful truth-seekers everywhere are hindered from believing in Christ when told that he is 'fully God and fully man,' 'God the Son,' or some other...description."[31]

As much as this writer would believe that some affirmation or confession of Yeshua as God is required for salvation (a high Christology), there are others out there who would argue for a comprehension of Yeshua only as an exalted human lord or master (a low Christology), in order for a mortal's "common sense" to process who He is. The debate which we will be considering from the Tanach (Old Testament) to the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament) in *Salvation on the Line* involves weighing these two positions:

1. A **low Christology** widely advocates that Yeshua (Jesus) is some sort of created, exalted agent of the Father. Yeshua might be the first ever created being, who in turn was authorized to create our known universe, and may even have great power, but He is ultimately created.
2. A **high Christology** advocates not just that Yeshua pre-existed our known universe and created our known universe, but that He is co-equal with God the Father and uncreated, sharing the same glory and worthy of the same worship as the Father. Yeshua the Son is the Father's agent, being incarnated and born as a human being, hence the Messiah can be spoken of as being both God and sent by God.

For those who advocate a high Christology of the Lord Yeshua genuinely being God and uncreated, our theological explanations of God have to account for a variety of factors, most of which are indeed detectable within the Gospels and Apostolic letters. How do you, for example, guard against Yeshua the human man being guilty of self-deification (John 8:53; 10:33), maintain

[31] Mark H. Graeser, John A. Lynn, and John W. Schoenheit, *One God & One Lord: Reconsiderting the Cornerstone of the Christian Faith*, fifth edition (Indianapolis: The Living Truth Fellowship, 2011), 8.

a religious ethos of monotheism (Deuteronomy 6:4) of the God of Israel being the One True God—while at the same time permitting for honor/reverence/worship of this Yeshua, not to the detriment of the YHWH God of the Hebrew Scriptures (cf. John 5:23; Philippians 2:10-11; Hebrews 1:6)? How do Bible readers properly consider the fact that Yeshua the Messiah is not just another political or reforming or even prophetic figure; Yeshua the Messiah came to explicitly "save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21) and usher in the world to come (cf. Galatians 1:3-4)? Can a created, supernatural agent be incarnated as a human being to save people from eternal punishment? Or does this actually require God formally taking dramatic and direct action? These are some of the critical questions we should all be asking, as we will be reviewing a huge number of Biblical passages detailing the nature of the Messiah.

There are a variety of important factors which significantly play into how we examine the nature of the Messiah. Those who hold to either a high or low Christology have their own presuppositions in how they are evaluated from the text of Scripture:

1. Lordship: Within the Hebrew Tanach, the God of Israel is certainly designated by the Divine Name YHWH/YHVH, which in most English Bibles is rendered as "the LORD," following Second Temple Jewish convention of not speaking God's proper name aloud (m.*Yoma* 6:2). The Greek Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Tanach rendered YHWH with the title *Kurios*,[32] which in a classical context can mean, "of persons, *having power* or *authority over, lord* or *master of*" (*LS*).[33] There are references seen in the Gospels, when Yeshua of Nazareth is referred to as *Kurios*, it is something more akin to "Sir." But, there will be other places, particularly when there is some significant Tanach (OT) quotation made involving the LORD or YHWH, where an ascription of such a status is seemingly given to Yeshua (i.e., Romans 10:13 and Joel 2:32; Philippians 2:10-11 and Isaiah 45:23). Is the statement, "Yeshua is Lord," merely a declaration of His supremacy, or is it also intended to be an assertion of His nature as actually being the LORD God or YHWH of the Tanach?

For certain, various resources[34] and scores of books and commentaries will conclude that Yeshua the Messiah being *Kurios* in the Apostolic Scriptures, bears some significant connection with the Divine Name YHWH in the Tanach. This is especially holds true when various Pauline letters include "grace and peace" issued from "God our Father and the Lord Yeshua the Messiah" (Romans 1:7).[35] The close proximity of God being referred to as "Father," and Yeshua the Messiah as "Lord," would be taken as natural evidence of a balanced Godhead where Yeshua is integrated into the Divine Identity (cf. 1 Corinthians 8:5, reworking the Deuteronomy 6:4 *Shema*), and that the intention of the Apostles was to present the nature of Yeshua along Jewish monotheistic lines, and not as some separate

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[32] G. Quell, "Lord, lord," in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament,* abridged (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), pp 488-491; Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 365; Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1993), 900.

[33] H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 458.

