

THE  
ONLY  
TRUE  
GOD

A STUDY OF  
BIBLICAL MONOTHEISM



ERIC H.H. CHANG

The faith of the Bible is not trinitarian but unyieldingly monotheistic. God's message to humankind is a call to faith in Yahweh, the one and only God of Israel. Monotheism took root in the Law and the Prophets, and flourished in the hearts of God's people. Jesus upheld Biblical monotheism when he prayed to his Father, "This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

In this study of Biblical monotheism and of trinitarianism's claims to monotheism, we pay particular attention to the Biblical texts, principally John 1:1-18, which are typically used to underpin trinitarian doctrine.

The book ends on a joyful note when it brings out the glorious blessings for God's people in the truth that the Word became flesh in Jesus Christ and dwelled among us.



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## 2017 Minor Revision

This 2017 edition of *The Only True God* is a minor revision of the original 2009 edition.

It makes zero changes to the text of the original edition; not one word or sentence has been added or deleted. The number of footnotes remains the same at 54.

This edition corrects a few typing mistakes and incorrect verse numbers, and includes a new copyright page, a new Scripture index, a refined cover design, and minor punctuation touchups.

This edition contains some typographical refinements. Whereas the first edition uses two different ways of numbering Bible verses—as seen in John 3.16 versus John 3:16—this edition unifies all Bible references to the latter convention. And in conformity to modern Bible typographical standards, we now render “Lord” as LORD (small caps) rather than LORD (all caps) where the term is used, especially in Bible quotations, as a titular substitute for the Hebrew divine name YHWH.

The main English Bible used in this work is the English Standard Version (ESV). Where the Bible version is not stated for a Bible quotation, in most cases it will be the ESV.

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# THE ONLY TRUE GOD

*A Study of  
Biblical Monotheism*

Eric H.H. Chang

The Only True God: A Study of Biblical Monotheism  
Eric H.H. Chang

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## *Dedication*

To the eternal King,  
immortal, invisible,  
*the only God,*  
be honor and glory  
forever and ever.

(1 Timothy 1:17)



# Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge with deep appreciation and gratitude the abundance of encouragement I have received, directly or indirectly, from the few hundred coworkers in our churches worldwide. Though they were initially surprised and even astonished when I first began to expound the Scriptures in the light of Biblical monotheism, they remained open-minded and supportive as well as being firmly determined to get to the truth as revealed in the Scriptures. Such open-mindedness and what might be described as “open-heartedness” is most certainly not something to be taken for granted, especially in the case of those who were nurtured from the beginning in trinitarianism (as I was). What I mean by “open-heartedness” is that I saw in them not only open-mindedness in the sense of being mentally or intellectually open but, beyond that, a deeper spiritual openness to God’s word and, above all, to the living God Himself. There seems to me to be no adequate explanation for this exceptional attitude other than that the grace of the one true God abounds towards them and fills them with a supernal love for Himself and His truth.

My heartfelt thanks are due also to Pastor Bentley Chan. He is a notable example of those to whom I refer above. He, moreover, already gave himself unsparingly to all the labor involved in the publication of my earlier book *Becoming a New Person*. Now, beyond all this, I once again have the

privilege of his skilled and competent participation in getting this book to the publishers. He graciously accepted the arduous work of, among other things, proofreading, formatting, making helpful suggestions, and compiling the Scripture Index. Who can fully reward him but the Lord Himself?

At my request, two of my coworkers, Agnes S.L. Lim and Lee Sen Siou, graciously undertook the arduous task of examining every occurrence of “Memra” (“Word”) in the Aramaic Targums of the Pentateuch (“the five books of Moses” as they are often called). Aramaic was the language spoken in the Holy Land in the time of Jesus and the early church. It is, therefore, important to know how the people at that time understood “the Word,” so as better to understand “the Word” in John 1:1,14, verses so crucial to our present study. But because Agnes and Lee Sen’s work is too large to include in its entirety in this book, only Genesis and Exodus could be included; even then the original Aramaic texts had to be left out. Their work appears in Appendix 12 of this book, and for their labors I wish to express my heartfelt appreciation. Pastor Bentley contributed the lucid and informative introduction to this Appendix.

It would also be remiss of me to fail to record my thanks and appreciation for my wife’s steadfast prayer support day in and day out. I suppose that only in eternity will it be possible to know how much I owe to her unceasing intercession. Her support was, of course, also given unstintingly on the level of daily household life, such as that of preparing the meals. When called to the dining table, I often only managed to get there when the food had gone cold because of trying to finish

some work on a section of the manuscript; yet on no occasion did she express any annoyance at having to reheat the food. I give thanks for His grace manifested in her life to His glory.

Finally, the whole process of writing this book has been, from beginning to end, a remarkable experience of the living God. Day after day, after having been granted a sound sleep, immediately upon awakening (sometimes it began when I was not yet fully awake), I would be given what I might describe as “a stream of thoughts” about what I was to write about that day; I would then spend much of the rest of the day putting it into writing. This did not happen every day, but I think it is true to say that it happened 50% or more of the time during the approximately one year of writing. Besides this, I was on several occasions led to discover, to my great joy, material of importance for the work that I had not been aware existed. Though I have been granted the privilege of experiencing God in many ways and at many times in my life, the writing of this book, though often mentally and physically exhausting (I also had to attend to administrative responsibilities during this time), has been above all a truly unique experience of the living God. To Him, the LORD my God, I wish here to record my wholehearted praise and adoration.



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## Preliminary Notes

This book is written for the general reader. For this reason, technical theological terms are avoided as far as possible. The aim of this work is to study the monotheism of the Bible with specific attention to those verses or texts which are used to underpin trinitarian doctrine, to see what these texts actually say when ideas are not read into them or doctrines forced upon them. To do this properly it is usually necessary to study the Scriptures in the original languages in which they were written and not merely in the various translations, because translations are rarely able to bring out fully the meaning and nuances of the original text.

When discussing the original Hebrew and Greek, every effort will be made to help the reader who is unacquainted with these languages to understand the drift of the discussion. Hebrew and Greek words will be transliterated (unless these words are in the text of reference works which are quoted in the present work) so as to help the reader to have some idea how these words are pronounced. But, as far as possible, exegesis of a technical character will be avoided where these may be difficult for the general reader to follow; however, these cannot always be avoided because scholars, and others with fuller knowledge of the Scriptures, also need the relevant material to enable them to see the validity of the exegesis

given. Some of this material may be too technical for the average reader, who may wish simply to pass over these sections and go on to the next point. Footnotes will be kept to a minimum.

For those who have some degree of familiarity with the landscape of Biblical studies, it may be of some help if I mention that I can in general identify with the work of Professor James D.G. Dunn of Durham, England. His commitment to exegetical accuracy and refusal to allow dogma to govern exegesis is something to which I, too, am committed. It will not be surprising, therefore, that my conclusions are often similar to his. While I have not read all of his prolific writings, what is relevant to this present work is found mainly in his *Christology in the Making* and *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*. This statement, however, has to do solely with *methodology*; it is in no way meant to imply complete agreement in substance. He has not seen this manuscript prior to its publication.

Where the statistical frequency of certain key words is given, these statistics are always based on the Hebrew or Greek of the original texts and not on the English translations.

Finally, it will be noticed that capitals are used in the words “Biblical” and “Scriptural,” contrary to general literary convention. This is done to emphasize the fact that the present writer regards this study as a study of the Bible as the Word of God, not merely as a study of the ideas and opinions of ancient religious authors. The conviction is thereby expressed that God speaks to mankind through people He has chosen to faithfully deliver His message, His truth. This ultimately rests on the conviction (rooted in personal experience) that

God is real, and that He is personally involved in His creation and powerfully active in it. God's personal involvement and activity came to its fullest and unique expression in Jesus Christ, both in word and in deed.



# Introduction

Before embarking upon a fuller study of monotheism in the Bible, let it be stated right from the outset that monotheism is something central to the heart and mind of Jesus—*monotheism is what Jesus taught, it is at the foundation of his teaching*. In fact the word “monotheism” is found in the Bible in Jesus’ own words, where in his prayer to God, the Father, he says, “this is eternal life: that they know you *the only true God*, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3). “Monotheism” is made up of two Greek words: *monos* (“only, alone,” and as the BDAG Greek-English lexicon explains: “with focus on being the only one”) and *theos* (“God”). It is precisely these two words which are found in Jesus’ words which he addresses to the Father as “the only (*monos*) true God (*theos*)”.

It is important also to notice carefully that Jesus’ words in John 17:3 have to do with *eternal life*, and that this involves two essential components: (1) “*that they know you the only true God*” and (2) “Jesus Christ whom you have sent”. Having eternal life is not merely a matter of “believing in Jesus” as some preachers would have people think. Jesus himself tells us that one must first come to know the one true God, and then also to know Jesus as the one sent by that one God. Notice, too, Jesus does not say anything about “believe” (which

many preachers take the liberty to define in whatever way they choose); the word he uses is “*know*,” which is much stronger than “believe” as it is usually understood.

“Know” (*ginōskō*) is, statistically, a key word in John’s Gospel (occurs 58 times), where it occurs almost three times more frequently than in Matthew (20 occurrences), almost 5 times more than in Mark (12 times), and more than double than in Luke (28 times). A standard Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament (BDAG) gives the following as the primary definition of the word *ginōskō*: “to arrive at a knowledge of someone or someth., *know, know about, make acquaintance of.*” To make someone’s acquaintance means to establish a personal relationship with that person. How many Christians can say that they have this kind of relationship with the one true God, and with Jesus Christ? According to Jesus’ words, eternal life depends precisely on this. “Believe” (another key word in John’s Gospel) is, therefore, defined in terms of “knowing” God and Jesus Christ. Also, those who suppose that Biblical monotheism is non-essential for salvation would do well to take a closer look at Jesus’ words in John 17:3 (not to mention his teaching elsewhere in the gospels and the teaching of the Bible as a whole).

Jesus’ words are so clear that no complicated linguistic techniques are needed to explain them. What Jesus states with crystal clarity is that there is only one God, the One he calls “Father,” and he asks his disciples to call upon Him in the same way (“Our Father in heaven”). Jesus speaks of himself as the one sent by “the only true God”. It should, therefore, have been perfectly obvious to anyone truly listening to what Jesus

said that if the Father is the one and only true God, then no one else can also be God alongside Him. It should be absolutely clear from Jesus' words that he definitely excludes himself from any claim to deity by this absolute *monos* or "only" referring to the Father. Only the fact that we have been immersed in trinitarianism all our lives prevents us from hearing what Jesus says in these words. Christians have come to that spiritual state in which we address Jesus as "Lord, Lord" but do not hear or do what he says (Lk.6:46; cf. Mt.7:21,22). We have become accustomed to imposing our own doctrines upon his teaching, and when these doctrines are incompatible with his words, we simply ignore what he actually said. But whether we like it or not, monotheism is at the very root of Jesus' life and teaching. That is the plain truth, which we shall consider more fully in what follows.

Jesus (in Mark 12:29) also explicitly endorsed the declaration which was (and still is) central to the Biblical faith of Israel: "Listen, Israel: Yahweh our God is the one, the only Yahweh" (Deut.6:4, NJB). These words express the uncompromising monotheism of Israel's faith. This is immediately followed by the command, "You must love Yahweh your God with *all* your heart, with *all* your soul, with *all* your strength" (Deut.6:5). The *threefold* "all" encompasses man's total devotion to God, making Him the sole object of worship and love. Interestingly, in Jesus' rendering of this command the "all" is *fourfold*: "And you shall love the Lord your God with *all* your heart and with *all* your soul and with *all* your mind and with *all* your strength" (Mark 12:30); "with all your mind" is added in, thereby evidently heightening the intensity

of devotion to Yahweh God. Jesus described this command (Deut.6:4,5) as the “first” or “most important” command (Mk.12:29,31). This command makes Yahweh the sole object of total devotion, “the one and only one”; indeed, it is not possible in practice to love more than one person with the *totality* of one’s being.

Consistent with this, it should also be noted that *nowhere in his teaching does Jesus make himself the focus of this all-encompassing devotion*, for that would contradict his teaching that Yahweh alone is to be accorded such single-minded dedication. Jesus’ own life as reported in the gospels fully epitomized and exemplified this total devotion to Yahweh. His life was always consistent with his teaching. How extremely disappointing and saddening it must be to him that his disciples fail to live by his example and teaching, and, contrary to his teaching, make him the center of their religion and worship, and imagine that in so doing they honor and please him.

Jesus’ monotheism also finds clear expression in John 5:44, “How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another, and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only (*monos*) God (*theos*)?” (NASB).

The New Testament writers, as true disciples of Jesus, faithfully affirm his monotheism. Thus the Apostle Paul in 1Timothy 1:17 (NIV), “Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only (*monos*) God (*theos*), be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.” Romans 16:27: “to the only (*monos*) wise God (*theos*) be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.” So, too, Jude: “to the only (*monos*) God (*theos*), our



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Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.” (Jude 1:25) It is interesting and significant to observe how it is in these beautiful and powerful doxologies, or public praises offered to God, that the early church expressed its monotheistic faith.

These examples show that the Bible is unquestionably monotheistic in character, and what is especially significant for the Christian is the fact that Jesus himself lived and taught as a monotheist. Despite the vicious attempts of his enemies to find a way to destroy him by slanderously accusing him of blasphemy (which incurred the death penalty in Israel) by charging him with claiming equality with God, the fact is that, according to the gospel accounts, *he never made any claim to equality with God*. In fact the gospel evidence shows that his enemies had the greatest difficulty even getting Jesus to publicly admit that he was the Messiah, the expected Messianic king, let alone that he was God! It is precisely as stated in Philippians 2:6, “he did not grasp at equality with God”. Yet, strangely enough, this is precisely what trinitarians do on Jesus’ behalf! We insist on imposing on him that which he himself rejected! But the fundamental problem created by elevating Jesus to the level of deity is that a situation is created in which there are at least two persons who are both equally God; this brings trinitarianism into conflict with the monotheism of the Bible.

The case for Biblical monotheism is rock-solid and requires no defense. It is trinitarianism that is on thin ice where the Scriptures are concerned, so it is not surprising that book

after book is published on the subject of the Trinity in repeated attempts to find some Scriptural justification for it. To try to extract trinitarian doctrine out of the monotheistic Bible requires resorting to every hermeneutical device imaginable (as can be seen in those books), because it is an attempt to make the Bible say what it does not say. I know—I did this very thing for most of my life because of the trinitarianism which was instilled in me from the time of my spiritual infancy, and which I accepted without question. In what follows, the main trinitarian arguments will be examined in the light of Scripture. Even more importantly, we will consider whether trinitarian teaching has resulted in the loss of the true Biblical teaching about God and about man's salvation, for error is always maintained at the expense of truth. Only when we let go of what is false can we begin to see what is true.

### **About this book**

A large part of this study is taken up with the Gospel of John. That is because this gospel is the one most relied upon by trinitarianism to support its arguments, and this is especially true of what scholars regard as a hymn embedded in John's Prologue (1:1-18) and most of all its first verse (Jn.1:1). Another New Testament passage also considered by some scholars to be a song about Christ, and of importance to trinitarianism, is found in Philippians 2 (vv.6-11). Colossians 1 (especially vv.13-20) and Hebrews 1 are other passages much

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used by trinitarians. These and other passages will be considered more briefly because their trinitarian interpretation depends implicitly or explicitly on the interpretation of John 1:1. Once it becomes evident that John 1:1 does not support a trinitarian interpretation, it will quickly become evident that the other texts also do not support trinitarianism. But we will examine some of the key trinitarian proof texts, even before we study John 1:1 in considerable depth and detail, in order to reveal interpretative and exegetical errors.

Regarding John 1:1, the trinitarian case rests on the *assumption* that “the Word” in this verse *is* Jesus Christ (the Word = Jesus Christ) and, therefore, the preexistence of the Word *is* the preexistence of Jesus. Amazingly, not one shred of evidence is produced from John’s Gospel to *prove* this equation or identification so fundamental to the trinitarian argument. On closer examination, this serious failure to provide evidence for the equation turns out to be not so amazing after all, because the fact is that no such evidence exists, for there is simply no equation of the Word with Jesus Christ in John. The equation is pure assumption. It is a shock to realize that the dogma that we held to so firmly as trinitarians rests fundamentally on an unfounded assumption.

The fact of the matter is that outside of John 1:1 and 1:14, “the Word” is not referred to again in John’s Gospel, while “Jesus Christ” is not mentioned until 1:17 at the end of the Prologue (vv.1-18). The only connection between “the Word” and Jesus Christ is to be inferred from John 1:14, “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us”. In the Bible, “flesh” is a way of describing human life. The Word entered into

human life (“became flesh”) and lived among us. But what the verse does *not* say is that “Jesus Christ became flesh”; and this is precisely what is simply assumed in trinitarian interpretation. Certainly we know that “Jesus” was the name given him at his birth (Mt.1:21), but what is the basis for assuming that the “preexistent Christ became flesh”? The idea of a “preexistent Christ” is based on the *assumption* that Jesus Christ and the preexistent Word are one and the same; but the fact is that *nowhere in John’s Gospel is the Word equated with Jesus*. In other words, Jesus and the Word are *not* one and the same. What or who is the preexistent Word? This is a question that we aim to study in depth in this work.

If John meant to identify the Word as Jesus, why did he not make this (for trinitarianism) all important identification? One answer to this question can be found in the stated purpose of John’s Gospel. It was not the purpose of this Gospel (unlike trinitarianism) to get people to believe that Jesus is the preexistent Word, but to believe that he is “the Christ”. This can easily be established because John is the only Gospel in which the purpose of writing the Gospel is explicitly stated: “these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31). “The Christ” is the Greek equivalent of “the Messiah,” a title which was extremely significant for the Jews but one which, unfortunately, means almost nothing to non-Jews.

## “The Son of God”

“The Son of God” is another messianic title derived from the messianic Psalm 2 (esp.vv.7,12) where the promised Davidic king will be granted a relationship with God like that of a Son with his Father. It is precisely this intimate relationship of Jesus with God which, in John’s Gospel, provides undeniable evidence of his being the Messiah; and to believe that Jesus is the Christ/ Messiah, God’s appointed “savior of the world” (Jn.4:42), is to “have life in his name”. Thus, from John’s stated purpose, it is clear that believing in Jesus as the preexistent Word was not the purpose of the Gospel. So it remains for us to consider carefully what is meant by “the Word,” and why John’s Gospel begins with reference to it.

Someone may ask, “If John’s Gospel was written for non-Jews, why does it use terms like ‘Messiah (Christ)’ and ‘Son of God’ (which in the Bible does *not* mean ‘God the Son’)?” This question reveals another assumption, namely, that this Gospel was written for Gentiles. Even assuming a late date for John’s Gospel (after AD 90), it must be remembered that the church, which started as a *Jewish church* (see the first part of Acts), was still predominantly Jewish towards the end of the first century, especially in *its monotheistic way of thinking*. At one time, though considerably earlier than the end of the first century, the Apostle Paul had to caution the Galatian Gentile believers against getting circumcised (Gal.5:2-4, etc)! Paul had to remind them that circumcision had to do with God’s earlier covenant with the *Jews* and was, therefore, not relevant to non-Jews and to the new covenant.

The first evangelists who preached the gospel to the Gentiles were, like the Apostle Paul, Jews. So they would have explained to their listeners the meaning of terms like “Messiah/Christ”. Like John, they would have also explained it in terms of “the savior of the world” (John 4:42), the giver of the water of life (John 4:14) etc, which both Jews and Gentiles could easily understand. But as time went on and the churches expanded throughout the world, and the Christian church became almost exclusively Gentile, the meaning of key concepts like “Messiah” began to become vague, or was even forgotten. Many, or even most, non-Jewish believers thought of “Christ” as just another personal name for Jesus. Three centuries later, *the Messianic title “son of God” was inverted into the divine title “God the Son,”* a term completely unknown to John or Paul or any of the New Testament writers!

In only about a hundred years after the death and resurrection of Christ, the rapid growth of the church in the world had one undesirable result: *the church did not retain its connection with its Jewish roots.* A consequence of this was that the meaning of terms and concepts once familiar to the early Jewish believers was now vague or even unknown to the average Christian. Apart from such a common term as “Christ,” the meaning of which the average Christian today would have difficulty defining with any degree of clarity, *the origin and meaning of “the Word” appears to have soon been lost.*

## “The Word”

This has resulted in almost endless speculations about “the Word” (“Logos” in Greek) and whether John (or whoever wrote the hymn John incorporated into the Gospel’s Prologue) derived it from Greek philosophy or Jewish teaching. But trinitarian scholars have found no help from any of these, because neither in Jewish nor Greek sources can a “Word” or “Logos” be found who is a personal divine being corresponding to “God the Son”. Finally, some scholars have gone so far as to suggest that John had himself created the idea of a personal Logos; this suggestion was dignified with the rather impressive term “the Johannine synthesis,” but without being able to provide the least evidence for the validity of this kind of suggestion. This can be seen in many commentaries on John’s Gospel.

This book aims to show that there is no need to resort to such desperate measures as fabricating this kind of origin for the Johannine Word. What we need to do, as a first step, is to gain some acquaintance with the Aramaic-speaking mother church of Christianity from which John and the other early apostles came. We need to learn basic facts, such as that *Aramaic was Jesus’ mother tongue*, and that it was the common language spoken in Palestine at the time of Christ, and was spoken for some considerable time both before and after his time. That is why many Aramaic words can still be seen in the gospels (Mark 5:41 is a well-known example). It is fairly certain that Jesus, and rabbis generally, could read the Hebrew Bible; but it is unknown whether he spoke Greek.

With some exceptions then, the average Jew in Palestine in the time of Christ did not speak Hebrew. So the Hebrew Bible had to be translated into Aramaic (a language related to Hebrew yet different from it) when it was read to the people gathered in the synagogues every week. The Aramaic word for “translation” is “targum”. What is of importance for us is the fact that “the Word” was a term familiar to the people in Israel in the time of Christ, because “*Word*” is “*Memra*” in Aramaic, and this word appears frequently in the Aramaic translations (or *targums*) which they regularly heard in their synagogues. We shall consider “*Memra*” in some detail so as to see its importance for understanding the message of John’s Gospel.

Most importantly, we shall see that there is in fact no other way to correctly understand the meaning of “the Word” (Logos) where Biblical exegesis is concerned (that is, if we do not wander off into Greek philosophy or the Jewish version of Greek philosophy produced by Philo), but to discover its meaning in the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament) and its important Aramaic Targums. If we look within the Scriptures we shall see that “the Word” in John 1:1, “the Word” in the Old Testament such as in Psalm 33:6, the hypostatized Wisdom in Proverbs (esp. 8:30), and the Word (*Memra*) in the Targums, all have in essence the same meaning—as might be expected from the consistent character of the Scriptures as the Word of God. The Scriptures do not leave us confused because of conflicting or incompatible meanings.



## The Scriptures

Speaking of “the Scripture” or “the Scriptures,” it is important to understand that this is the term used in the New Testament to refer to the Hebrew Bible, which Christians call the “Old Testament”. Jewish people, understandably, take exception to their Bible being referred to in this way because “old” could imply something antiquated, and hence redundant or obsolete. Certainly, “old” could also mean “of ancient origin” and as such to be venerated, but this does not rule out the other and, apparently, more obvious meaning of “old”. I use the term “old” here fully aware of the inadequacy and, indeed, inappropriateness of the term, only because it is the term universally understood by Christians, and also because of the fact that there is at present no other term commonly accepted among Christians to replace it. If the term the “Hebrew Bible” is used without further explanation it could be taken to mean the Bible in the Hebrew language. The term “the Scriptures” (both singular and plural) are today understood to include both the “Old Testament” and the “New”. So, until new terminology can be established, such as “the earlier Scriptures” and “the later Scriptures” (which will be used occasionally in this book), I shall for the time being be obliged to continue to use the terminology generally accepted among Christians; but I request the indulgence of Jewish readers. To use the term “the Jewish Scriptures” is of no real help because both the “Old Testament” and most of the New (i.e. excepting Luke and Acts) were written by Jews; this is something Christians too easily forget.

So the inappropriateness of the use of the term “Old Testament” lies not only in the fact that it is unacceptable to the Jews, but also in the fact that this is *not* the way the New Testament writings refer to the Hebrew Bible. In the “New Testament” the “Old” is always referred to as “the Scripture” (e.g. Mk.12:10; Jn.2:22; Rom.4:3; 1Pt.2:6; or “the Scriptures,” e.g. Mt.21:42; Rom.1:2); it occurs no less than 50 times. It needs to be borne in mind that “the Scripture” was the *only* Bible the early church had. The gospels and the epistles were first collected together into one volume and used in the churches only some 150 years after the time of Jesus’ earthly ministry. One of the earliest of these collections is listed in the Muratorian Canon (c. AD 170-180), which did not yet include all the writings of the New Testament as we now have it.

Scholars (especially OT scholars) have long been aware of the problem of the term “Old Testament,” so my adverting to it here is not something original; yet it is important to the themes discussed in this book as it is another indicator of the divergence of Christianity from its Biblical and Jewish roots. One Christian scholar who puts the matter very strongly is Garry Wills, Professor of History Emeritus at Northwestern University, who writes in his recent book *What Paul Meant*, “For Paul there was no such thing as ‘the Old Testament’. If he had known that his writings would be incorporated into something called the New Testament, he would have repudiated that if it was meant in any way to repudiate, or subordinate, the only scripture he knew, the only word of

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God he recognized, his Bible.” (*What Paul Meant*, Penguin Books, 2006, p.127f)

## **The themes in this study**

This book is about three main themes in the Bible of the greatest importance for mankind:

(1) There is one, and only one, true God, who is the Creator of all that exists, whose revelation of Himself is recorded for us first in the Hebrew Bible (which Christians call “the Old Testament”) and then also in the New Testament. The Christian church was born in Jerusalem, and its birth is described in the book of Acts. It was a Jewish church and, as such, was uncompromisingly monotheistic. But the Gentile (non-Jewish) Christian church, which had no such commitment to monotheism, and which from about the middle of the second century became detached from its Jewish mother, began to develop a doctrine in which there was more than one person who is God. The Gentile church took a first major step away from monotheism when it declared at Nicaea in AD 325 that this doctrine represents the faith of the church. This book aims to show that there is absolutely no basis, neither in the Old Testament nor the New, for this compromise with polytheism purporting to be some kind of “monotheism”.

(2) “The only true God,” as Jesus called Him (John 17:3), is one who is intensely concerned about His creation and especially about humanity and its well-being. He created mankind

with an eternal plan in mind. Thus we see Him intimately involved with human beings right from the beginning of man's creation. His remarkable involvement in the rescuing of a people entangled in the toils of slavery in Egypt, and His providing for their every need over the 40 year period during which they wandered through the frightening wilderness of the Sinai desert, is a story told over and over again, not only in Israel but around the world. In that story we also learn that God Himself stayed with the people of Israel, His Presence dwelling among them in the tent better known as "the tabernacle" (cp. John 1:14, "dwelt", "tabernacled"). He was present with them also in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night in which He led them through the desert. By all this He showed that He is not a God who is transcendent in the sense that He keeps Himself at a distance from man, but instead involves Himself with man in the most "down to earth" ways.

Certainly, God is concerned not only for Israel but for all of mankind, being the Creator of all of humanity. Accordingly, there are significant hints, especially given through the Old Testament prophets, that God will one day come in such a way that "all flesh shall see it (His glory) together" (Isaiah 40:1-5) and, even more astonishingly, that He would come into the world in the form of a human being. This appears to find clear expression in a prophetic statement made famous by Christmas cards (Isaiah 9:6, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.").

But, strangely enough, the trinitarian Gentile church decided that He who came into the world was not the One whom Jesus addressed as “the only true God” (Jn.17:3), and whom he consistently called “Father,” but that it was another person whom they called “God the Son”—a term which cannot be found anywhere in the Bible. The purpose of this book is to show that the small number of verses which trinitarians adduce from the New Testament in support of their doctrine provides no proof of the existence of “God the Son” or that Jesus Christ is God the Son. There is no doubt whatever that the authors of the New Testament were monotheists, so there is no justifiable way to extract trinitarian doctrine from monotheistic writings—other than by unjustifiably imposing interpretations upon the text which are not intrinsic to it.

(3) God’s plan to save man from the plight into which he has fallen (because of his failure to acknowledge Him as God, Rom. 1:21) was certainly not a plan put together on the spur of the moment or as an afterthought, but was something that He, in His foreknowledge, had integrated into His overall eternal plan for His creation. This is to say that His plan for man’s salvation was already in place “before the beginning of time” (2Tim.1:9).

In this plan the key figure is a man whom He had chosen and for whom He selected the name “Jesus” (Mt.1:21; Lk.1:31). This name is significant because it means “Yahweh saves” or “Yahweh is salvation”. Christians talk as though Jesus alone is the savior, but he is savior because “*God* was in

Christ reconciling the world to Himself” (2Cor.5:19). This was also precisely what Jesus himself kept on repeating in different ways in John’s Gospel, namely, that everything he said and did was actually done by “the Father” in him (Jn.14:10, etc). This is because God lived in Jesus in a way He had never done before in human history. This is what made Jesus completely unique as compared to anyone else who had ever lived on earth, and this is also why he enjoyed a uniquely intimate spiritual relationship with God which was like that of a son with his father. This is why he was called the “Son of God” which, in the Bible, never means “God the Son”. Because of his unique relationship with the Father, three times in John’s Gospel he is spoken of as the “only (or unique) Son” of God (Jn.1:14; 3:16,18).

In this unprecedented relationship, Jesus of his own free choice lived in total obedience to God his Father, and chose to be “obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8). It was through this “one man’s obedience that many will be made righteous” (Romans 5:19), which means that he accomplished man’s salvation through his death on the cross. It was in this way that God reconciled all things to Himself through Christ. It was also because of his obedience to God that God “highly exalted him and gave him the name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue confess him as ‘Lord’—to the glory of God the Father” (Phil.2:9-11). God conferred on Jesus the highest possible honor, which is why we call Jesus “Lord”.

## **A serious shift of focus in the Gentile (non-Jewish) Church**

The later Gentile church, however, failed (intentionally or unintentionally) to distinguish the difference in significance between “Lord” as applied to Jesus and “Lord” (or “LORD”) as applied to God (just as “lord” in English, the Greek word *kyrios* is used in both cases), even though in Greek (as in English) the word *kyrios* has several levels of meaning: it could be a courtesy title meaning something like “sir”; it was the way a slave addressed his master, or sometimes a wife her husband, or a disciple his teacher (as in English “master” as in “schoolmaster”), while in the Greek Old Testament (LXX), it was the usual way God was referred to. Thus the later Gentile church found it easy to go from speaking of Jesus as “Lord” to speaking of him as “God”. This was one of the main reasons why the Gentile church in the fourth century had relatively little difficulty in proclaiming that Jesus Christ was “God the Son,” a second person in the “Godhead”. Thus “trinitarianism” as it is known today was born.

The extremely serious consequence of all this from the Biblical point of view is that God (the Father) was sidelined or marginalized by the worship of Jesus as God which came to dominate the church. A look at most modern-day Christian hymnbooks will immediately reveal who is the central object of Christian prayer and worship. “The Father” is left with a relatively marginal role. Jesus has replaced the Father in Christian life because, for them, he is God. The Apostle Paul, who wrote repeatedly in his letters about “the God and

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom.15:6; 2Cor.1:3, etc) would have shuddered at the thought that the future Christian church would replace “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ” as the central object of worship by worshipping Jesus himself as God, even quoting (or rather, misquoting) his writings (esp. Philippians 2:6ff) in support of so doing!

If Jesus can be the object of worship, then why not also his mother Mary, who is declared to be “the mother of God” by the Gentile church, and who is actually worshipped in a large portion of the Christian church? For if Jesus is God, then Mary can properly be called “mother of God”. Even though Mary has not been declared to be God, this seems to be made unnecessary by the fact that as “mother of God” she would appear to have a position above God. She is usually portrayed in churches as holding the baby Jesus in her arms; the image suggests that the mother is somehow greater than her baby, even if that baby is God! Little wonder that so many Christians pray to Mary as the one who exercises the enormous influence of a mother over her son.

The purpose of this book is to sound the alarm that the Christian church has strayed from the truth found in God’s word, the Bible. All who love God and His truth will look carefully again at the Scriptures to consider the truth for themselves, and thus return to “God our Savior,” “who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of His own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before “the beginning of time” (2Tim.1:9). For this reason we honor Jesus as “Lord”—but always in such a way that it is *“to the glory of God our*



*Father*” (Phil.2:11). Prof. Hans Küng says the same thing in theological terms, “Paul’s **christocentricity** remains grounded and comes to a climax again in a strict **theocentricity**” (*Christianity*, p.93f, bold letters his).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the goal of this book is to grasp the meaning of the Biblical teaching summarized in 1Timothy 3:16, namely, that “He (God) was manifest in the flesh” in the person of “the man Christ Jesus” (1Tim.2:5). That the reference here is to *God* manifesting Himself in the flesh appears to be clear from the fact that to speak of a human being “appearing” or “being revealed” (which are meanings of the word ‘manifest’) in the flesh would not make much sense. Moreover, Christ is not mentioned in the two verses before this one, but God is mentioned twice in the verse immediately before it. So who else could the “he” in 1Tim.3:16 refer to besides God? If indeed God appeared in the flesh, then this could rightly be described as a “great mystery,” as is done in this verse.

It is precisely this mystery that God “dwelt among us” (John 1:14) “in Christ” (a very frequent term in Paul’s writings—73 times, not including “in him”, etc, over 30 times), just as He had dwelt among the Israelites, which we need to consider carefully. He did this so as “*in Christ to reconcile the world to Himself*” (2Cor.5:19). Trinitarianism, of course, also believes that God “was manifest in the flesh” but with the

difference that the God who was manifested was “God the Son,” without any regard for the fact that no such person is mentioned anywhere in the Bible. As a result they have sidelined the one true God, whom Jesus called Father, as the One who came into the world “in Christ” for the sake of our salvation. Or, using Prof. Küng’s theological terms, trinitarianism has replaced biblical “*theocentricity*” by means of their kind of “*christocentricity*”.

But is the understanding really correct that “God (Yahweh) was manifest in the flesh”? This is a truly momentous statement of staggering significance, and one which we will need to examine in careful detail in the coming pages.

## **Are we really monotheists, as we suppose ourselves to be?**

We are all nominally monotheists: Christians consider themselves monotheists. Christianity claims to be a monotheistic faith. But why? How can a religion that does not place its faith solely and exclusively in one personal God, but believes in three persons who are all equally God, still claim to be monotheistic? “Monotheism” by definition means “**belief in a single God:** the belief that there is only one God” (Encarta Dictionary); the definition is identical in every dictionary. But a belief in three co-equal divine persons is not belief in “a single God,” or in there being “only one God”.

The word “monotheism” comes, as we have already noted, from the Greek words *monos* (one) and *theos* (God). In the

Hebrew Bible (which Christians call the “Old Testament”), the God who has revealed Himself through it has revealed Himself by the majestic Name “YHWH,” which scholars generally agree is pronounced “Yahweh”. The precise meaning of His Name has always been a matter of discussion, but it means something like “I am that I am,” or “I will be who I will be” (see Exodus 3:14), or according to the Greek OT (the LXX) it has the meaning “the Existing One” (*ho ōn*), suggesting that He exists eternally and is the source of all existence. The Old Testament recognizes only one personal God, namely Yahweh, as the one true God. His Name is central to the whole Hebrew Bible in which it occurs 6828 times. Yet most Christians seem to be totally unaware of this basic fact.

Yahweh is absolutely the one and only (*monos*) God (*theos*) revealed in the Bible. There may have been “many gods and many lords” that people believed in (1Cor.8:5,6) but as far as the Biblical revelation is concerned, Yahweh is, in Jesus’ words, “the only true God”. Jesus certainly taught monotheism, but the question is: are we, his disciples, really monotheists?

It needs to be clearly understood that *monos* is not a word that can be stretched to mean a group consisting of several persons, a gathering of several entities, or a class made up of a number of beings. Here is the definition of *monos* as given by the authoritative BDAG Greek-English Lexicon of the NT: “**1. pert. to being the only entity in a class, only, alone** adj. **a.** with focus on being the only one. **2. a marker of limitation, only, alone,** the neut. μόνον [*monon*] being used as an adv.”

The word “God” and the term “only God” in the New Testament unquestionably always refer to the God of the OT, Yahweh. But then why does the Name “Yahweh” not appear in the NT in the way it does so very frequently in the Hebrew Bible (but not in most English Bibles)? The answer to this question rests on two important facts:

(1) The shattering impact of the Exile upon Israel as a nation resulted in its finally learnt its lesson. The people of Israel had come to realize that the reason for the fearsome exile and their destruction as a nation lay in the fact that they had all along been committing spiritual adultery by insisting upon worshipping other gods besides Yahweh (Ba’al being one of the best known among these), defying the repeated and persistent warning of Yahweh’s prophets, who specifically stated that Yahweh would certainly send them into exile for their rebelliousness against Him and for their idolatry. Having experienced the fact that Yahweh was true to His word, seeing for themselves that what He had said would happen did come to pass just as He had warned them, and having tasted the power of His chastisement, they returned to the ruined land of Israel after the exile a chastened people who from now on would worship no other God but Yahweh alone. They now revered Him to the extent that they even refrained from taking His exalted Name upon their lips. Henceforth they would speak of Him as “Lord” (*adonai*).

Moreover, the Jews would never again worship any other God besides Adonai Yahweh, not even if that God is called Yahweh’s “Son” (who is nowhere mentioned in the OT), nor

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even if that God is called Yahweh's "Spirit," mentioned a number of times in the OT but was never regarded as a separate person alongside Yahweh. That is why we can be certain that the Jewish writers of the NT could never have been trinitarians; we have already seen a number of examples from the NT (given above) of their fervent monotheism.<sup>1</sup>

(2) During the long 70 year exile (the Babylonian Captivity, as it is called) in a foreign country where Aramaic was the spoken language, the new generation of Jews spoke the local Aramaic rather than Hebrew (just as Jews today who live in the US or Europe speak the languages of their land of residence and are generally unable to speak Hebrew). The scribes, the Bible scholars, still read the Hebrew Bible (just as most rabbis around the world still do today), and they taught the Bible in the synagogues; but most of the common people no longer understood Hebrew, so the Bible portions that were read in the synagogues had to be translated into Aramaic. This is how Encarta explains it: "When, after the Babylonian Captivity in the 6th century bc, Aramaic replaced Hebrew as the generally spoken language, it became necessary to explain the

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<sup>1</sup> For this reason, too, the Jews down through the centuries and up to this day could not consider trinitarians as true monotheists even when they try to be as conciliatory as possible. (A fine example of their conciliatory attitude can be seen in the book *Christianity in Jewish Terms* (edited by Tikva Frymer-Kensky and others, Westview Press, 2000), which is a dialogue between Jewish and Christian scholars. It is hard to imagine a similarly conciliatory dialogue between Muslim and Christian scholars in the present religious climate.)

meaning of readings from the Scriptures.” (Encarta Reference Library 2005)

It is important for our present study to bear in mind the fact that in the Aramaic targums (translations) of the Hebrew Bible, God’s holy Name “Yahweh” was, out of reverence, replaced by the term “the *Memra*,” which in Aramaic means “the Word”. Thus every Palestinian Jew knew that “the Memra” was a metonymic reference to “Yahweh”. *Memra* appears frequently in the Aramaic Targums, as can be seen in Appendix 12 at the end of this book.

## **Monotheism in the Bible**

The monotheism of the Bible is absolutely uncompromising. I know of no Bible scholar who denies this fact. Therefore, when we teach Biblical monotheism we have no need to justify ourselves for so doing, we have no case to defend. It is those who use the Bible to teach something other than monotheism who will need to answer for what they are doing.

Trinitarian Christians like to rank themselves among Jews and Muslims as monotheists. The problem is that neither Judaism nor Islam recognizes trinitarian Christianity as truly monotheistic, regardless of Christian claims. Whatever Christian “monotheism” might be, neither Jews nor Muslims consider it monotheism according to their Scriptures. Are they being unreasonable?

## **How this book came to be written**

This work is not the result of a preconceived plan to negate or derail trinitarianism. It took shape as the result of an earnest evangelistic concern to bring the gospel of salvation to all nations and a desire for the Lord's coming again. These two things are linked in Jesus' words in Matthew 24:14, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." The "second coming" and "the end of the age" are inseparably linked together in Matthew 24:3, and both these events are linked to the universal proclamation of the gospel.

The undeniable fact is that a huge proportion of the world remains unreached by the gospel. The Muslim portion alone accounts for well over 1,000,000,000 (one billion) people. Moreover, Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world, so this figure will increase steadily over the coming years. A BBC report in December 2007 stated that Islam had tripled in number in Europe over the last 30 years. Not long ago I read an article in a Church of England newspaper which expressed the view that at the current rate of growth of Islam in England, it may not be long before it will become a Muslim country. What does all this mean? Does it not mean that Matthew 24:14 is not only not being fulfilled, but that the hopes of its being fulfilled are becoming steadily more remote, and that with it the hopes of the Second Coming may be fading?

Does this not evidently mean that not only has the church failed to fulfill the Great Commission but that, with the progress of events in the world, the possibility of fulfilling it is steadily declining? Add to this the historical fact that, in regard to Islam, Christianity has failed dismally to make any evangelistic impact upon it during the past more than 1400 years since the inception of that religion. Beginning in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, driven before the advancing forces of Islam, Christianity fell back on all fronts, losing their important centers in all of North Africa, the Middle East (including Jerusalem and the Holy Land), and what is today the nation of Turkey (once an important center of Christianity), as well as huge areas to the east of it.

In the face of these stark realities, how can the Great Commission (Mt.28:18-20) be fulfilled? Add to this the endless internal squabbling of Christians, both throughout church history and at the present time. Some Christians seem to make it their business to label others who disagree with their particular doctrinal views as belonging to a “cult” or as “heretics,” even in such matters as “once saved, always saved” or “eternal security,” often with very little clear understanding about the subject or the related Scriptural teaching. One is reminded of the events of the Roman siege of Jerusalem when, even as the Roman army was tightening its iron grip on the city in AD 70, some of the Jewish defenders within the city were still squabbling, fighting, and even killing each other because of fierce disagreements on various matters, until the Roman soldiers poured into the city and set it ablaze, and the



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temple in which Jesus himself had taught went up in fire and smoke.

So the situation both in the world and in the church today leaves little room for optimism about Jesus' words in Matthew 24:14 being fulfilled if things are left to continue as they are. It was precisely the attempt to address this question of why the church has failed so dismally to reach the Muslims with the gospel that it became necessary to ask what can be done, and also whether there is something wrong in the way the gospel has been understood and presented.