[34] William Childs Robinson, "Lord," in Everett F. Harrison, ed., *Baker's Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960), pp 328-330; John L. McLaughlin, "Lord (Divine Title)," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 820; "lord," in Jacob Neusner and William Scott Green, eds., *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), pp 388-389.

[35] Also 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2; Philippians 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1; 1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2; Philemon 3.

deity. Those who hold to a high Christology would be quite keen to conclude that Yeshua being Lord or *Kurios*, is rightly and widely to be associated with how *Kurios* in the Greek Septuagint is connected to the Divine Name YHWH.

Not all are convinced that Yeshua being *Kurios* is to be associated with the Divine Name YHWH, and instead would conclude that since the title *kurios* can indeed be used speaking of human people as lords or masters, that Yeshua being *Kurios* should be approached from Him just being "the Master." While the Sacred Name Only movement widely abhors the English title "Lord," and is frequently witnessed to use "Master" instead,[36] for those who have little issue with English terms, how disingenuous would it be for *Kurios* to be translated as "Lord" when it clearly refers to the LORD God or YHWH of the Tanach with some significant quotation in view, but then when Yeshua is titled *Kurios*, for it to then only be translated as "Master"? Should not there be some uniformity, with readers left to decide for themselves how to approach Yeshua as "Lord"? Those who hold to a low Christology will largely deny that there is any connection to be made between *Kurios* and YHWH when referring to Yeshua of Nazareth, leaving significant questions to be made when there is Tanach (OT) intertextuality in view.

2. Worship and Veneration: The First Commandment explicitly prohibits the worship of any other deity than the LORD God of Israel (Exodus 20:3-5; Deuteronomy 5:6-9), meaning that some significant questions are posed from the Apostolic Scriptures (NT), when it is clear that Yeshua of Nazareth was venerated by people and various supernatural entities. How are examiners and readers to view such veneration of Yeshua? Is this to just be some kind of intensified honor, as could be demonstrated by the ancients toward various human kings, political leaders, and figures of importance? Or, is the veneration which Yeshua of Nazareth received, to be indeed regarded as worship?

There are linguistic factors which play into evaluating the veneration demonstrated toward Yeshua of Nazareth. There is some disagreement about what the specific Hebrew verb translated "worship" in the First Commandment, among other key places, actually is, among lexicons, with *TWOT* favoring the verb *chavah*,[37] but it more often favored to be the verb *shachah*.[38] Lexically speaking, whether it is *chavah* or *shachah*, the underlying Hebrew can be translated as either "worship" or "bow down," depending on whether or not the God of Israel or some pagan deity is being venerated, or if just honor is being expressed toward another human being. The Greek equivalent via the Septuagint, which is also employed in the Apostolic Scriptures, is *proskuneō*, which in relative totality can mean "*worship; fall down and worship, kneel, bow low, fall at another's feet*" (*CGEDNT*).[39] The verb *proskuneō* can lexically be translated as either "worship" or "bow down," certainly asking some important questions concerning how it is employed when veneration or honor is expressed toward Yeshua of Nazareth (i.e., Matthew 2:2, 11; 14:33; 28:9).

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[36] *The Scriptures*, third edition (Northriding, South Africa: Institute for Scripture Research, 2009), 1225.

[37] Edwin Yamauchi, "*chavah*," in R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 1:267-269.

[38] Merrill F. Unger and William White, *Nelson's Expository Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1980), pp 295-296.

[39] Barclay M. Newman, Jr., *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament*, Revised Edition (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies/Deutche Bibelgesellschaft, 2010), 156.

Those who hold to a high Christology would, for sure, view the majority of uses of *proskuneō* in regard to veneration or honor of Yeshua of Nazareth being regarded as "worship," and not just some sort of "bowing down."[40] This especially concerns Tanach intertextuality, where worship of YHWH is ascribed to Yeshua (Hebrews 1:6 and Psalm 97:7). If Yeshua is not genuinely God, then to worship Yeshua is to violate the First Commandment and commit blatant idolatry. Those who hold to a low Christology of Yeshua of Nazareth being some important human lord or master, and perhaps even a supernatural agent but ultimately a created being, would not often consider "worship" to be ascribed to Yeshua. Where the verb *proskuneō* appears in the Apostolic Scriptures in association with honor of Yeshua, it is widely concluded to only involve people "bowing down" to the Messiah.

3. The titles "Son of Man" and "Son of God": Quite frequently, lay readers of Holy Scripture can conclude that when Yeshua of Nazareth is referred to as the "Son of Man," it regards Yeshua as a human being or in being identified with humanity, and that when Yeshua is referred to as the "Son of God" it only regards Yeshua as being, at the very least, supernatural. But is this really how these two titles are actually employed?

Those who hold to both a high and low Christology usually acknowledge that there is some association between Yeshua being referred to as the "Son of Man" in the Apostolic Writings (*[ho] huios [tou] anthrōpou*), and the figure of the *bar enash* or the "Son of Man" who is presented before the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7:13-14. As it is stated, "to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and *men of every* language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed" (Daniel 7:13-14, NASU). Ecumenical resources, involving both Jewish and Christian scholars, will lean toward this Danielic vision speaking of a high angel presented before God.[41] Those, who hold to a high Christology, will understandably look at the veneration given to this Son of Man who is "worshipped" (NIV), and draw the conclusion that given Yeshua's own usage of the term, that He is to be regarded as genuinely God, and that the clues regarding Yeshua being God are indeed provided in the Prophets.[42]

Those who hold to both a high and low Christology will have to concede that whatever is intended by Yeshua of Nazareth being referred to as the "Son of God," it is representative of a relationship which only Yeshua as the Son has to the Father (i.e., Matthew 11:25-27; Luke 10:21-22; John 3:16; 5:19-24; 14:13; 17:1).[43] It is then, of course, up to readers to decide, based on the context of how "Son of God" is employed (i.e. Matthew 26:63-64), as to whether or not the title "Son of God" implies some sort of Divine state of being or not. Too frequently overlooked, in association with the title "Son of God," is how this terminology is employed with Yeshua of Nazareth embodying the hopes, aspirations, and destiny of Israel (i.e., Exodus 4:22-23; Jeremiah 31:1; Hosea 11:1; Malachi 2:10) and its king (2 Samuel 7:14; Psalm 2:7; 89:26-27).

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[40] H. Greeven, "*proskynéō*," in *TDNT*, 949.

[41] "son of man," in *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period*, pp 597-598.

[42] Although having some liberal presuppositions, some interesting discussion is seen in "From Son of God to Son of Man," in Daniel Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ* (New York: The New Press, 2012), pp 25-38.

[43] "son of God," in *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period*, pp 596-597.

4. Agency: In what is often regarded as the high priestly prayer of the Messiah, the Lord prayed, "And this is eternal life, that they should know You, the only true God, and Him whom You sent, Yeshua the Messiah" (John 17:3, MARV). Those who hold to either a high Christology or a low Christology, do have to recognize that what is implied here, is that the Son has been sent as the Father's agent of salvation to the world. Those who adhere to a low Christology, commonly associate Yeshua as being a created supernatural agent sent by the Father, not too unlike the figure of Wisdom appearing in the Tanach and Apocrypha (i.e., Proverbs 1:20-23; 8; Job 28; Sirach 24; Wisdom 7:7-9:18) and Jewish philosopher Philo. Wisdom is observed to have been present at the creation of the universe (Proverbs 3:19), but is also attested to have been "created before all things" (Sirach 1:4, RSV). If Yeshua the Messiah is to be regarded as a supernatural agent such as Wisdom, perhaps even being Wisdom, then Yeshua may be regarded as a created being and not ultimately God, although semi- or quasi-divine.

Those who hold to a high Christology of Yeshua the Messiah being genuinely God, have to balance statements of the Son being sent by the Father, with statements that no mere, created agent—be that agent the figure Wisdom, or some other high ranking angel or messenger—could say. Yeshua was accused of the crime of self-deification (i.e., John 5:18; 10:33) by various Jewish religious leaders. Rather than capitulate to charges of a mortal claiming some inappropriate divine status, Yeshua predicated His identity on His pre-existence (i.e., Luke 10:18; John 8:56-58), and in having an identity which no mere mortal could intrinsically have (Mark 12:35-37; Matthew 22:43-46; Luke 20:41-44). Yeshua's being sent by the Father as His agent, and His unique and different relationship with the Father (John 20:17), was to draw people in, for them to sincerely investigate who He was, where He was from, and His true nature. While it can indeed be shown that there are areas of overlap between Yeshua the Messiah and supernatural agents such as the figure Wisdom, or various angels or messengers—it is in those areas of divergence, where Yeshua is shown to be uncreated. Wisdom was "created before all things (Sirach 1:4, RSV), but in contradiction to this, Yeshua "is before all things, and in Him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17, NASU).