## **Personal History**

I am writing as one who had been a trinitarian from the time I became a Christian at the age of 19—a time which spans over fifty years. During the nearly four decades of serving as pastor, church leader, and teacher of many who have entered the full-time ministry, I taught trinitarian doctrine with great zeal, as those who know me can testify. Trinitarianism was what I drank in with my spiritual milk when I was a spiritual infant. Later, in my Biblical and theological studies, my interest focused on Christology which I pursued with considerable intensity. My life centered on Jesus Christ. I studied and sought to practice his teaching with utmost devotion.

I was in a practical sense a monotheist, devoted to a monotheism in which Jesus was my Lord and my God. Intense devotion to the Lord Jesus inevitably left little room for either the Father or the Holy Spirit. So, while in theory I believed

in there being three persons, in practice there was actually only one person who really mattered: Jesus. I did indeed worship one God, but that one God was Jesus. The one God revealed in the Old Testament, namely, Yahweh, was in practice replaced by the God Jesus Christ, God the Son. A large proportion of Christians function as I did, so they can easily understand what I am saying here.

About three years ago I was pondering the question: How can the gospel be made known to the Muslims? I discovered that my Christianity was accompanied by some kind of prejudice against the Muslims which had to be overcome if I was to understand them and reach out to them. But I also soon realized that the moment I said anything about the Trinity, or said that Jesus is God, all communication with Muslims would cease abruptly. The same, of course, is true for the Jews. So how could they be reached?

We have already noted Jesus' words, "this gospel of the kingdom must first be preached to all nations and then shall come the end..." (Mt.24:14). One need only look at the situation in the world to see that it is extremely difficult to preach the gospel in Muslim countries, of which there are many. The same is true of Israel. What that means in terms of Jesus' words in Matthew 24 is that the end cannot come, and he cannot return, because the gospel cannot be preached to these nations.

Most Christians seem to be hardly aware of, or concerned about, these things. Accordingly, there is hardly any concern about reaching the Muslims. Most Christians know next to nothing about Islam and are, in any case, not interested about

them or their salvation. In general, there seems to be little spiritual fire or zeal in the churches. Is there a deeper spiritual problem within the church itself which is at the root of this?

If we consider the relationship of Islam to Christianity in history, we recall that it was only three hundred years after the Nicene Creed was established in the church (proclaiming God as consisting of three persons rather than one) that the “scourge” of Islam appeared on the scene of world history. Islam proclaimed once again the radical monotheism which had been proclaimed in the Hebrew Bible. From then onwards, Christianity, which had expanded rapidly throughout the world during the first three centuries of the present era, now fell back before the advancing forces of monotheistic Islam. Is there a spiritual message in this for us? If so, can we discern it?

One thing that I could see was that I needed to re-evaluate whether or not we Christians are really monotheists. Have we really been true to the Biblical revelation? The large number of books produced by Christian theologians trying to explain and to justify “Christian monotheism” already indicates a problem: Why is so much effort needed to explain or justify this kind of “monotheism”? As I was rethinking this question of “Christian monotheism” I looked again at an academic monograph on this subject which I had in my possession. It was a collection of essays by trinitarian theologians both Protestant and Catholic. I soon noticed that these writers had something in common: they were clearly uncomfortable with monotheism; some were openly critical of it.

When I examined my own thoughts, I too realized that my trinitarianism was at root incompatible with Biblical monotheism. It became necessary for me to carefully re-examine this crucial matter. When one believes in three distinct and coequal persons, each of whom is individually God in his own right, who together constitute the “Godhead,” how can one still speak of believing in “the radically monotheistic God” (Yahweh) revealed in the Hebrew Bible—unless one is using the term “monotheistic” in a sense fundamentally different from that in the Bible? (The term “the radically monotheistic God” is here borrowed from an article by Professor David Tracy of Chicago in the book *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, 2000, Westview Press, pp.82,83; the book consists of essays by Jewish and Christian scholars.)

Up until then I had confidently believed that I could readily defend trinitarianism on the basis of the New Testament texts so familiar to me. But now the more pressing question of evangelism was: How were these texts to be explained to Muslims who sincerely want to know Isa (as they call Jesus) and are even prepared to read the Gospels, which are endorsed by the Qur’an? To my surprise, once I began to put aside my own prejudices and preconceptions, and re-evaluate each text to see what it is actually saying, and not how we as trinitarians had interpreted it, the message which emerged from the text proved to be different from what I had supposed it to be. This was especially true of John 1:1. Because of my deeply entrenched trinitarianism, this process resulted in a long struggle (and a lot of hard work) to get to the truth of the Biblical message. Some of the results of those

efforts are put forward in this book. Let each reader carefully evaluate it for himself or herself, and may God grant you His light without which we cannot see.

When I first faced the challenge of reevaluating my trinitarianism in the light of the Bible, and then sharing that light with all who wish to see it, I thought I was alone in taking this stand. But when preparing this manuscript for publication I was surprised to come across the work of the renowned theologian Hans Küng and to discover that he had already declared that the doctrine of the Trinity is “unbiblical” in his large work entitled *Christianity: Essence, History, and Future*, which was published in 1994. Now I have discovered that he is not the only prominent Catholic dogmatic theologian who has made this affirmation. The systematic theologian K-J Kuschel, in an in-depth study titled *Born Before All Time? The Dispute over Christ’s Origin* published in 1992, had made the same point. It is certainly most encouraging to find such unanticipated support from unexpected quarters, especially from scholars of such outstanding quality and courage. And although work on the present manuscript was already approaching completion, I obtained their books in time to be able to insert a number of quotations from them into this work.

On the subject of the Trinity for example, in a section under the heading “No doctrine of the Trinity in the New Testament,” Professor Küng states unequivocally, “Indeed throughout the New Testament while there is belief in God the Father, in Jesus the Son and in God’s Holy Spirit, there is

no doctrine of one God in three persons (modes of being), no doctrine of a ‘triune God’, a ‘Trinity’.” (*Christianity*, p.95)

## **The obstacles we face when considering Biblical Monotheism**

(1) The first obstacle is the need to deal with multitudes of preconceptions due to our indoctrination: For example, we speak of the Spirit as “he,” because when we read the New Testament we see the Spirit referred to in this way. Most Christians, being unfamiliar with Greek, do not know that the word for Spirit, *pneuma*, is neuter and should therefore be translated as “it”. Even after having learned Greek we still speak of the Spirit as “he” because according to trinitarian doctrine the Spirit is a distinct person who is coequal with the other two persons in the Trinity, the Father and the Son. This, of course, is the reason why all translations depict the neuter word *pneuma* as “he”. It has nothing to do with proper linguistics but everything to do with Christian dogma.

The same is true of the idea of “Trinity”. In India there are a multitude of gods, but there are three at the top of the Indian pantheon. These three share in the same “substance” of deity; otherwise they would not be considered gods at all. If those in India who worship these three supreme gods are called polytheists by Christians, in what way is the Christian trinitarian concept fundamentally different from the Indian? Is it simply because the three persons in the Christian trinity are more closely related to each other, i.e. as “Father” and

“Son” (what about “Spirit”)? Indoctrination has the powerful effect of making us insist that trinitarianism represents monotheism—something which true monotheists like the Jews and the Muslims reject. If we still have a modicum of logical thinking left in us we would see that: if there is *God* the Father, *God* the Son, and *God* the Spirit then, obviously, there are three Gods according to this dogma. Yet we seem unable to face up squarely to the plain fact of the matter! Here we see the power of indoctrination and its capacity to overpower logical thought.

To those who have seen indoctrination at work, this is not something new. This kind of thing has been at work even in relatively recent history: The crazed idealism of Nazism and its dream of building a thousand-year utopia, the fulfillment of which required (among other things) the extermination of the Jews, considered by them to be the scum of humanity infecting the human race, or at least the Aryan race. Only indoctrination by means of intense propaganda could induce people to think such insane thoughts.

There are also many who have experienced the kind of brain-washing made familiar by Stalinist communism. People were permitted to think only in a predetermined way; any other way would bring severe penalties, including incarceration and death.

When it comes to restricting free thought, the church itself has a long record of this kind. Once it had established doctrines, such as the Nicene and Chalcedonian Creeds in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, dissent was prohibited on pain of excommunication which, in effect, meant condemning a person to

hell. Nothing could be more serious than that, not even physical death. This kind of ecclesiastical oppression developed into crude physical torture, often culminating in death, during the time of the notorious Inquisition which the church inflicted upon those they had condemned as heretics.

Even today there are not a few Christians who think that they have some kind of divine right to label other Christians who do not share their doctrinal views as “cultists,” “sectarians” or, as before, simply “heretics”. Thus these self-appointed defenders of the (their) faith carry on the long tradition of the Gentile church with its internecine doctrinal conflicts, which can hardly be to the glory of God in the eyes of the world, not to mention how God looks at it.

But quite apart from the strong external pressures to conform to a particular dogma is the fact that we ourselves have been convinced that this doctrine is true. All our Christian lives we have learned to read the Bible in a particular way as being the only right way to understand it. So now it only makes sense to us in that way and, conversely, everything we read convinces us further that the way we were taught is the right way. It thus becomes a self-reinforcing development of our faith in our particular doctrine, especially as we become teachers ourselves and teach others this doctrine, trying to find even more convincing explanations than we ourselves had been taught. Here I speak from my own experience as a teacher.

The practical result of all this was that when I read the New Testament, I inevitably saw every passage in the way I had learnt it, but which was further strengthened by new



arguments which I had developed myself. As any diligent teacher aims to do, I tried to make the trinitarian case as convincing as possible. I had both learned and taught the Bible as a trinitarian book; how could I now understand it in the light of monotheism?

Take, for example, the well-known text so constantly used by trinitarians to “prove” that Christ is God the Son, Philippians 2:6-11. Prof. M. Dods summed it up (as trinitarians would do) like this: “Christ is represented [in this passage] as leaving a glory he originally enjoyed and returning to it when his work on earth was done and as a result of that work” (*The Gospel of St. John, The Expositor’s Greek NT*, p.841). The “glory” which Christ left was the “divine glory,” as Dods states in the next sentence of his commentary.

That is how we all understood this text as trinitarians. It simply does not occur to us that this interpretation is the result of reading a lot of things into the text which are simply not there. The word “glory,” for example, occurs nowhere in this text (or even in this chapter) in relation to Christ, much less the term “divine glory”. By the term “divine glory” is meant not the glory of God the Father (see Phil.2:11) but of “God the Son,” a term which appears nowhere in the Scriptures. Dods’s key words “leaving” and “returning” also do not exist in this passage, but are read into it. To say, as Philippians 2:6 does, that he “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped” (ESV, etc) is not at all saying the same thing as “leaving” his “divine glory”.

Moreover, the passage in Philippians 2:6-11 says absolutely nothing whatever about Christ’s “returning” to the “glory

he originally enjoyed” (Dods). What it does say is something quite different, as one should be able to see for oneself: “Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name” (Phil.2:9). There is no suggestion that he was merely receiving again what he already had before; to say this is to render meaningless his being “highly exalted” by God.

Thus there is practically nothing in Dods’s summary of the Philippian text that actually derives from the text itself! Trinitarianism is simply and unabashedly read into it. Yet as trinitarians we took no notice of these serious discrepancies between our interpretations and the Biblical texts we were supposed to be interpreting. This was the result of not really knowing how to read the text in any other way than that which we had been taught. Here we shall not study Philipians 2 in detail (we shall return to it later; some points in this well-known passage will illustrate the fact that we habitually read the Bible through trinitarian glasses).

Apart from this difficult problem of practically having to re-learn how to read the Bible in a new light, that of monotheism, there is also the demotivating factor of reckoning with the external pressures of being labeled a “heretic,” which is intimidating for most Christians. That someone who proclaims that the Bible is monotheistic because it is the word of “the only true God” can be labeled a “heretic” by the Gentile church shows just how far the church has strayed from the word of God.

Only the God-given courage to face up to the truth, indeed to love the truth at all cost, will enable us to go forward to

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know Him who is “the God of truth”. I shall, therefore, conclude this section with the words of Isaiah 65:16, “So that he who blesses himself in the land shall bless himself by **the God of truth**, and he who takes an oath in the land shall swear by **the God of truth**; because the former troubles are forgotten and are hidden from my eyes.”

(2) Apart from the serious problems of indoctrination and peer pressure, there is the equally serious problem that we no longer possess the ideas and concepts which were familiar to those who first read the NT: common concepts such as Logos, or Memra, Shekinah, and above all the Name of God, Yahweh. These are now alien to most Christians. To understand the Bible, these concepts need to be learned, and for many people this in itself is a challenge.

Few Christians today know something as basic as the fact that God’s Name in the Hebrew Bible is “Yahweh,” which the Jews out of reverence read as “Adonai,” which means “Lord”. It is generally translated as “LORD” in most English Bibles (the New Jerusalem Bible, which has “Yahweh,” is a notable exception). Hardly any Christian knows how frequently the Name “Yahweh” appears in the Hebrew Bible (which Christians call “the Old Testament”). They are surprised to learn that it occurs 6828 times. When the shortened form of the Name is counted (as in Hallelujah, where “Jah” stands for Yahweh and Hallelujah means “Praise to Yahweh”), the number of occurrence rises to around 7000. No other name is even remotely comparable to this frequency of occurrence in the Bible. This makes it perfectly clear that

Yahweh encompasses both the center and circumference of the Bible; He is essentially its “all in all” (1Cor.15:28).

It also needs to be noted that “Yahweh” is also found in the NT, especially in the many places where the OT is quoted. “Adonai” (the Jewish metonym of “Yahweh”) occurs 144 times in the Complete Jewish Bible. In the *Salkinson-Ginsburg Hebrew New Testament*, “Yahweh” occurs 207 times.

But the matter goes far beyond the statistical frequency of Yahweh’s Name in the Bible. The extraordinary beauty of Yahweh’s character as revealed in the Bible is something that few Christians have perceived. The beauty of His character as seen in His compassion, His wisdom, and His power as used for man’s salvation, is revealed already in Genesis, where we can also observe the astonishing level of intimacy of His interactions with Adam and Eve, whom it seems He regularly visited in the “cool of the day” (Gen.3:8) in the Garden of Eden, which He had “planted” (2:8) for them. After they had sinned, He even made garments with which to cover them instead of the flimsy fig leaf covering that they had made for themselves (Gen.3:7,21).

Yahweh’s compassion and saving power are seen on an enormous scale when He rescued the people of Israel out of their slavery in Egypt. He led some 2,000,000 Israelites through the fearsome desert to the land of Canaan, providing for their every need for 40 years. We shall consider these things more fully in Chapter 5; here we only mention that these same qualities of Yahweh’s character are revealed again,

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in the gospels, in the life and actions of Jesus Christ, in whom the whole fullness of Yahweh dwelt (Col.1:19; 2:9).

(3) Even talking about “God” becomes a problem because to trinitarians the word can refer to any one of three persons or all three together. God is thus a triad, that is, a group of three entities or persons. We cannot even speak about God as Father without the trinitarian assuming that we are talking about that one third of the Trinity who is called “God the Father,” or even about Jesus as “Father,” because many Christians also apply this title to him. How then can we even speak of “the only true God” without being misunderstood by trinitarians? It seems that the only way available to us is to speak of the true God by the name He revealed Himself: “Yahweh,” or even as “Yahweh God” (*YHWH elohim*), a term which occurs 817 times in the OT.

### **Some important historical facts**

It is a fact of history that the trinitarian Nicene Creed was established in AD 325 (and the creed of Constantinople in AD 381), 300 years after the time of Christ. That is to say that trinitarianism became the official creed of the church three centuries after the time of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is likewise a plain historical fact that Jesus and his apostles were all Jews, and that the church when it was first established in Jerusalem (described in the book of Acts) was a Jewish church. What this means is simply that the earliest church was composed entirely of monotheists. Scholars

frankly acknowledge “the strict monotheism of the N.T. (in John, see in particular 17:3),” to use the words of H.A.W. Meyer (*Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Gospel of John*, p.68).

What this means is that when we understand the NT monotheistically, or expound it in this way, we are doing so in complete accordance with its true character. This is how the NT is properly understood or expounded. Therefore, when we speak of John 1:1 or any other part of the NT in monotheistic terms, we have absolutely nothing to justify, no case that we need to defend.

The NT is not a trinitarian or polytheistic document which we are now trying to explain monotheistically. If we were doing this, we would have to justify our actions or defend our case. But it is precisely the reverse that is true. In regard to the NT, it is trinitarianism that is on trial: it will have to explain why it has taken the monotheistic Word of God and interpreted it in polytheistic terms, thereby utterly distorting its fundamental character.

But are trinitarians not monotheists? As trinitarians we argued that we are monotheists, not polytheists, because our faith is in one God in three persons. We closed our eyes (and ears) to a fact that should have been perfectly obvious: If the Father is God, and the Son is God, and the Spirit is God, and all three are coequal and coeternal, then the conclusion is inescapable that there are three Gods. So how did we manage to maintain that we still believe in one God? There was only one way: the definition of the word “God” had to be

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changed—from a “Person” to a divine “Substance” (or “Nature”) in which the three persons share equally.

The plain fact is, however, that the God of the Bible is undoubtedly a very personal Being and was never merely a “substance,” no matter how wonderful that substance might be. Yet trinitarianism has changed the Biblical concept of God by daringly introducing polytheism into the church under the guise of “monotheism”. In so doing they changed the meaning of the word “God”.

### **The subtle shift from monotheism to trinitarian tritheism**

We have already noted the historical fact that there was an interval of 300 years from the time of Christ to the time of the Nicene Creed. During those three centuries a fundamental change had slowly but surely taken place in the church: it had moved from monotheism to polytheism. The historical reason for this change is not difficult to understand. As the early church, empowered by the Spirit of God, proclaimed the monotheist Gospel dynamically throughout the polytheist Greco-Roman world and many came to the Lord, many Gentile believers who came into the church did not leave their polytheistic way of thinking entirely behind them. With the growth of the church throughout the world, Gentiles came to predominate in the churches, until finally the Jews constituted only a minority in most churches outside Palestine. By the middle of the second century, when Christianity had

parted from Judaism, the break with Biblical monotheism became a reality in fact if not in name.

By the early third century AD it was hard to find a single Jewish name among the regional leaders (then called “bishops”) of the church. The church was now firmly under Gentile leadership. These leaders had grown up in a religious and cultural environment where there were “gods many and lords many” (1Cor.8:5, KJV). The “gods” and “lords” of the Greek and Roman religions were basically deified human beings who were honored by the multitudes as heroes. “So from humans into heroes and from heroes into demi-gods the better souls undergo their transition; and from demi-gods, a few, after a long period of purification, share totally in divinity” (Plutarch [c. AD 46-120], quoted in *Greek-English Lexicon*, BDAG, θεότης). Alexander the Great and some of the Roman emperors were hailed as gods.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In fact, as is well known, some Romans also had no problem to include Jesus as a god among the many gods of the Roman pantheon. What angered them was the refusal by the early Christians to acknowledge the emperor as a god. This resulted in several episodes of persecutions of the Christians, because their refusal to worship the emperor was considered as evidence of disloyalty to Rome. But Christians, for their part, were surely not too unhappy that some Romans were willing to honor Jesus as a god alongside their other gods. And if even the pagans were prepared to acknowledge the greatness of Jesus by giving him a place among their gods, why should (Gentile) Christians not be willing to honor him in like manner, that is, as God? This helped to pave the way to trinitarianism.



Whatever other reasons there may have been for the church's having gradually but steadily moved away from its original monotheism (cf. *Jews and Christians: the parting of the ways AD 70 to 135*, ed. James D.G. Dunn), it is clear that with the Creeds of Nicaea and Constantinople, promulgated three centuries after Christ, Christ was now proclaimed to be God, coequal and coeternal with two other persons in the Godhead. God was now no longer one personal Being but a group of three coequal persons. This meant that the very meaning of the word "God" had changed from being one divine Person into three divine persons sharing one divine "substance" (Latin, *substantia*; Greek: *hypostasis*; also, *ousia*<sup>3</sup>). Thus the Biblical proclamation fundamental to the Biblical faith in both the OT and the NT, expressed clearly in the words: "Hear, O Israel, the LORD (Yahweh) our God, the LORD (Yahweh) is One" (Dt.6:4; Mk.12:29), was changed in essence to: "Hear, O Church, the Lord your God is THREE."

With this change the very character of Biblical monotheism, in which one personal God is revealed, is changed to a "monotheism" in which "God" is not one person but one "substance" shared by three persons.

Already as early as the beginning of the third century, Origen, the prominent "father" of the Greek Church and teacher at the catechetical school at Alexandria, declared, "We are not afraid to speak in one sense of two Gods, in another

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<sup>3</sup> "*Hypostasis* and *ousia* were originally synonyms, the former Stoic and the latter Platonic, meaning real existence or essence, that which a thing is." J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p.129.

sense of one God” (J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p.129). “We are not afraid to speak...of two Gods”: How bold, or should we say, how daring?! The floodgates of polytheism (under the thinly disguised veil of “trinitarian monotheism”) were now boldly thrown open. Within barely 200 years from the time of Christ, the Gentile church daringly defies Biblical monotheism, and begins its long tradition of double-talk: “in one sense...in another sense”. In which senses? In terms (in the sense) of persons, the Gentile Christian God is/are two (or three, officially since AD 381); in terms of substance: one. But let it be clearly understood that as far as the Biblical revelation is concerned, whether of the Old Testament or the New, there are no two Gods (or three) in *any* sense whatsoever. Those who care about Biblical truth will reject the trinitarian double-talk, recognizing it for the falsehood that it is. There is only *one true God*, and His Name is Yahweh. Anyone who preaches another God besides Him will surely answer for it on that Day.

Although changing the way the word “God” is defined and understood is an extremely serious matter, the seriousness of the matter does not end there. What happens in the trinitarian declaration is a *flat contradiction* of the divine revelation that “Yahweh (the LORD) is ONE,” Deut.6:4. Yahweh is one Being, one Entity, one Person, as is clearly seen in the Hebrew Bible; and it is no different in the New Testament, as we shall see. Therefore, the meaning of the oneness of God in the Bible is not something open to negotiation or compromise.

The meaning of Yahweh’s oneness is defined with absolute clarity, and is not amenable to compromise of the kind that

suggests that His oneness is “a unity in diversity” with the idea that it might include another one or two persons besides Yahweh. The Scripture declares unequivocally that: “the LORD is God; *there is no other besides him*” (Deuteronomy 4:35). Or, in Yahweh’s own words, “*there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me*. Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and *there is no other*” (Isaiah 45:21,22). “No other” is reiterated three times in these two verses alone. It is repeated many times more elsewhere in the Scriptures; we shall have occasion to return to these passages later in this study.

Most notably, the trinitarian declaration flatly contradicts Jesus’ own affirmation of Deuteronomy 6:4 that Yahweh is one. On the occasion when a scribe asked, “Which commandment is the most important of all?” Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, *the Lord is one*. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’” (Mark 12:28-30) Who “the Lord your God” refers to is absolutely clear; in the Old Testament it is a standard form of reference to *Yahweh* where it occurs over 400 times.

Yet that group of church leaders at Nicaea, who presumably acknowledged Jesus as “Lord,” were not afraid (as was Origen) to contradict their master and demanded that the church must believe that God is more than one person. This reminds us of Jesus’ words, “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?” (Luke 6:46) When the master teaches that God is one, what should his true disciples’

response be? And when we don't do what he tells us, can we not expect to hear him say, "I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Mt.7:23)? Or do we imagine that he will be pleased with us because we elevated him onto the same level with Yahweh, much like the people who wanted to crown him king against his will in John 6:15: "Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself"?

As trinitarians we exalted Jesus to Yahweh's level even though he himself never once claimed to be God, just as Philippians 2:6 says that he "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped". Interestingly, the Greek word translated "grasp" in this verse is precisely the same word translated "take by force" (*harpazō*) in John 6:15 quoted above, by which a link between the two passages can be seen. Jesus never made an attempt to seize forcibly, or grasp at, equality with God. We shall return to Philippians 2 later in this work.

Trinitarianism also insists on making the Spirit of the LORD (Yahweh) a distinct person from Yahweh. For anyone somewhat familiar with the Old Testament, this is something strange. Jews must wonder whether Christians really have any understanding of the Bible at all. To argue that the Spirit of Yahweh, God's Spirit, is a person distinct from Him is like arguing that "the spirit of man" (1Cor.2:11; Prov.20:27; Eccl.3:21; Zech.12:1), man's spirit, is a distinct individual who lives in or with him as another person! This might be perceived as true by someone who suffers from schizophrenia,

but to suggest that this is the case with God borders on lunacy if not something worse, like blasphemy.

“God is Spirit” (Jn.4:24) as Jesus said, yet we do not hesitate to declare that God’s Spirit, the Spirit of the LORD, the Holy Spirit, is actually a different person from Him. The tragedy is that as trinitarians we have become so accustomed to this sort of teaching that we are no longer capable of seeing its absurdity. Surely, we assure ourselves, we are not that stupid. The problem is not stupidity but spiritual blindness—and we thought that it was only the Jews who were struck with blindness (Eph.4:18; Rom.11:25 KJV, esp. with regard to Jesus as Messiah)!

Since the Bible is unquestionably monotheistic in the Biblical sense (and therefore a monotheistic exposition of it requires no justification whatever, as noted above), what follows is an attempt to learn how to understand the Scriptures as it was meant to be understood: monotheistically. This is no easy task for someone as steeped in trinitarianism as I had been. But it is something that, by the grace of God, and for the sake of grasping His truth, must be done. It is time for us to “examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the LORD (Yahweh)” (Lamentations 3:40; NIV).

## **Trinitarian “Monotheism”**

The fact is that trinitarian “monotheism” can only qualify as monotheism by changing the definition of the word “monotheism”. It is rather like saying that an angel is a human

being by changing the meaning of the term “human being” to include angels. This is like changing the rules of the game by placing the goal posts farther apart and scoring your points. This can hardly be considered acceptable to those, like Jews (and Muslims), who know that this kind of argumentation is a denial of the radical, uncompromising monotheism of the Word of God, the Scriptures.

So how can trinitarianism, which claims that God is not one person but three coequal persons, still claim to be monotheistic? Well, to put it simply, by changing the meaning of “monotheism” in such a way that the one God is not understood as being one Person but one “substance,” the substance of deity or “godhead”. Encarta Dictionary defines “godhead” as the “state of being God or a god: the nature or essence of being divine; also called ‘godhood’”. All gods in polytheism are gods because they share in the “state of being god,” that is, in the “substance” of godhood. How else could they be gods? Likewise, we are human beings because we share in a common manhood; we share the “substance” of humanity. How else would we be human beings?

Thus, what trinitarianism has done is that it has reduced the word “God” from being a reference to the LORD God of the Bible to a group of three beings sharing the divine “substance” of godhood, rather like three men sharing the “substance” of manhood (“state of being a man,” Encarta). “God” is reduced to mean a “state of being,” not a person. The God revealed in the Bible is de-personalized into a divine “substance” in order to make way for two other divine persons

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to share in that “one substance”. This one substance, or nature, is trinitarian “monotheism”.

Whether the trinitarian realizes it or not (and he almost certainly does not), when he prays to his “God” he is not praying to a specific person but to a “state of being” in which he believes there are three persons. Little wonder that a few pray to the Father, and probably most pray to Jesus (as I did), and many pray to the Holy Spirit (as the charismatics do).

Where, then, does this distorted concept of monotheism come from? Trinitarians, of course, claim that it comes from the New Testament. John 1:1 is the single most important verse they use for their case. For this reason we shall study this verse in great detail in this work. If this verse cannot be shown to endorse trinitarianism, then the case for this dogma collapses. Other verses in the NT which trinitarianism also relies upon will be considered. These include a portion of Philippians 2, a part of Colossians 1, some verses in Hebrews 1 and in the book of Revelation; but the trinitarian interpretation of these passages depends heavily on its interpretation of John 1:1, so once the meaning of this verse is clarified the meaning of the other passages is relatively easier to grasp.

The purpose of this work has something much more important in view than the refuting of trinitarian dogma. The refutation of trinitarianism clears the way for the proclamation of a wonderful revelation that has been obscured by trinitarian doctrine, namely, that the one true God—who revealed Himself by the Name Yahweh (YHWH), the “I am that I am” (Ex:3:14), who through the great prophet Isaiah proclaimed that He would come to His people (Isaiah 40),

and who through the last OT prophet Malachi declared that He would suddenly (unexpectedly) come to His temple—He did indeed come in the person of Jesus Christ as proclaimed in all the Gospels. It is this mind-boggling revelation which trinitarianism has obscured. It is the first (and only) Person who came into the world in Christ, not an alleged “second person”. We shall go into this more fully after the trinitarian interpretation of Scripture has been evaluated.

### **Why do Christians believe that there is a Trinity?**

Clearly, if there were even just one verse in the Bible which plainly and explicitly states that “Jesus Christ is God” the whole matter should therewith immediately be settled, and no further discussion would be necessary. But the fact is: *there is no such statement in the Scriptures*. That being the case, why don't we close the case on trinitarianism because of insufficient evidence? Well, the matter is not quite that simple; a long and complex church tradition lies behind it. Why do Roman Catholics believe in the Trinity? They believe in it because it is the official doctrine of the Catholic Church. For the Roman Catholic the church is God's voice on earth. If you hope to be saved, then you must unconditionally accept what the church teaches.

That the leaders of the Catholic church are God's representatives on earth, authorized to execute what they consider to be God's will in regard to all matters of faith and practice in the church, is something that goes back a long way



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in church tradition and history. Accordingly, a group of church leaders (called “bishops”) gathered at Nicaea in AD 325 under the sponsorship of the Roman emperor Constantine (who claimed to have become a Christian but was not baptized until just before his death). Constantine placed on them the momentous task of deciding on the different and conflicting views about Jesus Christ and how he was related to God, which were current in the church at the time and which were threatening the peace and unity which he had hoped to establish in his empire.

The church leaders at Nicaea (there was considerable tension among them) finally came up with what we know as the Nicene Creed in which the deity of Jesus was declared to be what Christians must believe. *On what was this declaration based?* This is the important question that needs to be asked. Was it based on the Bible, or at least on the NT? No, there is not a single reference to the Bible anywhere in this creed. So on what authority was it based? It was based on the authority of these church leaders, who considered themselves as acting in God’s Name on behalf of His church.

This sole authority of the church in all matters of faith and practice was first challenged only a few hundred years ago (in the 16<sup>th</sup> century) by Martin Luther, who himself was a Roman Catholic and, indeed, an Augustinian monk. How dare one lowly monk stand up against the might of the vast Catholic establishment? Luther dared to do this on the basis of the New Testament which he had devoted himself to studying. While reading Paul’s letters he had noticed the phrase “justified by faith”. He came to realize that this contradicted the teaching

of the Catholic church of his day which taught the acquiring of “merit” as a means of obtaining forgiveness of sins. On this truth of justification by faith Luther took his courageous stand against the whole might of the established church; and out of this bold stand the Reformation was born.

Although the phrase “justified by faith” occurs only a few times in Paul’s letters (Rom.3:28; 5:1; Gal.2:16; 3:24), the idea expressed by that phrase has a wider basis in Paul’s teaching on salvation, as also in New Testament teaching. The enormous significance of Luther’s courageous stand meant that from then on the teachings of the church could be called into question on the basis of the Scriptures, the word of God. The church and its leaders could no longer continue to arrogate to themselves the authority to pontificate on all matters of faith and practice without needing to answer to the word of God. Unfortunately, this is still not the case in the Catholic Church even today, for the authority of the church (i.e. its leaders and its tradition) still takes precedence over the Scriptures.

Luther’s whole attention was taken up by the matter of “justification by faith”. One can only wonder, given his commitment to the supreme authority of the Scriptures for the church, what he would have thought of the question we started with at the beginning of this section—“Why do Christians believe in the Trinity”—when nowhere in Scripture can the phrase “Jesus is God” be found?

In the absence of explicit statements about Jesus being God, all that the church can use to argue for the doctrine of the Trinity are those verses which seem to imply Jesus’

divinity. It is upon this weak foundation that this doctrine is built, and it is these verses which we need to examine in what follows. Moreover, what the average Christian usually does not know is that there is no unanimity among scholars about the meaning of many of the key verses on which trinitarianism is built. These scholarly discussions are often found in learned books and articles which are generally inaccessible and/or largely unintelligible to the lay person. Most Christians assume that the case for trinitarianism is “cut and dried,” settled long ago beyond dispute. They would, therefore, be surprised to read a statement such as the following in Thayer’s *Greek-English Lexicon*: “Whether Christ is called God must be determined from John 1:1; 20:28; 1 John 5:20; Rom.9:5; Titus 2:13; Heb.1:8f, etc.; *the matter is still in dispute among theologians.*” (*Greek-English Lexicon*, θεός, sec.2).

But if the phrase “justified by faith” is explicit in Romans and Galatians as Luther had seen, the declaration that “the LORD is one” is certainly no less explicit, and it resonates throughout the Old and New Testaments. Jesus spoke of it as the “first” or “most important” commandment (Mark 12:29).

## **In conclusion: The fundamental difference between trinitarianism and monotheism**

As we proceed with the study of Scripture in this book, it is of the greatest importance to grasp clearly that what we are engaged in is not merely a study of different interpretations but a fundamental difference of ways of thinking on the

*spiritual* level, a total difference of the point of view from which Scripture is looked at and, indeed, everything else. We either look at everything monotheistically, that is from the truth that everything comes from the one true God and returns to Him such that He is the sum and circumference of everything that exists—He is thus the focal point of our lives; or we look at everything polytheistically, that is from the point of view that there is more than one God or more than one person who is God. Then the question becomes: which one of these is the focal point of our lives?

Trinitarianism speaks of three persons who are all equally God, and then goes on to claim a place in monotheism by changing the definition of God into a “divine nature”, “substance”, or “Godhead” in which the three persons all share; which means, of course, that this “Godhead” is not at all identical to the one and only personal God of the Bible. Where there is belief in more than one person who is God, that is polytheism by definition. What we need to realize is that trinitarianism is in essence, therefore, a different faith from Biblical monotheism. So we are not here dealing with the relatively simpler matter of Biblical interpretation, but with the far more profound matter of Biblical *faith*. In other words, what is at stake is true or false faith, not just true or false interpretations of the Bible. True or false faith, according to the Scriptures, is a matter of life or death.

If the experience of the Israelites is taken as a point of reference, then the transition from polytheism and idolatry to monotheism is not an easy one. It clearly involves what the Apostle Paul calls “the renewing of the mind” (Rom. 12:1,2).

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This is not something that we can accomplish simply by changing our way of thinking on the rational or intellectual level. There has to be a change on the spiritual level if it is to have any real depth, and this can only be done by God's own work in us.

We know from experience how difficult it is to change a habit. As trinitarians we were trained to understand any given passage of the Bible from the trinitarian perspective, which was often the only perspective we knew. We habitually looked at every verse from the point of view of trinitarian interpretation. Even if we could finally see that a different interpretation is the more correct one, that in itself does not resolve the deeper question of the kind of faith which gave expression to that interpretation. So, again, the question is not merely what is the correct interpretation of the many texts but, ultimately, which one is the true faith.

In the following chapters the trinitarian interpretation of the texts will be drawn from authoritative trinitarian reference works. It will become evident time and again that the interpretation of the texts is inevitably governed by the beliefs of the writers. In other words, it is not the Scriptures which govern the belief or dogma, but the dogma which governs the interpretation. This is usually done quite unconsciously (as I know from experience) because of the *belief* that it *has to be understood in this way*, that is, we believed that this was the only right way to understand it. There was, of course, never any intention to deceive ourselves or others; it was our faith that determined the way we understood things. Hence, as we have seen, it is at root a matter of faith.



## Chapter 1



# The Explicit Monotheism of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Apostles

## **“The Shema” in Jesus’ teaching: Mark 12:29**

Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.’”

Here Jesus quotes the Shema (from the Hebrew word *shama*, to hear) of Deuteronomy 6:4, which the Jews recited every day. But how exactly are the words “the Lord is one” to be understood?

I shall quote the discussion in the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (TWOT) under  $\text{אֶחָד}$  (*’ehad*, one):

Some scholars have felt that, though ‘one’ is singular (*’ehad* has a plural form, *’ahadim*, e.g. Ex.12:49; cf. Nu.15:16), the usage of the word allows for the doctrine of the Trinity. While it is true that this doctrine is foreshadowed in the OT, the verse concentrates on the fact that there is one God and

that Israel owes its exclusive loyalty to him (Deut 5:9; Deut 6:5). The NT also is strictly monotheistic while at the same time teaching diversity within the unity (Jas 2:19; 1Cor 8:5-6).

The lexical and syntactical difficulties of Deut 6:4 can be seen in the many translations offered for it in the NIV. The option ‘the LORD is our God, the LORD alone’ has in its favor both the broad context of the book and the immediate context. Deuteronomy 6:4 serves as an introduction to motivate Israel to keep the command “to love (the LORD)” (v.5). The notion that the LORD is Israel’s only God suits this command admirably (cf. Song 6:8ff). Moreover, these two notions, the LORD’s unique relation to Israel and Israel’s obligation to love him, are central to the concern of Moses’ addresses in the book (cf. Deut 5:9f.; Deut 7:9; Deut 10:14ff, 20f., Deut 13:6; Deut 30:20; Deut 32:12). Finally Zechariah employs the text with this meaning and applies it universally with reference to the eschaton: ‘The LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be (the only) one, and His name (the only) one’ (Zec 14:9 NASB).

In the first paragraph of TWOT quoted above, “some scholars” (not all, or perhaps not even many) “have felt” (is scholarship a matter of personal feeling?) that the singular “one” “allows for the doctrine of the Trinity” on the basis of “diversity within the unity”. The problem is that there is no mention in the OT of any diversity in Yahweh. So, what exactly is the feeling of the “some scholars” based on?



Then TWOT goes on to make the statement that “it is true that this doctrine (i.e. of the Trinity) is foreshadowed in the OT,” but not a single verse is given as evidence for this statement. The fact is that far from trinitarianism being foreshadowed in the OT, one will be hard put to find so much as a shadow of it! I have done my share of trying to find such shadows! Trinitarians have tried to point to such terms as the Shekinah, the *memra*, etc. which occur frequently in Hebrew biblical literature, but ignore the fact that these are not hypostases or persons in that literature; it is therefore all a matter of reading trinitarianism into those ideas and names (another example of eisegesis).

Trinitarian eisegesis also has to be employed if one is to discover “diversity within the unity” (i.e. a multiplicity of persons within one God) in James 2:19 and 1Corinthians 8:5-6 (which TWOT quotes in the first paragraph) even while admitting that “the NT also is strictly monotheistic”. Exactly how the NT can be “strictly” monotheistic if it teaches a multiplicity of persons in the Godhead, TWOT, not surprisingly, does not attempt to explain. It knows that its readers are primarily trinitarians who will not ask for any explanation anyway!

How exactly can James 2:19 (“you believe God is one” or, NIV “You believe that there is one God,” εἷς ἐστιν ὁ θεός), which evidently points to Deuteronomy 6:4 (κύριος εἷς ἐστιν), be used as evidence for “diversity within unity” in a discussion on Dt.6:4 is somewhat hard to fathom. It is also quite desperate to hope that “one” does not literally mean “one” but

something like a “unity” within which there could be a diversity or multiplicity of persons. The word “unity” in itself implies multiplicity; if there were only one state, one could not speak of the “United States”. Moreover, the problem for trinitarianism is that we would be hard pressed to find even a hint in the OT of any multiplicity of persons within Yahweh Himself, for Dt.6:4 is about Yahweh (“LORD” in small capitals in most English translations); and if there is no such multiplicity, it is pointless to speak of any “unity”.

TWOT also quotes 1 Corinthians 8:6 (ἀλλ’ ἡμῖν εἷς θεὸς ὁ πατήρ, ‘yet for us there is but one God, the Father’) which like James 2:19 echoes Dt.6:4 and, therefore, cannot legitimately be cited as evidence in support of allegedly “teaching diversity within the unity” (TWOT first paragraph), or one would be arguing in a circle.

On the other hand, TWOT does not inform the reader that the message of Dt.6:4 is echoed in other NT verses such as Gal.3:20 (ὁ δὲ θεὸς εἷς ἐστίν, ‘but God is one’), Rom.3:30 (εἵπερ εἷς ὁ θεός, ‘since there is only one God’), and 1Tim.2:5 (εἷς γὰρ θεός, ‘for there is one God’). But these do confirm TWOT’s acknowledgement that the NT is “strictly monotheistic”.

In fairness to TWOT, having said that the trinitarian doctrine is foreshadowed in the OT, it nonetheless puts the doctrine aside with the word “while,” indicating that it has no relevance to the meaning of Dt.6:4, and states instead that “the verse concentrates on the fact that there is one God”. This is developed further in the next paragraph of TWOT where it opts for the translation of Dt.6:4 which reads, “the

LORD is our God, the LORD alone”. That is, “the LORD is one” is understood to mean “the LORD alone”.

“The LORD alone” is surely a correct translation because “the LORD is one” certainly could not mean “one of many” nor, as we have noted, a unity of a multiplicity of beings, since no such “diversity” is implied in the OT. “The LORD alone” fits in properly with the context of this verse where the point is that Yahweh, the LORD, is *the only One* to whom “Israel owes its exclusive loyalty” (TWOT’s first paragraph above where Dt.5:9 and 6:5 are also quoted in support). “The notion that the LORD is Israel’s *only* God suits this command admirably (cf. Song 6:8ff)” (TWOT’s second paragraph, italics added).

TWOT is to be commended for the fact that in this case, in spite of its trinitarian leanings, it sought for an exegesis faithful to the context of Dt.6:4.

But a fundamental error inherent in the whole discussion in TWOT, and in the discussion of the Shema’ by trinitarians generally, is the failure to look at *what Dt.6:4 actually states*: “the LORD our God, the LORD is one”. The trinitarian concern is about whether God could be understood as “one” in the sense of being a multi-person unity. But *in the Shema’ the word “one” qualifies the word “Yahweh” (LORD), not the word “God”*. Does trinitarianism want to argue that Yahweh is a tri-person Being? If so, then Yahweh is not just the Father, but all three persons of the Trinity! Thus all three persons would be manifestations of the one Yahweh (which in theology is

called “Modalism” or “Sabellianism”). Or do trinitarians really want to maintain that Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible is a multi-personal being, contrary to what the Bible teaches? If not, then what is the point of all the lengthy discussion on “unity” and “diversity” in regard to the “one” in Dt.6:4?

### **The fallacious argument that “One” means “unity” rather than “singularity”**

This is an argument often used in trinitarian circles, and one that I had also used in the past, having accepted it without carefully examining it. The argument sounds impressive to the average Christian because it is based on the alleged meaning of the Hebrew word for “one” (אֶחָד, *'ehad*) which makes the argument sound scholarly and, since he knows no Hebrew, it is in any case beyond his capacity to check its validity. As we saw above, TWOT implies this notion of “one” by saying that it “allows for” the idea of the trinitarian “diversity within unity”; but TWOT does not supply any lexical evidence for this statement.