5. Yeshua's humanity: Supporters of both a high Christology of Yeshua being uncreated as God, and a low Christology of Yeshua being created, do ascribe some degree of importance to the humanity of Yeshua. As the Apostolic Writings (NT) attest, Yeshua the Messiah was born (Galatians 4:4-5). He grew up and matured (Luke 2:40, 52; Hebrews 5:8-9). He experienced hunger (Matthew 21:8) and thirst (John 4:7; 19:28) and fatigue (Mark 4:38; John 4:6). Yeshua the Messiah experienced common human emotions such as grief (John 11:35). Yeshua the Messiah was subject to death (Luke 23:46). And, Yeshua the Messiah was resurrected from the dead (Luke 24:39, 42-43; John 20:25-27). Yeshua the Messiah is to be regarded as a Second Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45), one who has genuinely participated in the human experience, but who decisively lacks a sin nature (Hebrews 4:15-16).

The major differences between those who hold to a high Christology and a low Christology, as they concern Yeshua's humanity, will mostly be seen in how the latter will tend to over-emphasize Yeshua's human experience, particularly in over-quoting a

passage such as 1 Timothy 2:5: "For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and humanity, Himself human, Messiah Yeshua" (MARV). The former will try to balance Yeshua's humanity as an example for His followers to emulate, but Yeshua being uniquely One in whom "all the fullness of the Deity dwells embodied" (Colossians 2:9, author's rendering).

While the five areas just summarized above (Lordship, worship and veneration, the titles "Son of Man" and "Son of God," agency, humanity) tend to compose the major areas where it can be demonstrated whether or not someone holds to a high or low Christology, these are not the only areas where either a high or low Christology can be detected. There are the inevitable translation issues of various passages to be considered, as various terms can be translated one way or another, reflecting either a high or low Christology—not too dissimilar from how various terms can be translated one way or another, reflective of whether Yeshua of Nazareth is the anticipated Messiah of Israel. While those of a low Christology can often be recipients of a huge amount of apologetic attention, because they believe in the falsehood that Yeshua the Messiah is a created being—it needs to be fairly recognized that those who hold to a high Christology of Yeshua being uncreated as God, do not always bear a united front. An area of ongoing disagreement among those who hold to a high Christology involves issues of subordination between the Father and the Son (i.e., 1 Corinthians 15:28). Is Yeshua the Son only subordinate to God the Father in His Incarnation, or is the Son permanently subordinate to the Father?[44]

This is No Mere Academic Exercise

There are a number of reasons, some of which are ideological, but some of which are also spiritual, as to why many Messianic people have been persuaded of a low Christology. There are many Messianic people, Jewish or non-Jewish, who bear a hatred or serious disdain toward anything that they perceive to be "Christian." A Divine Messiah, especially one depicted in terms of being a member of some "Trinity" of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is something which is widely concluded to be the offspring of a corrupt religious, and likely anti-Semitic and anti-Jewish system. But this is often based more in human emotions than in objective analysis of the Scriptures.

More complicated to be sure, are Messianic people who adhere to a low Christology of Yeshua being a created supernatural agent, but not God, because they think that religious Jews will be more open to considering Him as the Messiah. The thought here is that if Yeshua is depicted in terms of Him being just the agent of the Father, and obviously not God, then the Jewish people will turn en masse toward a more Judaically-sensitive faith.

Neither view, as Messianic people who hold to a high Christology will note, adequately addresses a whole host of Biblical passages detailing the nature of the Messiah.

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[44] As is indicated by a selection of literature produced in the past two decades or so, the debate between examiners over the subordination of the Son to the Father being limited to Yeshua's Incarnation, or being something permanent, involves more differences of approach to contemporary male-female relations and gender role debates (apparently reflective of the relationship of the Son to the Father) and women in ministry controversies, than it does to actual Christology and Yeshua's Divinity:

Kevin Giles, *The Trinity & Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God & the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002); *The Eternal Generation of the Son: Maintaining Orthodoxy in Trinitarian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012); Millard J. Erickson, *Who's Tampering with the Trinity? An Assessment of the Subordination Debate* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009); Dennis W. Jowers and H. Wayne House, eds., *The New Evangelical Subordinationism? Perspectives on the Equality of God the Father and God the Son* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012); Bruce A. Ware & John Starke, eds., *One God in Three Persons: Unity of Essence, Distinction of Persons, Implications for Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