Because of its importance for many trinitarians, I shall here delineate the salient features of this argument. The essence of the argument is this:

In its Hebrew usage the word *'ehad* implies unity not singularity because the “one” contains more than one element within it, for example, “there was evening and there was morning, one day” (Gen.1:5, NASB; but the “one day” is better translated as the “first day,” as in most other versions).

Particularly important for this argument is Genesis 2:24 where Adam and Eve together constitute “one flesh” (but cf. 1Cor.6:16,17 where it is applied to the believer’s spiritual union with the Lord). The tabernacle was made a unified structure by means of clasps holding it together: Exodus 36:18, “And he made fifty clasps of bronze to couple the tent together that it might be a single whole” (lit. “become one”). Another example can be found in Ezekiel’s prophecy of the uniting of the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel into one (Ezek.37:15-22). So the conclusion is drawn that to speak of God as “one” implies that He is a unity of more than one person, and that Jesus Christ, “God the Son,” is included in that unity, according to the trinitarian interpretation of the NT.

That, in essence, is the argument for the Trinity from the word *'ehad*. It seems impressive enough—until we examine the lexical details. This Hebrew word for “one” is used 971 times in the Hebrew Bible, so there is a lot of material with which to evaluate the trinitarian argument. When we do this we will discover in a very short time that the argument is entirely specious; it is another misguided case of special pleading—collecting the evidence that favors one’s own argument and ignoring the strong evidence that contradicts it. We don’t need to look at each one of the 971 occurrences because it will quickly emerge, even after considering a number of these, that the word *'ehad* is *definitely* also used in the sense of “singleness”. One quick way to see this fact for oneself is to look up the word “single” in a translation such as ESV and then look at the Hebrew word that is translated as “single”. It

will be seen that in many cases it is precisely the word *'ehad* which is translated as “single,” without any idea of unity implied. Here are a few examples (only the relevant portion of each verse is quoted):

**Exodus 10:19:** “Not a *single* locust was left in all the country of Egypt.” Or “not *one* locust was left in all the territory of Egypt” (NASB).

**Exodus 25:36:** “the whole of it a *single* piece of hammered work of pure gold”; or, “the whole made from a *single* piece of pure gold” (NJB).

**Deuteronomy 19:15:** “A *single* witness shall not suffice” or “*One* witness is not enough to convict a man” (NIV).

**1Samuel 26:20:** “the king of Israel has come out to seek a *single* flea”; or, “the king of Israel has come out to search for a *single* flea” (NASB).

In none of these examples does the idea of unity appear in the word *'ehad*; a simple singularity is what is expressed. There are many other instances of *'ehad* expressing singularity where the translations do not use the word “single,” e.g. Gen.27:38; 40:5; Ex.14:28; Josh.23:10; Judges 13:2; 1Chr.29:1; 1Ki.4:22 (5:2 in some versions); Isa.34:16, etc. What emerges from this lexical study is that the word *'ehad* can be used with reference to *both* a composite structure (e.g. the tabernacle) and to a simple singularity (e.g. a single witness). The idea of “*oneness*” is *not inherent to the word itself* but is determined by the *context*. So an examination of its use in Hebrew shows that

the word “*’ehad*” is not different from its use in English (or most other languages). Thus, in English “one” can be used in a collective sense as in “one family,” or as simple singularity as in “one individual”. Neither in Hebrew nor in English is either multiplicity or singularity inherent in the word “one”; this is determined by the context or the way in which “one” is used.

Moreover, while “one” can be used in a collective sense as in “one family” or “one company,” it does not of itself imply *unity* within that family or that company. A family can suffer from disharmony, and a company can be torn apart by disunity; so even such collective terms as “one family” or “one company” do not in themselves provide evidence of unity. If even when used in a collective term *’ehad* does not prove unity, then it is all the more evident that the idea of unity is not inherent in the word *’ehad* itself when used alone (as in Deut.6:4), but must be supplied either explicitly or implicitly by other words. For example, in the sentence “they were united as one man,” unity is made explicit by the word “united” and not by the word “one,” which here expresses singleness. The same idea of unity can be expressed implicitly by saying “all the people arose as one man” (Judges 20:8), where the idea of unity is expressed by the multiplicity of “all the people” joined together in the single-mindedness of “one man”. In either case the word “one” expresses singleness, while the idea of unity has to be supplied by the sentence as a whole. It should now be evident that it is entirely illegitimate

to argue that there is some special idea of unity inherent within the Hebrew word *'ehad*.

It is, therefore, completely erroneous to build a theology on the mistaken attribution of unity to the word *'ehad*. To argue for the “Godhead” as a unified entity (composed of more than one person) based on the lexical character of *'ehad* is a false argument. Unfortunately, trinitarianism is built upon this kind of fallacious argumentation. In Deut.6:4 Yahweh is declared to be *'ehad*, and both the immediate context and the general context of the OT show beyond any doubt that Yahweh is “one” in the singular sense of being the only one, the *only* God. In the OT one is hard put to find so much as a shadow of another divine individual who is said to exist in the “substance” (to use a trinitarian term) of the only God—which, of course, would be a contradiction in terms: if there were another person in His “substance,” He would not be the only God. Here again we see the impossibility of trying to extract trinitarianism out of true monotheism.

## **Deuteronomy 6:5 excludes anything other than monotheism**

That Yahweh alone is the one and only God is unequivocally asserted in Deuteronomy 6:4, as we have seen. But what is generally overlooked, especially by trinitarians, is that the command which follows immediately upon that affirmation reinforces it in such a way as to exclude any other option to



the “radical” Biblical monotheism which it uncompromisingly affirms.

**Deuteronomy 6:5** “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”

The thrice repeated “all”, which comprehends the whole human being in his entirety, leaves nothing whatever with which to love another deity. What we have failed to notice is that this command makes trinitarianism functionally impossible, because no matter how we try, we cannot possibly love three distinct persons with our “all” simultaneously. We can indeed love many people, but not in the way required here. That is why most earnest trinitarians (as I also was) ended up loving Jesus in this intense and concentrated way, making him the central object of our devotion and prayer. It was simply not possible in practice to accord the same level of devotion to the Father and the Spirit.

Thus, unwittingly, we lived in direct disobedience to this central command of Scriptural teaching, for Messiah Jesus (no matter on which Christian interpretation of the New Testament) is not “Yahweh your God,” who alone is to be the sole and full object of our devotion. I know of no church or scholar that does, or would, assert that Jesus is identical to Yahweh.

Significantly, all three Synoptic gospels record that Jesus himself taught Deuteronomy 6:5 as being the great and central command of “the Law and the Prophets” (Mt.22:40): Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27. But instead of

loving “Yahweh your God” as he taught his disciples to do, we chose to love Jesus as the central object of our devotion, regardless of his teaching. Should this not cause us to ponder again his words, “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?” (Lk.6:46)

What might the consequences be of such disobedience? Jesus did not leave his hearers in the dark about this: “On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’” (Mt.7:22,23). Are not those who disobey the great central command of Deuteronomy 6:4,5 accurately described as “workers of lawlessness,” i.e. those who disregard God’s command or law, especially the one which Jesus described as the “most important” (Mk.12:29)?

## The Shema

In the previous section we saw that Jesus fully endorsed the Shema. It is particularly interesting how the scribe with whom Jesus was conversing understood what Jesus had said, responding with the words, “You are right, Teacher. *You* have truly said that *he is one*, and *there is no other besides him*.” (Mark 12:32) Notice carefully: “He is one” is equated with “there is no other besides him”; the one statement explains the other. Jesus did not disagree in any way with how the scribe had interpreted what he had said. On the contrary, he

commended the scribe with the words, “You are not far from the kingdom of God” (v.34). Why was the scribe not yet in the kingdom? It was because he had not yet believed that Jesus is the Messiah; without this faith he could not be saved (John 20:31).

The scribe’s words in Mark 12:32 echo Deuteronomy 4:35: “the LORD (Yahweh) is God; *there is no other besides him*”. Compare:

**Isaiah 45:5:** “I am Yahweh, and *there is no other, besides me there is no God.*”

**Isaiah 45:14:** “there is no other, *no god besides him.*”

**Isaiah 45:18:** “I am Yahweh, and *there is no other.*”

**Isaiah 45:21b,22:** “Who told this long ago? Who declared it of old? Was it not I, Yahweh? And *there is no other god besides me*, a righteous God and a Savior; *there is none besides me*. Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and *there is no other.*”

**Isaiah 46:9:** “remember the former things of old; for I am God, and *there is no other*; I am God, and *there is none like me*”.

**Isaiah 46:5:** “To whom will you liken me and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be alike?”

**Isaiah 40:25:** “ ‘To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?’ says the Holy One.”

**Exodus 8:10:** “there is no one like Yahweh our God.”

**Exodus 9:14:** “that there is none like me in all the earth.”

**1 Samuel 2:2:** “There is none holy like Yahweh; *there is none besides you.*”

**Jeremiah 10:6:** “There is none like you, Yahweh; you are great, and your name is great in might.”

This long (though not exhaustive) list of references unequivocally affirms two things: (1) Yahweh is the only true God; there is no other God besides Him; (2) He is incomparable and without any equal. Compare these two affirmations with the *direct contradiction* of them in the trinitarian declaration that there are two other divine persons besides Yahweh, and both are His equals. Daring, indeed, are the trinitarian polytheists of the Gentile church.

Certainly, the strong affirmations in the Hebrew Bible were initially directed against the idolatry which flourished in Israel, and which finally led to their perishing as a nation at the Exile. Yet the Gentile church evidently learned nothing from the disaster which befell Israel. But the Gentile church is without excuse in view of the many monotheistic statements in the NT, including Jesus’ own explicit teaching (e.g. Mk.12:29f; Jn.5:44; 17:3).

Jesus’ dialogue with this scribe about “the first of all the commandments” (Mk.12:28ff) is typically a dialogue of a Jew with a Jew, and is one of the many passages in the gospels which confirm Martin McNamara’s statement that Jesus was

“a Jew of the Jews. His language and mental make-up were theirs.” (*Targum and Testament*, p.167), and no attempt on our part at presenting him as a blond hair blue-eyed Christ, or anything else, can change that fact.

As seen in this dialogue with the scribe, the Shema’ represents the central element of the Jewish faith. In the opening sentence of the article “Shema” in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* we read that the Shema’ is “recited as the confession of the Jewish faith”—it is the confession of their faith. This confession of faith is to be recited daily by every Jew both in the morning and the evening. How central the Shema’ is to the Jewish faith is described in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* in this way:

It was the battle-cry of the priest in calling Israel to arms against an enemy (Deut. xx. 3; Sotah 42a). It is the last word of the dying in his confession of faith. It was on the lips of those who suffered and were tortured for the sake of the Law. R. Akiba patiently endured while his flesh was being torn with iron combs, and died reciting the “Shema’.” He pronounced the last word of the sentence, “Ehad” (one) with his last breath (Ber. 61b). During every persecution and massacre, from the time of the Inquisition to the slaughter of Kishinef, “Shema’ Yisrael” have been the last words on the lips of the dying. “Shema’ Yisrael” is the password by which one Jew recognizes another in every part of the world.

Once the Gentile church moved away from this central element of the Biblical faith—the monotheism of the Hebrew Bible—officially installing in the Nicene Creed of AD 325 a multipersonal God, whereby “God” ceased to be a Person but

was now a “substance” (*ousios*)—a description of God wholly foreign to the Bible—it thereby denied the Shema’, namely, “that *He is one*, and *there is no other besides Him*”. They thereby also denied Jesus’ teaching. Are those who deny their master’s teaching truly his disciples? It is, therefore, perhaps hardly surprising that few Christians today would call themselves Jesus’ disciples.

The Shema’ (Deuteronomy 6:4) declares: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD [Yahweh] our God, the LORD [Yahweh] is one.” (ESV, NIV, NKJV, etc)

On the other hand, trinitarianism declares: “Hear, O Church, The Lord our God, the Lord is three.” (The basic meaning of “Trinity: 1. **three**: a group of three. 2. **threeness**: the condition of existing as three persons or things [13<sup>th</sup> century, Via Old French *trinite*, from Latin *trinitas*, from *trinus* ‘threefold’]” *Encarta Dictionary*, so also *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, etc.)

These are two entirely different, fundamentally incompatible, and mutually exclusive statements. What compatibility can there possibly be between a creed that speaks of a unity of a group of three coequal and coeternal persons in the Godhead, on the one hand, and a declaration, on the other, that *Yahweh* is the one and only God who is without any equal? One must surely have lost one’s capacity of perception and comprehension to insist on any compatibility between these totally different creeds about God.

Why is the Shema’ so relevant to us? First, because it is the fundamental declaration of monotheism, and second, because the true church of God embodies the “Israel of God”

(Gal.6:16); “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (Galatians 3:29); “For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.” (Romans 2:28,29)

## The First Commandment

Exodus 20:3, “You shall have no other gods before {Or besides} me.” (NIV). The “me” who is speaking is introduced in the first two verses:

**Exodus 20:1** And God spoke all these words, saying, <sup>2</sup> “I am the LORD (Yahweh) your God”.

If, according to trinitarians, Jesus is God and the Holy Spirit is God, and both are persons just as the Father (Yahweh) is, then they acknowledge two other persons besides Yahweh as God. This is in clear and direct violation of the First Commandment.

We have seen that Jesus firmly endorsed the *Shema* which embodies all the commandments including, of course, the First Commandment. But Jesus not only affirmed the monotheism of the *Shema* publicly, his monotheism is expressed nowhere more strongly than in his personal prayer to the Father in what is called his “high-priestly prayer” in John 17:

“And this is eternal life, that they know you *the only true God*, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (v.3).

**D**oes Matthew 28:19 contradict Jesus’ monotheism? This text is used as though it were a trinitarian formula. That is how as trinitarians we were taught to think of it, and we hear it frequently used in various important ceremonies, such as at weddings and at funerals, but especially at baptisms, for the verse reads, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”. The words which immediately follow in the next verse, “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (v.20), are not usually given much attention, least of all Jesus’ commitment to monotheism as in the *Shema*. But does Jesus contradict himself in Matthew 28:19? We shall see in the following section that not even trinitarian scholars dare to say so.

### **Matthew 28:19 as a proof-text for trinitarianism**

<sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:19-20)



H.A.W. Meyer in *Critical and Exegetical Handbook of the Gospel of Matthew* discusses this verse at some length. He claims that though the Name is singular, we are “of course” to read the rest of the saying as “and in the name of the Son, and in the name of the Holy Spirit”.

Meyer’s argument here is, however, remarkably hollow. To simply state that “εἰς τὸ ὄνομα (*eis to onoma*, into the Name) is, of course, *to be understood* both before τοῦ υἱοῦ (*tou huiou*, the Son) and ἁγίου πνεύματος (*hagίου pneumatos*, the Holy Spirit)” (italics his; transliteration and translation in parentheses added), is arbitrary. How can an important statement be simply justified by an “of course”? What does an “of course” prove? Nothing whatever. But there is a reason for this “of course”—for it is “of course” *where trinitarianism is concerned*, so this “of course” derives from the trinitarian dogma. Even an exegete like Meyer (notice the word “Exegetical” in the title of his commentaries) here allows dogma to determine his work, which I admit I also did in the past, such is the grip that dogma has upon us.

In an attempt to provide a cross reference in support of his argument, Meyer cites Revelation 14:1 (“his name and the name of his Father”), but he apparently fails to see that this verse is evidence of exactly the *opposite* of the point he wants to make, because “his name” and “the name of his Father” are mentioned *separately* in Revelation 14:1, while only *one* name is mentioned in Matthew 28:19. Likewise, if the Lord had intended all three names to be spoken in his baptismal statement then he would have said explicitly (as in Rev.14:1),

“In the name of the Father, and in the name of the Son, and in the name of the Holy Spirit” (which is done in some churches), or else “In the names of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”.

Meyer’s argument is rejected by *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*: “It is not said into the names of, etc., nor into the name of the Father, and the name of the Son, and the name of the Holy Ghost.—Hence might be deduced the idea of a trinity constituting at the same time a Divine Unity. *But this would probably be reading more into the words than was intended.*” (Italics mine; this portion of the commentary was written by A.B. Bruce, who at the time of writing was professor of apologetics, Free Church College, Glasgow, Scotland). Bruce’s frank comment (which I have italicized) is to be appreciated, since he is also a trinitarian, yet he honestly doubts that this verse can be used as an argument for the idea of the Trinity.

To be fair to Meyer, he did finally admit that this verse should *not* be used in relation to the doctrine of the Trinity. He wrote, “We must beware of making any such *dogmatic* use of the singular as to employ it as an argument either *for* (Basilides, Jerome, Theophylact) or *against* (the Sabellians) the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity.” He also rejects the trinitarian view of the German scholar Gess:

We should be equally on our guard against the view of Gess, who holds that Christ abstained from using the words “*of God* the Father,” etc. [i.e. *God* the Son and *God* the Holy

Spirit], because he considers the designation God to belong to the Son and the Holy Spirit as well.

Why does Meyer reject Gess's interpretation which, after all, is the usual one in trinitarian teaching? It is because as an exegete Meyer recognizes that in Jesus' teaching, "He was never known to claim the name θεός (*theos*, God) either for Himself or for the Holy Spirit" (these quotations are from footnote 1, p.302, all italics are his, bracketed transliteration and translation mine).

This last observation of Meyer's, that "He (Jesus) was never known to claim the name θεός either for Himself or for the Holy Spirit," is an extremely important one for correctly understanding Jesus and his teaching. It was this fact that eventually prevented Meyer from using Matthew 28:19 as an argument for the Trinity.

What then is Meyer's own understanding of the Trinity in connection with Matthew 28:19? His view is that "the Name" (singular) is "intended to indicate the *essential nature* of the Persons or Beings to whom the baptism has reference" (p.303, italics his); but he also says that the "Persons or Beings" are not equal in their positions relative to each other, because the Son is *subordinate* to the Father, and the Spirit is subordinate to both the Father and the Son. So they share the same "essential nature" (what was also called "substance" in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries and later) but they are not equal. This view is expressed in various parts of Meyer's commentaries. In relation to Matthew 28:19 he writes, "The New Testament, i.e. the Subordination, view of the Trinity as constituting the

summary of the Christian creed and confession *lies at the root* of this whole phraseology” (p.302, footnote 1, his italics).

I have quoted Meyer’s work here mainly because, though he belonged to an earlier generation of scholars, his command of New Testament Greek and his scholarship in regard to the Greek New Testament in general have rarely been equalled. His 20-volume exegetical commentaries on the Greek New Testament (originally written in German and translated into English) are available in recent reprinted editions. Many other reference works could be cited and discussed, but this would be beyond the scope of this book. I shall leave that to those who wish to pursue the study of this verse in the many commentaries which are available.

But if, as Prof. A.B. Bruce indicated, more is being read into Matthew 28:19 by trinitarians than was originally intended, what then was the meaning that Jesus intended in teaching that new disciples are to be baptized in the one Name of God? To this question Bruce’s commentary provides no answer. But does the Lord leave us without any answer? Not at all, an answer is available if we listen attentively to his words, because it has to do with the fundamental character of his ministry.

Why then are we baptized into the one Name? The one Name in Scripture, as we should now realize, can only refer to the Name of Yahweh, who Jesus consistently addressed as “Father”. The reason why Jesus mentions only one Name in Matthew 28:19 emerges clearly when we begin to grasp the essence of his teaching. Consider the following passages:

John 5:43: “**I have come in my Father’s name**, and you do not receive me; **if another comes in his own name**, him you will receive.” [NKJV] Here Jesus states categorically that he did not come in his own name.

John 10:25: Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. **The works that I do in my Father’s name**, they bear witness to me.” [NIV] Jesus did not do his works (including miracles, etc) in his own name, but in the Father’s name.

John 12:13: So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying, “Hosanna! **Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord**, even the King of Israel!” (These words occur in all four Gospels)

John 12:28: “**Father, glorify your name.**” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” Jesus’ whole life and ministry had the glorifying of the Father’s name as its objective.

John 17:6: “**I have manifested your name** to the men whom you gave me out of the world; they were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.” [NASB] Jesus’ life and work was to make Yahweh God known (“manifested your name”) to his disciples.

John 17:11: “I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, **protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one.**”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Jesus’ being “one” with the Father is here linked to receiving “the

This NIV translation of 17:11 brings out sharply the striking truth expressed in this verse: that the Father has given His Name, or authority, to Jesus; *he acts in the Father's Name, not his own*. The NASB also brings out the meaning, but some of the other translations do not express it clearly enough, with the result that one might suppose that what is given to Jesus are the disciples rather than the Father's Name. The NIV translation is, however, absolutely correct.<sup>5</sup> "Name" refers here to the Father's authority rather than to a title. It is by the power of that authority that the disciples are to be protected.

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name you gave me". The same is true for his disciples; for how else could they be "protected by the power of your name" unless they were under His Name or bore His name (somewhat like a wife who bears her husband's name)? To receive His Name is to receive His "glory" [for the equivalence of "name" and "glory", cf. e.g. Ps.102:15; Isa.42:8; 43:7; 48:11; 59:19; Jer.13:11; etc.]; Jesus received the Father's glory (Name) and also gave it to his disciples: "The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one" (John 17:22). This is important for our understanding of Matthew 28:19 because to be baptized in, or into, the Name of the Father is to come under His Name as His possession (e.g. 1Pet.2:9), to be united with Him, and thus to be under the protection of "the power of your (His) Name".

<sup>5</sup> Because αὐτοῦς (*autous*) "they" is acc.masc.pl., while ὃ ὄνομα "the name" is dat. neut. sing. corresponding to the dat. neut. sing. of ἧ "which" (i.e. "the name (which—implied but not translated in NIV) you gave me.")

John 17:12 “While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by **that name you gave me.**” [NIV] These words reemphasize what has been said in the previous verse.

John 17:26 “I made known to them **your name**, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

Jesus preached not himself as the center of his message, but faithfully proclaimed the Father to them. He declares that this is what he will continue to do (i.e. after his death and resurrection) so that the Father’s love for Jesus will be poured out into the hearts of his disciples (cf. Rom.5:5).

These many verses demonstrate the fact that Jesus’ entire ministry centered upon doing everything in his Father’s name, not in his own name. He never exalted himself but always the Father. It is for this very reason (“I always do the things which please Him (i.e. the Father),” Jn.8:29) that the Father glorified Jesus, making him the object of faith for salvation, and has given no other name through which we can be saved (Acts 4:12); and the Father is pleased to answer prayers made in Jesus’ name (Jn.15:16; 16:23-26).

Since Jesus came in the Father’s Name as one who was sent by the Father, and since he always functioned in the Father’s Name, not his own, then it must be expected that Jesus commanded that baptism be done in the Father’s Name. Because the Son (and the Spirit, cf. Jn.14:26, etc) did his work in the Father’s Name, that, in the light of Jesus’ teaching, is evidently why only one Name is mentioned in Mt.28:19. That Jesus came in the name of the Lord (i.e. Yahweh) is mentioned

twice in Matthew (21:9; 23:39), and once in each of the other three gospels. It is also in Matthew that Jesus taught his disciples to pray, “Father in heaven, **Your Name** be hallowed” (Mt.6:9).

If it is the case that baptism is first and foremost into the Name of the Father, while the Son and the Spirit are subsumed under that one Name, are we not also baptized into the Son and the Spirit seeing that both are mentioned in this verse? But nowhere else in the NT is it again mentioned that we are “baptized into the Holy Spirit” (*baptisein eis pneumati hagiō*, βαπτίσειν εἰς πνεύματι ἁγίῳ).

The ἐν (*en*, in) in ἐν πνεύματι (*en pneumati*) in 1Cor.12:13 is certainly instrumental in meaning and is best translated as “by the Spirit” or “by means of the Spirit”; this is most likely its meaning also in Mt.3:11 and its several quotations in the NT. It is, however, certainly affirmed that we are “baptized into Christ”: Rom.6:3; Gal.3:27; and that thereby we are united with him in his death and his life.

In the book of Acts there are a few references to baptism “in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5). This certainly does not mean that people were baptized into the name of Jesus alone, blatantly disregarding Jesus’ instruction to baptize in the triadic baptismal declaration as given in Matthew 28:19. Even to this day I know of no church that baptizes people in Jesus’ name alone. In Acts, the formula “in the name” (e.g. Acts 3:6; 9:27,28; 16:18) means acting in or under someone’s authority, in this case, acting in Jesus’ authority to conduct baptism as he commanded his disciples to do. “In the name” is a key term in Acts; and just as Jesus



always lived and worked in the Father’s Name, so his disciples always function in Jesus’ name, by which is understood that they are thereby living under the Father’s name: “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col.3:17); “always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Eph.5:20, NIV).

### **Further thoughts on Matthew 28:19**

Once released from the “bewitchment” (Gal.3:1, “who has bewitched you?”) of trinitarianism, one wonders how one could have thought that this verse, Matthew 28:19, provides support for the Son as “coequal with the Father”. One need only ask: What precedes the statement in this verse (and on which this statement depends, as seen in the word “therefore” which links it to the previous verse)? Verse 18 reads, “All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. *Therefore* go...” “All authority” *given* to the Son by whom? By the Father, of course. How then can he who functions by the authority *conferred* upon him by another be declared to be equal to the one who conferred that authority? If he were equal, he could exercise his own authority and would not depend on conferred authority to function. All this should have been obvious enough. But is it not in the nature of the state of being “bewitched” that one cannot see the obvious?

Since the authority comes from the Father, it is equally obvious that he who functions in that authority functions in the name of that authority by which he is authorized to function, in this case the Father's name. Not surprisingly, therefore, only one name is mentioned, which in view of the preceding verse must be the Name of the Father. This means that the Son and the Spirit function under the Name of the Father, because one name means one person, not three. Jesus made it clear that he did not come in his own name (Jn.5:43; 10:25), and that the Spirit comes forth from the Father (Jn.15:26); hence they function under one Name, that of the Father (Yahweh).

In regard to Mt.28:19, the foregoing point should be conclusive in itself. But we can consider a further point to demonstrate the willful carelessness of trinitarian argumentation. In this connection, consider this quotation from the Mishnah: "Rabbi Judah said, 'Be heedful in study, for an unwitting error in study is accounted wanton transgression'" (Aboth 4:13). H. Danby, the editor of the Mishnah says (in the footnote to this reference) of Rabbi Judah that he is "the most frequently mentioned teacher (some 650 times) in the Mishnah," indicating that his words were considered wise and weighty, and therefore to be heeded.

Trinitarians should have understood that if Matthew 28:19 was to be used in any valid way as evidence for the Trinity, it would first be absolutely necessary to demonstrate that "the Son" in Matthew is a divine name. If not, then even if two of the Persons are divine but it cannot be shown that the third is also divine, obviously no case can be made for a

Trinity. Moreover, only the concise term “the Son” appears in this verse; can it simply be assumed that “Son of God” is meant, not “Son of Man”? This question is important firstly because Jesus never spoke of himself as the Son of God; for though the term “Son of God” occurs 10 times in Matthew, with 9 of these referring to Jesus, yet in no instance is it used by Jesus with reference to himself. There is, therefore, no reason to suppose that he used it of himself in Mt.28:19.

The term the “Son of Man,” which occurs 28 times in Matthew, is the title of choice for Jesus when referring to himself. Is it, therefore, not to be expected that this was what he meant by “the Son” in Matthew 28:19?

But even if we assume that what Jesus meant was the Son of God, contrary to his consistent usage in Matthew, it still remains to prove that “Son of God” is a divine title. Examining the evidence in Matthew, the most that can perhaps be shown is that it is a title of spiritual honor and exaltation, but it simply cannot be shown to be divine in the sense that it refers to God or to a being equal to Him. In the Beatitudes Jesus declared, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God” (Mt.5:9). It is instructive that of the nine instances where the title “son of God” is applied to Jesus, the first two are Satan’s well-known “if you are the Son of God” spoken during the Temptation (4:3,6); the next one is spoken by the two demon-possessed men in 8:29; in three other instances it is used in a derisory way on the lips of his enemies (26:63; 27:40,43). Only twice does it appear on the lips of his

disciples (14:33; 16:16); and, finally, on the lips of the centurion at Jesus' crucifixion (27:54).

Jesus never used this title of himself in this gospel; and out of a total of ten occurrences only two are applied to Jesus by his disciples, which would seem to indicate that this was not the preferred title. In Matthew 14:33 the disciples declare that he is son of God after the stilling of the storm; in Matthew 16:16, Peter confesses him as "the Messiah, the son of the living God" where "son of God" has reference to "the Messiah of God," as is also the case in the parallel passage in Luke 9:20; in Matthew 26:63 the high priest adjured Jesus to declare under oath whether he is "the Messiah, the Son of God," but Jesus still refused to give a direct answer, referring to himself as usual as "the Son of Man" (v.64); twice Jesus is taunted as "the Son of God" while he hung on the cross (27:40,43).

The final instance comes from the mouth of the Roman centurion and some of his soldiers when they experienced the earthquake at the time of Jesus' death and acknowledged him to be the (or, a) Son of God (27:54). What would the Roman soldiers have understood by that term? The parallel passage in Luke provides an answer: "The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, 'Surely this was a righteous man'" (Luke 23:47, NIV).

Thus the conclusion of this survey of the use of "Son of God" in Matthew provides no evidence that it refers to a divine being who stands on the same level with God. Careful consideration of the evidence shows that there is no basis in Matthew 28:19 for claiming it as supporting the doctrine of a divine Trinity.

What the triadic baptismal formula does clearly show is that the Father is the source of our salvation, that the Son is the one through whom salvation was made available to mankind and, thirdly, that the Spirit of Yahweh God is involved in the entire process of our salvation. This analysis is based upon the fundamental principle lucidly stated in 1Corinthians 8:6, “yet for us there is one God, the Father, *from whom are all things* and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, *through whom are all things* and through whom we exist.” It is always *from* the Father, *through* the Son, *by* God’s Spirit. This is the principle seen throughout the NT.

## **2 Corinthians 13:14**

The same is true in 2Corinthians 13:14: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all”. In Pauline usage, “the Lord Jesus Christ” is not a title that places him as equal with God, but is distinct from the “one God” as is seen in 1Corinthians 8:6, where he declares that for us there is only “one God, the Father, and one Lord Jesus Christ” or, in the words of 1Timothy 2:5, “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”.

2Corinthians 13:14 is of no value for trinitarianism since there is no mention of either “Father” or “Son”. The fact that Jesus is mentioned before God shows that both “the grace” and “the love” here have to do with *salvation*, because no one comes to the Father except through Christ (John 14:6); for

God has determined in His eternal wisdom that “there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). In our *experience of salvation*, we come to Christ first, and through him we experience the love of God, and only then do we experience His Spirit working in our lives.

Moreover for Paul there is definitely no question of trinitarianism; his affirmation of the “one God” (Rom.16:27; Rom.3:30; 1Cor.8:6; 8:4; Eph.1:3; 3:14; 4:6; 1Tim.1:17; 2:5, etc) confirms that his faith is firmly rooted in the uncompromising monotheism of the OT.

Isaiah 45 is one of the chapters where this uncompromising monotheism finds expression and where, confronting the idolatry of Israel, Yahweh declares three times in two verses (vv.21,22) that He is the only God there is:

<sup>20</sup> “Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, you survivors of the nations! They have no knowledge who carry about their wooden idols, and keep on praying to a god that cannot save. <sup>21</sup> Declare and present your case; let them take counsel together! Who told this long ago? Who declared it of old? Was it not I, the LORD? And *there is no other god besides me*, a righteous God and a Savior; *there is none besides me.* <sup>22</sup> Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and *there is no other.*”

Paul’s familiarity with this chapter is reflected in his letters: Col.2:3 – Isa.45:3; Rom.9:20 – Isa.45:9; 1Cor.14:25 – Isa. 45:14; Rom.11:33 – Isa.45:15; and Rom.14:11; Phil.2:10-11 – Isa. 45:23.

## The title “the Lord Jesus Christ”

This title is quite certainly from the earliest church teaching. It appears in the very first message preached by Peter after Pentecost in Acts 2:36, “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this *Jesus*, whom you crucified, both *Lord* and *Christ*.” Notice the three words which I have italicized and which together form the title “the Lord Jesus Christ”.

So this title was not Paul’s invention but was among the things which he had “received” (1Co.15:3). From Acts 2:36 we see that it was *God* who made Jesus “Lord”; hence there is no question of any innate or intrinsic equality with God. This being the case, 2 Corinthians 13:14 cannot provide support for the doctrine of the Trinity. What is consistently affirmed in Paul’s letters is that God works for our redemption in and through Christ, and for our sanctification in and through the Spirit.

## Jesus never claimed the name “God” for himself

Earlier we noted Dr. H.A.W. Meyer’s statement: “He (Jesus) was never known to claim the name θεός (*theos*, God) either for Himself or for the Holy Spirit”. No scholar questions the correctness of this assertion, because it accurately reflects the Biblical truth of the matter. This truth is extremely important for correctly understanding Jesus and his teaching.

But if Jesus himself never made any claim to be God, Christians nonetheless insist on calling him “God” even when this is contrary to Jesus’ own attitude and teaching, and

specifically contrary to Jesus' own monotheism. Like the people in John 6 who wanted to make Jesus king by force, Christians make him God by force. This is not what John or the "Johannine community" did.

Discussing the message of Jesus in John's Gospel, the German systematic theologian Karl-Josef Kuschel asks, "Did Jesus give himself out to be God? Did the disciples of Jesus deify their hero?" To these questions he replies:

First, there can be no question that the text indicates that Jesus deified himself here. Jesus did not proclaim himself "God," but rather was understood by the community after Easter, in "the Spirit," as the word of God in person... Secondly, the disciples of Jesus did not claim that Jesus was God either; they, too, did not deify their hero. Nowhere does the Johannine Christ appear as a second God alongside God. In the Gospel of John, too, it is taken for granted that God (*ho theos*) is the Father, and the Son is the one whom he has sent, his revealer: "the Father is greater than I" (14:28). The famous confession of Thomas, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28), must also be understood in this sense; reflecting the language of prayer (!), it clearly refers to the risen Christ and presupposes the sending of the Spirit (20:22). In content it does not represent any change from previous christological statements (in the direction, say, of a deification of Christ or a replacement of God with Christ), but is a confirmation of what is introduced in the prologue and will also be expressed at the end of 1John (5:20), that "God has really become visible in the form of Jesus" (H. Strathmann), that "Jesus is transparent to the Father as his revealer" (Rahner and Thuesing, *A New Christology*, 180. On John



1:1, Thuesing (ibid.) convincingly declares that “Logos” here is not the second mode of subsistence of the Trinity, but God’s word of revelation’.) (K-J Kuschel, *Born Before All Time?* p.387f.)

But not only did Jesus not claim to be God, he was reluctant to even speak of himself as Messiah in public. This fact is clearly evident in the gospels. The German scholar William Wrede called this “the Messianic secret,” and this “secret” is the subject of an abundance of scholarly discussion in books and articles. All that we need to notice here is that if Jesus refused to even acknowledge his messiahship publicly, how much less would he have made any claim to be God.

But Christians, while admitting that Jesus never applied the word “God” to himself, argue that some of his sayings constitute implicit claims to deity. One such statement they cite is: “I and my Father are one”. If we are to be true to Jesus’ attitude of refusal to claim divine status, then clearly any interpretation of Jesus’ words will rule out any implicit or subtle claim to being God. If we could for once drop the habit of reading our own trinitarian interpretation into whatever we read in the gospels, we would see that the “oneness” with God of which Jesus speaks is not exclusively a oneness between him and the Father, but is a *oneness which is to include all believers*; and it is precisely this inclusive oneness of all believers with himself and with God for which Jesus fervently prays in John 17:11,22: “that they may be one, even as we are one” (cf. v.21: “that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us”). If oneness with God

has to do with being God, then all believers would become God through this union!

## **The antichrist: the only person mentioned in the New Testament who claims to be God**

Jesus never claimed to be God; there is only one person mentioned in the New Testament who will make this claim: the antichrist, “the man of lawlessness”.

Why is it that trinitarians insist on saying that Jesus claimed to be God (allegedly by means of the “I am” statements, which we will consider below), when he did not make any such claim? In 2Thessalonians 2:3,4 it is said of “the man of lawlessness, the son of perdition (or, destruction)” (v.3), that he will “proclaim himself to be God”—a man who proclaims himself to be God is the main sign by which those who have been taught will be able to identify him (v.4). Do we really wish to claim that this is in fact what Christ himself did, and that “the son of perdition” will imitate him?

If Christ never did make such a claim, then the falsity of the claim of “the man of lawlessness” will easily be exposed for what it is. But if the multitudes have already accepted the trinitarian claim that Jesus claimed to be God (or even if he did not actually make such a claim, that he was in fact God nonetheless), then it would not be surprising that many will assume that this antichrist, who at the end of the age will claim to be God, may actually be the Christ who has come again (as he said he would), and thus be deceived by the

antichrist. It should be remembered that the antichrist will obviously not proclaim himself as “the man of lawlessness” or “son of perdition” (these are the Biblical descriptions of him) but rather as the true Christ, the savior of the world, the one who brings “peace and security” (1Thess.5:3) to the world.

Now let us look again at 2 Thessalonians 2:4; here is the whole verse: “who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.” Notice that the antichrist opposes every other god, thus exalting himself as the only true object of worship—again something which Jesus not only never did, but on the contrary, already at his temptation declared (Mt.4:10), “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only’ (Deut.6:13, NIV)”. How utterly different from the antichrist!

Notice too that “he takes his seat in the temple of God” (v.4) which, of course, follows from his claiming to be God; for if he is God then where else would his seat be but in the temple of God? From all this we can easily see that if Christ claimed to be God, and the antichrist was doing the same thing as he did, then the chief identifying mark of the antichrist is lost. How, then, is the antichrist to be identified when he comes, especially when his coming will be accompanied by dazzling “signs and wonders”? 2 Thessalonians 2:9: “The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders”.

## **The enemies of Jesus accuse him of claiming equality with God**

There are two main passages in the gospels, both in John, which record that Jesus' enemies charged him with indirectly claiming to be equal with God. For the convenience of the reader both texts are here quoted in full. Both are "conflict passages" in which the hostility of Jesus' enemies finds expression in making that serious allegation that Jesus implied having equality with God. That was, of course, a charge amounting to his having committed blasphemy, which under Jewish Law was punishable by death. Such was their hostility against him for not observing the Law to their satisfaction, notably the important Sabbath law, that they were looking for a way to put him to death.

This is the context of the accusation of blasphemy brought against him. We have already noted repeatedly that Jesus never claimed equality with God. On the contrary, he strongly emphasized his total dependence upon God and submission to Him. No gospel brings out his teaching on this matter more strongly than John's Gospel. So it should be obvious to any unprejudiced reader of John's Gospel that the charge of making himself equal with God and, therefore, of blasphemy was a patently *false* charge designed to secure his death as John 5 (quoted below) states plainly, and that his enemies "were seeking all the more to kill him" (v.18). Yet the strangest thing of all, from the perspective of Biblical exegesis, is that trinitarians regard this false charge as true! After all, this is what the trinitarian dogma requires. It does not overly

concern them whether Jesus himself accepts the accusation as true. His answer to the accusation is plain enough for all to see.

John 5: <sup>15</sup> The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. <sup>16</sup> And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. <sup>17</sup> But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.” <sup>18</sup> This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, *making himself equal with God*. <sup>19</sup> So (*oun*, ‘therefore’) Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.”

What then is Jesus’ response to the charge brought against him that he was “making himself equal with God” (v.18)? Only blindness prevents us from seeing that his reply is a flat rejection of the charge of equality for, on the contrary, “the Son can do *nothing* of his own accord”; he follows the Father absolutely, for he does “*only*” “whatever the Father does”. How could a stronger rejection of the charge of equality have been made than this?

Relating to God as Father was indeed a central element in Jesus’ life and teaching. Early in his ministry he taught his disciples to speak to God as “Father,” teaching them to pray, “Our Father in heaven”. Nor was this something entirely unique to Jesus as though it was an unknown form of address

to God; it occurs in the OT: Isaiah 64:8, “But now, O LORD (Yahweh), you are **our Father**; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand,” and “I am a father to Israel,” Jer.31:9; cf. Mal.1:6. And Israel is repeatedly referred to as God’s “son” (Ex.4:22,23; Dt.14:1 “sons” in both Hebrew and Greek texts; so also Isa.1:2).

If God is “our Father” collectively, then He is also “my Father” individually; for how could He be “our Father” if He is not “my Father”? So Jesus’ speaking of God as “his Father” should not have been any real issue for the Jews, other than that they may have considered Jesus as over-emphasizing this form of addressing God in a way that they felt was overly intimate and therefore irreverent. But none of this holds up as an accusation of claiming equality with God and, therefore, of blasphemy. All this makes it very obvious that the whole episode is one in which the leaders of the nation were trying by all conceivable means to trump up some false charge against Jesus so that they could have him killed, and thus rid themselves of one they regarded as a great troublemaker, a thorn in their side.

The other incident in which Jesus is accused of claiming equality with God is recorded in the following passage:

John 10 (ESV)

<sup>27</sup> My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

<sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

<sup>29</sup> My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.

<sup>30</sup> I and the Father are one.”

<sup>31</sup> The Jews picked up stones again to stone him.

<sup>32</sup> Jesus answered them, “I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?”

<sup>33</sup> The Jews answered him, “It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because *you, being a man, make yourself God.*”

<sup>34</sup> Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your Law, ‘I said, you are gods’? [Ps.82:6]

<sup>35</sup> If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken—

<sup>36</sup> do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’?

<sup>37</sup> If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me;

<sup>38</sup> but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that *the Father is in me and I am in the Father.*”

This second attempt to pin the charge of blasphemy on Jesus arises from their failure to understand Jesus’ words “I and the Father are one” (v.30). Like the trinitarians, they somehow managed to read a claim to equality with God in these words, even though Jesus had said immediately before these words that “My Father is greater than *all*” (v.29). Do we imagine that “all” excludes Jesus himself? Is the meaning not

plain enough: Absolutely no one is greater than my Father? Or in Paul's words, the Father is "God over *all*, blessed forever" (Rom.9:5). By saying that "the Father," not the Son, "is greater than all," Jesus had already precluded any claim to equality. He put this matter beyond dispute when he declared, "the Father is greater than I" (Jn.14:28).

Notice that the whole issue in this section of John 10 revolves around blasphemy: "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God" (v.33); and again, "You are blaspheming" (v.36), all with the publicly stated intention of stoning him to death. Jesus rejected their charge of blasphemy precisely because, contrary to their allegations, he had not made any claim to equality with God.

Jesus explains what he means by "I and the Father are one" by the words, "that you may know and understand that *the Father is in me and I am in the Father*" (v.38). But this explanation probably did not illuminate them much, at least not until they had heard his teaching in John 15:1ff which has to do with a union of life with the Father which *includes* the disciples.

Jesus also explains that by the words "I am the Son of God" he is referring to himself as one "whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world" (v.36) and this, as he points out, cannot constitute a charge of blasphemy. For in the history of Israel there have been others, most notably Moses, who have also been consecrated and sent by God to His people. Yet the Law even speaks of lesser leaders than Moses as "gods" in that they acted as God's representatives under the authority of His



word. Jesus thereby shows clearly and pointedly that their accusation is without any basis whatever.

### **“Son of God”**

The term “son of God” is nothing new to the Jews. It is found in the OT, where Israel is called God’s “son” (Ex.4:22,23; Isa.1:2; Jer.31:9; Hos.11:1, cf. Mt.2:15). So what is this trumped up charge all about? Quite simply this: Jesus was accused of not using the term “son of God” in the conventional OT sense, but as a claim to equality with God—a claim which is blasphemous and punishable by death according to the Law (Jn.19:7). Remarkably, trinitarianism agrees with Jesus’ enemies that he did make this claim! It was on this false charge that Jesus was condemned to death by crucifixion (Jn.19:6, also vv.15ff; Mk.14:64; Mt.26:65, 66). But according to trinitarianism the charge against Jesus of claiming equality with God was true; if so, then he was rightly crucified according to Jewish Law, because Jesus’ claim would have left the Sanhedrin (the highest legal body in Israel) without any option but to sentence Jesus to death.

Yet the gospel accounts of Jesus’ trial make it very clear that Jesus was condemned and executed on the basis of *false* accusations made by *false* witnesses. The gospels nowhere affirm that the Sanhedrin did the right thing according to the Law. Matthew states the matter with perfect clarity:

<sup>59</sup> “The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for *false* evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. <sup>60</sup> But they did not find any, though many *false* witnesses came forward.” (Mt.26:59,60, NIV)

It should surely be obvious to any perceptive person that if Jesus had indeed claimed equality with God, then what need would there have been to look for false evidence and false witnesses? But even the false witnesses failed to concoct a convincing case as Matthew 26:60 pointedly describes. Finally, as the account shows, frustrated at being unable to find a valid charge against Jesus, they charged him with blasphemy for claiming to be the Messiah—which is not a charge punishable by death under the Law! Here is the scene as described in Matthew’s gospel (ch.26):

<sup>62</sup> And the high priest stood up and said, “Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?” <sup>63</sup> But Jesus remained silent. And the high priest said to him, “I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.” <sup>64</sup> Jesus said to him, “You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.” <sup>65</sup> Then the high priest tore his robes and said, “He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy. <sup>66</sup> What is your judgment?” They answered, “He deserves death.” (ESV)

Notice that Jesus was asked to declare under oath whether or not he is “the Christ” i.e. the Messiah, the Son of God (this was another title of the Messiah, as will be discussed more fully below). Why did the high priest not simply ask him whether he claimed to be equal with God, which was what he had been publicly accused of? The answer is simply, as we have seen, that they could not pin this charge on Jesus even by means of false witnesses; so it was clear that he had never made such a claim, and would have again denied it if questioned.

Remarkably, even in regard to the question of whether he is the Messiah, Jesus declined to give a direct answer, replying only with “*You* have said so,” i.e. those are your words, not mine. And, turning away from the title “the Son of God” he refers instead to himself by his preferred title “the Son of Man” (v.64) by which he points to the messianic prophecy in Daniel 7:13: “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man”. How exactly this could constitute blasphemy under Jewish Law is not clear at all, and there are volumes of scholarly discussion on the whole subject of the trial of Jesus for those who wish to pursue this matter. But what is clear is that the Sanhedrin was determined to have Jesus executed with or without the required evidence.

All that matters for our purpose is to show from the gospel accounts that the charges brought against Jesus of having claimed to be equal with God could not be sustained even in a court which was fiercely hostile to him, namely, the

Sanhedrin. It becomes incomprehensible, in the light of the gospel accounts, how trinitarians can disregard the evidence of the gospels and insist that Jesus did claim to be equal with God.

Certainly Jesus did claim a special intimacy with God as his Father because God's Logos was incarnate in him (Jn. 1:14); but it was his aim, both through his life and his death, to draw his disciples into a similar intimacy (or oneness) with the Father, so that they too would know Him as Father and live in a Father-son relationship with Him; this is a central element of Jesus' teaching in the Gospel of John.

Jesus' ministry was intended to bring the disciples ("those whom the Father has given me") into a similar relationship: "the glory which you gave me [what other glory than that of sonship?] I have given them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one," Jn.17:22,23; cf.14:20). The description of this spiritually profound relationship in terms of being one with God (which he also brings his disciples into) was used to frame the charge that he was making himself equal with God.

## **The meaning of "Son of God" as applied to Jesus in the NT**

We have seen that Jesus never claimed to be God in any of the gospels, and that the word "God" is not used with reference to him elsewhere in the NT (except in some modern English translations where, in two or three verses, a

translation is given in which “God” is made to refer to Jesus; we shall examine these translations later on). We have also noted that the trinitarian term “God the Son” is nowhere to be found in the Bible, so where does this term come from? The short answer is that it is, of course, a trinitarian invention. The term gains some currency by the fact that it looks deceptively like the title “the son of God” which does appear in the NT; in the minds of those who are not exceptionally alert, the two terms could easily be confused with one another. “God the son” inverts “the son of God” while deleting the “of”. These significant changes may appear to be minor, especially in languages (such as Chinese) where the syntax requires the inversion of the word order in the process of translation. This is possible also in English if “the son of God” is translated as “God’s son” which would be similar, for example, to how it would be translated into Chinese. But similar though “God’s son” is to “God the son,” their meanings are totally different where the Scriptures are concerned. It is precisely this distinction that is easily (especially in the case of the average Christian) overlooked, resulting in serious error.

What is the meaning of “Son of God” in the NT? A look at the Biblical evidence shows that this was a title of the Messiah, the hoped-for King of Israel, who would also be “the savior of the world” (Jn.4:42; 1Jn.4:14). It has nothing whatever to do with the trinitarian idea of a divine being called “God the Son”. The Biblical title derives from the important Messianic psalm, Psalm 2, where (in verse 7)

Yahweh addresses the Davidic king with the words, “You are my son, today (the day of anointing and coronation) I have begotten you” (i.e. I have entered with you into a relationship like that of Father and son; and from then on King Messiah will reign on earth in Yahweh’s Name to subdue the enemies of righteousness, cf. Ps.2:9; 110:1; 1Cor.15:25-28). The Messianic phrase “today I have begotten you” indicates the origin of the phrase “the only begotten son” (Jn.1:18; 3:16 KJV, but not all English translations) which trinitarians often quote without any regard for its origin, imposing their own dogmatic meaning on it. The fact is that Psalm 2:7 is repeatedly applied to Jesus in the New Testament:

**Acts 13:33** “this he (God) has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you.’”

What is interesting and significant about this verse is that God’s raising Jesus from the dead is seen as the point at which Psalm 2:7 is fulfilled, the point at which he is “begotten” as “son,” when he is anointed and crowned as king.

Interestingly, the same verse is applied to Jesus in Hebrews 5:5 in connection with his being appointed as *high priest* so that, like Melchizedek (Heb.7:1), he is both king and priest:

**Hebrews 5:5** So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”.

From all this it is clear that “the Son of God” is a title of the Messiah in the Bible, and not to be confused with the trinitarian “God the Son”. A few more references should suffice to establish this fact:

**John 1:34** “I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.”

What did John the Baptizer mean by ‘the Son of God’? From verse 41 (“we have found the Messiah’, which means Christ”) it is perfectly clear who his disciples understood him to be speaking about.

**John 1:49** Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”

These words show that for Nathanael (and for Jews generally) ‘the Son of God’ meant ‘the King of Israel,’ another title of the Messiah.

The connection between the promised and expected Davidic King of Israel, the Messiah, and the title “Son of God” is also clearly seen in the following passage in Matthew 27:

<sup>41</sup> So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, <sup>42</sup> “He saved others; he cannot save himself. *He is the King of Israel*; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. <sup>43</sup> He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For *he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’*”

It must be remembered that this is a passage in Matthew, not in John, so ‘the Son of God’ has none of the connotations that it is supposed to have in John, and there is certainly no stated claim to equality with God in Matthew. We must therefore ask what the chief priests and scholars of the Law (‘scribes’) understood by the term (or thought Jesus meant by it), and why did they deliberately link it with ‘the King of Israel,’ even though in mockery? The answer is again: both ‘Son of God’ and ‘King of Israel’ are messianic titles. But they rejected Jesus as the Messiah of Israel; they saw him as a false Messiah and, as such, they considered him extremely dangerous politically, as his tumultuous welcome by the multitudes at his ‘Triumphal Entry’ demonstrated. The Romans, too, were always in fear of political uprisings, so the Jewish leaders played on these Roman fears, urging them to have Jesus crucified.

**Mark 15:32** “Let the Christ (the Messiah), the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe.’ Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.”

## **Son of God, the Messianic king of Israel**

That the title “the son of God” was a well-known title of the Messiah is seen from the following verses which show that the two titles “Christ” (or “Messiah”) and “son of God” were frequently used together: Mt.16:16; 26:63; Mark 1:1 (“son of God” not found in two important ancient Greek texts, uncials); Lk.4:41; Jn.11:27; 20:31; Rom.1:4; 1Cor.1:9; 2Cor.



1:19; Gal.2:20; Eph. 4:13; 1 John 5:20; 2 John 1:3,9—a total of 14 instances (or 13 if Mk.1:1 is omitted).

From these verses, and especially those in the gospels where “Christ” and “son of God” are spoken together as two parts of the one title, it should now be absolutely clear that the Messiah was called “son of God” based upon the words “you are my son” in Psalm 2:7 addressed to the Davidic king. On this verse Robert Alter, Professor of Hebrew and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Berkeley, wrote recently, “it was a commonplace in the ancient Near East, readily adopted by the Israelites, to imagine the king as God’s son” (*The Book of Psalms, A Translation with Commentary*, Norton, 2007; on Psalm 2 in relation to the title “the son of God” see the fuller discussion in Appendix 1 of the present book).

In order to consider the meaning of the title “son of God” even more fully, I quote from James Stalker’s article in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (ISBE):

In Scripture the title [son of God] is bestowed on a variety of persons for a variety of reasons. **First**, it is applied to angels, as when in Job 2:1 it is said that “the sons of God came to present themselves before Yahweh”; they may be so called because they are the creatures of God’s hands or because, as spiritual beings, they resemble God, who is a spirit. **Secondly**, in Lk 3:38 it is applied to the first man; and from the parable of the Prodigal Son it may be argued that it is applicable to all men. **Thirdly**, it is applied to the Hebrew nation, as when, in Ex 4:22, Yahweh says to Pharaoh, “Israel is my son, my first-born,” the reason being that Israel was the object of

Yahweh's special love and gracious choice. **Fourthly**, it is applied to the kings of Israel, as representatives of the chosen nation. Thus, in 2 Sam 7:14, Yahweh says of Solomon, "I will be his father, and he shall be my son"; and, in Ps 2:7, the coronation of a king is announced in an oracle from heaven, which says, "Thou art my son; this day have I begotten thee." Finally, in the New Testament, the title is applied to all saints, as in Jn 1:12, "But as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name." *When the title has such a range of application, it is obvious that the Divinity of Christ cannot be inferred from the mere fact that it is applied to Him.* (Bold lettering added for clarity; italics mine)

As a trinitarian, however, Stalker would hardly be willing to settle for what is stated in the last sentence of this passage. Indeed, as might be expected, he would not conclude his article until he could find some way to turn "son of God" into "God the Son". To accomplish this, a lot of specious argumentation follows.

In the paragraph immediately following the one quoted above, Stalker writes, apparently with some measure of disagreement, "it is natural to assume that its use in application to Jesus is derived from one or other of its [four] Old Testament uses; and the one almost universally fixed upon by modern scholarship is that from which it was derived is the fourth mentioned above—that to the Jewish kings." But is Stalker prepared to take the (for him impossible) position that the title "son of God" as applied to Jesus is not rooted in the

OT? In his haste to get on with arguing for the deity of Christ he does not tell us!

As an example of Stalker's specious argumentation I shall only cite the following:

When, at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus evoked from the Twelve their great confession, this is given by two of the synoptists in the simple form, 'Thou art the Christ' (Mk 8:29; Lk 9:20); but Mt adds, 'the Son of the living God' (Mt 16:16). It is frequently said that Hebrew parallelism compels us to regard these words as a mere equivalent for 'Messiah.' But this is not the nature of parallelism, which generally includes in the second of the parallel terms something in excess of what is expressed in the first; it would be quite in accordance with the nature of parallelism if the second term supplied the reason for the first. That is to say, Jesus was the Messiah because He was the Son of God.

Stalker's argumentation takes two steps. First he makes the statement, "It is frequently said that Hebrew parallelism compels us to regard these words as a mere equivalent for 'Messiah.'" He accepts this parallelism, but it does not take him far enough. He wants to say that "Son of God" means more than "Messiah," indeed, very much more. How much more? Clearly, he wants to say that it means "God the Son"; and though he does not actually use this trinitarian term, he does repeatedly speak of the "deity" of Christ. So how to make "Son of God" mean that much more than "Messiah (Christ)"? That is his next step.

Stalker's second step is to claim quite dogmatically that Hebrew parallelism "generally includes in the second of the parallel terms something in excess of what is expressed in the first," but he fails to furnish the reader with even one Biblical reference to substantiate this statement. This after all is an "encyclopedia," so it should not be too much to expect a supporting reference.

One is obliged to question the soundness of Stalker's understanding of "the nature of (Hebrew) parallelism". First of all, two titles spoken one after the other (as in Matthew 16:16) does not of itself constitute "parallelism," Hebrew or otherwise. Parallelism is a feature of Hebrew poetry, and it takes more than the placing of two titles in sequence to form poetic parallelism. Stalker evidently never consulted a standard work on the subject, such as that by E.W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech used in the Bible* (pp.349-362), which could have saved him from misconceptions about Biblical parallelisms. But even without having to go through extensive examples of OT parallelism, had Stalker only checked the NT evidence of Jesus' titles when used in sequence, he would have seen that there is no "second term" which is "in excess" of the "first term" to talk about: In the Pauline letters, for example, the title "son of God" is mentioned *before* the title "Messiah (Christ)". See for example, 2Corinthians 1:19 (cf. 1Cor.1:9; Eph. 4:13), "the Son of God, Jesus Christ (Messiah)"; here "Jesus the Messiah" is the "second term" which, according to Stalker, would express "something in excess of what is expressed in the first," and which would therefore (according to his argument) be the opposite of Mt.16:16! That is to say,

on the basis of Stalker’s argument, Jesus the Messiah means something *more* than his being “the Son of God”!

Perhaps we may be pardoned for admitting to becoming quite tired of this kind of ludicrously baseless argumentation which, unfortunately, is quite typical of trinitarianism. I have included it here as an example of how trinitarians all too often argue their case.

What Stalker could not deny, however, is that there is a definite equivalence in Scripture between the titles “Son of God” and “the Messiah (Christ)”. But he sought by all means to make “son of God” mean something more than “Messiah,” perhaps in part because of a somewhat inadequate understanding of what is involved in the title “Messiah” in Scripture, but even more because he wanted to try somehow (in this case, by incorrect use of parallelism) to make “son of God” mean “God the son” in accordance with trinitarian dogma. He should have seen, however, that even if it were true that the second term in a parallelism expresses “more” (than what is in the first term) that “more” could never turn “the son of God” into “God the son”. But, sadly, exegesis is made subservient to dogma and pressed into speaking the language of trinitarianism. The end is thus made to justify the means.

Another scholar, James Crichton, in his article on “Messiah” in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* wrote,

It cannot be doubted that the ‘Son of God’ was used as a Messianic title by the Jews in the time of our Lord. The high priest in presence of the Sanhedrin recognized it as such (Mt 26:63). It was applied also in its official sense to Jesus by His disciples: John the Baptist (Jn 1:34), Nathaniel (Jn 1:49), Mary (Jn 11:27), Peter (Mt 16:16, though not in parallel). This Messianic use was based on Ps 2:7; compare 2 Sam 7:14.

Crichton, like Stalker, was a trinitarian (otherwise his article would not have been printed in ISBE) and, as might be expected, maintains that Jesus is “coequal with the Father,” but he sees that the NT evidence compels the acknowledgment that “the son of God” is a Messianic title.

To conclude and summarize this section, I quote the German systematic theologian Dr. Karl-Joseph Kuschel’s conclusion of his discussion concerning the relationship between the title “son of God” and the idea of a pre-existent or divine Christ. Kuschel writes:

Now what does all this mean for the question of the relationship between being Son of God and the pre-existence of Christ? Here, too, we can establish a consensus beyond the confessional [denominational] frontiers.

1. In keeping with its Jewish origin (the royal ideology) the title “Son of God” was never associated with the heavenly existence before time or with divinity.
2. Jesus did not speak of himself as Son of God, nor did he say anything about a pre-existent sonship. Granted, the earliest Aramaic-speaking post-Easter community confessed

Jesus as Son of God, but in line with the Old Testament it did not include any statements about pre-existence in this confession.

3. The basic foundation of post-Easter talk of Jesus as Son of God does not lie in Jesus' 'divine nature,' in a pre-existent divine Sonship, but in the praxis and preaching of the earthly Jesus himself: in his unique relationship to God, whom in an unprecedentedly familiar way he was accustomed to address as 'Abba'.

Last, but not least, as we heard, in Israel the title son of God referred for the most part to the unique dignity and power of the supreme political ruler.”

*(Born Before All Time?, p.238)*

Finally, it is worth noting that while the Qur'an does speak of Jesus (Isa) as Messiah (Masih), it absolutely rejects the NT Messianic title "son of God". The reason for this is easy to see from these ISBE articles in which every attempt is made to turn "son of God" into "God the Son". The sad result of this is that Muslims reject the NT as a whole, and in so doing reject its message of salvation in the Messiah (Christ). If they can be assured that "the son of God" in the NT is a title of Messiah (Masih) and does not mean "God the Son," they would have no reason to reject it. Also, we should again be reminded that *nowhere in the NT is belief in the deity of Christ required for salvation*; this was something imposed by Christian dogma, not by the word of God. By insisting on

Jesus being “God the Son,” Christians have closed the door for the salvation of Muslims through faith in Christ, as the Messiah or “son of God” in its proper Messianic sense (Jn.20:31). Will Christians be able to say to the Muslims on that Day, “I am innocent of the blood of all of you” (Acts 20:26)?

## **The Synoptic Gospels**

The observant reader of the NT will inevitably notice that there is virtually nothing in the first three gospels (called the “Synoptic Gospels” because they appear to share the same point of view of the person and work of Jesus) which is useful to trinitarianism. It should be of serious concern to trinitarians that three of the four gospels cannot be drawn upon to support the argument for the deity of Christ central to their dogma. Many of us noticed this fact as trinitarians, and though somewhat puzzled by it, and though unable to come up with any satisfactory answer to the question as to why something so important (to us) as Christ’s deity is simply ignored by the Synoptics, we could do little else but shrug off the matter. So John’s Gospel became the beloved gospel for trinitarians, because in it we thought we could quarry for proof texts to our hearts’ content. It is for this reason that we shall concentrate a large part of our study on John’s Gospel.

We shall see that while it is true that John’s perspective is different from that of the Synoptics, there is in essence no difference in regard to the person of Jesus and his work.



Regarding the matter of perspective, Jesus' teaching in the Synoptics centers on "the Kingdom (or Kingship) of Heaven" (Matthew) or "the Kingdom (Kingship) of God" (Luke); evidently Matthew's Gospel had a Jewish audience in mind, so "heaven" was used as a reverential circumlocution for "God," namely, Yahweh. In John, Jesus' teaching reveals his own "unique relationship to God" (to use Dr. Kuschel's words) and how through him we, too, enter into a life-receiving relationship with God. But this truth appears also in one place in Matthew: "All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Mt.11:27; 28:18; cf. Jn.3:35; 5:21-27; 13:3; 17:2; also Jn.10:15; 14:9).

Matthew 11:27 has been described as "a bolt out of the Johannine blue". Here we have Jesus' usual way of referring to God as "my Father" so familiar to us from John's Gospel. Here, too, is the profound intimacy of mutual knowing which speaking of God as "Father" (or Abba) indicates. For unless there is mutual knowing, there is no intimacy to speak of. When Jesus reveals the Father to us, we are thereby drawn into that mutual knowing that allows us to call God "our Father" (as Jesus taught his disciples to do, Mt.6:9) not merely in a ceremonial sense, but in the intimacy of a Father-child relationship.

In any case, this verse in Matthew serves to confirm that there is no essential difference between the Synoptics and John in regard to the matter of who Jesus is.

## The “I am” sayings—Did Jesus claim to be God?

As trinitarians we used the “I am” sayings in John’s Gospel as a trump card to “prove” the deity of Christ, namely, that Jesus is God. We failed pathetically to see that this is one of the most muddleheaded arguments that could be advanced. Why? Because there are only two possible ways to understand these “I am” saying of Jesus:

(1) Either Jesus is using the term in the *ordinary* way in which it is used in daily speech (e.g. “*I am* a student,” “*I am* from Scotland,” etc) and is thus making some statement about himself as the Messiah, the Savior, or

(2) Jesus is using the “I am” in the *special* sense of referring to Exodus 3:14 where it appears as a title of Yahweh; and if this is the case, then either Jesus is claiming to be Yahweh, or Yahweh is speaking through him.

Whether “I am” is understood as (1) or (2), neither of these alternatives provides any proof of Jesus being God (i.e. God the Son) because, as used in (1), the ordinary way, he speaks as “the man Christ Jesus,” and as used in (2), the special reference is to Yahweh, God the Father. Therefore, Jesus’ “I am” sayings provide absolutely no evidence whatever of Jesus’ deity as God the Son in the trinitarian scheme of things.

We shall now consider both (1) and (2) more closely in the light of the gospel evidence. But we shall also have to bear in mind the possibility that Jesus used “I am” on some occasions in its ordinary or regular sense and at other times in its special sense.

## How to correctly understand Jesus' use of "I am"?

(1) The "I am" as used in its ordinary meaning in daily speech, in which Jesus speaks as a true human being, but specifically as "the Christ," which means "the Messiah."

To put the matter into its proper context we must take into account the many verses where Jesus as "Son" expresses his total dependence upon, and total submission to, the Father (John 3:35; 5:22,27,36; 6:39; 12:49; 13:3; 17:2,7,8, etc). In all these verses the word *didōmi* ('give') is used to express the fact that everything that the Son has, he *received* from the Father who *gave* him these things.

"I am" (*egō eimi*, present tense) occurs 24 times in John, of which 23 times are in Jesus' words and once in the words of the blind man whom Jesus healed (Jn.9:9). So it is not actually a matter of 7 "I am"s (which most Christians know about) but 23 that have reference to Jesus. Statistically, the frequency of "I am" shows that it belongs to the special vocabulary of John's Gospel, as becomes evident from a comparison with the rest of the NT: Matthew has 5 occurrences; Mark: 3; Luke: 4; Acts: 7; Revelation: 5: added together = 24, the same number as in John. In other words, half of all the occurrences of *egō eimi* in the New Testament are in John.

What then is the purpose of these many "I am"s in John? The answer is surely in the stated purpose of the Gospel, "these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (Jn. 20:31). The third person form of "I am" is "he is". So the whole purpose is to proclaim that "he is," that is, he

(Jesus) is the Christ, the Son of God. But when Jesus speaks, the “he is” obviously has to be in the form “I am”.

The word “Christ” (Greek for “Messiah”) occurs 18 times in John, but only once does it come forth from Jesus’ own lips, and that was in his prayer to the Father in John 17:3. When asked in John 10:24 to state plainly whether he is the Christ, he replied, “I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father’s name speak for me” (v.25, NIV). He did tell them, but not by using the title “Christ”; he let the miracles “speak for me”. Moreover, instead of the title “Christ” he described the ministry of the Christ, the Messiah, in metaphorical terms such as “the shepherd of the sheep,” “light of the world,” etc, each beginning with “I am”. But what is clear is that he did acknowledge that he is the Christ, though he generally declined to do so explicitly.

“If you do not believe that I am he (*egō eimi*), you will die in your sins” (Jn.8:24). The reason it is necessary to believe that *he is* the promised Messiah/ Christ is that “by believing you may have life in his name” (Jn:20:31)—it is essential for salvation. But *believing that Jesus is God is nowhere in the New Testament a requirement for salvation*. Trinitarianism has imposed upon the church a requirement for salvation which is without any warrant in the Word of God, and this is a very serious matter.

In the following passage in John 8 we can see the characteristic way in which Jesus uses “I am” (*egō eimi*), usually translated as “I am he” as required by English linguistic convention:

<sup>24</sup> “I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he (*egō eimi*), you will die in your sins.” <sup>25</sup> So they said to him, “Who are you?” Jesus said to them, “Just what I have been telling you from the beginning.” <sup>26</sup> I have much to say about you and much to judge, but he who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him.” <sup>27</sup> They did not understand that he had been speaking to them about the Father. <sup>28</sup> So Jesus said to them, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he (*egō eimi*), and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me.”

Notice carefully that Jesus tells the people that they must believe that “I am (he)” if they do not want to die in their sins. So, as we would expect, they immediately ask him, “Who are you?” (v.25) but, again, to this question he refuses to give an explicit or direct answer, that is, he refuses to say “I am the Messiah” or “I am the Son of God”. He merely states “I declare to the world what I have heard from Him” (v.26, referring to “the Father,” v.27 ). Here, as elsewhere in John, Jesus stresses his total subordination to the Father, to the extent that he says nothing but what the Father gives him to say (v.28).

Yet in verse 28 Jesus again refers to himself as “I am (he),” but this time speaking of himself as “the Son of Man”. There are no capitals in the Greek; these are supplied by the translators, obviously with the intention that the term be understood as a messianic title. “Son of man” is by far Jesus’ preferred title for himself in all the four gospels (altogether 74

times: Mt: 27 times; Mk:14; Lk:22; Jn:11). Both in Aramaic and in Hebrew (also modern Hebrew) “son of man” is the ordinary term for “man,” any man (cf. Eph.3:5). This is something unknown to most Christians, so they assume that it is necessarily a special title of some kind, in this case, a messianic title. In fact, it would be quite correct linguistically to translate the relevant words in Jn.8:28 as “When you have lifted up the Man (or, man), then you will know that I am (he) (*egō eimi*)”. Whether or not “the son of man” is a messianic title is discussed in an enormous number of books and articles, but it is not directly relevant to this study. All we need to take note of here is that Jesus clearly wanted his hearers (most of whom, like himself, spoke Aramaic as their mother tongue, as we shall see later) to notice his speaking of himself as “the man” or “the Man”.

The point that I am making on the basis of this passage in John 8, as also in regard to the other uses of “I am” in Jesus’ sayings, is that *the “I am” in John’s Gospel is in itself a messianic statement* precisely because it echoes the “he is” of John 20:31: “these are written so that you may believe that *Jesus is the Christ*, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name”—*He is the Christ*. Thus “I am” = “he is”. So in John 8:28, for example, Jesus is the Christ/Messiah regardless of whether or not “the son of man” is understood as a messianic title. Hence, here in John 8, as in some other passages, “*I am*” is an *implicit messianic affirmation*, not a claim to Yahweh’s title.

It would, of course, be a mistake to immediately assume that every occurrence of the 23 “I am”s in John is to be understood messianically. The basic principle governing all exegesis is that the context is a determining factor in establishing the meaning of the passage under consideration.

### **“I am” in John 14:6**

Jesus’ total submission to the Father stands out with perfect clarity throughout John’s Gospel. In retrospect I now realize how strange it is that Jn.14:6 (“I am the way, and the truth, and the life”), for example, is quoted by trinitarians as evidence of Christ’s deity and equality with God the Father. One does not need to be a profound thinker or to be extraordinarily perceptive to see that a “way” or a road is the *means* to a destination, *not* the destination itself; it is the means to an end, not the end itself. When we travel, do we become so enamored of the road that we lose sight of where the road is meant to take us? And where is Christ, the Way, meant to bring us? The same verse (14:6) provides the answer: To bring us to the Father, because “no one comes to the Father except through me.” Christ is the Way—“through me”—whereas the destination is “the Father”: “for Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18, NIV).

“The way and the truth and the life” (Jn.14:6): in John these three elements—way, truth, and life—are aspects of the one reality. The Word came in Christ (Jn.1:14) to bring us to

God; hence he is *the way through whom we come to God*. The Word accomplishes this mission because it is the truth, as Jesus said, “*Your word (logos) is truth*” (Jn.17:17). It is through this “word (*logos*) of truth” (Eph.1:13) proclaimed in the gospel that we are saved. Or, put in terms of regeneration, “He (God) chose to give us birth through the word (*logos*) of truth” (James 1:18, NIV; this translation is supported by BDAG). Christ, in whom the *logos* is incarnate (Jn.1:14), embodies “the word of truth” which God has provided for our salvation.

The same is true of “the life” as is, likewise, made perfectly clear in 1Jn.1:1, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning *the Word (logos) of life*.” The *logos* of life has become visible and tangible in the person of Christ; the Word came into the world to *be* the Way to the Father, indeed the only way, for “no one comes to the Father except through me” (14:6), hence he is “*the way*”.

The truth and the life, like the way, are not destinations or ends in themselves; they are the means by which God brings us to Himself. This can be expressed through Paul’s words, “in Christ (the way, the truth and the life) God was reconciling the world to Himself” (2Cor.5:19). It is *through* the Word that God, in His loving kindness, made available to us the truth and the life of “eternal salvation” (Heb.5:9) in Christ. It is precisely for this reason that God is the central object of praise and worship in the Bible.



But why is it that every time we see or hear a statement of Jesus in the form “I am the way...” we assume that he is asserting, or claiming, divinity? Is it not because we have been saturated with trinitarian teaching that we cannot understand these words in any other way? If Jesus wanted simply to say that he is the way to God, was there any other way for him to say it other than “I am (*egō eimi*) the way”? If I say “I am Chinese” does the “I am” in these words imply that I am making a claim to divinity? In John 9:9, when the people debated whether the blind man was indeed the one whom Jesus had healed, he himself confirmed that fact with the words “I am (*egō eimi*),” which is to say emphatically, “it is I and not someone else.” It would be ludicrous to suggest that by saying “I am” the once blind man was making an implicit claim to being God.

It is true that the Greek “I am” in John is emphatic, emphasizing that Jesus is the only way; just as “I am the door” (Jn.10:7,9) means “it is I, and none other, who is the door.” But the door, like the way, is the *means* by which one enters and exits the house or enclosure. The door is not the house; if there were no house or enclosure, there would be no need for a door. Likewise, where there is no destination, there would be no need for a way, path, or road.

In view of the foregoing discussion, there can be no doubt that the “I am” in “I am the way” of John 14:6 is messianic in character, just as we saw was the case in John 8:24 and 28; but it certainly does not constitute a claim to divinity.

**“I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25)**

Trinitarians would not hesitate to quote these words as “proof” that Jesus is God. But, as usual, they do not bother to look at the context. These words were spoken to Martha, and when Jesus asked her whether she believed this statement of his as well as the other striking statements which immediately follow it, he said: “Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” To this question Martha’s reply was not, “Yes, I believe you are God” but “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world” (Jn.11:25-27). In other words, she did not see this as a claim to divinity but as a messianic statement to which she replied in the affirmative. As a Jew she knew, as most Gentiles apparently do not, that “the Son of God” is not a divine title in the Bible but a title of the Messiah based on Psalm 2:7 (we shall study this more fully later in this study).

But was it not on the occasion of raising Lazarus that Jesus said this? Certainly. But if this question implies that his raising a dead man is proof of his being God, then this shows remarkable ignorance of the Bible. This was not the only time that someone was raised from the dead in the Bible accounts. In fact this was not the first time that Jesus raised a dead person. Long before Jesus’ time, Elijah also raised a dead child and no Jew has ever thought that that could be used as proof that Elijah was a divine being! The account of what Elijah did is recorded in 1Kings 17:17ff, and it bears remarkable similarity to Jesus’ raising the widow’s son in the town of

Nain as described in Luke 7:11-17. The main points of similarity are: (1) in both instances it has to do with the bereavement of a widow; (2) the death of an only child; (3) the words at the end of Luke's account after the dead person had been brought back to life, "Jesus gave him to his mother" (Lk.7:15), echo what Elijah did after the child was restored to life: he brought him down from the upper chamber where he had taken the child and prayed to Yahweh for him, and gave him back to his mother. It is possible that the words in Luke mean no more than the mere fact that Jesus returned to the mother the son she had lost because of his death, but it is still possible that Luke did also intend to imply a reference to that great prophet Elijah. This is the more likely as we read the account, for immediately after that statement in Luke 7:15 we read, "They were all filled with awe and praised God. 'A great prophet has appeared among us,' they said. 'God has come to help his people'" (NIV).

The point of all this that matters for us here is that the raising of the young man from the dead did not cause the Jews to suppose that this was proof of Jesus' divinity but rather that it was evidence that "a great prophet (like Elijah) has appeared" and that "God has come to help his people" just as He had rescued Israel from idolatry (and the death that it brings) through Elijah, especially through the astonishing and well-known events on Mount Carmel. As we shall have occasion to see repeatedly in this study, trinitarians persistently read their claims for Jesus' divinity into his sayings and

actions where he intended nothing of the kind and where those who were present at the time saw nothing to that effect.

What is important, however, is that the people who witnessed Jesus' raising the dead did recognize that in Jesus "God has come to help his people". The word translated as "help" (NIV) and as "visit" in many other translations is the word *episkeptomai* which can mean visiting the sick (e.g. Mt.25:36,43), obviously not just as a courtesy call but with the intention of helping in any way possible; significantly, it is also used in the sense "look after, make an appearance to help" (BDAG) in Exodus 3:16 (immediately after Yahweh's self-revelation to Moses as "I am that I am" in 3:14) where Moses is instructed to deliver this message: "Go, gather the elders of Israel together and tell them, 'Yahweh, the God of your ancestors, has appeared to me—the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob—and has indeed visited (*episkeptomai*) you and seen what is being done to you in Egypt, and has said: I shall bring you out of the misery of Egypt'" (NJB, see also Ex.4:31). The Exodus is an event of great importance for understanding the message of John's Gospel, as we shall see.

It is also wrong to suggest that Jesus was claiming divinity by the words "I am the resurrection and the life" because such a claim would be in flat contradiction to Jesus' own explicit and unequivocal teaching on monotheism (Mk.12:29; John 5:44) and the fact that for him *the Father* is "the only true God" (Jn.17:3). Moreover, he made it as plain as possible that "I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works" (Jn.14:10). Applied to John 11:25, what else could this mean but that it is *the Father who*

*dwells in Christ*, and that the Father is the source and the power of “the resurrection and the life” that comes through Christ?

### **Is “I am” used in a special sense (i.e. in reference to Yahweh) in some of Jesus’ sayings?**

Jesus repeatedly affirmed that the Father was the source of everything he did. He did and said “nothing of his own accord”. What else could that mean but that his actions and his words were what the Father, who dwelt in him, expressed through him? This is stated in John 5:19: ‘Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, *the Son can do nothing of his own accord*, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.”’ Also John 5:30, “I can do nothing on my own.” John 8:28, “I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.” These sayings clearly mean that the Father God, Yahweh, acts and speaks through Jesus. Is there evidence of this in Jesus’ words? Perhaps the following statement is an example:

**John 8:58:** ‘Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.”’

To understand this verse, there are two options: (1) To take “I am” in this verse as a reference to Exodus 3:14 or to Isaiah 43:10,11; we must realize that this amounts to saying that Jesus is thereby claiming to be Yahweh—which is a claim that trinitarians would not want to make because, if Yahweh has

any place at all in the Trinity, it would be as “God the Father,” not “the Son”. (2) To take this to mean that Yahweh is incarnate in “the man Christ Jesus” and is here plainly speaking in and through him. The latter is certainly exegetically possible; but it would be equally contrary to trinitarianism.

Why do we say that the alternative is possible, namely, that Yahweh is the One who is speaking through Jesus in the words, “Before Abraham was, I am”? It is possible for two related reasons:

(1) The Father “dwells”, “lives”, or “abides” in Christ depending on which English translation you read. All these words have basically the same meaning, and all translate the word *menō* in John 14:10 and elsewhere in John. “Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is *the Father, living in me*, who is doing his work.” (Jn.14:10, NIV)

(2) Jesus reaffirmed in various ways that “*the word that you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me*” (Jn.14:24); “For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me *what to say and how to say it.*” (John 12:49, NIV)

Adding these two points together, it is certainly possible that John 8:58 is an instance where the Father, Yahweh, is speaking through Jesus using the words “I am”. And He was certainly before Abraham in *any* sense of the word “before”.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> On John 8:58 see also Appendix 2.

Another instance where we may justifiably hear the voice of Yahweh speaking through Jesus is John 10:11,14, “I am the good shepherd,” which clearly reflects the well-known words of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, “The LORD (Yahweh) is my shepherd”. It is hard to escape the conclusion that a deliberate identification is intended, an identification further strengthened by another well-known and beautiful verse: “He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.” (Isaiah 40:11, NIV)

John 2:19 appears to provide yet another instance of the Father speaking through Jesus. Here it is not the present “I am” but the future form “I will”. The verse reads, ‘Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days *I will* raise it up.”’ This is explained two verses later as meaning that “He was speaking of the temple of his body” (Jn.2:21). Now the significant fact is that *the Scriptures declare unanimously that it was the Father, God, who raised Jesus from the dead*. This is stated frequently in Acts (2:24, 32; 3:15,26; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30,37 etc); and in Romans 10:9: faith in God’s having raised Jesus from the dead is required for salvation (see further 1Cor.6:14; Gal.1:1; Col.2:12; 1Pet.1:21, etc).

There are many references to Jesus’ resurrection in the NT, but not one of them speaks of Jesus raising himself from the dead; it is always God’s act. This matter is decisively settled by the fact that within this passage itself—in the very next verse—it is affirmed that the Father is the One who raised Jesus: John 2:22, “When therefore *he was raised* from the

dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.” The words “he was raised” translates *ēgerthē* which is aorist *passive* of *egeirō*, confirming that it was *God* who raised him from the dead. All this leads to the unavoidable conclusion that the “I” in the words “I will raise it up” is an important example of the Father, Yahweh, speaking in and through Jesus.

### **The error of the trinitarian use of “I am” as proof of Jesus’ deity**

It must be borne in mind that to say that Yahweh, the Father, spoke through Jesus in whom He dwelt, is something very different from the trinitarian use of “I am” to argue for Jesus’ deity. What trinitarians need to understand is that

*If by “I am” Jesus claimed to be God, then he specifically claimed to be Yahweh!*

The trinitarian assertion that the “I am”s in John are to be understood as Jesus’ claim to be God, runs into many problems. Do they wish to say that Jesus, rather than the Father, is Yahweh? Or do they wish to say that there are three (or two?) persons who are Yahweh? This violates the OT’s monotheist revelation. But, not only so, it would make nonsense of Jesus’ own words in John as, for example, “The Father is greater than I” (Jn.14:28), if “I” is to be understood as the divine “I am”. In the context of John 14 we are to believe in



God and also in Jesus (14:1, cf.10,11); and Jesus would have us understand that, as the object of our faith and trust, the Father is greater than he. What else could he mean?

Regarding John 14:28, Dr. Kuschel quotes from the work of the German theologian W. Thuesing:

W. Thuesing, *‘Die Erhoehung der Verherrlichung’* [*The Exaltation of Glorification*], 206-14, esp. 210, [where he] has already said all that needs to be said: ‘What is the meaning of the reason “for the Father is greater than I?” It must be interpreted in the terms in which the relationship between Father and Son is described elsewhere in the Gospel; compared with the Son, the Father is always the one who gives, the one who has the initiative, who gives the command. The Son always hears and receives from the Father; he fulfills the will of the Father, he carries out what the Father has begun—but not vice versa. “Being greater” also appears elsewhere in the New Testament, but not as a metaphysical or qualitative difference rather, it expresses a relationship of superordination and subordination. (K-J Kuschel, *Born Before All Time?* Part Two, B, VII, footnote 74, p.637, words in square brackets added).

Is it not the case that trinitarianism, with its dogmatic insistence on the equality of the divine ‘persons,’ has made it very difficult for us to accept the very plain and explicit teaching in John of the Son’s subordination to the Father? We are made to feel that we disgrace or humiliate the Son by acknowledging that he is subordinate to the Father—even though the Son himself insists upon his subordination (cp.

Paul who gloried in the title “slave (*doulos*) of Jesus Christ” (Rom.1:1; Gal.1:10). In recognizing his subordination to the Father, it is not we who are daring.

Finally, trinitarians seem to be unable to make up their minds whether Jesus was claiming to be Yahweh (although he did not even openly proclaim himself as the Messiah) or the son of Yahweh (“son of God”). Many trinitarians are so confused on this issue that in their equivocality they appear to want to assume some kind of fusion of both! Unscriptural as this is, trinitarian dogma actually routinely indulges in this kind of double-talk, now stating that Jesus is God and then also that he is the Son of God—this is, of course, something we are familiar with because we ourselves engaged in it as trinitarians.

### **Who exactly is “the Father” of whom Jesus speaks so frequently in John’s Gospel?**

“The Father,” as referring specifically to God, belongs to John’s special vocabulary; it is a key word in Jesus’ teaching. The statistics show this clearly: “The Father” occurs in Matthew: 23 times (in 21 verses); Mark: 3 times (including “Abba” in 14:36); Luke: 12 times (in 9 verses); and John: 114 times (in 97 verses).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> These statistics are based on the references given in *Modern Concordance to the New Testament*, Michael Darton, ed., Doubleday, 1976, which here appear to be basically reliable.

From these figures it can immediately be seen that the occurrences in John are about 5 times those in Matthew, and Matthew is a longer book than John. Clearly, “Father,” as referring to Yahweh God, is constantly on Jesus’ lips, as also in his heart and mind. Obviously, we cannot here examine all 114 references to “the Father” in John, but we will summarize a few main points.

Who “the Father” is in Jesus’ teaching comes to light in the following passages:

(1) He is the God of Israel, Yahweh, worshipped in the Temple in Jerusalem, but who will be worshipped universally “in spirit and truth”.

John 4: <sup>21</sup>Jesus said to her (the Samaritan woman), “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. <sup>22</sup> You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. <sup>23</sup> But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.

All these verses are about *worship*; the Father alone is the object of worship both for the Jews and the Samaritans; He is worshipped in Jerusalem, that is, at the temple there. So the reference is unmistakably to the God of Israel, Yahweh. Jesus also spoke of Him as “God the Father” (John 6:27).