As Bible readers and examiners, what should most matter to us about the nature of the Messiah, is what the Biblical text communicates and testifies to. There is doubtlessly, as the history of emerging Christianity in the Third-Sixth Centuries C.E. indicates, a wide degree of Christological divergence.[45] *The debate over Yeshua the Messiah, and whether or not He is genuinely God, is an old debate.* And, it will be widely encountered, whether we are innately aware of it or not, that we will be reasoning through various Christological issues in much of the same way that millions of Christian people, for certain, have done before. While we will be taking some cues here and there from historic Christian voices, but more prominently from various theologians, commentators, and examiners, **our final authority must be the Holy Scriptures.** While many evangelical Protestants of today will determine whether or not a teacher or an organization or a religious denomination is "cultic" on the basis of where they stand regarding the historic doctrine of the Trinity, the term "Trinity" is notably post-Biblical. *EDB* fairly directs some of the Bible passages and concepts we will have to be processing, in our evaluation of whether or not Yeshua the Messiah is God:

> "The term may be traced to Tertullian, the 3rd-century C.E. Latin father, who coined the work *trinitas* to express this unique intradivine relationship. While the term 'trinity' itself is not a biblical word, the doctrine of the trinity is clearly founded upon the OT and NT...[T]he frequent use of the divine name in its plural form (Gen. 1:26; 11:7) and the imitations of divine personhood in reference to the Word of God (Ps. 33:6) and the Wisdom of God (Prov. 8:12) all imply OT roots for a doctrine of the trinity" (*EDB*).[46]

The formal doctrine of the Trinity, as it is witnessed throughout much of Christian history, is commonly concluded by examiners to be something which can be deduced from canonical Scripture. Evangelical Protestants, for sure, advocate the doctrine of the Trinity—God existing in the persons of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—because they believe it is what the Holy Scriptures teach and support. In the estimation of Robert M. Bowman, Jr.,

> "Evangelical Christians...believe that the Bible is the only infallible source of doctrinal truth. No tradition, no religious organization, and no philosophy may add to the body of Christian doctrine, though any of these might help to explain or apply biblical doctrine" (*Why You Should Believe in the Trinity*).[47]

So, while various early Christian leaders of the Second-Sixth Centuries might be found to affirm various Biblical truths, it is up to each person to actually go back to the Scriptures, for confirmation, and if necessary, reevaluation. Those who hold to a low Christology of Yeshua of Nazareth not being God, have certainly reevaluated some more widely held views of Bible passages. Those who hold to a high Christology of Yeshua of Nazareth being God, **should not be too afraid** of conducting their own examinations.

To much of the contemporary discussion about Yeshua being God, the issue about terminology such as the historic Christian doctrine of the Trinity, is actually a side issue and unnecessary distraction. In the view of the *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*,

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[45] Robert Letham, *The Message of the Person of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013), pp 229-246.

[46] D. Larry Gregg, "Trinity," in *EDB*, 1336.

[47] Robert M. Bowman, Jr., *Why You Should Believe in the Trinity: An Answer to Jehovah's Witnesses* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 21.

> "*Trinity* simply means 'triunity.' God is not a simple trinity; there is plurality in his unity."[48]

A common resource like the *ESV Study Bible* asserts,

> "There are many passages that reveal the Trinitarian, or at least the plural, nature of God."[49]

To many, the term "Trinity" is simply a synonym for the concept of **a plural Godhead,** and when engaging with various Christian theological works in this publication, this is how the term "Trinity" has been widely employed by examiners. In his first volume of *Jewish Objections to Jesus* (2000), Michael L. Brown fairly directed,

> "Maybe the problem is not really about the nature of God as much as it is about a gut-level, negative reaction to anything 'Christian.' Maybe the problem lies with an overemphasis on the often misunderstood—and frequently poorly explained—term *Trinity*. Perhaps it would help if, for just one moment, we stopped thinking about what Christians believe—since not everything labeled 'Christian' is truly Christian or biblical...."[50]

In many theological works, there is commonly an emphasis that a Christian doctrine such as the Trinity—often intended to just mean "the plurality of God"—possesses a mystery which human beings cannot hope to fully comprehend. And indeed, those who hold to either a low Christology of Yeshua not being God, or a high Christology of Yeshua being God, should be willing to concede how **God is indeed bigger than any of us as mortals, and He has the right to reveal Himself as He chooses on His own terms.**

The issue of the nature of Yeshua, and Yeshua genuinely being God, cannot be fought on the basis of religious-political abuses from the Middle Ages or Twentieth Century "cult busters." The issue of Yeshua being God must instead be something deduced from the Biblical text, with a major litmus test being whether the nature and/or actions of the being or entity in view, reflect that of any other created, supernatural being or entity, ***or*** must instead reflect the nature and/or actions of an eternal, uncreated being or entity. There is little doubting the fact that Yeshua of Nazareth bears many of the same characteristics as the other supernatural, inter-dimensional beings portrayed in Holy Scripture and various Second Temple Jewish writings. But it is not in the areas of *agreement* with such entities where we need to take notice; it is in the areas of *disagreement*.