A few more key observations concerning “the Father”:

(2) He is the “self-existent One,” the Creator, who has conferred on Jesus the power to carry out His will in both the resurrection and the judgment:

**John 5:26:** “For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.”

“The Father” is the *source* of life, for He is the One who alone “has life within Himself”. Significantly, this is what the description of Yahweh’s Name in Exodus 3:14 as “I am that I am” is thought to mean (particularly as reflected in the LXX, *ho ōn*). He does not derive life from anyone else, but everything that lives receives its life from Him; for He is the Creator, the Absolute in relation to whom all else exists. He has chosen in His sovereign will to *grant* the Son to have life in himself and to communicate life to all who hear his voice (Jn.5:25). It is important to notice that Jesus makes it clear that the life which he has is the life that has been *given* (*didōmi*) him by the Father; it is not something he has in his own right. This, of course, contradicts trinitarian Christology.

This important point, namely, that all that Jesus has he has received from the Father, is reiterated in the next verse:

**John 5:27:** “And he has *given* him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man.”

Here “given” (*didōmi*) is used again, now with reference to the authority or power (*exousia*) *conferred* upon him by the Father to carry out judgment. These two words “given” and

“authority” are exactly the same two words in the Greek text which appear in Matthew 28:18: “Jesus came up and spoke to them. He said, ‘All *authority* in heaven and on earth has been given to me.’” (NJB)

The context of the verses in John 5 (vv.24-29) are about the coming resurrection (hence v.29) and the judgment (hence v.27). These verses can also serve as the context of Matthew 28:18.

Jesus’ statements clearly affirm the fact that all these things that he has were generously given him by the Father. The all-encompassing statement in John 5:30 flows spiritually and logically from these affirmations: “*I can do nothing on my own.* As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.”

It is truly incomprehensible how anyone who listens to what Jesus says in all these passages can still assert that Jesus claimed equality with the Father.

(3) The Father has sent Jesus to be “the savior of the world” (Jn.4:42) so that mankind may not be condemned at the judgment but receive eternal life. Jesus accomplishes this by (1) revealing the Father to all who seek Him (Jn.14:9), and (2) by his being “the lamb of God,” the lamb which the Father Himself provided as a sacrifice for sin, to “take away the sins of the world” (Jn.1:29).

As can be seen in John 5:30, “I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me,” Jesus speaks of the Father having *sent him* to accomplish the work entrusted to him to do. That it was the Father who sent him is something which

Jesus repeats many times in John's Gospel. Jesus lived with a strong sense of the mission which the Father had given him to complete.

(4) The foregoing points are combined in Jesus' prayer in John 17:3: "And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

Foundational to Jesus' whole teaching in the gospels is the affirmation that the Father is "the only true God".

But "God the Father" (Jn.6:27, namely, Yahweh) of whom Jesus speaks must not be confused with the trinitarian "God the Father," who is not "the only true God" but is only one of three persons, and therefore constitutes one third of the trinitarian "Godhead". Trinitarianism uses the same terms as those used in the Bible but often with a totally different meaning. This blurring of the meaning of important terms can result in muddled thinking. It is, therefore, necessary to vigilantly check the precise meaning of terms that are being used when discussing trinitarianism.

## **The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**

"The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" is an important form of reference to God found in Rom.15:6; 2Cor.1:3; 11:31; Eph.1:3; 1Pet.1:3. These five references indicate that this was a well-known description of God in the NT church and that the God they worshiped was indeed "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ".

For those of us brought up in trinitarianism, “the Father” is immediately associated with “God the Son,” whereas in the NT “the Father” is a term that is understood in relation to “the son of God,” the title of the Messiah or Christ. This title is in turn incorporated in the title “Lord Jesus Christ,” which to a Hebrew speaker is “Lord Jesus the Messiah” (see e.g. the *Salkinson-Ginsburg Hebrew NT*). To non-Hebrew speakers, the title “Christ” has become a kind of surname with the result that its original significance has been lost.

“God has made him both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36); it is not least for this very reason that the Father is both “*The God and Father of our Lord Jesus*”. This makes it clear that the early church did not see “Lord” as a divine title in the trinitarian sense. How different things are today in that Christians cannot think of Jesus as “Lord” except in the sense that he is God. This goes to show how trinitarian thinking makes it almost impossible for us to read the NT except in terms of trinitarian language and categories. Christians are bound in such a way that they read through trinitarian glasses. Unless we are, by the grace of God, freed from this bondage, we will not be able to understand the word of God correctly, but in seriously distorted terms. How much of the present spiritual condition of the church today can be attributed to this sad and dangerous condition, when the church can no longer hear the word of God as it was meant to be heard? They worship three persons instead of one, and mostly one person—Jesus. In sharp contrast to this, in the NT the church worshipped

“the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”. Or as the Apostle put it, “I kneel before the Father” (Eph.3:14, NIV).

How can we reconcile, on the one hand, the trinitarian notion of Jesus as equal with Yahweh and, on the other hand, the fact that Yahweh is Jesus’ God? Will it again be by way of the usual double-talk: the latter applies to him as man, but not as God (otherwise Yahweh would be the God of God!)? In other words, trinitarianism involves the necessity of cutting Jesus into two when it comes to the exegesis of verses in Scripture: In one place something is said to apply to Jesus as man, and in another place Jesus as God. It is by this kind of hopping back and forth that the dogma is maintained. Yet the separation of God and man in the trinitarian Christ is actually not permitted by the trinitarian creed itself, for this kind of separation of God and man in Christ is what is condemned as heretical under the name “Nestorianism,” bringing with it excommunication. “Eutychianism and Nestorianism were finally condemned at the Council of Chalcedon (451) which taught one Christ in two natures united in one person or hypostasis, yet remaining ‘without confusion, without conversion, *without division, without separation.*’” (*Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, W.A. Elwell, Baker, article *Christology*, p.225; italics added).

Thus the self-contradictory character of trinitarianism is exposed by trinitarian double-talk. For if God and man in Christ can be separated by saying that this verse applies to Jesus as man but that verse applies to Jesus as God, then he is not one person but two, and this is contrary to the trinitarian dogma that Jesus is both “true God, true man” in one person.



But theory is one thing, practice is another. Confronted by insurmountable problems in the light of the Bible which is uncompromisingly monotheistic, trinitarians are obliged to resort to interpretative juggling to try to support their dogma.

Let us take one fundamentally important point as an example. One thing which is stated with great frequency about Jesus is the fact of his atoning death. But if Jesus is God, he cannot die; if he can die, he is not God; for one fundamental truth about God in the Bible is that He is eternal, everlasting, and immortal (Dt.33:27; Ps.90:2, etc); there is absolutely no question about this where the Bible is concerned. Paul speaks of God as the One “who alone has immortality” (1Tim.6:16). Everything else will pass away, but God abides forever, His “years have no end” (Ps.102:25-27).

So trinitarianism is faced with the question: how can Jesus die and yet be God? To this there is no other answer than to say: Jesus died as man, but not as God. This is the inevitable double-talk. What then about the trinitarian creed as stated at Chalcedon: “One Christ in two natures (notice how God is spoken of in terms of “nature”) united in one person ... *without division, without separation*”? Obviously, this dogma is simply impossible to sustain in the light of the Biblical revelation of God.

Moreover, if Jesus is God, then the term “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ” must mean, inescapably, that God is the God of God! Alas, trinitarianism! For this inevitably raises the question: What kind of “God” is the Jesus of trinitarianism? For God is indeed known as “the God of gods” (Deut.10:17;

Ps.136:2; Dan.2:47; 11:36), but who these “gods” are must be left to the trinitarians to discover.

## **God as Jesus’ God and Father—and ours; John 20:17**

The term “God and Father” occurs 12 times in the NT; of these 6 relate to Christ, and another 6 relate to believers. All 12 references are here given in full for convenience of reference:

God as the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, or “his God”:

**Romans 15:6**, “that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

**2 Corinthians 1:3**, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort”.

**2 Corinthians 11:31**, “The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever [cp.Rom.9:5], knows that I am not lying.”

**Ephesians 1:3**, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places”.

**1 Peter 1:3**, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us

to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”.

**Revelation 1:6**, “and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

God as our God and Father:

**Galatians 1:4**, “who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father”.

**Ephesians 4:6**, “one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

**Philippians 4:20**, “To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

**1 Thessalonians 1:3**, “remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ”.

**1 Thessalonians 3:11**, “Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you”.

**1 Thessalonians 3:13**, “so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.”

Muslim scholars have accused Paul of being the one who deified the man Jesus by making him God the Son, and that Paul thereby became the true founder of Christianity as it is

today. But beyond the fact that the term “God the Son” was never used by Paul, from what we see in the above list of verses concerning “God and Father,” it will immediately be apparent that most of the references to God as “the God of Jesus Christ” are found in Paul’s letters (4 out of 6 refs.), and that he writes in precisely the same way about God being our God (all 6 refs.).

Jesus spoke of God as “*my God*” (Jn.20:17; Mt.27:46 = Mk.15:34); these words echo Ps.22:1, but they do not thereby lose their significance. In John 20:17 Jesus says to Mary Magdalene, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” This is powerfully reflected in Revelation 3:12 where the risen Christ speaks of “*my God*” four times in this one verse:

“The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of *my God*. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of *my God*, and the name of the city of *my God*, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from *my God* out of heaven, and my own new name.”

The meaning of this verse would not have been essentially affected if instead of “*my God*” it simply read “God”. So what is brought out powerfully is the affirmation of the risen Christ that God is *his* God in the most personal way this can be stated. This is most significant for the understanding of the Christology of the book of Revelation (cf. also 3:2).

As trinitarians we argued that the words “my Father and your Father,” “my God and your God,” distinguished Jesus from us more than it unites him with us because he did not say “our Father” and “our God”. But we ignored the fact that in the same sentence he also said “go to *my* brothers”; was he also thereby distinguishing himself from them? If so, how? Did he not also say that all who do God’s will are his brothers (Mt.12:49,50; Mk.3:34,35; Lk.8:21), meaning that all who do God’s will have God as Father? That Jesus fulfilled God’s will more fully than his brothers is not disputed, but does that make God his Father in a different way?

But here, as everywhere else, we read our trinitarianism into the text, and our dogma required that a distinction between our humanity and Christ’s be made because Christ is not a human being in the way that we are: he is the God-man, God and man in one person. This means that, in trinitarianism, he is not really a human being as we are. This means, further, that in the trinitarian mentality Jesus is more God than man; his humanity is overshadowed by his deity. This raises the question whether the trinitarian Jesus is anything more than a human body in which the one driving personality is his divine nature. The trinitarian Christ is God, but can it honestly be said that he is “truly man”? A God-man, in the nature of the case, is not a man as we are. So trinitarianism has to alter both the Biblical definition of “God” and of “man” to accommodate their deified Jesus! If we consider ourselves at liberty to redefine Biblical terms in whatever way is required by our dogma, then we have chosen

to do with the Bible whatever we wish. But what else can be expected when the foundation rock of Biblical monotheism, in which Yahweh is the one and only God, has been rejected in favor of three persons sharing in one divine substance or nature?

Consequently, it is alleged by the trinitarian “exegesis” of John 20:17 that “Father” is also to be understood in different senses; so when Jesus says “my Father,” he is allegedly deliberately distinguishing his relationship to the Father from that of his disciples by the term “your Father”. What logic! But the plain reading of the text (without trinitarian glasses) indicates that exactly the reverse is true: what he is saying is that from now on, by the power of the resurrection, and by the Holy Spirit that he was about to channel to them (as mentioned a few verses later, Jn.20:22), the disciples will know that “my Father” is “your Father”. This reminds us of the beautiful words in the book of Ruth, where Ruth says to Naomi, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and *your God my God.*” (Ruth 1:16, NIV)

This brings us to the heart of Jesus’ ministry, the purpose of which the Apostle Peter described as “to bring us to God” (1Pet.3:18). To accomplish this, Jesus does two things that call for a response: first, Jesus calls the hearer to “come to me” (Mt.11:28; Jn.1:39; 5:40; 6:44,65) and, second, he calls us with the words, “follow me” (Mt.10:38; Mk.8:34; Jn.10:27, etc); or simply, “come, follow me” (Mt.19:21; Lk.18:22). Often “follow me” already implies “come to me”; and “follow

me” occurs frequently in all four gospels (Mat: 6 times; Mk: 4; Lk: 4; Jn: 6 = 20 times in the gospels). These two steps define the nature of discipleship in the New Testament. Ruth’s words to Naomi are rightly seen as expressing the essence and character of discipleship.

The result of our being brought to God through Jesus is that we come to know God as our Father in the same way he knew God as Father. Every Christian has learned to pray the “Our Father” (Mt.6:9-13) since childhood. It is often recited in church services. But how many Christians *know* God as Father? What does it mean for Jesus to “bring us to God” unless it means bringing us to *know* God, so that we call Him “Abba, Father” from our hearts (Gal.4:6; Rom.8:15), exactly as Jesus also called Him “Abba, Father” (Mk.14:36)? He came to save us, and this is what being “saved” means. “Now this is eternal life: that they may *know* you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” (Jn.17:3)

“Know” (*ginōskō*) is a key Johannine word; it appears in both the Gospel and in 1John far more frequently than in any other NT book (John: 57 times; Mt: 20; Mk: 12; Lk: 28; Ac: 16; Ro: 9; 1Jn: 25). Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon has a long and instructive section on *ginōskō* (know) as used in relation to God which begins, “In particular γινώσκω [*ginōskō*] *to become acquainted with, to know*, is employed in the N.T. of the knowledge of God and Christ, and of the things relating to them or proceeding from them; a. τὸν Θεόν [*ton theon*], the one, true God, in contrast with the polytheism of the Gentiles: Rom.1:21; Gal.4:9; also John 17:3”. In discussing

the different Greek words for “know” (in the final section of *ginōskō*, on synonyms), Thayer makes an important observation about the meaning of *ginōskō*: “a knowledge grounded in *personal experience*” (italics added).

## **The thorny trinitarian problem of “the two natures” in Christ, the “God-man”**

In Christian theology, a subject of special importance is “Christology,” which is primarily concerned with the thorny problem of how Jesus Christ is to be understood as having the two “natures” of God and man in his one person. This problem does not derive from the New Testament but from the time that Jesus was deified as God by the Gentile church; only then did this problem become acute for Christianity. The deification of Christ had, inevitably, the serious consequence of calling monotheism into question by creating a situation in which there was now more than one person who is God. The Gentile church was fully aware of the fact that the Bible is monotheistic, so how could it preserve some form of monotheism while still maintaining the deity of Christ as God the Son? Some church leaders had a greater concern for monotheism; others were determined to insist on Christ being God. As a result, the history of Christology is marked, as might be expected, by conflicts, schisms, and excommunications (even bishops excommunicating each other!). In the end the view that Jesus was God triumphed in the Gentile



church. This was something which could never have happened in the early Jewish church.

What then about monotheism? Well, God was reduced from being one Person to being one “substance”. This emerged already early in the Gentile church very soon after it had lost its connection to its Jewish mother church. The prominent early Latin “father” Tertullian (AD 155-220) put the matter like this, “God is the name of the substance, that is, divinity” (J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p.114). The influence of Tertullian can be seen in Kelly’s observation that, “the pope [Dionysius] may well have inferred, on sound etymological grounds, that *hypostasis* was the Greek equivalent of *substantia*, which he had learned from Tertullian signified *the indivisible concrete reality of the Godhead*” (Kelly, *Doctrines*, p.136; italics in the last sentence added). Without going further into the complexities, and the twists and turns of the history of Christology (since this book is not meant to be a theological discourse on christology), it will suffice to know that the doctrinal position of the church today remains essentially the same as that of Tertullian, that is, “the three persons of the Godhead share a common substance” (W.A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, “Substance”; interestingly, in this fairly long article, Tertullian is mentioned only once, which shows that he is considered only one among many representatives of this view.)

Why do trinitarians speak of Jesus as “God-man”? It is because they claim that he possesses two “natures,” one divine and one human. How do these two natures relate to each

other in him? The answer given at the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451) stated that the two natures coexist “without confusion, without change, without division, without separation” in the one person. This would seem to indicate a fusion (not confusion) of two totally distinct and different natures in the person of Jesus. How such a “person,” who is essentially two persons, can function at all is not explained, and is, no doubt, inexplicable. So it belongs to the realm of theological “mysteries”—something which discourages any further inquiry. Presumably the person of Jesus must simply be accepted as an enigma. The person at the center of the trinitarian faith must remain unintelligible, at least in regard to how he could possibly function as one who is said to be simultaneously God and man. The Chalcedonian statement is unintelligible *if* it was supposed to have any meaningful reference to a real person. As it stands, it is little more than a dogmatic assertion made by a church council at Chalcedon in the 5th century. This assertion cannot be demonstrated as having any solid basis in the Scriptures, yet it is declared by the trinitarian church to be the touchstone of Christian orthodoxy. But the question that can and must be asked is whether this is the Biblical teaching or the product of human confusion resulting from a failure to understand the Biblical revelation?

Down through the centuries, many thoughtful trinitarians found it unsatisfactory to be content with faith in a Christ who was essentially unintelligible, an enigma. Many preferred the idea of Jesus as God incarnate in a human body. At least this idea appeared to make sense. In their view of Christ, God (i.e., *the Son, not the Father*) took over the place in man’s

constitution which is normally occupied by the “spirit of man”. This idea found some support in what is known in theology as “Alexandrian Christology”.<sup>8</sup> According to this idea, Jesus had a true body of flesh just as we do, but the person functioning within him was God the Son (otherwise there would be two persons functioning in the one person—which would be something akin to schizophrenia!); in Christ “God the Son” has taken over (whatever that might mean, or, on another view, replaced) the human spirit. Thus, he is like us on the level of the flesh, but it is “God the Son” who lives in that flesh. In this way he could be considered “true God and true man”. Here we will not consider the question of “true God,” but can someone constituted in this way really be “true man” even if he has a real human body?

It is not difficult, surely, for anyone to see (unless we are determined to be willfully blind) that no man who is also God can truly be a human being without redefining the term “human” into something different from what it actually means. We may not know very much, but *we are human beings*, so even if we don’t know anything else, at least we *do know* what a human being is. For this reason we know that, whatever a God-man might be, he is not a human being as we are, he is simply not one of us.

To speak of God and of man in terms of “natures” is hardly a good way to proceed with the christological inquiry. But it is not difficult to see why trinitarians are compelled to use this

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<sup>8</sup> For fuller discussion of the trinitarian conflict between the Alexandrians and the Antiochenes, see Appendix 11.

term. It is only proper to speak of God and man in terms of “persons,” which they are. To speak of man in terms of “natures” is to speak of his characteristics and qualities, not about his being a “person” as such. But, obviously, given the trinitarian idea of Christ as “God-man,” it is not possible to speak of God and man in terms of “persons” because, otherwise, Christ would be two persons: God and man!

But to speak of God as being a “substance” or “nature” is really nothing less than an insult to the God of the Bible, and those who do so may unwittingly be playing with the “consuming fire” (Dt. 4:24; 9:3; Isa.33:14; Heb.12:29). In the Bible, God is certainly not merely a “nature” or “substance”. Moreover, to possess the “divine nature” is not thereby to be God, or else on the basis of 2Peter 1:4 we would also be divine. Nor is being man to be thought of merely as having a human “nature” or “essence”; rather, it is *because* we are human beings (or persons) that we possess a human nature.

What exactly is meant by “nature”? Presumably it refers to things like intrinsic character, temperament, or essential quality. Such “qualities” in man derive from his humanity, but his being a human being does not derive from them. Therefore, to put a “nature” before a person is “to put the cart before the horse”. An animal may demonstrate human characteristics or behavior (“almost human”), but that does not make it human. In 2Peter 1:4 what is meant by “the divine nature” is perfectly clear from its context, which explains that the moral and spiritual *qualities* of God are made available to us (cf. “the fruit of the Spirit”, Gal.5:22) as a result of our having become new persons in Christ (2Cor.5:17).

To say, therefore, that Jesus had a divine nature is not the same as saying that he is God. Evidently what the trinitarians want to refer to by the term “nature” is something more like “essence”. But, again, God is not an essence, and neither is man. A person is much more than his “essence,” whatever that may be. It could be said that a person is more than the sum of his essences or natures or characteristics.

It is little wonder that with such opaque terminologies like “nature” and “essence,” the two-nature doctrine of Christ became a thorny issue in the church from the Nicene period onwards, resulting in confusion, discord, conflicts and schisms. Is there any solution to the problem which the church itself created?

Scripture speaks of the “Spirit of God” and also of the “spirit of man” (Prov.20:27; Ecc.3:21; Zech.12:1, etc). Can we speak of “spirit” in terms of “nature”? If so, then the “spirit of man” would be equivalent to the “nature” of man insofar as it is a fundamental constitutive element in man. But, as everyone knows, in the constitution of every human being there is also “flesh,” and this “flesh” is likewise an essential constitutive element in man. It so defines what man is, and is so fundamental to his character and nature that the Bible speaks of human existence simply as “flesh” (e.g. Isa.40:6; Jn.1:14). But if “flesh” defines human life, and if man also has a “spirit” which is also integral to his “nature” as a human being, then man has two “natures”: flesh and spirit. Then, if this is indeed the case, for Jesus to be the God-man would mean that he would have *three* “natures”: man’s flesh and

spirit (i.e. the “spirit of man”) are added to him as God the Son! This can hardly be considered a true human being without changing the definition of what it is to be a “human being”.

One solution was to suggest that God the Son, as Spirit, has replaced the human spirit in Jesus. But this does not really solve the problem, for now the human being is minus a human “spirit” and is, therefore, still not truly a human being, not “true man”. From all this, it becomes evident that trinitarianism, by its deification of Christ, created a problem for which there is simply no solution. God and man simply cannot be conjoined or fused together in the way that trinitarianism imagines it in the idea of the “God-man”. Had they not created the problem, there would not be the need for a solution. This is not a New Testament problem, as we shall see, but one created by the Gentile church.

### **If Jesus is God, what happens to man’s salvation?**

The problem is even more complex than that: If Jesus was God then he could not possibly sin, because God cannot even be tempted to sin (James 1:13), let alone sin. How could he who could not sin identify with sinners and be their representative? Only he who could sin (like Adam) but did not—who was sinless not in the sense that he could not sin but did not sin, who succeeded where Adam failed—only such a person could die for sinners. It was “through one man’s obedience the many were made righteous” (Romans 5:19),

but if he was obedient because he could not, in any case, be tempted, disobey, or sin, then it is meaningless to speak about his “obedience”.

If there is any wonder at all about Jesus being our Savior, it surely consists in this: that *he could have sinned, but he did not*; he could have disobeyed the Father, but he remained absolutely obedient under all circumstances. If that is not a supreme wonder, what is? Anyone who has ever seriously faced the challenges of living a life pleasing to God must surely be amazed at the wonder of Jesus’ perfect life. Even someone of Paul’s spiritual stature confessed, “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own” (Philippians 3:12).

Is there an answer to this problem in Scripture? The first clue to an answer may be found in John 1:18, “in the bosom of the Father,” which speaks of a profound intimacy of Christ’s relationship with Yahweh; in comparison to such intimacy, John’s being “in the bosom” of Jesus (Jn.13:23, usually thought to refer to John) was but a dim reflection. There was a depth of union with Yahweh expressed in the words: “I in you, you in me” which Jesus desired should also eventually become a reality in his disciples. Some believers have had a tiny taste of the reality expressed in the words, “He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him” (1Cor.6:17), for this is not just a status but an experiential reality (just as becoming “one flesh” through marriage is not merely a status but a reality which is experienced). But we have only a shallow idea of what such a union in its perfection would be like. Yet

in the case of Jesus this spiritual union with Yahweh resulted in the constant dynamic in which he lived his life and which is evidenced by the perfect sinlessness of his life.

Had the Gentile church understood that the reality in Christ was not some kind of *metaphysical* union through the joining of two “essences” or “natures” in Christ (the “hypostatic union,” in trinitarian terminology), if they could have been freed from thinking in their polytheistic (“three Persons”) and Greco-philosophical categories, and grasped something of the depth and power of *spiritual union* (“one spirit,” 1Cor.6:17), they would have grasped the Scriptural truth of the person of Christ and his union with the Father.

The wonderful words of Deuteronomy 33:12 apply to Jesus at a depth which could not apply to anyone else, “The beloved of Yahweh ... dwells between His shoulders.” That is indeed to be “in the bosom of the Father”! To live “in Him” in the way Jesus taught.

### **Trinitarian Christology: an even more serious problem to think about**

But there is a yet more serious problem that trinitarian christology poses: the union of God and man in such a way that God actually becomes incarnate in a human body permanently and thereby becomes a human being, such that God can be said to be man—a particular man named Jesus Christ. Trinitarianism is represented by the way in which Anselm could speak of God having become man (in his well-known



book *Cur Deus Homo?*). This is going far beyond anthropomorphism. It is one thing to say that God appeared in human form in the Old Testament, but it is something entirely different to say that God became a man, a human being, in the way trinitarianism conceives of it.

We do well to reflect on the question of whether we have gone much too far with our Christian dogma, to the extent that we have transgressed against the transcendent character of God; whether His immanence has been dragged down to the level where theologians do not hesitate to speak of the immortal God having been crucified and dying on the cross (cf. J. Moltmann, *The Crucified God*). Trinitarianism, unfortunately, has made this way of speaking about God possible. The line between being God and being man has not only been blurred but demolished. There are some things which no amount of reverence on our part can justify. Anyone who has truly absorbed the spirit of the Old Testament revelation of God would surely shudder at speaking about God's having been crucified and having died like mortal man. But trinitarianism has so desensitized us that we dare speak even of God in such a way as should be considered blasphemous according to the Scriptures. We dare to tread where no angel would dare venture (cf. Jude).

Since this work is exegetical and expository in character, and is not intended as a theological treatise, I shall leave this question as a matter for sober reflection.

## **Spiritual union—the highest form of union**

Being unspiritual, we are slow to realize that spiritual union is the highest form of union; there is none higher. Instead, from the 5<sup>th</sup> century (the Council of Chalcedon, AD 451) onwards, the Gentile church officially demanded faith in a creed that declared “the union of the two natures (*dyo physes*) of deity and humanity in the one *hypostasis* or person of Jesus Christ” (“Hypostatic Union,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*). Notice that what is thereby explicitly affirmed is the union of God and man through the union of “the natures of deity and humanity”.

If the intention is to state the union of God (even if it be “the Second Person”) and man in Christ, why not state this plainly? Why speak of “two natures”? For it should be obvious that the “nature” of a person is not the whole person. And if the whole person is meant, why speak only of his “nature”? In 2Peter 1:4 we, too, are declared to be “partakers of the divine nature (*physis*, the same word as “nature” in the creed)”. Does our possession of “the divine nature” make us God or equal to God or cause us to be included in the Godhead? Certainly not. Then why would possession of the divine “nature” constitute Christ as God, or show that he is a member of the Godhead?

And since “nature” is not equivalent to the whole person, then would not the union of “two natures” in one person result in a person who is neither wholly God nor wholly man? Yet trinitarianism wants thereby to affirm that he is “truly God and truly man”!

How could the church have landed in such a befuddled, confused state of affairs? It was the failure to perceive the Scriptural truth that *spiritual union* (“one spirit,” 1Cor.6:17) *is the highest and profoundest form of union*, that led to the seeking of some form of metaphysical union of “essences” or “natures” in Christ, for which they invented the term “hypostatic union,” evidently assuming this to be some higher form of union. But, as we have seen, a union of “two natures,” that of God and of man, cannot really mean much more than a possession of the attributes represented by, or contained in, those “natures”.

Yet what the Chalcedonian creed wants to affirm by this doctrine of “hypostatic union” is that God and man are truly united in Christ such that “a human nature was inseparably united forever with the divine nature in the one person of Jesus Christ, yet with the two natures remaining distinct, whole, and unchanged, without mixture or confusion so that the one person, Jesus Christ, is truly God and truly man” (“Hypostatic Union”, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*). How can one have the “whole” nature without the whole person?

What the trinitarians failed to see is that *only in the case of spiritual union* is it possible for God and man to be united in such a way as to remain “distinct, whole, and unchanged, without mixture or confusion” in the one person: “But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him” (1Cor.6:17).

Moreover, the idea of some kind of metaphysical “union of natures” (whatever that actually means) inevitably compromises the understanding of the true humanity of Christ, and this has the most serious soteriological consequences.

Yet the Church insisted on her dogma and ignored the fact that the Biblical doctrine of salvation was thereby compromised, but the average Christian is not aware of this. It is essential that we realize that a Christ who is not truly human cannot save those who are truly human. It is precisely because Christ Jesus, in the New Testament, was truly human that he could truly save us. No one who is “truly God” can be “truly man” in the Biblical sense of being “man”. For this reason, too, any discussion about the meaning of the Logos in John 1 must bear this salvific truth in mind, and not allow itself to be carried away by metaphysical ideas and opinions.

The idea of a God-man was familiar to the Greeks, whose mythology is full of such gods who once were men or women. Little wonder that the Greek, or Greek educated, Gentile church leaders could come up with this notion of the union of a divine and a human nature in the one person of Jesus Christ. They were simply formulating Biblical teaching in terms of the Greek cultural ideas in which they were habituated to think and to express themselves. It seems that most of them were not yet sufficiently steeped in Biblical teaching to breathe in its spirit and think in its terms, in contrast to the early Jewish believers.

But as the church became more and more filled with Gentiles as a result of the effective expansion of the Gospel into the world, the world also expanded into the church, and

by the time of the Council of Nicaea in AD 325, the world (notably in the form of the emperor Constantine) began to take effective control of the church. It was Constantine who first made Christianity the predominant religion of the Roman Empire, and it was he who convened the Council of Nicaea.

### **The “Mystery of Christ”**

What are we saying when we speak of Jesus as “true God and true man”? What are we really talking about? We surely do not mean that he is part God and part man. Yet, what else can it mean? That he is all God and all man, wholly God and wholly man, 100% God and 100% man (thus adding up to 200%!)? But this is not an ontological (nor even a logical) possibility. What, then, does “true God and true man” mean? Here, as might be expected, the convenient (and only) recourse is to retreat into “mystery”. This, however, was certainly not what Paul meant when he spoke of the “mystery of Christ” (Eph.3:4; Col.4:3), for by this term he did not refer to some logical or ontological puzzle, but to God’s wonderful plan of salvation hidden in ages past but now revealed in Christ and brought to fruition through his death and resurrection.

But the problem lies not only in the elevation of Jesus to the level of being God, but in the consequence of worshipping him as God, thereby relegating “God our Father” to a secondary place in the hearts and minds of most Christians, if

indeed He has any meaningful place at all. “The first person” of the Godhead has for all practical purposes become “the second person,” even though He is still left with the honorary title of “the First Person”—made more presentable by writing the words with capitals. The Son has replaced the Father as the center of Christian devotion. Paul, as also all the other NT writers, would have been horrified at this state of affairs. I am now coming to realize that this is abhorrent to Christ himself. His teaching has been twisted into something that he did not teach. Even the elect have been deceived (cf. Mt.24:24). Now we can understand why judgment will commence at the house of God (1Pet. 4:17).

Thus once the church had taken the dogmatic position that Christ is God and therefore equal in all respects with the Father, it then followed that to worship Christ is equal to, the same as, worshipping God, our Father. From worshipping him with the Father, we slip imperceptibly into worshipping him instead of the Father. Moreover, even when “Father” is used in prayer it often turns out that it is actually Christ who is being referred to by that term. The justification for this is claimed from Isaiah (9:6, “Everlasting Father”), whereas Jesus’ own instruction to call no man “Father” except God Himself (Mt.23:9, “for you have one Father, who is in heaven”) is, as usual, ignored.

## **The “Mystery of Christ”, A Blessing or a Curse— depending on one’s attitude**

There are undoubtedly different aspects to the mystery of Christ; it is a complex rather than a simple reality. One aspect involves the principle that the same reality can be either a blessing or a curse depending on one’s attitude towards that reality. Thus, 2Cor. 2:15,16, “we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life”—the same aroma of Christ brings life to one and death to another. In Lk.20:17 the cornerstone of the divine structure for God’s people becomes (in v.18) the cause of destruction for those who reject it and those who fall under judgment. In the same way the “mystery of Christ” includes the remarkable fact that it can mean salvation for some and destruction for others. The consequences of misinterpreting that “mystery” is, therefore, serious in the extreme; it is a matter of life or death.

The general principle that a blessing can become a curse is also seen in the principle, “To whom much is given, much is required” (Lk.12:48). To be given much is a blessing, but to misuse that blessing is to come under judgment. And the greater the blessing, the greater the judgment if the blessing is misappropriated. The greatest blessing ever given to man is God’s “unspeakable gift” (2Cor.9:15, KJV)—Christ. The misappropriation of this gift will also have unspeakable consequences.

The Scriptural revelation makes it clear that Jesus is the way to God and is not the destination, which is God Himself. Jesus is the means, not the End. If now we make him the end rather than the means, we have distorted God's purpose, and the blessing of Christ will become a curse. To make Christ equal to the Father in the trinitarian sense, to make him an "equal partner" with God, is to subscribe to ditheism or tritheism, and therefore to idolatry, which results in falling under God's curse. The LORD has given the warning, "You shall have no other gods before {Or besides} me" (Ex.20:3; Deut.5:7); we disregard it to our own eternal cost.

Jesus himself taught his disciples to be wholly devoted to "the one and only God" (Jn.5:44; Mk.12:29,30), yet we (Christians) chose to worship Jesus as God! Anyone who studies his teaching with care will realize that such a thing would have horrified him. If we hold to Biblical monotheism and worship God alone we would be in line with Jesus' teaching, and we will certainly not be on the wrong road and head in the wrong direction, going towards spiritual disaster.

All this means is that in God's wisdom and purpose, Christ is the means that God uses to separate between the sheep and the goats, the true and the false believers. In fact, in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats, Christ is both the standard for separating the sheep and the goats as well as the one who separates them based on that standard (Mt.25:31-46). The parable speaks in terms of practical acts, but the point is that true "faith works by love" (Gal.5:6) and is never a merely intellectual or abstract belief.



## Something extremely disturbing

What I find exceedingly disturbing is that what we have done in trinitarianism is to take what is in itself very good, namely the person and work of Jesus Christ, and by it displace the absolute good, namely, the LORD God Yahweh Himself, as the center of our faith and worship. This was, no doubt, done as the result of our having been deceived by Evil, and not by any willful intention to do evil; but it is the acme of evil, nonetheless, to use good against the supreme Good by replacing the latter with the former. It is devilish in its subtlety in serving as the most effective method of deception that is calculated to appeal to those who desire the good, namely, the “saints”.

It seems that Jesus himself foresaw this prophetically when he said, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone” (Mk.10:18; Lk.18:19). He was surely not denying that he was good, but he did not intend to be used as the “good” to replace Him who alone is the absolute Good, nor did he ever claim to be that absolute Good himself. Jesus strikingly declares that “good” is a quality that belongs to Yahweh God *alone* and to no one else (*oudeis*, “no one, nobody,” BDAG). All that is truly good derives from Him.

In the present dismal circumstance of the church, it is surely time to issue the rallying call which Moses issued when the Israelites had turned from Yahweh to set up their own god: ‘then Moses stood in the gate of the camp and said, “Who is on the LORD’s (Yahweh’s) side? Come to me.” And all the sons of Levi gathered around him’ (Ex.32:26). We do

not live in the era in which Moses lived, so the command (in the next verse), “Put your sword on your side each of you, and go to and fro from gate to gate throughout the camp,” would, of course, today not mean the use of any literal sword, but would today mean the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God (Eph.6:17; Heb.4:12).

### **The serious danger of idolatry**

The First Letter of John ends surprisingly and abruptly with the warning: “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1Jn.5:21). This abrupt and terse ending seems designed to lodge this serious warning firmly in our hearts and minds. But surely, we think, “true” Christians are not likely to fall into the “sin that leads to death” (1Jn.5:16,17), namely, that of idolatry, and if it is unlikely, then the warning is redundant. But God certainly knows us better than we know ourselves, and He therefore issues this trenchant warning through His servant. To fail to heed it is to perish.

It was precisely because of idolatry that Israel perished as a nation when it was sent into exile. How Israel allowed itself to be seduced into idolatry forms a large portion of the Old Testament. It was “bewitched” (Gal.3:1) by other gods and by their worshippers to such a degree that they not only turned a deaf ear to Yahweh’s urgent appeals and warnings through His prophets but went so far as to silence their voices by killing them (cf. Mt.23:34, 35; etc).

The character of idolatry is, first, that it is man-made and contrary to what God has revealed. One can, however, take something that is divinely revealed, such as the Bible, and turn it into an object of worship in itself. In this case it is called “bibliolatry”. But this is relatively rare because usually a second vital ingredient in idolatry is its anthropoid character: a god made by man generally bears some human features, which makes it easier for man to identify with it.

In the case of Jesus, something very subtle and dangerous can happen (and has happened). If he is both God and man, then it follows that not only is he said to be man, but *he is more than God*, because God is “only” God, while Jesus is both God and man. Clearly it is harder to identify with a God who is wholly transcendent, invisible, and therefore practically unreachable; but if Jesus is God who has a real human body such as we have, identification with him is much easier. Little wonder that he can easily supplant the Father in our prayers and our worship.

In all this, we hardly notice that we have done something extremely serious, namely, we now see God as “only” God, but Jesus is God plus man. God’s perfection is, for us, incomplete because it lacks manhood. But this is found in the perfection of Christ, who is both God and man in one person. Trinitarianism (unwittingly no doubt) has produced a super-idol, greater even than God himself, for this doctrine implies, almost imperceptibly, that God is “perfected” (from the human point of view) by the addition of manhood! This is the inevitable result of a doctrine that insists on Christ being

100% God (“true God”) and 100% man (“true man”) (200% (!) in contrast to God as 100%, “only” God—how close is all this to blasphemy? Is there still the “fear of God” in man’s heart?). The effect is that God the Father, who is actually the heart and center of all things, is marginalized in trinitarian Christianity.

In asserting that Jesus is true God and true man, trinitarianism seems to have given no thought as to whether it is actually possible to make any kind of sense of such a statement when one comes to think about it carefully. Is it the case that Christians will really be satisfied to treat it as a “mystery” beyond the reach of human reason? It is a sad day for truth if something which does not make sense is simply classified as “mystery”. This is most certainly not the definition of the word “mystery” as it is used in the New Testament.

But for someone who does stop to think about it, the logical (not to mention spiritual) absurdity of the claim that a person could be “100%” man and also “100%” God, would become evident by the fact that such a “person” would be 200% and is, therefore, two persons not one! 100% (as a mathematical equivalent of “true”) is not meant in purely quantitative terms, but as a means of including *whatever* is required by the description “true”. For if a person is not 100% man, how can he be true man? A chimpanzee is said to have about 98% of human DNA, but does that qualify it to be a human being? Beyond lacking 2% of human DNA, it surely also lacks “the spirit of man” without which one cannot be a human being as far as Scripture is concerned, and this is far more important than the DNA.

Ultimately, the trinitarian dogma represents a failure to understand both God and man. God is absolutely perfect in Himself and nothing can be added to His perfection—if we had any idea of the reality of God as to who He is in Himself. As for portraying Jesus as God-man, “true God and true man,” if we use mathematical metaphors in terms of percentages, recognizing that when we speak of what it means to be *one* “person” no one can be more than 100%, does it not follow that if Jesus is “God-man” he could only be 50% God and 50% man? And that would be to say that he would be neither really God nor man if God and man are understood in *Biblical* terms. But, as we have seen, the God-man idea was commonplace in Greek thought which dominated the culture of the Gentile world. The Greek and Roman gods were, for the most part, glorified and deified human beings; they had become mythological entities, and the requirements of truth and logic do not apply to mythology. No one can read Greek classical literature without coming across the names of their “many gods,” exactly as Paul described them (1Cor.8:5). Those brought up in this kind of culture would find nothing difficult about believing in Jesus as the God-man.

### **Misled by Greek religious and philosophical ideas**

We did not realize that we were being led into error by Greek theological “wisdom” or sophistry and, consequently, away from the wisdom of Biblical revelation (these different and opposing wisdoms are discussed in 1Cor.1:17-2:13). In the

Bible, for example, God (Yahweh) is not a “substance”. Has anyone ever produced so much as one scrap of Biblical evidence to substantiate (pardon the pun) this idea that one can speak of God in terms of “substance”? Yet this is a term which the Greek leaders of the church did not appear to have had qualms about using. Every theologian is (or should be) aware that this definition of God as a substance, in which three persons coexist, is the product of Greek theological sophistry—a sophistry legitimized by using a collection of Scripture verses, and which has successfully misled us all. Greek philosophical speculations have carried us away from the word of God.

But there is something even more serious to consider: Has it ever crossed our minds that to speak of God as “substance” could possibly be blasphemous? Can it be that our minds and spirits have become so desensitized through cultural “acclimatization” that we have become accustomed to that term “substance” to such an extent that we take no such possibility of blasphemy into account? Is it not somewhat like a person who swears habitually but is not aware of the offensiveness of his speech? Will God hold us to account for describing Him as “substance,” or the “essence” (Latin *substantia*; Gk. *hypostasis* or *ousia*) of three divine persons?

As for Greek ideas, Garry Wills (Professor of History Emeritus at Northwestern University) puts the matter succinctly, “Paul never presents Jesus as the God of the Greeks, as the Wisdom of Plato, as the Unmoved Mover of Aristotle” (*What Paul Meant*, Penguin Books, 2006, p.127).

## **The trinitarian search for proof-texts**

What is the psychology behind our determination to prove that “the Lord Jesus Christ” is absolutely equal in all respects to “God our Father”? In our eager pursuit of this objective we did not stop to consider the fact that not one book in the NT has that objective in view, so we find ourselves out of line with the NT. In fact, it cannot be demonstrated that the word “God” (in the trinitarian sense of a being who is coequal with the Father) is ever applied to Christ in the NT. So the attempted proofs of Christ’s deity have to rely chiefly on the kind of titles we have looked at above, such as “the son of God”.

For my part, I do confess again that, at least in the matter of Christology, I have in the past allowed my trinitarianism to govern my exposition. I searched the Scriptures to find proof-texts for Christ’s deity. I still have the old Bible which is marked in every place where such texts could be found, often accompanied by copious notes. Nowadays I am a little amused or even bemused when I hear people quoting those same texts to me in support of their trinitarianism.

## **The practical consequences of Trinitarianism**

What are the consequences of trinitarian Christology? With the deification of Christ to equality with God, “Christ” and “God” have essentially the same meaning. The result is that praying and worshipping Jesus *is* praying and worshipping God. God the Father is reduced to being just one of three,

and not even the central one at that. Once the Father is marginalized, the door is open to making other persons the chief object of prayer and devotion. As a result, Jesus is central in “mainline” Protestantism; in Pentecostalism the Spirit is central; in a considerable part of Roman Catholicism the Virgin Mary supplants the divine “persons,” she having been elevated to a similar status.

If any of them were asked to stop praying to, and worshipping, the figures they have deified, they would become so disorientated that they would hardly know what to do. It seems clear that, misled by their trinitarianism, they would scarcely have any idea how to pray and to worship if they were to stop worshipping the deity of their choice. They have been so misled that they may have some difficulty praying to the Father, for it would be like praying to a stranger.

New Testament teaching is entirely different. In it, it is clearly taught that God the Father (not in a trinitarian sense) is always the central object of our prayers and worship. This was precisely how Jesus himself prayed, and he taught his disciples to do likewise. He always taught us to pray to the Father, which should have been obvious from the “Lord’s Prayer”. The central aim of Jesus’ ministry was in fact to bring us into a direct relationship with the Father whom he knew and loved. He wanted us to pray to “Abba, Father” in the way he did. This is seen from his teaching, from his death (to open the way to reconciliation with Him), and the sending of the Spirit to inspire and strengthen us to pray to Abba.

The risen Christ must doubtless be horrified that his teaching has been abandoned by a doctrine that marginalizes



the Father in his name. Instead of following his teaching and example, his disciples have placed him at the center, and thereby displaced the Father from the position that He certainly has in the NT as a whole—and all this, moreover, in utter disregard for Jesus’ own teaching. “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’, and do not do what I say?” (Lk.6:46; cf. Mt. 7:21-23)

Does it really matter if we continue to hold on to the doctrine of the Trinity? Will it really affect our salvation? No—if it also doesn’t matter whether or not we listen to and obey the Lord Jesus’ own teaching. Perhaps we never really thought that the Lord’s words in Mt.7:21-23 might apply to us. But we would do well to take to heart Paul’s exhortation to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling,” something that the Evangelical church assures us is unnecessary; indeed “fear and trembling” (2Cor.7:15; Phil.2:12) is said to express a lack of faith which, they declare, walks in holy boldness! Paul could get a lesson on faith from these bold preachers!

Can it be that we, too, “listen but do not understand”? Are our hearts also hardened in some way because we have come under the power of deception? Can we look at the Lord’s teaching in all the four gospels and miss the point? The Kingdom of God, as we ought to know by now, is a central element in Jesus’ teaching. It is first and foremost *God’s*, the God whom Jesus called “Father”. But we are deceived by trinitarianism which tells us that it is *Jesus’* kingdom, because he *is* God.

It is true that in an important sense it is Jesus' kingdom. In what sense? In the sense that God has appointed him king in *His* kingdom, in the same sense in which David, his father ("son of David" was one of the titles by which Jesus was addressed in the gospels), was anointed king of Israel which, as a theocracy, was God's kingdom. It is this kind of admixture of truth and falsity that gives trinitarianism its grip on people. But surely everyone who reads the gospels without prejudice would know that when Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom, he was proclaiming God's kingdom, not his own.

Another central element in Jesus' ministry, in view of the nearness of the Kingdom emphasized in the Synoptic Gospels, was to bring people into a life-saving relationship with God which must commence with repentance. Once there was repentance, Jesus called them into the next step: a trusting and intimate relationship with the Father as "Abba". In John's Gospel, Jesus teaches the disciples that this intimacy is based on mutual indwelling, for which one could borrow the theological term "coinherence" to describe it ("I in them and you in me," Jn.17:23, etc). In all this, it should be perfectly evident, especially in Jesus' teaching in John's Gospel, that the Father is central in Jesus' ministry.

This point about the Father's centrality in John (and indeed also in Paul and the rest of the NT) causes us to pause and reflect on the general doctrine of God ("theology proper") in Christian theology as it is today, and ever since the 4th century. God is taught as first and foremost a transcendent Being, where the word "transcendence" means "existence above and apart from the material world" (Encarta). God

the Father, in trinitarian doctrine, is indubitably transcendent while the Son of God is presumably immanent, at least in regard to his earthly ministry. In this doctrine Father and Son really function in different spheres.

What needs to be understood is that this doctrine of divine transcendence derives from Greek philosophy (Plato and Aristotle) and not from the Hebrew Bible. The Greek notion of divine transcendence is strikingly shattered in Jesus' teaching in John, where he makes it absolutely clear that the Father is intimately involved in every aspect of his (Jesus') life and work, and in the whole work of the salvation of mankind.

This emerges also in the three Synoptic gospels where the Kingdom of God is not something solely in heaven or only in the future, but is already operating in the world now, and will ultimately triumph over every opposing power on earth. This is also what Paul teaches; and his perspective is very close to John's. The Revelation puts it like this, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever" (Rev.11:15). But the Greek idea of the supreme God, the Father, as wholly transcendent and unconcerned with the affairs of the world is, therefore, incompatible with the Scriptures, and effectively alienates Him from us as Someone remote and rather inaccessible.

Not surprisingly, we don't really identify with 1John 1:3, "Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ". Given the Father's (supposed) remoteness implied in

the Christian teaching we have received, how can we fellowship with the Father? Consequently, almost all Evangelical Christians today fellowship with the Son while occasionally paying some lip service to the Father as an act of courtesy to Him. All this is born out of our failure to perceive the Scriptural teaching of the Father's immanence and deep involvement in our salvation. As a result, our spiritual lives become unbalanced and even distorted when seen in the light of God's word. If one day we are, by grace, granted the privilege of being admitted to heaven, we would probably go straight to Jesus, and worship him in thanksgiving and praise, and would not (like all the heavenly multitudes described repeatedly in the Revelation) worship the Father seated upon the throne first and foremost. How out of tune we will be with all those multitudes in heaven—including our Lord Jesus Christ!

And what was the purpose of the cross, that is, of Jesus' death? Was its primary purpose to reconcile the world to Jesus himself? Was the reason for the sacrifice of the Lamb of God that mankind be reconciled to the Lamb rather than to God? To ask such questions is already to answer them, at least for anyone who has some understanding of the Scriptures. What then has so blinded us that what should have been obvious is no longer obvious? May the Lord grant mercy.

## Jesus as Lord

The situation with trinitarianism is not a simple matter of our either taking it or leaving it, that is, if you want to stick to it fine and if you want to leave it that's also fine. It should now be plainly evident that this dogma is a transgression of the word of God, that is, it literally "goes beyond" ("transgresses") His word. Nowhere in the apostolic preaching in Acts, and in the teaching of the NT, is belief in the deity of Jesus required for salvation. This is how the apostle sums up the faith needed for salvation: "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom.10:9). Peter explained the meaning of "Lord" already in his first message (the first message of the Gospel proclaimed after Pentecost) in Acts 2:

<sup>34</sup> "For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand,

<sup>35</sup> until I make your enemies your footstool.' [Ps.110:1]

<sup>36</sup> Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that *God has made (poieō) him both Lord and Christ*, this Jesus whom you crucified."

The exaltation of Jesus as "Lord and Christ" is directly related to his having been "raised up" at his resurrection by God (Acts 2:31-32).

The meaning of "Lord" is clearly expounded in these passages. It is not to be read as "the second person of the Godhead". To do so is to perversely disregard, and thereby to

transgress, God's word. Peter makes it clear that "Lord and Christ" is to be understood in terms of Ps. 110:1 which refers to the promised Davidic Messianic king who had now come in Christ. Yet trinitarianism asserts that if you don't believe that Jesus is God according to their definition then you are a heretic, and heretics will not be saved.

Yet strangely enough, evangelists calling people to repentance and salvation in Christ do not usually mention that you must believe in him as God before you can be saved. Some only say that he must be accepted as Savior, and some demand that he is to be accepted also as Lord. Do they assume that non-Christians (e.g. those in Asia) are already supposed to know that they are expected to believe that Jesus is God? Why then is the deity of Christ not always stated explicitly in evangelism? Is the intention to get people to first make a "decision for Christ" and only afterwards tell them that they must believe that Jesus is God the Son? Is this being honest? Or are evangelists not entirely sure that this doctrine is necessary for salvation?

A restoration to Biblical monotheism will be accomplished when the Father is adored as the undisputed center of the life of the Church in accordance with the teaching of Jesus, whom Christians profess as "Lord"—that is, when all who profess to be disciples of the *Lord* Jesus Christ follow their Lord's example in praying to the Father and doing His will. Christ strengthens his disciples through God's Spirit to do what by nature they are unable to do. If discipleship means to follow Jesus, then that following must refer both to his teaching and the example of his life in its absolute devotion to Yahweh

God, the Father, whom he endearingly addressed as “Abba”. This is surely what Jesus is doing even now, according to Scripture, interceding on behalf of all who trust and follow him; for is it not written that, “he is able to save to the uttermost *those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them*” (Heb.7:25)? This shows how vital for our salvation is his present ministry of intercession for us before the Father, Yahweh God.

But will he intercede for those who call him “Lord, Lord” but do not obey him? On the contrary, Jesus warns such people that they should expect to hear this from him “on that day” (i.e. the day of Judgment, Mt.7:22): “Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. *Depart from me, you evildoers!*’” (Mt.7:23, see vv.21-23) Interesting, the last statement echoes Psalm 119:115 where the psalmist expresses his absolute commitment to obey God and His word: “*Depart from me, you evildoers, that I may keep the commandments of my God.*” Jesus repeatedly spoke about his keeping God’s commands: John 10:18; 12:49; 15:10; also 14:31. Notice, too, that Jesus uses the term “my God” also after his resurrection (Jn.20:17; cf. Mt.27:46); but what is seldom noticed is that the glorified Christ in the Revelation still speaks of Yahweh God as “my God” (Rev.3:2,12). The intercession of such a high priest (Heb.7:24,25; and note that in Rev.1:12, Jesus appears in the heavenly temple as indicated by “the seven golden lampstands”) will undoubtedly be heard.

## The Bible is God-centered

To understand anything in Scripture correctly, we must begin by realizing that it is God-centered, which finds clear expression in Ephesians 4:6, “one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all”; notice the four “all”s. “Father of all” in the present context speaks of God as the Father of all believers. “Over all” (*epi pantōn*) is exactly the same as in Rom. 9:5 (which is why Rom.9:5 applies to “the one God and Father,” not to Jesus as trinitarians want to have it) and speaks of His supremacy and lordship over all; “through all” “expressing (His) pervading, animating, controlling presence” (*The Expositor’s Greek Testament*); “in all” His indwelling presence by His Spirit. J.A. Robinson puts it like this, “Supreme over all, He moves through all, and rests in all” (*Commentary on Ephesians, Exposition of the Greek Text*). In short, He is all or everything in every conceivable respect—He is absolutely all.

This all-ness is put in another way in Rom.11:36, “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.” The New Jerusalem Bible translates this thus, “Everything there is comes from him and is caused by him and exists for him. To him be glory for ever! Amen.” “From”, “through”, and “to”—these encompass everything.

What all this means is that there is absolutely nothing and no one who stands outside the all-ness of God. Whatever exists, exists for Him (“for whom and through whom all things exist,” Heb. 2:10) because of Him and in dependence



upon His sustaining presence. That is to say, everything and every being great or small exists in relation to Him, relative to Him who alone is absolute. There are no two (even less, three) absolutes. All this means that, as far as the Scriptural revelation is concerned, Christ must be understood in relation to “the one God and Father of *all*” (Eph.4:6), even if his relation to Him is on a far higher level as compared to anyone else’s. To speak of Scripture as “Christ-centered” is erroneous if this means (as it does mean in trinitarianism) that Christ is an absolute in himself, i.e. God. There cannot be two absolutes, or else neither is absolute. For the same reason, absoluteness cannot be shared between two or more beings. In Scripture, there is no demonstrable instance where there is a “God” (whether he be called “Son” or “Spirit”) who exists independently of “the one God and Father” and on equal terms with Him. All beings exist always and only in relation to Him, and have absolutely no existence or function apart from Him.

In view of these facts, the discussion about who Jesus is in himself is futile since an answer can only be found relative to “the one God and Father of all” (Eph.4:6). That is to say, Christology is impossible apart from theology proper, and is meaningless apart from it. This is evident from the titles used of Christ in the NT. The paramount titles of Jesus, “Lord” and “Christ,” were both conferred on him by God, as is made clear in the first message preached after Pentecost and the outpouring of the Spirit (Acts 2:36). No other title is an exception. This is a reality which Jesus himself not only

recognized but joyfully embraced. He always affirmed his total dependence on, and subjection to, and commitment to the Father (as is clearly seen in John's Gospel), while constantly teaching his disciples to follow him in doing so.

The stating of these Biblical truths is in no way to denigrate Jesus, but to correct the perspectives which have been distorted by trinitarianism. God has chosen to exalt Jesus high over all others, glorifying him because of his total self-abnegation on the cross (esp. Phil.2:6-11), and we may not (nor would we desire to) diminish that God-given glory by one iota. On the other hand, we may not give to Christ the glory that belongs to the one God and Father alone.

The greatness of the glory that God was pleased to confer upon Jesus comes to magnificent expression in Eph.1:19-23:

<sup>19</sup> what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his great might <sup>20</sup> which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, <sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; <sup>22</sup> and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, <sup>23</sup> which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all (cf. 4:10).

The eternal purpose of this is revealed in 1Cor.15:27-28:

For he “has put everything under his feet.” Now when it says that “everything” has been put under him, it is clear that *this does not include God himself*, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then *the Son himself will be made subject to him* who put everything under him, *so that God may be all in all.* (NIV)

## The firm monotheism of Jesus is rooted in the uncompromising monotheism of the Old Testament

The monotheism of the OT is stated so clearly and unequivocally that it leaves absolutely no room to argue or quibble about it. The Biblical texts speak for themselves with complete clarity:

### “No other god”

**Deuteronomy 4:35** To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD (Yahweh) is God; *there is no other besides him.*

**Deuteronomy 4:39** know therefore today, and lay it to your heart, that the LORD (Yahweh) is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; *there is no other.*

**Exodus 34:14** you shall worship *no other god*, for the LORD (Yahweh), whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God

**1 Kings 8:60** so that all the peoples of the earth may come to know that Yahweh is God indeed and that *there is no other*. (NJB)

**Isaiah 45:5** I am the LORD (Yahweh), and there is no other, besides me there is no God

**Isaiah 45:18** For thus says Yahweh, the Creator of the heavens—he is God, who shaped the earth and made it, who set it firm; he did not create it to be chaos, he formed it to be lived in: *I am Yahweh, and there is no other*. (NJB)

**Isaiah 45:21,22** Was it not I, Yahweh? *There is no other god except me, no saving God, no Saviour except me!* Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and *there is no other*. (NJB)

Let us notice carefully that in all these verses what is stated is not only that there is one God, but that this one God is *Yahweh*, and that there is “no other besides Him”. This makes it impossible to talk about God as a “substance” in which three persons share. No one in his right mind will argue that Yahweh is a substance, or that there are three persons called Yahweh. The consequence of offering worship and sacrifice to any god besides Yahweh is stated with absolute clarity:

**Exodus 22:20** “Whoever sacrifices to any god, other than the LORD (Yahweh) alone, shall be devoted to destruction.”

Again, there is no room to argue about the meaning of “alone” (Heb: *bd*; Gk: *monos*). Where there are two or three persons, no individual in this number can be said to be alone.

The same word “alone” as used in Exodus 22:20 is used frequently of God:

**Deuteronomy 32:12** the LORD (Yahweh) alone guided him, no foreign god was with him.

**2 Kings 19:15** And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD (Yahweh) and said: “O LORD (Yahweh) the God of Israel, who is enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth” (also Isa.37:16).

**2 Kings 19:19** So now, O LORD (Yahweh) our God, save us, please, from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O LORD, are God alone." (also Isa.37:20)

**Nehemiah 9:6** You are the LORD (Yahweh), you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you.

**Psalms 4:8** In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O LORD (Yahweh), make me dwell in safety.

**Psalms 72:18** Blessed be the LORD (Yahweh), the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things.

**Psalms 83:18** that they may know that you alone, whose name is the LORD (Yahweh), are the Most High over all the earth.

**Psalm 148:13** Let them praise the name of the LORD (Yahweh), for his name alone is exalted; his majesty is above earth and heaven.

**Isaiah 2:11** The haughty looks of man shall be brought low, and the lofty pride of men shall be humbled, and the LORD (Yahweh) alone will be exalted in that day (also 2:17).

**Isaiah 44:24** Thus says the LORD (Yahweh), your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb: “I am the LORD (Yahweh), who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself”.

That Jesus fully endorsed this strongly stated and clearly defined monotheism can be seen right from the beginning of his ministry:

**Matthew 4:10** Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only (*monos*).’” {Deut.6:13} (NIV) (also Lk.4:8)

What is striking about Jesus’ quoting from Deuteronomy 6:13 becomes evident when we compare it with that verse:

**Deuteronomy 6:13** It is the LORD (Yahweh) your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear.

The word “only” appears neither in the Hebrew text nor in the Greek text of this verse though, in view of the foregoing OT verses and the OT context as a whole, it is certainly

implied. What Jesus does is to state explicitly and authoritatively what is implied by inserting the crucial word “only” (*monos*) into this verse. Jesus’ monotheism is thereby made very clear.

The same is true in Luke 4:8, so that it cannot be argued that the “only” (*monos*) was added in by Matthew because his gospel was more “Jewish” in character as compared with the other gospels.

**Luke 4:8** And Jesus answered him, ‘It is written, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only (*monos*) shall you serve.”’

It should also be noticed that “the Lord your God” in both Matthew and Luke is “the LORD (Yahweh) your God” in Deuteronomy. Jesus chose a verse which does not just speak of serving God only, but specifically a verse which speaks of serving Yahweh only. This fact, taken together with Jesus’ strong monotheistic affirmation in John 5:44 where he speaks of God as “the only God” and his addressing the Father as “the only true God” in John 17:3, means without doubt that Jesus did not merely adhere to some generalized idea of monotheism which could think of God merely as “substance” but that he was firmly committed to the monotheism of Yahweh, a monotheism in which Yahweh alone is God, “him only shall you serve” (Lk.4:8). This, in fact, is true Biblical monotheism; Biblical monotheism is the monotheism of Yahweh.

Another point of importance that calls for attention is that these monotheistic statements of Jesus are all “*situational*,” by which is meant that they were not uttered as part of his public teaching but were spoken in a particular situation, addressing a specific incident. The Jews were ardent monotheists; Jesus did not need to preach monotheism to them. So these situational statements of Jesus tell us about his own monotheism, rather than that of the Jews generally. It is for this reason that these statements are particularly significant. The first of these, where he quoted Deuteronomy 6:13, was when he was confronted by temptation, and we have noticed that Jesus chose to add in the word “only” (*monos*), which occurs frequently in other OT texts with reference to Yahweh, but not in this particular text.

John 5:44 stands in the context of a dialogue with an unreceptive audience: “How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?” Two verses earlier he said, “I know that you do not have the love of God within you” (Jn.5:42); the evidence of this charge is that they seek praise (“glory”) from men, not that which comes from God. In other words, man not God is central to their lives; they are man orientated, not God orientated. This tells us something of great importance about Jesus’ monotheism. For him, monotheism is not just a religious dogma that one espouses but involves a way of life totally orientated towards God, not man. It involves the commitment to do His will, to seek always to live in a manner pleasing to Him. To profess the monotheism of Yahweh and yet live a self-centered life is, for Jesus,



unthinkable and intolerable; it is utter hypocrisy. His stern denunciations in Matthew 23 were directed at the religious elite whose professed monotheism was not in question, but whose life and conduct were worse than questionable. True monotheism must find expression in a life that honors Yahweh, driven by love for Him.

This comes out strongly in another situation, mentioned in all three Synoptic gospels, where Jesus was asked a question about which of the many commandments was the most important.

Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:29-31).

Jesus underlines the fact that the monotheistic confession (“the Lord is one”) is inseparably tied to a love that is totally committed to God, that is, a love that involves one’s whole being, and which also involves love for one’s neighbor. This is to say that monotheism is not just a confession that one makes with one’s mouth, but one which is made with the heart and governs one’s whole person and lifestyle. This was perfectly exemplified in Jesus’ own life.





## Only the Perfect Man can be the Savior of the World

### **The Biblical teaching on One True God and One Perfect Man**

Some years ago, motivated by a concern for the evangelizing of India, my wife and I, while traveling in that great country, were struck by the huge multitude of images of gods; only a few of these appeared to stand out as more prominent objects of worship. Larger and smaller temples were everywhere to be seen, often thronged by worshipful devotees. One question inevitably comes to mind: What need is there for such a multiplicity of gods? If there is one all-sufficient God who meets the needs of all, would that not render all other gods redundant? Is it not because they have not found one such all-sufficient God that man must resort to a variety of gods to meet a variety of needs?

Indeed, if there is one such all-encompassing personal God, a second or a third divine person would be unnecessary. But evidently this one God is unknown to men, hence the

need to look for others. This reminds us of Paul's words in Athens regarding "the unknown God" (Acts 17:23). For someone like Paul who knows the wonderful God of Israel, Yahweh, the need for other gods was incomprehensible. What would he think of trinitarianism that goes so far as to attribute to him (Paul) the teaching of a second and even a third divine person besides Yahweh? The more one understands the OT with its 6,828 references to Yahweh without any reference to any other divine person associated with Him, and the more one understands Paul's teaching on salvation, the better we will realize that any suggestion that he taught Christ as being a second coequal divine person besides Yahweh would have ignited in him a towering wrath. Worse than that, it will ignite Yahweh's own burning wrath (Ex.32:10f). But what the trinitarian may least expect is that, because their teaching is fundamentally contrary to Jesus' own teaching, they will discover on the great and final Day not the "gentle Jesus meek and mild," described so soothingly in a well-known Christian song, but the awesome "wrath of the Lamb" (Rev.6:16; cf.14:10).

Gentile Christianity today no longer knows that "Jewish Christianity always insisted on the historical fact that the Messiah and the Lord Jesus of Nazareth was not a divine being, a second God, but a human being among human beings" (Hans Küng, *Christianity*, p.97).

## **No need for another God, but a desperate need for a perfect man**

What was the essence of the NT teaching on salvation in general, and of Paul's teaching in particular, which is so vital for mankind's eternal well-being? The whole New Testament teaching on salvation is tied to the essential concept of the *perfect man*, without whom there can be no salvation. What is the perfect man? He is a man who, unlike Adam, is flawless and blameless ("a lamb without blemish or spot," 1Pet.1:19), and who for that very reason can be the savior of the world. Man does not need another God (Yahweh is more than sufficient), so man does not need Jesus as God, but what man desperately needs is a perfect man if he is to have any hope of being saved.

Being God does not make Jesus a perfect man; on the contrary, being God would not make him a real human being at all apart from having a human body. Is this not something which should be perfectly obvious? Or has our trinitarianism blurred our minds to the extent that we are unable to perceive even the obvious? What is at stake is this: If Jesus is not a human being as Adam was—and as we are—then all hope of our salvation vanishes into thin air. The reason we do not understand this is that we have not understood the fundamental principle of our salvation according to the Biblical revelation. Put in a nutshell, what this means is that if we are to be saved, God had to provide mankind with a *perfect man* who could undo the deadly effects of Adam's (and man's) sin.

How does God save us through this perfect man? Paul puts it neatly like this:

For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:19)

This one verse lucidly and concisely sums up the New Testament doctrine of salvation. To understand it thoroughly is to understand the way of salvation fully. But a huge amount of spiritual material is packed into, and condensed, in this verse.

This “one man's obedience” by which “the many will be made righteous” was something established “through suffering”:

**Hebrews 2:10:** For it was fitting that he [the Father God], for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation [Christ, the Son] *perfect through suffering*.

**Hebrew 5:8:** Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. <sup>9</sup>And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him.

**Hebrews 7:28:** a Son who has been made perfect forever.

These important verses are a real problem for trinitarianism because trinitarians have been indoctrinated to read “God the Son” into every reference to “Son”. The notion, therefore, that the Son was in some sense imperfect and that the Father had to perfect him—and perfect him specifically through

suffering—is theologically indigestible to the trinitarian. Any argument to the effect that this refers to the Son *as man* runs into the serious Christological problem of splitting up the “two natures” to make them function independently of each other, thereby bringing into question the unity of the two natures. And if the two natures cannot be separated to the extent needed to escape the sharp edge of these statements in Hebrews, it raises a trenchant question regarding the divine Son: What kind of a son is it that had not yet learned obedience to his father? That a human son, even a good one, needs to learn obedience to his father is perfectly understandable; and his being good consists precisely in his obedience. But how is one to explain the case of the preexistent, eternal Son who has not yet learned obedience to the Father, and only finally learns it when he comes to earth?!

What is also necessary to observe about these verses in Hebrews is that it is consistently stated that *it is the Father God, Yahweh, who perfected the Son*; it was *not* the Son perfecting himself, so reference to the alleged “two natures” is irrelevant. Thus in Hebrews 2:10 “make perfect” in the Greek is the one word “perfected” in the *active* form, because it is Yahweh God who was active in perfecting the Son. In the other two verses “being made perfect” is passive because the Son, not the Father, is the subject. The perfecting of Christ was the Father’s will, and initiated by Him for the sake of mankind’s salvation.

In Hebrews, as in the New Testament as a whole, the “Son” refers to the *messianic* titles “the Son of God” or “the Son of Man” but *never* to the trinitarian term “God the Son”

for the simple reason that the title “God the Son” does not exist in either the New Testament or the Old.

The importance of the three passages in Hebrews, cited above, is found in the fact that all three illuminate the truth that God made the Son, the Messiah Jesus, perfect through the process of suffering so that he could be “the founder of their salvation” (2:10). What this means is that the perfecting of “the man Christ (which, let us remember, means “Messiah,” the Savior, Lk.2:11, etc) Jesus” was *absolutely essential for man’s salvation*. Only the Messiah as *perfect man* could be “the savior of the world” (Jn.4:42; 1Jn.4:14).

Put in sacrificial terms, only if the animal being offered up on the altar was “without blemish,” that is, perfect, could the sacrifice be acceptable to God. No imperfect animal, having even the slightest blemish, could be offered as a sacrifice. This point is repeatedly stressed in the Law of the Old Testament. Even someone who knows no Hebrew can confirm for himself or herself that “without blemish” occurs in 17 verses in Leviticus and also 17 in Numbers in the ESV (English Standard Version) in regard to animals offered as a sacrifice. In some verses the phrase occurs more than once: e.g. Numbers 6:14, “and he shall bring his gift to the LORD (Yahweh), one male lamb a year old *without blemish* for a burnt offering, and one ewe lamb a year old *without blemish* as a sin offering, and one ram *without blemish* as a peace offering”.

Accordingly, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Perfect Man, was able to offer himself up for the salvation of the world. In the words of Hebrews 9:14, “how much more (than the animal sacrifices, v.13) will the blood of Christ, who through the



eternal Spirit offered himself *without blemish* to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God,” and 1Pt.1:18,19, “knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb *without blemish or spot.*”

## **The Uniqueness of the Perfect Man Jesus Christ**

The perfect man is a man who is perfect in his *obedience* to God. *Such a man had never existed in the history of the world.* This is what Apostle Paul highlights in Romans 3:10, “As it is written: ‘There is no one righteous, not even one’”, a verse often misused to argue for man’s “total depravity,” disregarding the fact that Paul does recognize that there are righteous and good people in the world, as can be seen from the following statement, “Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die.” (Romans 5:7)

Although there may be “good men” in the world, there has never been a perfect man as measured by Yahweh God’s standards. Yet nothing less than such a man was needed for man’s salvation. *Only if Jesus is such a man can he save us.* Had trinitarian theologians better understood Biblical soteriology (doctrine of salvation) they would have avoided the error of constantly harping on the theme of Jesus being God. *Nowhere in the New Testament is faith in Jesus as God required for salvation.* But it is essential to believe that “the man Christ

Jesus” is the one mediator whom God appointed for our salvation (1Ti.2:5,6); he is *the one and only perfect man* who has ever appeared on the face of this earth; this is a new thing which God has done in order to accomplish the salvation of mankind.

The perfection of Jesus consisted precisely in his utter voluntary submission and total functional obedience to the Father God, Yahweh. It is for this very reason that his full voluntary subordination to the Father’s will is so constantly, almost repetitiously, emphasized by Jesus himself as described extensively in John’s Gospel, which we shall study later in this work.

But this leads us to consider the question: What is implied by the term “perfect man”? What needs to be perceived in this connection is that perfection in its absolute sense is an attribute of Yahweh God, not of man (“your heavenly Father is perfect,” Mt.5:48). Thus, to be made perfect is to become like Him; it is to acquire His character. But can suffering, though necessary in the process of perfection, of itself make anyone perfect? Suffering, after all, is something which a large portion of mankind has had a great deal of experience of, and many have endured it with dignity and even outstanding heroism, but would that make them perfect persons in the sense in which Hebrews is speaking about? Some people who have suffered could perhaps have reached a high level of moral excellence; but reaching Christ’s perfection is not within the realm of human attainment.

Christ’s perfection rests on the fact of *the unique divine involvement in his person* as the one in whom the Word (Memra)

was incarnate or “became flesh” (Jn.1:14); “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (Col.1:19); “in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col.2:9). This means that *Christ’s perfection was attained through the unique indwelling presence and power of God in him*. Yahweh God established a union with Christ at the deepest level of his being (“I and my Father are one,” Jn.10:30); *in this union Christ was empowered to attain what no man could of himself attain*. It was for this reason that he was called “the only son,” or “only begotten son” (Jn.1:14; 3:16,18; 1Jn:4:9); this is what distinguished him from Adam, the man “from the earth,” as “the man from heaven (i.e. from God)” (1Cor.15:47). Without Yahweh God’s unique indwelling in Christ, the necessary perfection could not have been achieved. The perfect man was the man in whom Yahweh’s fullness lived bodily here on earth among men to accomplish man’s salvation.

But it needs to be emphasized that Christ’s perfection as man was not something in which Christ was only a passive participant. For Hebrews 5:8 says, “Although he was a son, he *learned* obedience through what he suffered.” “Learned” is in the active form in Greek. This was no mere passive submissiveness, but wholehearted obedience to the Father; Jesus expresses it like this, “I always do the things that are pleasing to him” (Jn.8:29). He could fully echo the sentiments of the Psalmist, “My delight is to do your will; your law, my God, is deep in my heart” (Psalm 40:8, NJB); he could speak of doing God’s will as his food (Jn.4:34), from which it can be seen that he certainly knew what it meant to “delight yourself in the LORD (Yahweh)” (Ps.37:4; Isa.58:14).

## Perfect man as perfect teacher

We often speak of “the teaching of Jesus” without taking due note of the fact that his teaching originates from the Father; it is not his own. What Jesus taught was *the Father’s teaching* of which he was the channel, as he himself affirmed unequivocally in John 7:16, “*My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me.*” It is the Father speaking to us in all of Jesus’ teaching. Jesus repeats this point many times. In addition to John 7:16, there are the following:

**3:34:** For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure.

**12:49:** For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak.

**14:10:** The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works.

**14:24:** Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me.

**17:8:** For I have given them the words that you gave me.

Jesus was the perfect man also for this reason, namely, he always “utters the words of God” (3:34) and was, therefore, perfect in speech. As it is written in James 3:2, “For we all stumble in many ways, and if anyone does not stumble in

what he says, he is *a perfect man*, able also to bridle his whole body.”

Without Jesus we would not have the Father’s teaching; we therefore thank the Father from the depth of our hearts for Jesus. But we must not forget that his message is the Word of *God*, the God whom Jesus repeatedly referred to as “Father”.

The Word which Jesus declared and embodied is *truth and life* precisely because it is the Word of *God*, the Father. The Word of God is God’s self-revelation, which is the means by which all men are drawn to Him. The Father draws *through* His word. This is consistent with what we saw earlier, namely, that Jesus as the embodiment of God’s word is the Way to the Father. Put in another way, he is the Bread sent down by the Father that men may have life through the process of “eating” it. All the other metaphors similarly portray Jesus as the instrument of the Father’s revelatory and saving work. This comes out particularly strongly in John’s Gospel, in which the truth that Jesus is the one *sent* by the Father and *functioned in total subordination to, and dependence on, the Father*, is more strongly emphasized than anywhere else in the NT. We shall now consider the evidence for this statement.

## **Jesus' emphasis on his having been sent by the Father and therefore acting under His authority in all that he does**

On the Father sending Jesus, a look at the statistics will immediately reveal its importance in John. Two Greek words are translated as “send”:

*apostellō*

Matthew: 3 times (if 21:37, in a parable, is counted)

Mark: 2 times (if 12:6, in a parable, is included)

Luke: 4 times

John: 17 times

*pempō*

Synoptic Gospels: 0

John: 24 times

*Apostellō* and *pempō*, in reference to the Father sending the Son, together add up to a total of 41 times in John.

This emphasis is striking. What is also striking is not only that they appear in John's Gospel, but that the references are all *in Jesus' own teaching* in that Gospel. And as though to ensure that we do not miss the point, Jesus says in 13:16, “Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant (*doulos*, slave, as applied to Jesus see Phil.2:7) is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him”; hence, “the Father is greater than I” (14:28).

This huge number of 41 references in the Lord's sayings in John's Gospel shows that *it constitutes the heart and essence of his teaching*. A study of each of these sayings would give the

details of Jesus' teaching in John. But that would be beyond the scope of this book.<sup>9</sup>

I shall not here attempt to analyze the semantic differences (if any) between *apostellō* and *pempō*, except to provide a quotation from *A Treasury of New Testament Synonyms* (Stewart Custer, Bob Jones University Press, Inc., 1975) where he gives a summary of his discussion of the two words as follows, "The word ἀποστέλλω (*apostellō*) denotes 'I send with a commission' or 'I send officially.' Πέμπω (*pempō*) is a general term for 'I send.' In some contexts it certainly means 'I send officially,' but by no means always; the context must decide."

But Custer's study is more strongly based on classical Greek than on NT Greek where the distinction between the two words appears to be less marked, though some such distinction as given by Custer can still be admitted, though to a lesser extent. For example, both *apostellō* and *pempō* appear in John 20:21 where the difference does not seem at first to be very obvious; it disappears altogether in the various translations. But are the two different words used merely for literary variation? Or could it be that the Lord (in Jn.20:21) did not want to put his sending out the disciples on the same level as the Father's sending him into the world, and thus again honoring the Father as greater than he?

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<sup>9</sup> For those who would like to study these references, you might like to know that if you have the *Modern Concordance of the New Testament* (M. Darton, Ed.), all 41 references are conveniently listed under "Send," section 1 of both *apostellō* (17 refs.) and *pempō* (24 refs).

## Jesus' total dependence on the Father as seen in his teaching

He who sends is obviously greater than he who is sent by him. Hence, to be sent in itself expresses the subordination of the one who is sent to the one who sends him (Jn.13:16). But Jesus affirms even more than that: he expresses himself as being *totally dependent* upon the Father. John 6:57, "Just as the living Father sent me and *I live because of the Father*, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me." Our relationship to Jesus, our dependence on Jesus for life, mirrors his dependence upon the Father for life.

According to Jesus' own teaching in John 6:57, just as we cannot live without Jesus, so also Jesus cannot live without the Father. C.K. Barrett (*The Gospel According to St. John, Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, SPCK) puts it like this, "The life of the Son is *entirely dependent* upon the Father (διὰ τὸν πατέρα) [*dia ton patera*], he has no independent life or authority, and it is because he abides in the Father that men may live abiding in him" (p.248, on Jn.6:57; italics mine). M. Dods, "The Father is the absolute source of life; the Son is the bearer of that life to the world; cf. 5:26, where the same *dependence* of the Son on the Father for life is expressed" (*Expositor's Greek Testament*, on Jn.6:57; italics mine).

John 5:26: "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself." The Son has life in himself, but only because the Father has *granted* (ἔδωκεν, *edōken* aor. of *didōmi*) it to him. And because the Father has



given the Son this life, the Son can also give it to others: “just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it” (5:21). The Son has been granted full authority to pass on the life which the Father had given him.

### Didōmi in John

*Didōmi* (“give”) is another statistically significant word in John’s Gospel; it occurs more frequently in John than in any other book in the NT (Jn: 75 times; Mt: 56; Mk: 39; Lk: 60); it is frequent also in the Apocalypse of John, the Revelation (58 times).

For most Christians, probably the best known instance of “give” in John is found in 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that he gave (*didōmi*) his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” This is what Paul described as “God’s unspeakable (inexpressible, indescribable) gift” (2Co.9:15) to us. It was *God* who gave Jesus to us for no other reason than that He loved us. It is hard enough for the basically unloving, self-centered people such as we are, to understand that anyone should love us so deeply and genuinely; it is well-nigh incomprehensible (unless, of course, we are extremely conceited, which is possible) that God should have any reason to love us. But the point being made in this verse is not only that God loved us, but that He loved us to the extent of actually giving His Son. What gratitude do we have for the Father in return? We love the Son (rightly), but

we marginalize the Father as though He was less involved in our salvation.

## **Jesus emphasized his obedience to the Father**

“Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me’” (Jn.8:42, ESV). Jesus emphasized not only his subordination to the Father as the one sent by Him, but also his complete dependence on the Father for life. In this verse (8:42) he underlines his obedience to the Father: his coming into the world was not primarily a matter of his own choice or initiative, but it was in obedience to the Father’s will. On this verse C.K. Barrett (*The Gospel According to St. John*) comments, “Once more the mission of Jesus is emptied of every suggestion of self-will or self-seeking. This is a very common and essential Johannine emphasis; see especially 5:19-30. Jesus did not come into the world of his own accord; he came because he was sent. His ministry has significance not in any wisdom or virtue of his own, but in the fact that he is the delegate of God himself.”

It is clear that with the words “I came not of my own accord, but he sent me” (8:42), Jesus established firmly that his coming was an act of obedience to the Father, not an act of his own will. Presumably, he could have disobeyed, and in that act of disobedience (like Adam) clutched at equality with God. Yet, do we not read Phil.2:6f as though his coming was of his own initiative, an act of his own volition? This, as it

turns out, is wrong, and distorts our understanding of that important passage.

Romans 5:19, “For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous” (NASB). Obedience, if it is to be meaningful, must involve choice. Jesus repeatedly maintained that he had made that choice to obey the Father: John 4:34 (NIV), “My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work”; the Father’s will is like food to him, he lives on it. John 5:30, “I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.” John 6:39, “And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.”

## His subordination and dependence

**John 14:10**, “The words that I say to you *I do not speak on my own authority*, but the Father who dwells in me does his works.”

**John 5:19**, “So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, *the Son can do nothing of his own accord*, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.””

**John 12:49**, “For *I have not spoken on my own authority*, but the Father who sent me has himself given (*didōmi*) me a commandment (*entolē*) —what to say and what to speak.”

In this last verse Jesus makes it clear that he always lives by the commands (*entolē*) the Father has given (*didōmi*) him. As we might now come to expect, the word “command” (*entolē*) appears more often in John as compared to the synoptic gospels (Jn: 10 times; Mt: 6; Mk: 6; Lk: 4). Jesus refers to the Father’s commands repeatedly:

**John 10:18**, “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. *This command I received from my Father.*”

**John 15:10**, “If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, *just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love.*”

Compare this with the following verse (the NIV translation is given because it helps to bring out the meaning more clearly):

**John 14:31**, “but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded (*entellomai*) me.”

## Jesus always does the Father’s will

God’s will (*thelēma*) is another key word in John, again occurring more frequently than in the other gospels (Jn: 11 times; Mt: 6; Mk: 1; Lk: 4). Here we cite only those verses directly relevant to what is being discussed in this section. Apart from 4:34, quoted earlier, there are the following:

**John 5:30**, “I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.”

**John 6:38**, “For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.”

**John 7:17**, “If anyone’s will is to do God’s will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.” Only those who live according to God’s will are granted to know Jesus—the one who teaches and lives according to God’s will. The Word of God and the will of God cannot be separated.

We note that Jesus did not simply say in a dogmatic way: If you want to be saved, you have to believe me and accept whatever I say or teach (this is the way we are used to hearing the Christian church speak). How does anyone know whether he (or the Church) is really speaking God’s word, God’s truth? That is surely a fair question. Jesus’ answer is: If you are truly willing to live totally and uncompromisingly according to God’s will, God will surely grant you to know whether I—and my teaching—am true or not.

Knowing the truth is not a matter of theory or dogma, but a matter of life (or death)—and life is no mere theory or dogma. If our lives are lived in the light (i.e. not in darkness) through doing God’s will faithfully, He will certainly grant us to see His light, just as it is written in Psalm 36:9, “For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light.”

John's Gospel is written in a clear and uncomplicated style. If in spite of this fact we still cannot understand the message it contains, then we must examine our spiritual condition ("Let a person examine himself," 1Cor.11:28). Those who search John's Gospel for proof-texts, which they take out of context to support their unscriptural ideas and doctrines, do well to consider the consequence: "And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). "Their deeds were evil" does not necessarily mean that these people are robbers or fornicators, but that they live according to their own (or men's) will, rather than live wholly in glad obedience to God's will. Doing or not doing the will of the Father God is what, in Jesus' teaching, defines good or evil; how each person lives in relation to God's will is what determines whether it will be evaluated as good or bad, whether it will lead to life or to death.

### **Christ's true and full humanity is essential for man's salvation**

There is another important observation that we need to take note of in view of the foregoing points: If the humanity of Christ is in any way called into question or compromised, we would likewise compromise our salvation, for as we have noted, if Christ is not truly man he cannot be our savior. But trinitarianism has done precisely that; it compromises Christ's humanity by dogmatically asserting that Christ is both "truly

man and truly God”. If we have not been blinded by the twisted logic of trinitarianism, it should not have taken us more than a moment to see that this is logical nonsense. The plain fact is that *no one can be truly man who is truly God*. No one can be 100% man and also be 100% God, for that adds up to 200%—two persons.

Is there anything impossible with God? The answer is ‘Yes’ *if what is involved is logical contradiction or nonsense*. It is like asking: can God make something both 100% black and 100% white all over at the same time? Can 100% salt also be 100% sugar? The point is that self-contradictory nonsense can never be attributed to God; He is the God of truth, not irrationality and falsehood.

Yet this is precisely the kind of self-contradictory Christology which results in Christians saying “Jesus is God”; these Christians generally have a weak concept of his humanity. The fact is that we cannot hold two contradictory ideas about Christ in balanced tension without the one dominating over the other, and since God must be the One who dominates, therefore the humanity of Christ is eclipsed by that dominance.

Also, this dogmatic God-man notion about Jesus results in Christians having to engage in the art of double-speak: one moment we may speak of him as God and then at another moment we talk about him as man, without even noticing the contradictions involved. We are hardly conscious of this swinging to and fro, having become immune to self-contradiction in a thought world in which truth and falsehood, reason and irrationality, are forced into coexistence.

This mental “achievement” has come at a terrible price: we need only look around in the world and see that, far from the church being “the light of the world” (Mt.5:14) as it is meant to be, it has become irrelevant, because it has itself fallen into the darkness of error. How can the church function as light unless it is delivered from the bondage of error? In view of the evil of error, the relevance of the words which Jesus taught his disciples to pray, “deliver us from evil,” begins to become strikingly clear.