While the length of this study and the many Bible passages it addresses, demonstrates a high degree of interest in the details regarding this subject, and various levels of engagement with a broad array of writing—this resource has not been released as just some interesting, academic exercise of comparative religion. This publication has not been released so J.K. McKee can just add another book to his "list." This massive work has been released so that today's Messianic people can have significant answers to the questions being posed to them, whether they are consciously aware of it or not. *Salvation on the Line* has been produced so that when a torrent of claims and reasons against Yeshua being God hit—in whatever your Messianic sphere of influence might be (congregational, Bible study home group, individuals fellowshipping and talking with each

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[48] "Trinity," in Norman L. Geisler, ed., *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 730.

[49] Wayne Grudem, ed., *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 2514.

The list it provides, includes: John 14:16, 26; 16:13-15; 20:21-22; Romans 8:9; 15:16, 30; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Galatians 4:4-6; Ephesians 2:18; 4:4-6; 1 Peter 1:1-2; 1 John 4:2, 13-14; Jude 20-21.

[50] Michael L. Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus: General and Historical Objections* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), pp 7-8.

other)—you can have some well reasoned answers. This study has been put together, so we can be molded into the Messianic men and women the Lord wants us to be, as we steadily approach the final stages of salvation history, the Second Coming, and the Messianic Age.

Approaching the Nature of Yeshua from the Tanach

Today's Messianic people affirm that Yeshua (Jesus) of Nazareth is the Messiah whom "the Torah of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms" (Luke 24:44, MARV) gave ample testimony to. 1 Corinthians 15:3 explictly directs "that Messiah died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (MARV). Today's Messianic people assume *the Messiahship* of Yeshua, and that His arrival on the scene of history in the First Century C.E. was something directly predicted, as well as indirectly implied, throughout the Hebrew Tanach or Old Testament. There are passages of Tanach Scripture such as Isaiah 53 believed to directly speak of the Messiah and His work, and other passages of Tanach Scripture such as Hosea 1:11 which typologically speak of the Messiah.

A huge part of Christology, or the study of the nature of the Messiah, understandably does involve the Messiahship of Yeshua, as the prophesied King of Israel and the sacrificed lamb for human sins. But what does the Tanach communicate or imply about the nature of the Messiah and His origins? Those who hold to a low Christology of Yeshua not being God, will without hesitation make claims that a belief in an uncreated, Divine Messiah, is completely incompatible with the Hebrew, Israelite, or Jewish monotheism seen in the Tanach or the Old Testament. The *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4, after all, proclaims that it is only YHWH, the LORD or HaShem, who is the One True God. For those who hold to a low Christology, Yeshua being regarded as God by millions of Christian people over the centuries for sure—and even tens to hundreds of thousands of contemporary Messianic people—is to be in sure violation of Biblical monotheism.

Is the view that the Messiah is God, something which is sustainable, or at least compatible, with the Hebrew monotheism of the Tanach or Old Testament? None of us can deny how the Tanach or Old Testament was "the Scriptures" (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16) of the First Century Messianic Believers. They gave regular attention to a public reading of the Tanach (1 Timothy 4:13), but their writings also give ample testimony to them making statements about Yeshua of Nazareth, which depict Him as being no mere supernatural being or entity. Surely, as First Century Jews who would declare the God of Israel as the One True God, the Apostles and first Believers in the Messiah, had to have reflected upon the Tanach Scriptures, and consider what it meant to associate—and indeed *closely associate*—Yeshua with the LORD (YHWH).

Just as there are people who read Messianic prophecies in the Tanach and conclude that Yeshua of Nazareth is not, in fact, the Messiah—there will be people who read statements about the God of Israel, who while affirming Yeshua of Nazareth as the Messiah, will quantitatively deny that He is God. There will be other people—most especially including, we believe, some of Yeshua's early followers in the First Century C.E.—who will affirm that a belief that Yeshua is God is absolutely compatible with the monotheism and nature of God represented by the Tanach. In fact, it is astutely required of those who believe in "our God and Savior, Yeshua the Messiah"

(2 Peter 1:1, MARV), to believe that such a truth is in concert with what the Tanach records and mandates of our Eternal Creator.