Let us take one example: the temptation of Christ in Matthew 4 and Luke 4. How is trinitarianism to explain these passages in the light of the principle stated in James 1:13, “God cannot be tempted by evil”? This means that *if Jesus cannot really be tempted, then he is not man; and if he can be tempted, he is not God*. To argue in the usual double-talk way, as trinitarians unashamedly do, that he can be tempted as man, but not as God, is to reduce sense to nonsense, and truth to falsehood, for when it comes to temptation, he is not God—but if he were God, then he could not be tempted and the temptation of Christ would be an exercise in meaninglessness. What happened to the claim that he was both 100% God (true God) and 100% man at one and the same time? How can one properly and responsibly interpret the Scriptures with this kind of teaching?

Trinitarianism wants to have it both ways: Jesus, the God-man, is one person yet functionally he is really two persons simultaneously, i.e. God and man. So when there is the question of facing temptation, Jesus who is God, is instantly switched to being man. This constant switching back and



forth as the situation requires is the inevitable way in which the trinitarian Christ functions, but which immediately reveals the fact that he cannot be both God and man *simultaneously*. For the truth of the matter is that no one can both be tempted yet not tempted simultaneously, as this is both logically and factually impossible, and to maintain that it is possible is simply to insist on speaking nonsense. Is it really that difficult to see that any statement to the effect that Jesus *can* be tempted but at the same time and in the same sense *cannot* be tempted is nonsensical? Yet it is this kind of double talk that trinitarians are obliged to engage in to argue for the God-man doctrine. Their “yes” is “no,” and their “no” is “yes” (cf. Mt.5:37; 2Cor.1:17,19; Jas.5:12)—whatever suits their purpose to sustain a dogma which in the end proves sustainable neither by Scripture nor by logic.

## **The origins of Trinitarianism**

In the light of Scripture, the origin and development of the trinitarian error can be analyzed in three steps:

(1) The misinterpretation of “the Word” to refer to “God the Son,” who exists nowhere in the Scriptures (or anywhere else) yet who is created by trinitarianism as a result of the mistaken interpretation, in particular of John 1:1. Because of the importance of this matter and its serious consequences for the church, careful attention will be given to examining it in the following chapters.

(2) “Incarnation” is interpreted to mean that two different and distinct persons, one who is said to be “God”—namely, “God the Son”—and the man named Jesus, are quite literally compressed or condensed into becoming one person, one individual. Two persons are made to become one person! This is not meant as a metaphorical union such as that of husband and wife becoming “one flesh” (Gen.2:24; Mt.19:5, etc), but actually becoming one person! By this doctrine two persons are conflated into one—without any concern whether this is logically or factually possible. But this raises the problem that such a “person” ends up being neither truly human nor divine, being some kind of combination of both. But, worst of all, there is absolutely no basis for any of this in Scripture. It is nothing more or less than a misguided trinitarian fabrication. Yet this is the sort of doctrine that Christians are expected to believe in!

(3) The Western church failed to see that it was Yahweh God who was “in Christ reconciling the world to Himself” (2Cor.5:19) in spite of the fact that, as Jesus himself had clearly stated, the Father, Yahweh, is “the only true God” (Jn.17:3), being “the only God” (Jn.5:44); who else but He who was “in Christ reconciling the world”? Yet Western theology closed out this option because, under the influence of the Hellenistic (Greek) philosophy which maintained that God was transcendent, they thereby made unthinkable the possibility that Yahweh could come into the world in Christ. Apparently, “the Word” was actually thought of as being less than transcendent, perhaps as some kind of intermediate

being (as in Philo); otherwise, how could the Word avoid the man-made ban on God's coming into the world because of His "transcendence"? It did not seem to occur to trinitarians that the Word's exemption from this ban in itself calls into question their claim about the full deity of the Word, since it would be an admission that he was not transcendent to begin with.

### **Jesus' own teaching**

That "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (2Cor.5:19) was not Paul's invention (Paul is often wrongfully accused of being the originator of later Christian doctrines); it was undoubtedly Jesus' own teaching. As we shall see when studying his teaching in John's Gospel, Jesus consistently maintained that it was the Father, Yahweh, who was the dynamic power at work in him, enabling him to fulfill the mission of accomplishing the salvation of mankind. This is clearly seen in the words, "the Father who dwells in me does His works" (Jn.14:10).

Jesus' teaching never gives the notion that Yahweh's transcendence prevents Him from coming into the world in Jesus; Jesus can even speak metaphorically of earth as Yahweh's "footstool" (Mt.5:35)—His feet are firmly planted on this earth which He created! No philosophy, Greek or otherwise, will be permitted to ban Him from His world, over which He reigns. "The Kingdom of God" is one of the central elements of Jesus' teaching.

It can, therefore, easily be seen in the light of Jesus' teaching that the three points on which the trinitarian dogma is based find no support in his teaching. In regard to the first point, "the Word" as a metonym for "Yahweh" was something familiar to Jesus and the Jews of his day because it was rooted in the OT and in the Aramaic Bible (Targums) which were commonly used in the synagogues in Israel. This will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters.

Regarding the second point, that in Jesus, God and man were "condensed" into one (how else does one describe two persons being reduced to one person?!), such an idea is totally foreign to Jesus' teaching, and incompatible with it. Once we begin to understand something about the fundamentals of Jesus' teaching, we begin to feel an uncomfortable queasiness about the trinitarian idea of reducing God and man into one person; it seems to border on the blasphemous. But how else can we deal with this falsehood without mentioning it? What is strange is that, as trinitarians, we had no qualms about this dogma of the merging of God and man into one person. This is probably because, in part at least, few of us had any real idea what such a merging really meant or entailed; the concept was extremely vague to us, and hence its real implications did not strike us. But the other reason is that most people have an extremely shallow concept of God; the lofty awe-inspiring majesty of the living God is very remote from most people's thoughts about Him. So it simply did not occur to us that we may be saying something which is deeply displeasing to Him. Moreover, if people believe anything about God at all, it is often the idea that anything is possible with him, and this

makes it possible to speak even of absurdities as though these might also be possible for God.

*Jesus warned us about how we make reference to God.* This, for example, is what lies behind his warning not to swear:

“But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one” (Mt.5:34-37; NIV).

What is striking about what Jesus says here is his warning that even though direct reference to God is avoided when swearing “by heaven”, or “by earth”, etc, your oath (usually made to support what you want to affirm) still unavoidably has reference to God, so you will answer for it before Him, and you could be “subject to judgment” or even to “the hell of fire” (Mt.5:22) because it “comes from the evil one” (Mt.5:37). *This is a level of reverence for God in daily life and speech that is far beyond the concept of the average Christian*, and is almost inconceivable to him. It is hard to imagine, therefore, what Jesus must think about the merging of God and man into one person as dogmatically defined in trinitarianism!

This trinitarian reduction of two persons into one in no way represents what Jesus meant by being “one” with the Father and our becoming “one” with both him and the Father through a similar union. This union is always spoken of in terms of “abiding” or “living” in one another, not some kind

of quasi-physical absorption into one another. The identity of each person is fully ensured in this union, and indeed enriched and enhanced by it.

Jesus never engaged in ‘double talk,’ that is, sometimes speaking as man and at other times as God. Anyone who does this could rightly be considered schizophrenic, if not something worse. But throughout John’s Gospel, as we shall see, he speaks consistently as “the son” who lives in total love and obedience to his Father. But trinitarianism, in its determination to maintain the Scripturally (and logically) untenable idea of Jesus as being both ‘true God and true man,’ finds that it cannot do this without resorting to alleging that Jesus would in one place speak as God yet in another place as man (e.g. “I thirst,” Jn.19:28). They thus admit that he functioned schizophrenically, but unavoidably so, because of his dual natures. There is absolutely no basis for this kind of notion in the gospels.

It must be borne in mind that, from the point of view of the salvation of mankind, the deity of Christ does not matter, but the reality of *Christ’s humanity is of the greatest importance*. If we do not wish to be misled, we must keep this in our minds: *Nowhere in the NT is faith in the deity of Christ required for salvation*. These facts will become clearer to the reader as we proceed through the present study.

## Perfect Man as Mediator

“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” (1Timothy 2:5)

Moses served effectively as a mediator between Israel and Yahweh. On several occasions, rebellious Israel was saved from God’s wrath through Moses’ intercessions. But who stands between mankind and God? “All have sinned” (Rom.3:23), all have disobeyed God, all are in the clutches of death and condemnation; who is there to speak on mankind’s behalf in the way that Moses did for Israel? This is where the necessity of Christ’s ministry as the “one mediator” becomes evident. Not surprisingly, therefore, Christ is compared with Moses as mediator (Gal.3:19-22). Even in John’s Prologue there is reference to Moses (John 1:17), for through him the Word (*logos*) of God came to Israel in the form of the Law.

The Letter to the Hebrews discusses in detail Jesus’ mediatorial role in terms of being the great high priest. The function of the high priest is explained in Hebrews 5:1, “For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed *to act on behalf of men in relation to God* [i.e. act as mediator], to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.” “And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God” (v.4). “So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you’ [Ps.2:7]” (v.5). “For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God

*on our behalf* (*hyper hēmōn*)” (9:24). “On our behalf” crystallizes the character of the mediator’s role, and especially that of the high priest as mediator. But “on our behalf” is just one translation of *hyper hēmōn*, which is literally: “for us”. These words appear many times with reference to Christ’s work as high priest and savior; there are too many references to study here, but the following are the occurrences in Romans:

“For while *we* were still weak, at the right time Christ died *for* the ungodly.” (5:6)

“But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died *for us*.” (5:8)

“He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up *for us* all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (8:32)

“Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding *for us*.” (8:34)

It is important to notice from the foregoing references that it was *Yahweh God* who provided the mediator by appointing Jesus as high priest (Heb.5:5), and that He also provided the sacrifice for sin by giving up His own Son (Rom. 8:32), so “Christ died for us” (Rom.5:8). These are the reasons why Yahweh is called “God our Savior” (1Tim.1:1; 2:3; etc). These provisions for man’s salvation remind us of what happened at the sacrificing of Isaac by Abraham. When Isaac asked his father where the animal for the sacrifice was,



Abraham, “the father of all who believe” (Rom.4:11), replied, “God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” (Gen.22:8) This foreshadowed a faith that could and would believe in Yahweh’s provision of “the Lamb of God” (Jn.1:29,36; and, in Revelation, “the Lamb”); the phrase means: a Lamb that God Himself provided—to make possible the salvation of mankind.

What is also important for us to know is that “for us” (*hyper hēmōn*, and therefore, “for you,” *hyper sou*) has its roots in the language of *redemption* in the OT. The following is an example from Isaiah 43:

<sup>3</sup> For I am the LORD (Yahweh), your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead [LXX, *hyper sou*, “for you”]. <sup>4</sup> Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give men in exchange for you [LXX, *hyper sou*], and people in exchange for your life.” (NIV)

This passage illustrates several significant points:

(1) Yahweh is the Redeemer of His people. This is an important theme in the Hebrew Bible, but is given special emphasis in Isaiah. “Of thirty-three passages in the Old Testament in which *gō’ēl* [redeemer] is applied to God, nineteen occur in Isaiah... In spiritualizing the term *gō’ēl*, Isaiah (49:26; comp. Psa. 19:14) places it on a par with ‘savior’”. (*Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, “Redeemer”)

(2) Redemption involves the paying of a “ransom”. In this case, since Egypt also belongs to God, He chose to give it as a

ransom to liberate His people from the bondage they were subjected to there. The ransom is the “price” (*timē*) paid to redeem a slave. Hence Paul writes to the Corinthian church, “You are not your own, for you were bought with a price (*timē*). So glorify God in your body.” (1Cor.6:19,20; also 7:23)

(3) A ransom is something given in *exchange* for the prisoner or slave for whom the ransom is paid. Thus, when we read in Romans 5:6 that “Christ died *for* the ungodly,” we understand that he gave his life as a ransom for us in order to secure our life through his death. He gave himself in exchange for us. Jesus himself put it like this, “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and *to give his life as a ransom for many.*” (Mt.20:28) Jesus was the ransom who freely gave himself *for us* (Gal.2:20). But, unlike Paul, we usually overlook the fact that it was *Yahweh God* who gave His Son as that ransom; it was “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up *for us* all” (Rom.8:32). In other words, Yahweh God is the Redeemer-Savior, and Jesus is the ransom that He paid for us. The beauty of the mediator is that he is the willing ransom-sacrifice. The beauty of Yahweh is that He was willing to “give up” His “beloved son” for our salvation-liberation from sin and death. From the fact of Jesus’ willing self-giving we can appreciate why he is Yahweh’s “beloved son”.

The Apostle Peter put it like this, “knowing that you *were ransomed* [by God] from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but *with the precious blood of Christ*, like that of a lamb

without blemish or spot.” (1Pet.1:18,19) Why does he speak of Christ’s blood as “precious”? Is it not because it is the blood of God’s “beloved Son” (2Pet.1:17; Mt.3:17; 17:5, etc)? Notice, too, as a matter of relevance to this section, that “blood” speaks of Jesus as *man*, and “without blemish or spot” describes him as *perfect*; hence it speaks of him as the perfect man.

(4) Those who have been ransomed become the possession of the one who redeemed (or ransomed) them. This is stated with exquisite intensity in Isaiah 43:1, “And now, thus says Yahweh, he who created you, Jacob, who formed you, Israel: Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name, *you are mine*.” (NJB) This sentiment was expressed already much earlier in Deuteronomy 14:1,2: “You are the sons of the LORD (Yahweh) your God... For you are a people holy to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession.” So also Deuteronomy 26:18, “And the LORD has declared today that you are a people for his treasured possession.” These same sentiments are applied to the church in the New Testament, as in 1Peter 2:9,10:

<sup>9</sup> But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, *a people for his own possession*, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. <sup>10</sup> Once you were not a people, but *now you are God’s people*; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

It is for this reason, too, that the church is called “the church of God” (7 times in the NT). In our “Christ-centered” trinitarianism we always spoke of “the church of Jesus Christ”. How great was my surprise to discover that the term “the church of Christ” cannot be found in the New Testament! This reminds me of Matthew 22:29: “Jesus replied, ‘You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God’”—and I had assumed that I knew both reasonably well!—a stinging but much needed lesson in humility!

In God’s loving kindness and tender mercy He redeemed us through Christ and made us His own. But what we, as trinitarians, have forgotten (or have chosen to disregard) is that it is not only we ourselves who belong to Him, but that Christ Jesus our Lord is also Yahweh’s own possession, just as the Apostle states so clearly yet so concisely in the words, “you are Christ’s, *and Christ is God’s*” (1Cor.3:23). I finally understood something which, because of my trinitarian Christology, I had never understood before: Christ is not an *independent* mediator standing between God and man; he is and has always been *God’s*. That is to say, he is not a third party who came to act as an arbiter or negotiator between God and man. He was indeed a mediator, but only in the sense of someone sent by God and appointed by Him to be both high priest and sacrifice; for it was God Himself who “was in Christ reconciling the world *to Himself*” (2Cor.5:19). “He spared not His own Son but gave him up for us all” (Rom.8:32) in order to secure our redemption. The whole initiative was Yahweh God’s from the beginning; it was He alone who provided the mediator.

Finally I began to understand what the Apostle was saying in Galatians 3:20. All Bible translations understandably try to make sense of this highly condensed sentence, but they seem hardly successful in their attempts. A literal word for word translation would read, “Now a mediator is not of one; but God is one.” What does this mean? As we have seen, the entire initiative for the salvation of mankind came from *God alone*; man had no part in it, he made no contribution to it whatever; it came only *from the one God*—there was no other party involved in the planning and implementing of man’s salvation, it was of God’s grace alone. So in Galatians 3:20, while Paul agrees that a mediator is not usually put forth or provided by one side only, yet in the case of man’s salvation, Christ the mediator was indeed provided by only one side: that of the one God, the one who alone is God. “God is one” echoes Deuteronomy 6:4 and Mark 12:29; it is here applied to the specific matter of salvation.

### **Jesus’ God-given name “Yeshua”**

As is (or should be) generally known, Jesus’ Hebrew name is Yeshua. This is rendered in English as “Jesus,” following the Greek form, not the Hebrew. “Yeshua” means “Yahweh saves” or “Yahweh is Savior”. It would be strange if the one whose very name proclaims Yahweh as Savior should substitute Him as savior! Indeed, it would not only be strange but false, and even evil.

The meaning of the name “Yeshua” was, clearly, that Yahweh would save in and through the person who was given that name. At various times in Israel’s history Yahweh saved His people through deliverers or saviors whom He raised up. For example:

**Nehemiah 9:27:** “Therefore you gave them into the hand of their enemies, who made them suffer. And in the time of their suffering they cried out to you and you heard them from heaven, and *according to your great mercies you gave them saviors who saved them from the hand of their enemies*” (ESV).

**Obadiah 1:21:** “Saviors shall go up to Mount Zion to rule Mount Esau, and the kingdom shall be Yahweh’s.”

Jesus, too, was a Savior sent from God, as it is written in 1John 4:14, “And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.” Moreover, as we recall, Jesus constantly affirmed that it was the Father who did the work through him: “the Father who dwells in me does his works” (Jn.14:10; cf.5:19); “His works” here are, above all, what is needed to be done for the salvation of mankind.

“God my Savior” (or “God my Salvation” in other translations) is frequent in the OT. The words “God” (*elohim*) and “save” (*yasha*, the Hebrew root from which the name “Yeshua” is formed) occur together no less than 70 times in the OT; and “Yahweh” occurs together with “save” 131 times. Ultimately, there is no other savior apart from Yahweh: “And there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me” (Isa.45:21).

## The glory of Christ—as man

The glory of Christ consists not in his allegedly being “God,” but in his being the “last Adam” (1Cor.15:45), the climax of God’s creation: the new man. The new man Jesus is “the first fruits” (1Cor.15:23) as also its final fruit, its apex, the “perfect man” (Eph.4:13; KJV, NKJ), to whose “stature” we are to attain. This is why he is “the first and the last” (Rev.1:17; 2:8), the beginning and the climax of the new creation.

The reference to Ephesians 4:13 requires fuller explication. This is how this verse reads in the New King James Bible: “till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a *perfect man*, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”. A look at other translations will show that most of them translate “perfect man” as “mature man” or “mature manhood”. What the Greek text has are the two words “*anēr*” and “*teleios*”. The basic meaning of *anēr* is “an adult human male, *man, husband*” (BDAG); so the word is not *anthrōpos*, the word for man as a human being. Why is the specific word for an adult male used here in Ephesians and not the word for man in a general sense? The answer should be obvious: the “perfect man” here has specific reference to *Christ*, which is confirmed by what immediately follows: “the stature of the fullness of Christ”. As for “*teleios*” its primary meaning is “1. pertaining to meeting the highest standard, *perfect*,” but it can also mean “2. pertaining to being mature, *full-grown, mature, adult*” (both quotes are from BDAG). The point in Ephesians 4:13 is surely not that we are to grow up spiritually into maturity in a general sense, but specifically to

grow up into the full stature of Christ as the “perfect man”. The New Jerusalem Bible combines both points by translating the Greek word *ēlikia* as “maturity” instead of “stature” (which is possible): “until we all reach unity in faith and knowledge of the Son of God and form *the perfect Man*, fully mature with the fullness of Christ himself” (italics added).

Another striking point to observe about this verse in Ephesians is how “the Son of God” is understood. “The Son of God” is none other than the “perfect man”! The two phrases are clearly linked to each other in the text, and cannot be correctly understood separately.

The perfect man was no human puppet, but one who in total obedience and devotion to Yahweh carried out His saving purposes in joyful submission (“who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross,” Heb.12:2). We can exclaim from the heart, “What a savior!” All the more so when we understand that it was possible for him to be tempted and fall in the way Adam did (which would not have been possible if he were God), but he “triumphed over them” (Col.2:15; cf. Rev.5:5) in his steadfast obedience to the Father (Yahweh) dwelling in Him, who sustained him, constantly empowering him in everything he said and did, thus ensuring his triumphal success.



## **Christianity's negative view of man**

The Augustinian and Calvinistic degradation of man as being nothing more than a wretched and “depraved” sinner, made it seem unworthy for Christ to be a “mere” man. (Christ could not have been an angel or archangel, or it would have to be said that man was saved by an angel!) And if Christ—so the logic goes—had to be more than man and more than an angel, how could he be less than God? Paul’s teaching of man as “the image and glory of God” (1Cor.11:7) was swept aside by this Christian Gentile dogmatism which selectively quoted verses such as those found in Romans 3:10-18, which is a collection of OT verses describing the level of vileness to which men who choose to be evil can, and do, descend. But to suggest that the dregs of humanity are representative of all mankind is not true to fact (such as the numerous instances of people such as fire fighters who, even if they are non-Christians, risk life and limb, and even die, to save others in times of natural and other disasters), nor is it true to Paul’s statement about man being (present tense) “the glory of God” (1Cor. 11:7)—a rather strong statement, is it not? Why then is speaking of Christ as man something that degrades him?

## **“Glory” in John: Jesus does not accept glory from men—he declined to be made king by force**

A person whose life has God’s will as its one and only overarching concern is, consequently, utterly unconcerned about receiving glory from men. Jesus began his teaching ministry with the Beatitudes (Matthew 5); these delineate the principal ways in which a person who lives according to the will of God functions in daily life. It is this kind of person who is the object of God’s blessings. In the last section of the Beatitudes Jesus says:

<sup>10</sup> Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>11</sup> Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Those who seek the reward or glory that comes from God alone, because their only desire is to live for God and to please Him, are unconcerned about the hostility of men. To be reviled and persecuted is cause to “rejoice and be glad”. By the end of the gospel the reader will know that it was not only the prophets who were persecuted but above all Jesus himself; and so will all those who do the Father’s will and seek only His glory.

“Glory” (*doxa*, δόξα) is a statistically significant key word in John’s Gospel where it occurs 19 times compared to 13 times in Luke (which is more than 20% longer than John),

Matthew 7 times, and Mark only 3 times. The only book in the NT where *doxa* occurs almost as frequently as in John is the Johannine book of Revelation, where it appears 17 times.

A look at the place of *doxa* in Jesus' teaching reveals something of great importance about the mind of Christ which few have noticed:

**John 5:41:** I do not receive glory from people.

**John 5:44:** How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? (Notice monotheism as the motivating factor: from "the only God," *monos theos*)

**John 7:18:** The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory, but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood.

**John 8:50:** Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge.

**John 8:54:** Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, 'He is our God.'"

**John 12:43:** For they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.

All this is summed up by Jesus' action in John 6:15, "Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself."

We may have read the Gospel of John many times but have we ever really understood its message and, in particular, the significance of these words and actions of Jesus? Do we think that we please Jesus by forcibly crowning him as our king, just as the people in John 6 sought to do because they recognized him to be “the Prophet who is to come into the world” (6:14), the great Messiah they had been expecting? They may have wanted to crown him because they saw that he could meet their physical needs; but are we better than they because we don’t have such urgent material needs (‘bread’ or food) as they had but desire for ourselves the bread that gives us eternal life? Are spiritual desires necessarily less selfish than material ones? Is the desire for happiness, for example, necessarily less selfish than the desire for food?

*But the whole point here is that Jesus refuses to be crowned as king by anyone—except by God alone.* We sing such hymns as “Crown Him, Crown Him” with great enthusiasm as though this is something which glorifies him and pleases him. But is it possible that he would no more accept it from us than from those in John 6:15? It never crossed our minds because we have never understood his mind—“the mind of Christ” (1Cor.2:16). It was always his desire first and foremost that the Father God be glorified, and never that Jesus himself should be glorified apart from the Father. This is also something which finds clear expression in the Revelation. Jesus accepts the glory of kingship *only* from the Father, and from absolutely no one else. How little we understand him.

## **The Christian error is even more serious than that**

In John 6:15 the people wanted to make Jesus king “by force”. Can the king of Israel ever be appointed by popular acclaim, or is he appointed by God alone? Can God’s people ever arrogate to themselves the authority to choose their own king in God’s kingdom? The Israelites had done this before in their history when they chose Saul to be their king—with disastrous consequences. Do we dare to do the same thing as they did? Do we suppose the Kingdom of God to be a democracy rather than a theocracy? If so, then we have not even begun to grasp the nature of salvation which is inseparable from *God’s* kingship. Nor have we really grasped the fact that Jesus proclaimed *God’s* Kingdom, i.e. His kingship, as the central message in his teaching, as can be seen in the Synoptic Gospels. In God’s eternal plan, Jesus was appointed *by God* as king in His kingdom and thus, as all the kings of Israel were meant to be, he would be (and now is) God’s regent.

It is worth noting that in Revelation, the greatest of spiritual beings cast their own crowns before the Lord God’s feet (Rev.4:10). Unlike us, they are never so presumptuous as to imagine that they have the right (by reason of their spiritual status) to crown anyone, least of all the Lord Jesus Christ. If Jesus is king, or even king of kings, that is only because Yahweh elevated him to that position, not because he seized that position for himself, much less because we accorded him that dignity.

But trinitarian Christianity has gone very much further than the Jews in John 6 ever did. We have deified Jesus to the level of equality with God the Father, Yahweh Himself—ignoring Jesus’ own affirmation of the Father being “the only true God”. We have consequently made Jesus the object of our worship and prayers. As a result, the Father has been consigned to a relatively marginal place in both worship and prayer. Indeed, for many Christians even the word “Father” is a form of addressing Jesus (Isaiah 9:6 being used as a justification for so doing).

If Israel’s arrogating to themselves the right to choose their own king, as the neighboring nations did, was regarded as an act of rejecting Yahweh (“they have rejected me from being king over them”, 1 Samuel 8:7), what words are left to describe what the Gentile Christian church has done to Yahweh?!

### **Jesus as both “Lord” and “servant”**

Jesus’ principle was never to seek or even accept glory from men. He never taught his disciples to honor him other than to accept him as their teacher because he was to teach them the words of eternal life and to be a living example to them, a living embodiment of all that he taught. This is hardly surprising when we realize that he came not to be served but to serve (Mk.10:45); he took “the form of a slave/servant” (Phil.2:7) and demonstrated this by washing his disciples’ feet (Jn.13:1ff). It would have been obviously inconsistent for one who came to be a servant to demand honor for himself. He

also taught, as we recall, that the greatest in God's kingdom is to be the servant of all (Mk.10:42-44; Mt.20:25ff; Lk. 22:25ff). All this expressed the central principle of his life and his mind.

## **Were the principles of God's Kingdom changed after Jesus' exaltation?**

Was this principle of not seeking glory from men discarded after Christ's resurrection? Have the principles of the Kingdom been changed since then or, specifically, after he was given the Name above every name? If they have been discarded or changed then it is evident that the nature of the Kingdom of God itself has changed and, if so, into what? But there is nothing whatever to indicate that anything has changed in regard to the nature of God's Kingdom, whether on earth or in heaven. If it has changed at all, then it is we (the church) who have changed it, behaving in the same way as those in John 6:15. How then will the Lord deal with us? Will he not reject us in the same way as he rejected those in 6:15? If we really seek to glorify God in Christ we must do so in God's way—or face His rejection and exclusion from His Kingdom.

If then the spiritual principles of the Kingdom have not been abrogated or changed, then does it not follow that it remains true that the greatest will serve as the least? Does it not therefore follow that the King of kings is also the Servant of servants? This is beyond the comprehension of the world,

but that is precisely the point of the Lord's teaching, that the Kingdom is radically different in character from the world, and those of the world cannot understand or accept it. If then we wish to honor the Servant-King in God's Kingdom, how do we go about it? The consistent answer to this question in all of the Scriptures is to obey him. "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord' and do not do the things I say?" (Lk.6:46). We call him Lord but we act, even in relation to Christ, like those in the world. We honor him in much the same way as those of the world honor their worldly sovereigns and potentates, and we are worldly to the extent that we imagine that by so doing we are pleasing him. His desire is that we follow him in giving glory to God alone, and honor him by faithfully obeying his teaching.

We may also ask, in connection to the question of whether the principles and character of the Kingdom were changed after Jesus' exaltation, and to his having been given the name above all other names, whether in consequence of that exaltation he ceased to be in "the form of man" and, if not, did he cease to be in "the form of a servant (slave)"? In view of what was stated a little earlier, it should be evident that he retains both his "form" of being man as also that of being servant/sacrifice (cf. Jesus as "Lamb," his foremost title in the Revelation). In Jesus' teaching, servant and sacrifice are inseparably linked together as in Mark 10:45: "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (so also Mt.20:28) and in the important spiritual symbolism of washing his disciples' feet just before going to the cross.



Yet Christians generally seem to have assumed that with his exaltation Jesus ceased being a servant, because in our carnal view the two appear to be incompatible; but this is not so in the Kingdom of God: in the Kingdom, the moment one ceases to be a servant, one also ceases to be a king (or leader) in God's eyes. Unless we understand and apply this in our lives, we cannot function in God's kingdom or in His church in the way He requires; Jesus warned of the danger of ending up as "goats," not "sheep" (Mt.25:31-46).

### **"King of kings" as a proof-text for Christ's deity**

One of our favorite "proof texts" as trinitarians is the title "king of kings, and lord of lords" (since kings were generally higher in status than lords, or else 'lords' was just another way to describe kings; the use of both titles was intentionally repetitive and thereby a means of giving emphasis and resonance in the offering of praise). In Rev.17:14 it is applied to the Lamb, and in 19:16 to the Word of God; but in 1Tim.6:15 the title is used with reference to God. So the conclusion is readily drawn that the Lamb is God in the sense that he is God's equal, something which (as we shall see) is not substantiated in the book of Revelation.

When I checked my old Bible I found that 1Tim.6:15 was indeed the cross-reference that I had written in the margin of Rev.17:14. But characteristic of the trinitarian use of Scripture, I neglected to include other references to the title "king of kings" in the Bible as a whole. The fact is that in

Scripture *this title is also used of human sovereigns*. In Ezra 7:12 it is used of Artaxerxes; and in Ezekiel 26:7 God Himself speaks of Nebuchadnezzar as “king of kings”; so also in Dan.2:37. So the argument for the deity of Christ is accomplished by a selective use of texts, ignoring texts that are contrary to our case. Does this not indicate a lack of spiritual and intellectual honesty, a lack of openness to the truth?

In Mt.28:18 the risen Christ announces to the disciples that “All authority in heaven and on earth has been *given* to me”. This being the case, he is rightly spoken of as “King of kings and Lord of lords”. But what needs to be noted is that this cannot be turned into an argument for Christ’s equality with God our Father because it is a sovereignty *given* to him by the God who alone has the right to confer it, for it is His by right as God. But for some reason we were not content with the fact that God has thus “crowned (Jesus) with glory and honor” (Heb.2:9), so we demanded nothing less than his innate (as distinct from conferred) divine glory or deity, namely, that he is eternally equal with God our Father in every sense, even though there is no Biblical justification whatever for doing so. The one time Paul used the title “King of kings” is in 1Tim.6:15, and by that title he undoubtedly referred to God our Father, as is made perfectly clear in the verse itself.

1Timothy 6:15 may well carry an echo of Deuteronomy 10:17, “For Yahweh your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe.” This is also echoed in Psalm 135:1-3, “Give thanks to Yahweh, for he is good, for his

steadfast love endures forever. Give thanks to the *God of gods*, for his steadfast love endures forever. Give thanks to the *Lord of lords*, for his steadfast love endures forever”. (Psalm 135:1-3 in LXX, 136:1-3 in English Bibles.)

These passages are reflected in 1 Corinthians 8:5,6, “For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we live”. Both passages (in Deuteronomy and the Psalms) speak of the LORD i.e. Yahweh, who Jesus certainly referred to as “the Father,” and by Paul as “God our Father”.

### **“The First and the Last”**

Concerning the proof texts used in trinitarianism, let us consider another related example of the methodology used to “establish” an argument. Returning again to the Johannine Apocalypse (or book of Revelation), consider the title “the first and the last” (Rev.1:17; 2:8) which is expanded to “the alpha and the omega; the first and the last; the beginning and the end” (22:13) where all three titles are synonymous, that is, they mean basically the same thing. Since these are titles of Christ here, they are used to argue for his deity.

Unlike the case of “king of kings” where the OT evidence was simply ignored, this time everything depends on using two texts in the OT to establish our case. The two texts are

Isa.44:6 and 48:12 where God is “the first and the last”. There we have our “proof” of Christ’s deity. Thus the case can seemingly be established with surprising ease. Of course, we have not stopped to consider one small problem: Since God is “from eternity to eternity” and therefore without beginning or end (see too Rev. 4:9,10), how can He be “the beginning and the end,” “the first and the last”? This is possible only in one sense as the context of Scripture makes clear: God is the beginning and the end specifically *in relation to* His creation (which includes mankind), and in relation to His people in particular.

Creation began with God (came into existence through Him) and will reach its final consummation in Him (at His appointed time when His purpose has been accomplished). In regard to His people, they owe their redemption to Him. He is our beginning because He has called us to Himself and thus constituted us as His people through the covenant He has established with us. He is our end in that our final fulfillment will be found in Him and only in Him.

What was true under the old covenant is equally true under the new, but with the new reality that God now makes us a new creation *in Christ*. Christ is “the mediator” of the new covenant (Heb.9:15; 12:24; 1Tim.2:5); under this covenant God has chosen to do everything “through Christ” (or, more frequently in the Bible, “through him”) and “in Christ” because “God was *in Christ* reconciling the world *to Himself*” (2Cor.5:19). For this reason God is still “the first and the last” *in and through Christ*; and since this is effected “in Christ,” Christ can also be described as the “first and the

last” in relation to God’s people. Thus, in Heb.12:2 Christ is described as “author and completer” of our faith. The word translated “completer” (*teleiōtēs*) is semantically related to the word “end” (*telos*) in the words “the beginning and the end” in Rev. 22:13.

In relation to mankind as a whole, Scripture speaks of Christ as “the *first* fruits” of those who have died (i.e. the *first* man who was raised from death permanently, 1Cor.15:20); the final resurrection has begun with Christ’s resurrection—he is the beginning of the final resurrection and its guarantor. Notice that “first fruits” is *ap-archē* (hyphen added), while “beginning” in Rev.22:13 is *archē*. Christ is also “the *last* Adam (‘Adam’ is Hebrew for ‘man’)” in 1Cor.15:45, where “last” (*eschatos*) is exactly the same word as in Rev.22:13. So it is true that “the man Christ Jesus” is “the first and the last” in relation to mankind and his salvation.

But there is another not so small problem for the trinitarian attempt to use “the first and the last” to prove the deity of Christ, and that is the fact that this title is not a general title for God, but it is specifically a title of *Yahweh*: Isaiah 44:6, “Thus says the LORD (YHWH), the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD (YHWH) of hosts: ‘I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.’” Do trinitarians really want to prove that Christ and Yahweh are one and the same person?

## **Christ as the all-sufficient sacrifice provided for us by God (Yahweh)—used as an argument for Christ’s deity**

I have in the past argued for the deity of Christ on the grounds that one man could only die for one other person; if Christ were only human, how could his death avail for all mankind? This argument sounded convincing because of its apparent self-evidence: how can the death of one human individual atone for the sins of all men? But God’s wisdom is not established by human wisdom or reasoning. The error of this kind of reasoning became evident to me when I perceived the truth in John 3:14,15, “as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”

This refers to the incident recorded in Numbers 21:6-9 in which the people were dying from the bites of venomous snakes. Moses was instructed by God to make a serpent of brass and set it on a pole for all to see; those who *believed* as they looked were saved from the venom of the snakes. Jesus compares this incident to *faith* in him: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever *believes* in him may have eternal life” (Jn.3:14,15). The point here should be extremely clear: the saving of the thousands who looked to the brass serpent had nothing whatever to do with anything inherent in that serpent—they were saved by *God* through *faith* in His promise that whoever looked would be saved: “Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who

is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.” (Num.21:8) The next verse confirms that those who had the faith to look lived. The same is true for all those who are looking to Jesus for salvation through *faith* (Heb.12:1,2); it is *God’s* saving power in Christ which saves them from sin and death. It is, therefore, not something inherent in the constitution of Christ that saves, but it is God our Father (Yahweh) who saves us in and through Christ. For salvation is entirely God’s work; it is by faith and through His grace alone.

Romans 3:21-26 is acknowledged to be the heart of the teaching on salvation in Romans (cf. also Dunn, *Christology* I, p.219). These six verses, which together constitute one sentence (!) is summarized in v.26: *God* is “the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” This is precisely the point made in the previous paragraph. We fail to properly present Biblical soteriology (doctrine of salvation) if we fail to make it clear that God our Father is the ultimate or fundamental author of our salvation while Jesus is the mediating, or instrumental, agent for our salvation. This point emerges not only from Rom.3:26 but from the passage as a whole:

<sup>21</sup> But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, <sup>22</sup> the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction; <sup>23</sup> since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup> whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed

over former sins; <sup>26</sup> it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus. (RSV)

“God” is mentioned 10 times (including pronouns) in these 6 verses concerning our salvation, making it perfectly clear that He is the subject in the grammatical sense. “Jesus” (including “Christ Jesus” or “Jesus Christ”) is mentioned 4 times (including the pronoun in v.25). God’s righteousness is referred to 4 times, and “justify” (a word related to *righteousness* in Greek) twice; while “faith” appears 3 times. The statistics of this passage gives us a good summary of the soteriology (doctrine of salvation) of Romans as a whole.<sup>10</sup>

Romans is the only writing in the NT that provides a full and relatively systematic teaching about salvation. In it, God is by far the central figure. The references to Christ are about half of the number of references to God, reflecting the similar statistic in Rom.3:21-26. It is always *God* (the Father) who justifies (saves) “through faith in Jesus Christ” (Rom.3:22).

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<sup>10</sup> Statistics for Romans (in the Greek text):

- “God”: 153 times (not counting pronouns) in 135 verses
- “Jesus Christ” or “Christ Jesus”: 31 times; “Jesus” (alone): 5; “Christ” (alone): 34 = total: 70 times (the most occurrences in the NT, even without counting pronouns)
- “Righteousness”: 29 times (by far the most frequent in NT; Mt is next with 7 times)
- “Righteous” (verb): 14 times (the next most frequent is Gal: 6)
- “Faith” 35 times (next most frequent: Heb: 31).

These figures show that all these are key words in Romans.



## **All Jesus' miracles were done by God (Yahweh) through him**

All sorts of attempts have been made to explain, or explain away, Jesus' miracles, even by some Christian scholars unable or unwilling to accept the supernatural. But short of denying the veracity of the gospel accounts, there are many miracles that simply cannot be explained in terms of psychosomatic healing, coincidence, etc. I recently heard an ophthalmologist acknowledge that even with the latest (2007) knowledge and equipment (lasers, etc), he could not restore the sight of a man born blind and had already grown up, as in the case of the man who Jesus healed in John 9. Jesus certainly did not perform miracles as a spectacle to impress the multitudes; the miracles carried a spiritual message for those who had ears to hear and eyes to see (Mt.13:15, 16). The healing of the blind man, for example, would remind a perceptive observer of a passage such as that in Isaiah 29:

<sup>18</sup> In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness *the eyes of the blind shall see.*

<sup>19</sup> The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the LORD (Yahweh), and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel.

I also heard a discussion with a meteorological expert who had studied the Lake of Galilee for 25 years to find out whether some scientific explanation could be found for Jesus' stilling of the storm on that Lake (Mt.8:24-27); the expert acknowledged that there is no known explanation. But this

miracle on “the Sea of Galilee,” as it is often called, is an enactment of a portion of Psalm 107:

<sup>23</sup> Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the great waters; <sup>24</sup> they saw the deeds of the LORD (Yahweh), his wondrous works in the deep. <sup>25</sup> For he commanded and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea. <sup>26</sup> They mounted up to heaven; they went down to the depths; their courage melted away in their evil plight; <sup>27</sup> they reeled and staggered like drunken men and were at their wits' end. <sup>28</sup> Then they cried to the LORD (Yahweh) in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. <sup>29</sup> He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. <sup>30</sup> Then they were glad that the waters were quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven. <sup>31</sup> Let them thank the LORD (Yahweh) for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of men!

A comparison of the account in Matthew 8 with this passage in Psalm 107 immediately shows the striking correspondence between the two, which is certainly no coincidence but is designed to show who actually was stilling the storm in Galilee. Notice that Yahweh is mentioned three times in this portion of the Psalm.

These and other miracles are constantly used by trinitarians to argue for Christ's deity. But like the “I am” sayings (which, as we have seen, point to Yahweh), the miracles do the same. They do not “prove” that Jesus is God, but if they prove anything, they would prove either that Jesus is Yahweh, or that Yahweh indwells Jesus bodily (Jn.1:14) and does His

works through him. Which one is the correct alternative is made perfectly clear by Jesus himself and in the NT. That it was the God of Israel, Yahweh, who did His works in Christ is stated plainly in Acts 2:22, “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with *mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him* in your midst, as you yourselves know.”

Jesus affirmed this himself: “The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but *the Father who dwells in me does his works.*” (John 14:10) “Work” (*ergon*) can include specific reference to miracles, i.e. supernatural works. The BDAG Greek-English lexicon on *ergon* (work) has, “of the deeds of God and Jesus, specifically, miracles”. “He (John) frequently uses the term ‘works,’ not indeed exclusively with reference to the miracles of Christ, and yet often with particular reference to them; as if miraculous works were only the natural and appropriate works of one who was himself miraculous” (*Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, “Miracles”). Here, appropriately, the *Bible Dictionary* quotes John 5:36, “For *the works that the Father has given me to accomplish*, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me”; John 10:25, “*The works that I do in my Father’s name* bear witness about me [i.e. that I am the Messiah, v.24]”; John 10:32, “Jesus answered them, ‘I have shown you many good works *from the Father*’”. To this can be added John 5:19, “Jesus gave them this answer: ‘I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself’” (NIV). The “mighty works and wonders and signs” (Acts 2:22) were all a part of *God’s work*

of saving mankind, for “*God was in Christ* reconciling the world to Himself” (2Cor.5:19).

This means that it is completely erroneous to use the miracles as evidence of Christ’s deity. For whether it was the feeding of the thousands, walking on water, raising the dead, these were all accomplished because, as Jesus said, “*the Father* who dwells in me does His works” (Jn.14:10). Why don’t we listen to him when he said, “I can do nothing on my own” (Jn.5:30, and his many other sayings on this matter) instead of fabricating our own doctrines?

## **The significance of Psalm 8 for understanding the person and work of the Messiah (Christ)**

Psalm 8 (ESV):

<sup>1</sup> O LORD (Yahweh), our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.

<sup>2</sup> Out of the mouth of babes and infants, you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger.

<sup>3</sup> When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,

<sup>4</sup> what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?

<sup>5</sup> Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.

<sup>6</sup> You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet,

<sup>7</sup> all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,

<sup>8</sup> the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

<sup>9</sup> O LORD (Yahweh), our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

The whole Psalm is quoted to make it more convenient to view its structure and substance. Notice, first, that the Psalm begins and ends with exactly the same words of praise to Yahweh (“LORD”). In verse 1 it says, “You have set your glory above the heavens.” That is to say, Yahweh’s glory is higher than the heavens; Yahweh’s supernal majesty and glory are exultingly extolled.