This section of *Salvation on the Line*, **"Approaching the Nature of Yeshua from the Tanach,"** addresses a selection of passages from across the Torah, Prophets, and Writings. These range from dealing with the uniqueness of the God of Israel, Ancient Israelite and Jewish monotheism, various passages which directly or indirectly are seen being applied to Yeshua of Nazareth, some via quotes in the Apostolic Writings or New Testament, as well as conceptual ideas involving pre-existence and supernatural agency. Yeshua the Messiah being God, is something which is defended as being compatible from the Tanach or Old Testament, and is in fact absolutely required, lest those who believe that Yeshua is God ever be accused of adhering to polytheism or idolatry, venerating a deity other than the God of Israel.

Genesis 1:26-28; 3:22-23; 11:7-8
"God Speaking as 'Us'"

> **"Then God said, 'Let Us make humanity in Our image, after Our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the sky, and over the livestock, and over all the Earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the Earth'** Jam 3:9; Eph 4:24**. So God created humanity in His own image. In God's image He created him; male and female He created them** Mar 10:6; Mat 19:4; Act 17:29; Jam 3:9; 1 Cor 11:7; Col 3:10; 1 Tim 2:13**. God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful, multiply, fill the Earth, and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves upon the Earth'"** (Genesis 1:26-28, MARV)**.**

> **"Then YHWH God said, 'Behold, the human has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand, and also take of the Tree of Life, and eat, and live forever—'** Rev 22:2, 7, 14, 19 **Therefore YHWH God sent him out from the Garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken"** (Genesis 3:22-23, MARV)**.**

> **"'Come, let Us go down, and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.' So YHWH scattered them abroad from there on the face of all the Earth. They left off building the city"** (Genesis 11:7-8, MARV)**.**

A significantly important component, on whether or not Yeshua the Messiah is to be considered God, involves whether or not the oneness of God (cf. Deuteronomy 6:4) is a solitary or composite oneness. Is God a singular being, composed of only one manifestation? Or, could the One God be a plural being, composed of multiple manifestations—the most relevant for our examinations being the Father and the Son? It is certainly true that the most frequently employed term in the Hebrew Bible for "God," *Elohim*, is plural, which could be taken as some sort of evidence in favor of an internal multiplicity of God's being on some level. Yet, more would surely have to be considered across the scope of Scripture.

Throughout religious history, some significant controversy and debate has ensued by a number of statements made by God in the early Genesis narratives of Creation and the Tower of Babel, regarding God's own nature. That a supernatural being is seen communicating something, with a contrast intended between God and humanity, is obvious enough. But when various plural statements appear, with God speaking in terms of "Us," what is intended?

- *na'aseh adam b'tzalmeinu k'demuteinu*, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness" (Genesis 1:26, NRSV).

- *hein ha'adam hayah k'echad m'mennu*, "The human being has now become like one of us" (Genesis 3:22, Common English Bible).
- *ha'bah neir'dah*, "Come, let us descend" (Genesis 11:7, ATS).

It is very easy to see how many Christians throughout the centuries, upon seeing God speak in terms of a plural "We" or "Us," would conclude how this would likely be God speaking as: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[1] A small survey of Jewish and Christian resources on Genesis 1:26, where God announces the intention to create the first human, Adam, will show that there are three main ways that the "We" or "Us" has often been approached. These include: (1) the magisterial or royal "we," or the "we" of respect,[2] (2) "we" or "us" involving God consulting His magisterial court of both Himself and His angels,[3] and (3) a plural God speaking to or within Himself.[4] While it is important to note and weigh the importance of God speaking with a plural "We" or "Us" in early lines of dialogue in the Book of Genesis, these statements do not present Bible readers with a comprehensive picture of the nature of God. As far as these statements can be pressed, regardless of which conclusions someone may draw, is for examiners to detect whether a plural Godhead, of at least the Father and the Son, is compatible with some reading of the text of the Tanach.

It is hardly a surprise that those who hold to a low Christology, of Yeshua the Messiah not being God, would conclude that *Elohim* speaking in the plural "We" or "Us" is not the Father and Son (at least) carrying on a conversation—but instead God speaking with a magisterial or royal "we," and/or God consulting with His angels as members of His Heavenly court. Even a number of evangelical Protestant commentators, who would affirm that Yeshua is God, would not argue for a plural Godhead from Genesis 1:26. John H. Walton, for example, concludes,

> "if we ask what the Hebrew author and audience understood, any explanation assuming plurality in the Godhead is easily eliminated...Without a specific New Testament treatment, we have no authoritative basis for bypassing the human author."[5]

So, if Genesis on its own is read *separate from* the wider record of Holy Scripture, could the Ancient Israelites seeing statements such as, "Let us make a human in our image, by our likeness" (Genesis 1:26, Alter), only conclude that God was communicating to His Heavenly court, God's associates or His angels?

Doubts have arisen as to whether or not the view of God speaking to His celestial court in Genesis 1:26, and subsequent verses, is the appropriate conclusion to draw. In his specialty Jewish translation *The Five Books of Moses*, Everett Fox renders Genesis 1:26 with, "Let us make humankind, in our image, according to our likeness!" He notes,

> "The 'our' is an old problem. Some take it to refer to the heavenly court (although, not surprisingly, no angels are mentioned here)."[6]

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[1] The Amplified Bible rendering of Genesis 1:26a actually has, "God said, Let Us [Father, Son, and Holy Spirit] make mankind in Our image."

[2] J.H. Hertz, ed., *Pentateuch & Haftorahs* (London: Soncino, 1960), 5.

[3] Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 1-15*, Vol 1 (Dallas: Word Incorporated, 1987), 28; Nahum M. Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 12; John H. Walton, *NIV Application Commentary: Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 128.

[4] Victor P. Hamilton, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 134; C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006), 60.

[5] Walton, 128.

[6] Everett Fox, trans., *The Five Books of Moses* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 15.

Textually from Genesis, it is entirely legitimate to ask, when witnessing God speaking in the plural "We" or "Us," whether the male and female were made in the image of *both* God and His angels, or in *just* the image of God. Genesis 1:27 makes it clear that male and female are only created in the image of God: "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them[7]" (NRSV). C. John Collins concurs in his resource *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary*,

> "...[T]he possessive 'our' in 'our image' should refer to the same person(s) as the 'us' that is the subject of the verb: 'Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness.' Then God carries this out in Genesis 1:27, 'God created man in his own image'; that is, only God is the subject of the verb, and only God is the referent of the possessive. In fact, man is only said to be in *God's* image, not in the image of any other heavenly being (as also Gen. 5:1)...[W]e have a parallel in Genesis 11:7, where the Lord says, "Let *us* go down and confuse,' with its fulfillment in Genesis 11:8, where the Lord is the only actor."[8]

The early statements in Genesis, with God speaking in the plural "We" or "Us," do not present anything comprehensive on what *Elohim* composes. But, the view that God is speaking to His celestial court in Genesis 1:26-28; 3:22-23; 11:7-8 can legitimately be ruled out. And, while it is surely important for us as Bible readers and examiners to consider various ANE components to the early chapters of Genesis, we also have a responsibility to consider the wider scope of Holy Scripture, and the explicit Gospel claim that Yeshua the Messiah was present with God the Father at the Creation (John 1:1)—meaning that the "We" or the "Us" present can very well be taken to be (at least) the Father and the Son. Victor P. Hamilton asserts that the Ancient Israelites, while certainly not engaged with later Christian discussions and debates over the "Trinity," were not so limited or ignorant so as to consider the concept of plurality in unity. As he states in his commentary,

> "The best suggestion {for the 'us' of Genesis 1:26} approaches the trinitarian understanding but employs less direct terminology...It is one thing to say that the author of Gen. 1 was not schooled in the intricacies of Christian dogma. It is another thing to say he was theologically too primitive or naive to handle such ideas as plurality within unity. What we often so blithely dismiss as 'foreign to the thought of the OT' may be nothing of the sort. True, the concept may not be etched on every page of Scripture, but hints and clues are dropped enticingly here and there, and such hints await their full understanding 'at the correct time' (Gal. 4:4)."[9]

It is textually appropriate, with humanity made in the image of God—not both the image of God and the angels—for the "We" or "Us" in Genesis 1:26 to denote some kind of plurality in unity. Such a plurality in unity might not approach some of the rigidity of later Christian debates on the doctrine of the "Trinity," but can surely be read as compatible with the belief of a pre-existent and eternal Son, who created all things (Colossians 1:16-17; Hebrews 1:2), as a part of a plural Godhead of *Elohim*.

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[7] Heb. *b'tzalmo b'tzelem Elohim bara oto.*

[8] Collins, 60.

[9] Hamilton, 134.