But the 2nd verse, in striking contrast to the 1st, suddenly descends to the level of “babes and infants,” from whose mouths Yahweh “established strength” in the face of His enemies. What is this contrast intended to signify? Does it not remind us of the statement that His “power is made perfect in weakness” (2Cor.12:9)? And this prepares us effectively for the next pair of contrasts: v.3 “When I look at your heavens...” versus v.4, “what is man...” Yet it is precisely in the relative weakness of man that Yahweh, as in the case of babes and infants, has chosen to manifest his power and glory: “You have... crowned him with glory and honor” (v.5).

Notice that in the structure of this Psalm, v.5 is at the center of the Psalm, being its middle verse. Notice, too, how its substance also corresponds to the first and the last verses of the Psalm, namely, Yahweh’s glory and majesty, which in v.5, is conferred upon man! Notice, too, that “man” and “the son of man” are synonymous in v.4. It is evident that the Psalmist

knows nothing of the degradation of man such as that taught in the Christian doctrine of man's "total depravity". Nor does the Apostle Paul teach any such doctrine, seeing that he speaks of man as "the glory of God" (1Cor.11:7), by which he proclaims the same truth as in this Psalm.

Let us consider verses 5 and 6 of Psalm 8 more closely. Several important things are stated in these verses:

(1) "Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings." The ESV translation "heavenly beings" is a compromise between other English translations which vary from "angels" to "God". The word in the Hebrew text is *elohim* which generally means "God" or "god" (over 2600 times in the OT), but it can occasionally mean "angels" or heavenly beings generally. Since the word is in the OT mostly applied to Yahweh, why is "God" not used in all translations of Psalm 8:5? The answer is to be found in the influence of the Septuagint, where the translator has chosen to translate *elohim* as "*angelous*" (plural of *angelos*) from which, obviously, comes the word "angels".

What, then, should the correct translation be? The word "angel" or "angels" appears a number of times in the Psalms but in each instance the usual Hebrew word for "angel," *malach*, is used. I have not found any instance in the Psalms where *elohim* definitely means "angels". There does not, therefore, seem to be any good reason why Ps.8:5 should not be translated as "a little lower than *God*," as in some English translations (RSV, NRSV). This would not mean that man is necessarily higher than the angels (although see 1Cor.6:3,

“Do you not know that we will judge angels?”), nor that he is lower. But is not the whole point of the verse that God has conferred “glory and honor” on man so that His divine glory and majesty will be revealed through him in the entire universe? In the Scriptures, therefore, man as “the glory of God” is only “a little lower than God”.

(2) Verse 6a, “You have given him dominion over the works of your hands”. The reference here to Genesis 1:26,28 and 9:2 is unmistakable. This statement is re-emphasized and strengthened in the following sentence:

Verse 6b, “You have put all things under his feet”; this important affirmation appears repeatedly in the NT with reference to Christ, while it also has a significant link to the Messianic words in Ps.110:1, “The LORD (Yahweh) says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool”. Obviously, to “make your enemies your footstool” is equivalent to putting them “under (your, i.e.) his feet” (Ps.8:6). Jesus saw Psalm 110:1 as fulfilled in his ministry (Mk.12:36; 14:62; and parallels).

That God has “put all things under his feet” (Ps.8:6) is a statement applied to Christ as the representative man, “the last Adam” (1Cor.15:45). In 1Cor. 15:27 it serves as the key to understanding the section from 15:24-27. Being “seated at God’s right hand,” in Eph.1:20, means that “he (God) put all things under his (Christ’s) feet and gave him as head over all things to the church” (1:22).

Christ's God-given authority is extended to, and implemented through, the church, as in Romans 16:20, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under *your* feet" (cf. Rev.3:9); this reflects the promise to the righteous in Psalm 91:13, "You will tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot" (cf. Gen.3:15).

As in the Messianic Psalms generally, Psalm 8, too, is prophetic in character, as can be seen in the references to it in Hebrews 2:

<sup>8</sup> Now in putting everything in subjection to him (Christ), he (God) left nothing outside his control. *At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.* <sup>9</sup> "But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. (The references to Psalm 8 are clearly evident.)

(3) In view of the foregoing points, there can be no doubt that Psalm 8 is one of the foundational passages in the OT for understanding Jesus' consistent use of the title "son of man" (Ps.8:4). This finds confirmation in his teaching such as that in Mt.11:27 (par. Lk.10:22) and Mt.28:18; also Jn.3:35; 13:3.

(4) From Psalm 8 and related passages it can be seen that *the Scriptures have an exalted view of man in God's eternal plans.* All this finds full and perfect fulfillment in the person of Christ. In Christ, man as "the image and glory of God" (1Cor.11:7) reaches the acme of resplendent expression: "He



is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” (Heb.1:3). But it is *as man* that Christ reveals God’s glory and power, for it would hardly be saying anything significant to say that *God* reveals God’s glory, nor would it make much sense to say that God is “the exact imprint of his nature”.

Yet, contrary to Scripture, Christianity has a low view of man, who is seen essentially as a depraved sinner, “rotten to the core”. In this view it is simply unimaginable that man could ever be “the radiance of the glory of God” (Heb.1:3); so it is little wonder that passages such as this one in Hebrews are used to prove Christ’s deity, rather than the wonderful fulfillment in Christ of God’s eternal plan for *man*. Once we grasp more fully the Biblical teaching of man as “the image and glory of God”—a glory now fully realized in the person of Jesus the Messiah (Christ)—we will see that many of the passages used by trinitarians to “prove” the deity of Christ actually proclaim something different, namely, that the divine glory was fully manifested in and through the “one man Jesus Christ” (Rom.5:15,17; 1Tim.2:5).

## Daniel 7 in Jesus' use of "Son of Man," and "the man from heaven" (1Cor.15:47)

**Daniel 7:13**, "I was gazing into the visions of the night, when I saw, coming on the clouds of heaven, as it were a son of man. He came to the One most venerable and was led into his presence." (NJB)

**Matthew 24:30**, "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory." (NIV)

It can immediately be seen that Jesus' words in Matthew 24 make reference to Daniel 7. In particular, the term "son of man" (without the word "like"), and the phrase "on the clouds of heaven," are exactly the same in the Greek text as in the Greek Old Testament (the LXX). "Coming" is the same Greek word though in a different tense.

The connection of Daniel 7 with Psalms 8 is seen in the references to "the Son of man" in both places. But, more importantly, "dominion" is given to "the Son of man" in both passages, for Daniel 7:14 reads, "And to him was given *dominion* and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his *dominion* is an everlasting *dominion*." Here the connection with Psalm 110:1 is also evident, thus linking all three passages. These passages provide the background for understanding what Jesus says in Matthew 24:30.

Daniel 7 is prophetic in character, that is, it concerns the *future*, not the past. That is to say, it speaks of “the Son of man” in the future; it is not about a preexistent person by that name. Similarly, Psalm 110:1 also concerns the future; it is God’s promise to the royal Davidic messiah. In the same way, Jesus’ words about the coming “Son of man” has to do with a future event which Christians often call the “Second Coming” of Christ. The same is true of Jesus’ words in the following verse:

Jesus answered him, “It is you who say it. But, I tell you that from this time onward you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.” (Mt.26:64, NJB)

That these words are linked to Daniel 7:13 is again seen in the phrases “the Son of man” and “coming on the clouds of heaven,” while the connection with Psalm 110:1 appears in the words “seated at the right hand of the Power (i.e. God)”.

Jesus’ reference to Daniel 7:14 stands out sharply in Mark 13:26, “At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.” (NIV) Here “great power” is equivalent to “dominion” in Dan.7:14, so “power and glory” are the equivalents of “dominion and glory” in Dan.7.

All this helps us to better understand why Jesus used “the Son of man” as the title of preference in the gospels. It emphasized not only his true manhood, but especially his messianic ministry in fulfillment of important prophecies in

which God's promise to His people of future deliverance will also be fulfilled.

Furthermore, without knowing this OT background we cannot correctly understand what the Apostle Paul says about the "second man" who comes "from heaven," and may end up in philosophical speculations about some *Urmensch* (German for 'Primal Man') or supposed preexistent prototype man—an idea which some theologians have toyed with. But this has absolutely nothing to do with what Paul writes in 1Cor.15:47, "The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven." Anyone familiar with Daniel 7:13,14 would immediately recognize "the man from heaven" in Paul's words. Nor is this the only connection between the two passages. For example 1Corinthians 15:25, "For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet" is certainly linked to Daniel 7:14, "And to him was given *dominion* and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him."

But the connection between the two passages goes even further than this. "The man from heaven" in 1Cor.15:47 is in a context of a discussion about the *resurrection* which covers the section from verses 35 to 57. Now if we look at Daniel 7:13 (quoted at the beginning of this section), we are told of a heavenly vision of the Son of man *coming into the Presence of God*. When we compare this with Jesus' words in Matthew 26:64, "I tell you that from this time onward you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds of heaven," the picture becomes clearer: First, the Son of man comes to God (Dan.7:13) and is granted to

sit down at His right hand (Ps.110:1); from the Scriptures we know that *this is what happened after Jesus' resurrection*. Then, second, in the future the Son of man will be “coming on the clouds of heaven” with “great power and glory” (Mk. 13:26). Paul discusses this second stage in 1Cor.15:24-28, while he writes about “the man from heaven” in the long section about resurrection (1Cor.15:35-57).

What this means is that Jesus is “the man from heaven,” the “spiritual” (v.46) man, because of the resurrection. It has nothing whatever to do with non-Scriptural metaphysical speculations about some preexistent eternal man. G.G. Findlay, in *The Expositor's Greek New Testament*, discerned this correctly, “From his resurrection onwards, Christ became to human faith the *anthrōpos epouranios* [man of heaven]”.

Finally, it is God's plan for us that through Christ we “also are those who are of heaven” (1Cor.15:48); and through him “we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven” (v.49). What does this mean but that we shall, like Christ, also be people “of heaven” as a result of the resurrection?

## God was in Christ

That Jesus is man or “the Son of man” is abundantly clear in the Bible. His supreme significance for us lies in the fact that “God (Yahweh) was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself” (2Cor. 5:19). But as far as trinitarianism is concerned, this could just as well read that God was Christ (or, Christ was God). Does the change really matter? What have

they changed? What is changed is that whereas in 2Cor.5:19 it is GOD who was the one reconciling, it is now CHRIST as God who does the reconciling. Yahweh has been sidelined by Christ *as God*. The monotheism of Yahweh has been thereby subverted—an exceedingly serious matter indeed, where the word of God is concerned.

It should be obvious that “God was in Christ” is a fundamentally different proposition from “God was Christ” or “Christ was God”. “God was in Christ” also means that although both God and Christ can properly be called “our savior,” their roles in our salvation are fundamentally different: Christ is the indispensable *agent* in and through whom God worked out His saving purposes for us; but it was God Himself who was the Prime Mover of the process of salvation (reconciliation). Where would our salvation be if God had not sent Christ into the world? And where would it be if He had not raised Jesus from the dead? Not to mention the Father’s constant empowering of Christ throughout his ministry: both his teaching and the signs and wonders worked through him ensure the triumphant completion of his saving work.

On the other hand, Christ’s role was certainly not a merely passive one, but one of determined, faithful, and glad obedience to the Father throughout his ministry. He is the unique, new, “last Adam,” who in God’s purposes was essential for the redemption of mankind. But it must be clearly understood that, in the NT message, Christ’s role in the salvation of mankind was always and absolutely as *man*, and that it was GOD who was in the MAN Christ Jesus reconciling the world to Himself. Any deviation from this is deviation from the word

of God as proclaimed in the NT, and results in the serious consequence that God the Father, Yahweh, is sidelined as the absolute Center of the Gospel message. This, in turn, must inevitably have fearful consequences.

### **“Savior” applied to Yahweh God and to Christ in Timothy and Titus**

The word “savior” (*sōtēr*) occurs 24 times in the NT (the verb “to save,” *sōzō*, 106 times) and is applied to God and to Christ. But the title “God our Savior” is unique to the Pastoral Letters (Timothy and Titus) and Jude (v.25), where it appears 6 times. The title “Christ our savior” is also unique to the Pastorals, appearing once in that form (Tit.3:6), and 3 times in variations on that form (“Christ Jesus our savior,” Tit.1:4; “our savior Christ Jesus,” 2Tim.1:10; and “our savior Jesus Christ,” Tit.2:13), making a total of 4 times. Thus, God is described as our “savior” more frequently than Jesus. But the newer English translations boldly try to “even the score”.

### **Making Jesus God by way of translation; the alleged “one article rule”**

Trinitarianism has daringly given itself a boost by their newer translations of a few verses in the pastoral letters, notably Titus 2:13. The KJV translated it as, “Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ”. But the New King James changes this

to, “looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,” and the same is true of all the newer major English translations. In this way “our great God” and “Savior” are both applied to Jesus.

Before we examine this matter more closely, it is worth noting that the ancient Syriac translation called the Peshitta has this translation, “looking for the blessed hope, and the manifestation of the glory of the great God, and our Life-giver, Jesus the Messiah” (James Murdock’s translation). As one would expect in a Semitic translation, “the great God” is distinguished from “Jesus the Messiah” by the word “and,” though also united to him by it. Interestingly, “savior” is rendered as “life-giver”. The Peshitta is the ancient Syriac Bible which, according to Encyclopedia Britannica, was “the accepted Bible of Syrian Christian churches from the end of the 3rd century AD,” that is the century *before* the Nicene and Constantinople creeds were formulated as the basis for trinitarianism. The important point to notice is that it does not reflect the character or wording of the modern trinitarian translations of Titus 2:13.

What is the basis for the translation of “our God and Savior Jesus Christ” in the Pastorals? It was the “discovery” of a grammatical “rule” (which appears to have first gained prominence in the 20th century) that says because only one definite article governs the words “God” and “Savior” in Titus 2:13 it must refer to the same person, namely, Jesus Christ. What seems surpassingly strange is that the early Greek speaking Fathers, and other Greek speakers in the early church, appear to have been unaware of any such “rule” in their



language! The Greek speaking bishops and scholars who supported the trinitarian position in the 4<sup>th</sup> century seem never to have thought of using such an obvious “rule” to their advantage—if such a rule existed! This “rule” had to wait until some European scholars, whose native language was not Greek, elevated it to the level of a “discovery”. Needless to say, all of us who were trinitarians were delighted by this “discovery”; I still recall my joy at hearing about it in my student days and marking Titus 2:13 in bold letters in my Bible. Poor 17<sup>th</sup> century King James Version was, of course, too early to benefit from it!

One can only wonder what the Greek Fathers would have thought if they had been told that they had failed to understand a basic rule in their own language! We may suppose that their response would have been very much like the kind of response Chinese scholars would have if they were told by some Western scholar that they had failed to understand a rule of the Chinese language! But in this case the Greek Fathers are not available for comment.

It is true that after trinitarianism had been established as the dogma of the Western Christian church, the translation “our God and Savior Jesus Christ” did begin to emerge, as has been found in some papyri; but apart from the fact of their obvious trinitarian origin and their late date (nothing earlier than the 7<sup>th</sup> century), Greek had long before that ceased to be the universal language in the Roman empire (Augustine, AD 354-430, though a top leader of the church, hardly knew any Greek), so the level of competence in the language was not likely to be comparable to that of earlier times, even assuming

that the language itself had not already undergone substantial changes (as, for example, in the case of NT Greek as compared to classical Greek, and Modern Greek as compared to NT Greek).

In regard to the question of the correct translation of Titus 2:13, it is significant to note that N.J.D. White, who as a trinitarian accepts the deity of Christ, indicates in *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (where he discusses the matter at some length) that the grammatical evidence for the translation “our God and Savior Jesus Christ” is simply inadequate and rejects it unequivocally. In regard to the alleged “rule” mentioned above, Dr. White writes,

The grammatical argument—“the identity of reference of two substantives when under the vinculum of a common article”—is too slender to bear much weight, especially when we take into consideration not only the general neglect of the article in these epistles but the omission of it before σωτήρ [savior] in 1Tim.1:1; 4:10.

Regarding the magnificent phrase “the appearing of the glory of our great God” (Tit.2:13), White makes the following comment,

The Second Coming of Christ will be, as we are assured by Himself, “in the glory of His Father” (Matt.16:27; Mark 8:38). “We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God” (Rom.5:2). The Second Coming of Christ may, therefore, be regarded as an “appearing of the glory of God” [the words between the quotes are in Greek in White’s text].

Further on, White writes, “St. Paul is nowhere more emphatic in his lofty language about God the Father than in these epistles [i.e. the Pastoral epistles]; see 1Tim.1:17; 6:15,16.” He also says, “This is the only place in the N.T. in which μέγας [great] is applied to the true God, although it is a constant predicate of heathen gods and goddesses, e.g., Acts 19:28.”

Very similarly, J.E. Huther, in Meyer’s *Critical and Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament*, provides an extended discussion of Titus 2:13. Dr. Huther (and perhaps it hardly needs to be mentioned that he is also traditionally a trinitarian) points out that the meaning of this verse “cannot be decided on purely grammatical grounds”. He then lists three decisive points why, on exegetical grounds, the words “our great God” in this verse does not apply to Christ. But to avoid excessively lengthening our discussion of this verse, and also because, in the nature of a commentary on the Greek text of the NT, a lot of Greek is interspersed throughout Huther’s discussion, I shall leave its details to those who wish to study this matter for themselves.

However, in regard to the alleged “rule” on which many English Bible versions base their translation of Titus 2:13, Huther’s comment is directly relevant, “There are instances enough of two distinct subjects standing under *one* article only, and we cannot see why these instances should not be quoted here” (note 1, p.360, italics his).

We can let *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, Moulton-Howard-Turner, a standard reference work, have the final word on this subject: “One must look critically at the

common view that in Ti.2:13 we have two clauses in apposition [i.e. referring to the same person]. The same is true of 2Pt.1:1... *The repetition of the article was not strictly necessary to ensure that the items be considered separately*" (vol.3, p.181, re. Tit.2:13, Greek texts omitted; italics added). In other words, there is no basis for the alleged "rule"; one article can refer to two distinct subjects, not necessarily to one only. The "bottom line" is really simply this: the trinitarian translations are ultimately not determined by either grammatical or exegetical considerations but by the dogmatic predilections or commitments of the translators.

Moreover, in trying to use this verse in the Pastoral letters to elevate Jesus to being God, they deliberately ignore the fact that it is precisely in these letters that monotheism *and* the humanity of Christ are both stated with absolute clarity: "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1Tim.2:5). One must surely be willfully blind not to see the explicitly and characteristically Pauline monotheistic declaration at the beginning of this sentence, "*For there is one God,*" namely, the God referred to as "God our Savior" two verses earlier (v.3). The sentence ends with the equally explicit statement, "*the man Christ Jesus*". Is there any way to make these statements any plainer such that "even if they are fools, they shall not go astray" (Isa.35:8)?

In this respect it must, sadly, be admitted that the Muslim accusation that Christians have distorted the meaning of Biblical texts does carry considerable weight. Also, how can one

give, with a good conscience, such distorted translations to Jews or to Muslims who wish to get acquainted with the NT?

## 2 Peter 1:1

As might be expected, the major newer English translations of 2Peter 1:1 apply the same “one article rule” to their translation of this verse, “the righteousness *of our God and Savior Jesus Christ*” (the words in italics translate τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ σωτῆρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ). Yet *exactly* the same grammatical structure in 2Thessalonians 1:12 (τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) is translated by these same versions as “the grace *of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ*”; why is the “one article rule” discarded here? Is it because these words have become part of a traditional pronouncement of a blessing used in church services that they don’t wish to change or infringe upon? Is it tradition that again determines the translation here?

## Jude 4

But consider how the ESV, like many other modern versions, translates the last phrase in Jude 4 as “our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ” (τὸν μόνον δεσπότην καὶ κύριον ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν: literally, the only Master and our Lord Jesus Christ). The Greek text (like the verse in Titus discussed in the previous paragraphs) has only one definite article, which is not translated in ESV, but is replaced by “our” for both

“Master” and “Lord”. But what is the reason or excuse for so doing? Is it again because of the alleged “one article rule”? But the translators should surely know that this is unjustifiable because “our,” which in the Greek text stands immediately before “Jesus Christ,” can stand in place of the definite article—which they admit by replacing the “the” at the beginning of the Greek phrase by “our”. Once again they do not hesitate to misapply the supposed “one article rule” in order to achieve their trinitarian translation.

There can be no doubt whatever that here the King James translation gives the correct sentence structure: “the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.” This is followed by the New King James version. So, too, the ancient Peshitta: “him who is the only Lord God and our Lord, Jesus the Messiah” (Murdoch). Tyndale, who evidently had not heard of any “one article rule”, translates it as, “God the only Lorde and oure Lorde Iesus Christ.” (*Tyndale’s New Testament*, 1534)

Now this verse may not seem relevant to our present discussion since Jesus is not referred to as God in it. But the matter is not quite so simple because of the phrase “our *only* (*monos*) Master” which NIV translates as “our only Sovereign”. If Jesus Christ is our only Sovereign and Lord, then that clearly leaves no room for God the Father! This displacing of God the Father is precisely the kind of thing that Western Christianity has been doing all along, even using the NT to justify its doing so.

Here consider again the ancient Peshitta, “Him who is the only Lord God and our Lord, Jesus the Messiah”; the distinction between “the only Lord God” and “our Lord Jesus” stands

out clearly. But is this reading justified? Let us consider the following facts:

(1) The second part of this verse (Jude 4) reads, “ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master...” What is being perverted? It is “the grace of our God”. Who is being denied by those who do the perversion? Is it not the God whose grace is perverted? Does it not evidently follow that the God whose grace is perverted and who is thereby openly denied, is the One spoken of as “the only Master”? Of course, in denying God, the only Sovereign, His Christ is also thereby denied; but the verse itself makes it clear that the primary reference is to God, the Father.

(2) The word translated as “Master” (*despotēs*) was used as a title for God both in the OT and the NT. All other instances of this word when used as a divine title in the NT demonstrably refer to Yahweh God: Lk.2:29; Ac.4:24; 2Pet. 2:1 (“bought” cf. Ac.20:28); Rev.6:10 (“Sovereign Lord” cf. Ac.4:24), not to Jesus, so there is no reason to suppose that Jude 4 is an exception, and especially not when the qualifier “only” (*monos*) is used. In the Greek OT (LXX) *despotēs* (Master) appears many times as a form of addressing Yahweh God, especially in Daniel where it occurs 7 times.

In view of the foregoing evidence, the extent to which some trinitarians are willing to go to mistranslate and mishandle even the Scriptures, which they claim to believe to be the

word of God, is truly astonishing—and saddening. Is there no commitment to truth?

## **What is the psychology that operates in trinitarian thinking?**

Is Jesus only precious to us if he is God? Is he of less value to us as man? Would we, therefore, love him less if he is “only” man? Does his preciousness to us lie in his “divine nature,” such that only if he is God is he to be treasured? Or is he precious because “he loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20) regardless of what his “essential nature” might be? Does status determine the value of love? Is the love of a king worth more to me than the love of my mother only because he is a king? If it were possible that the love of the king was of a purer (e.g. less self-interested) kind than my mother’s, that would be a different matter, but it would have nothing to do with his status.

Jesus, because of his sinlessness, can (and did) love with a purity and power that exceeds all human love we have ever known, hence his love is of a quality that no human being, not even a mother, can match. Is the love of the one who “gave himself for me” (that is, for my salvation and eternal life) worth less because it was the love of “the man Christ Jesus” rather than “the God Christ Jesus”?

And, speaking of sinlessness, was Jesus sinless because he was God? If this were so, then he was sinless by nature (because God cannot sin) and not because of victory over sin



and the flesh. The Scriptural teaching would thereby be declared false, for it would be contrary to the fact encapsulated in the statement in Romans 5:19, “as by the *one man’s* disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the *one man’s* [Jesus’] *obedience* the many will be made righteous.” This is the fundamental principle of NT soteriology, the fundamental basis of our salvation: the obedience of the “one man”.

Everything hinges upon Christ’s obedience *as man*. It was not God’s obedience to God that mattered for the salvation of man, but *man’s* obedience to God, which Christ fulfilled by being “obedient unto death, death on a cross” (Phil.2:8). So it must be clearly grasped that the love of “him who loved me and gave himself for me” was the love of the man Christ Jesus. Again we ask: Is this love worth less because it was the love of this man Christ Jesus? Well, it is certainly not worth less to me; he is not less precious to me if he is “only” man. His love for us is absolutely vital for our salvation.

Certainly Jesus remained sinless not solely by his own unaided effort but by the fullness of Yahweh who dwelt or “tabernacled (tented, John 1:14)” in him bodily (Col.2:9). In much the same way we, too, can triumph over sin through God’s indwelling presence in us as His temple (1Cor.3:16; 6:19). In 1John 3:9 we read, “No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.” If this verse has application to us, how much more to Christ, the “only begotten”?

Trinitarianism has blinded us to what we might describe as the “marvelous phenomenon of Christ,” namely, that a true man succeeded in being sinless even though he was “one who

has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin” (Heb.4:15, NIV). The astonishing reality of this amazing triumph over sin is lost in trinitarianism because, as God, Christ could not possibly sin—for if he could sin, he wouldn’t be God. If he could not sin because of being God, then Hebrews 4:15 would be meaningless—and so would be his being tempted in the wilderness (Mt.4; Lk.4). Inherent sinlessness (because of being God) would have disqualified Jesus from being the atoning Sacrifice for sin (which required the obedience of “the one man,” Romans 5:19); it would also have made him incapable of being tempted “just as we are,” so he could, therefore, not act on our behalf as a compassionate High Priest (again contradicting Heb.4:15).

But let us return to the question of the psychology of trinitarian thinking which implies that Christ’s worth consists primarily in his deity, and that he is devalued by the suggestion that he is “merely” man. The question “What is man?”, taken as a rhetorical question, expects the answer, “Not much more than dust”. This may apply on the physical level, but it is not true of him on the spiritual level (see our earlier discussion on Psalm 8). If our thinking is dominated by an unscriptural concept of man, it is little wonder that any suggestion that Jesus is man, not God, will be resisted with the utmost determination as a devaluation of his person.

But let us ask again: does his value for us consist in his deity? Or does it not rather consist in what he *accomplished* for us as our Savior and Lord? In order to get a clearer grasp of the heart of this matter, we could put the question like this: In Scriptural teaching, what exactly does our salvation depend

on? Does it depend on his “essence” (whether he was God or man) or on his “works” (his function). Jesus pointed to his “works” as evidence of his authenticity (John 10:25,37,38).

To put the question less abstractly, we could ask by way of an illustration: In what does the importance of a key consist? Does it consist in what it is made of (its “essence”), that is, whether it is made of some precious metal such as gold or platinum, rather than iron or steel? Or does it consist in its function, namely, that of opening the door to the house? Does it matter what it is made of so long as it enables us to gain access into the house? Does not its value lie in what it accomplishes for us, rather than in what kind of metal it is made of?

It is both interesting and significant that Jesus spoke of “a pearl of great price” (Mt:13:46). Whether the pearl is a picture of the Kingdom (or reign) of God, or of Christ himself as the one appointed by God to reign, does not matter for our present purpose. What is significant is his choice of a pearl as the symbol. In what exactly does the value of a pearl consist? Does it consist in what it is made of (its “essence”)? If a pearl were ground down to powder, would it still have much value? If the powder were made into a cosmetic paste, it would be worth a little, but not very much compared to this valuable pearl. So, whatever the reason a pearl has value, the value evidently does not lie in its “essence” or its chemical constituents.

Is not the matter quite different with gold? Would one ounce of gold powder be worth less than one ounce of a gold bar? The value would, of course, be the same. But the matter would be different if an artist of great skill created something very beautiful with that gold, for now what he creates has a

totally different value; now it has become (or, we may say, it “functions”) as a *work* of art. A great painter can even use materials which are not necessarily of much value in themselves (canvas, oil or water paints) and with these create a masterpiece worth millions of dollars.

The materials are not the important issue in this case, it is what was done (or accomplished or achieved) with them that is all important. Likewise, Scripture is not primarily concerned with the “essential nature” of Christ, as though he must be something more than “mere man”; its central theme is about what Yahweh God in His loving-kindness *accomplished* in and through Christ Jesus for our salvation.

Is the salvation which God has made available for us worth less if Christ cannot be shown from Scripture to be a being eternally coequal with Yahweh God in every respect? Is the saving work of Christ by the empowerment of God worth less if his deity cannot be demonstrated from Scripture? Surely not. For, as we have seen, what matters for us is what was *accomplished for us by God in Christ*; as for other matters we (I) shall “know even as I am known” (1Cor. 13:12) on that Day.

From all this it should be clear that the trinitarian mentality does not correspond to the NT revelation. Yet, regardless, they persistently insist that Jesus is God, even going so far as to “translate” Scripture according to their own interpretation, thus providing themselves with verses they use to support their doctrine! May God have mercy upon them—and on us who did the same thing.

## **The crucial issue: What really is the Biblical revelation about the person and work of Jesus Christ?**

To even begin to answer this question, we have been obliged to first clear a path through the trinitarian arguments for Christ's deity, the claim that he is "God the Son," a title which (it must be emphasized) does not exist in the Bible. Where the Bible is concerned, Jesus Christ is firmly in the realm of humanity, a genuine human being. It was impossible, both in the light of Scripture and of reason, for him to be a real human being such as we are if he was also "truly God". It is certain that we become fools and talk spiritual nonsense when we depart from the Scriptures.

We can be sure that we are on firm Scriptural ground when we affirm that Jesus is truly and certainly man. Is this to say that he is "just" a man like the rest of us? Not at all. No? But did we not say just now that he is truly human? Certainly, but which of us can be described as a "perfect man" or a "sinless man"? None of us. So it is clear that in this most important sense he is unlike us. Since only he alone is a perfect man, does it not follow that only he is perfectly human? Does it not likewise follow that in the light of Jesus' unique perfection, all mankind must admit to being not perfectly human? Thus, human beings are not truly human in the way they were meant to be until they too are finally "made perfect" (cf. Heb. 5:9; 7:28; 11:40; 12:23). The great Apostle obviously did not consider this a possibility in this life when he said, "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his

own” (Philippians 3:12). *This means that Jesus is the only true man who has ever existed on the earth because he is the only perfect, sinless person who has ever lived.*

Where Scripture is concerned, there is therefore no question about Jesus being human and, indeed, the only truly human person. Herein is his absolute uniqueness; he is incomparable. This is precisely why he alone could be the savior of the world. For the problem with humanity is that because of its self-centeredness and sin it has often behaved as less than human, less than what God intends man to be. This is, sadly, something many people experience all too painfully on the personal and social levels, as also on the international level—something we are reminded of daily by simply turning on the world news reports and hearing about the interminable conflicts and wars going on in the world. But there is hope in Christ, because in him Yahweh God will reconcile all things to Himself (Col.1:20).

The Biblical revelation brings us to the realization that *there is only one true God and there is also only one true man.* Moreover, between them, as might be expected, there exists a unique relationship of oneness, which Jesus repeatedly spoke about. This oneness or union he described in terms of a mutual “abiding” or indwelling: “I am in the Father and the Father is in me” (Jn.14:11). Because Jesus alone was sinless, he alone was the “place” (Jn.2:19) where the holy God could dwell in His fullness. This divine fullness is represented by God’s Word (Jn.1:1) which, as words do, might be described as having welled up from the innermost depth of His being

and having come forth to dwell in the one true man, and in Christ to dwell among us (Jn.1:14).

In the early church there was a description of this oneness of God in Christ in terms of the picture of a piece of iron placed in the fire until it glows in the fire; thus the iron is in the fire, and the fire is in the iron, yet the fire is still fire and the iron is still iron, the one does not change into the other, but it beautifully and effectively illustrates Jesus' words, "I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (Jn.14:11). The union is such that Yahweh could freely speak and work through Christ to accomplish His eternal purposes in the world, and Christ could speak and act for Yahweh as His fully empowered plenipotentiary. That is why there are some places in Scripture where it is not always clear whether the reference has to do with Yahweh or with Christ. Yet it must be remembered that the union of iron with fire does not mean that the iron becomes fire, or that the fire becomes iron; they are united but remain distinct. Likewise, the union of Yahweh with Christ does not mean that Christ is Yahweh or that Yahweh is Christ.

So the Biblical revelation reveals not only that Jesus is the only true man, which in itself would be marvelous enough, but just as amazingly, that Yahweh God came into the world in Christ to reconcile the world to Himself, that is, to save it. Thus it was not some unknown divine being called "God the Son" that came into the world to save us; it was none other than Yahweh Himself that came into the world for our salvation. It is this fundamental and wonderful truth of Biblical revelation that trinitarianism has distorted and lost by

substituting “God the Son” for Yahweh as the one who came into the world. How great is that loss!

Jesus, therefore, is uniquely Yahweh’s “temple” (Jn.2:19) in the world where atonement for sin was made through his truly human and sinless blood, and from which Yahweh God’s truth is proclaimed to the ends of the earth. And because Jesus is the only true man, he is the only mediator acting on man’s behalf (1Tim.2:5), just as Moses mediated on Israel’s behalf. His is also the only name effective for mankind’s salvation: “there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). “Given” by whom? Who else but by Yahweh God Himself?

From our study of the Scriptures it emerges that whereas trinitarianism is erroneous on the one hand, yet on the other hand, the teaching of various Christian groups both ancient and modern (e.g. Arians, Unitarians, etc) whose teaching about Jesus is that he was only an outstanding person, a great prophet, and an adopted “son” of God, are totally inadequate, completely missing the most important element about Christ’s humanity, i.e. his unique perfection, and was rightly rejected by the early church.

Since it pleased Yahweh God, the Father, to exalt Jesus over all other beings, such that every tongue should confess him as “Lord,” that is how he is to be regarded and honored “*to the glory of the Father*” (Phil.2:10-11). But the difficulty for us now is that as trinitarians we were Christ-centered, we did everything for the honor and glory of Christ, and because we thought of Jesus as God, we thought that in glorifying him



we were glorifying God. So the idea of honoring Christ “to the glory of the Father (Yahweh)” is actually an alien concept to us. In our minds Yahweh hardly figured at all, and even the trinitarian “God the Father” had little, if any, real significance in our Christocentric way of thinking. This is where a radical change, a renewal of our minds (Rom. 12:2), will be necessary if we are to return to Biblical monotheism.

But our trinitarian past will not make this easy; it is difficult to let go of something that has been at the center of our lives and thoughts for so long. It is hard for us to realize that in deifying Jesus and idolizing him (what else can we call it?), we have disobeyed both Yahweh God and His Christ. We have failed to see that Jesus is the way, not the destination; he is the mediator, the high priest who offered the sacrifice to Yahweh on our behalf, but he is not the Yahweh God with whom we need to be reconciled. We are eternally grateful that he is the perfect man who “loved us and gave himself for us” in order “to bring us to God” (1Pet.3:18). And now we are eternally united with God and with Christ in “the body of Christ,” which is the church of God, and of which Christ is the head and we are the members. In this new life we now learn to relate to Yahweh God as the center of our lives, while always gratefully remembering and honoring Christ, the perfect sacrifice (as at the Communion, or Eucharist) that Yahweh provided for us. Christ Jesus, the only perfect man, made the salvation of mankind possible.



## Chapter 3



# The Need to Reevaluate the Christian Understanding of Man

## **The low view of man in trinitarianism versus the Biblical teaching of man as “the image and glory of God” (1Cor.11:7)**

A serious obstacle to our acceptance of Jesus as true man and as perfect man is the extremely low view of man in Christian thought, especially since the time of Augustine, some four centuries after the time of Christ. The notion of the total depravity of man, which began to dominate Christian teaching from that time on, reduced man to a state of total moral degradation. All this was done in the name of exalting God’s grace as man’s only hope of salvation.

It was not enough for these dogmatists to show that man’s righteousness, no matter what level of righteousness he could attain to, could never be sufficient to merit salvation, for no man of himself could reach the required standards of God. That is why salvation is available only by grace through faith.

No, it was thought necessary, on the basis of a few verses quoted out of context, to insist that all men are utterly and thoroughly depraved, rotten to the core, their righteousness being nothing more than “filthy rags”.

Do these dogmatists really want to assert, for example, that the actions of those who courageously laid down their lives to save others (of which there are numerous instances almost daily, such as the more recent example of the firemen who died in trying to save others from the fires of the Twin Towers on 9/11) were not righteous, even in God’s eyes, and does anyone dare to speak of such righteousness as “filthy rags”? The Biblical statements about hypocritical or “show” righteousness, which Jesus condemned most severely, are misapplied by the dogmatists to human righteousness in general. “Give honor where honor is due.” But if all men are depraved, why give honor to anyone? Paul spoke of a “good man”; will we insist that he meant “good” only in man’s eyes? And is “a man of peace” a righteous person or not?

Moreover, if this extraction of “filthy rags” from the context of Isaiah 64:6 (KJV, NIV, etc) for defiling all human righteousness serves as an example of Christian “exegesis” of Scripture, then the way Scripture has been mishandled in trinitarian “exegesis” is hardly surprising. A look at the passage in Isaiah will readily show that the dogmatists really cared nothing about what Isaiah was actually saying. The words “all our righteous acts are like filthy rags” (NIV) is *a contrite confession of sin before God* on behalf of the nation of Israel, a confession of the hollowness of their religious observances, because the fact was that “No one calls on your name or strives

to lay hold of you” (v.7); and for this reason “you (God) have hidden your face from us and made us waste away because of our sins” (v.7, NIV). But the immediately preceding verses make it very clear that none of this was meant to deny that there were those in Israel who “wait for” the Lord and who “joyfully work righteousness”: “Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of *those who wait for him*. You meet *him who joyfully works righteousness, those who remember you in your ways*” (Isa.64:4,5).

The careless and callous way these Christian dogmatists treat the Scriptures in order to achieve their dogmatic objective of painting all mankind in the lurid colors of depravity for the sake of establishing their doctrine of grace must surely be astonishing to any responsible exegete of the Bible. Thus, man who is portrayed as “a little lower than God, and crowned with glory and honor” (Ps.8:5; RSV, NRS, NASB) is now painted as being scarcely better than the devil! One Christian writer quotes the Austrian writer Karl Kraus (d.1936) with some degree of approval when Kraus wrote, “The Devil is wildly optimistic if he thinks he can make human beings worse than they are.”

## **The one-sided emphasis on man as depraved sinner in Christian teaching and its consequence: we are reluctant to speak of Christ as man**

So much of Christian teaching goes on the supposition that God is glorified and His salvation magnified by degrading man as a degenerate or depraved being. Typically, in a book on Christian theology, for example, the writer puts together a list of verses which speak of man's sinfulness and depravity, while God's glorious purpose for man gets scarcely a mention. The words of Psalm 8, "What is man...?" is treated in writings and songs as though these words posed a rhetorical question expecting the negative answer, "He is nothing". Evidently, no one had even bothered to look at the whole verse: "what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?" (Ps.8:4; 144:3) Far from being a rhetorical question, it is actually an expression of wonder, praise, and gratitude, moved by God's mindfulness and care for him!

Job, even in his disgruntled state, also acknowledged this: "What is man, that you make so much of him, and that you set your heart on him, visit him every morning and test him every moment?" (Job 7:17,18) God has set His heart on man! He makes so much of him! Job's question "what is man?" does not propose the answer "nothing," or "just a depraved sinner," but "someone precious to God," "one on whom God has set His heart".

Certainly, the Bible does not whitewash man's sins, but it never suggests that mankind has become degraded and worthless because of sin. Man's preciousness to God even as a

sinner must always be kept in view even when the seriousness of his sin is not overlooked; this is the Biblical viewpoint. The Prodigal Son is still a son, at least in the Adamic sense (Lk. 3:38), even if not yet in the sense of one who is a child of God in Christ.

Undoubtedly, sin has reduced mankind to a state of spiritual penury, and worse, to the fearful consequences of slavery under sin and death. But the evidence that God has never abandoned His predestined eternal plan for man is clearly evinced by the redemptive plan for man He had already established “before the foundation of the world” through “the man Christ Jesus”.

But the low view of man so prevalent in the Christian church makes Christians reluctant to speak of Christ as man, except by way of the concession that unless Christ was man he could not be man’s savior. He is portrayed as one who magnanimously humbled himself to this lowly state of being human for the sake of our salvation though, in actuality, he was God not man, for at the center of his being he was “God the Son”. This is the kind of thinking which dominates the Christian mind and which, unfortunately, is out of touch with Biblical anthropology and God’s glorious eternal plans for man revealed in it.

## The high view of man in Scripture

God's glorious plans and purposes for man are clearly revealed, not concealed, in Scripture, so there is little excuse for failing to see it. We have already noted the fact that, in Genesis 2:7, Yahweh breathed into man's nostrils so that he became a living being. What did God impart to man by breathing into his nostrils? Was it air or oxygen? Hardly! Many other creatures which He formed also breathe air and oxygen, but He did not breathe into them. What He breathed into man was His own breath or spirit. Both in Hebrew and Greek, "breath" and "spirit" are one and the same word, that is, the Hebrew word *ruach* and the Greek word *pneuma* can be translated as either "breath" or "spirit". When a man dies, "the spirit returns to God who gave it" (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

It is precisely because man has a spirit which was given him by God that he is, *in this sense*, a divine being. It may be that Jesus was also drawing attention to this fact in John 10:34-36. It is a quotation from the Psalms: "I said, 'You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless, like men you shall die, and fall like any prince'" (Ps.82:6,7). Beyond the possible reference to people of power and authority by the word "gods," could it be that Jesus wants to go deeper by indicating that man is divine in the sense that he has received his spirit from God? If so, how much more is Jesus divine as being the one in whom God dwells in His fullness as incarnate Logos (word)? As a matter of fact, we are unable to speak a word without breath or spirit. That is how closely related breath or spirit is to word.



If Psalm 8:5 could speak of man even in his present state as being “crowned with glory and honor,” how much greater will his honor and glory be when Yahweh has completed His redemption of man! And in what exactly does man’s glory and honor consist? “You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet” (v.6). And what exactly is the extent of the dominion that God has given to man in putting “all things under his feet”? The astonishing answer is that the “all things” includes absolutely everything excepting God alone!

For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when it says, “all things are put in subjection,” it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him (1Cor.15:27).

This means that God’s purpose in Christ is to make man His vice-regent over all of creation, second only to God in the universe! All this is what God will accomplish in and through Christ—as man, for the words in Psalm 8 concern *man* and Yahweh’s exalted purpose for him.

This finds a good illustration in the well-known story of Joseph, whom Pharaoh appointed ruler over everything in Egypt—everything, that is, excluding Pharaoh himself (Gen. 45:26), thus making him second only to Pharaoh in the whole land. Such is God’s glorious predestined plan for man in Christ. The exaltation of Christ in Philippians 2:9-11 can be illustrated by the exaltation of Joseph as ruler of Egypt in the following manner, “Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph’s hand, and clothed him in

garments of fine linen and put a gold chain about his neck” (Genesis 41:42). These were not merely ceremonial acts, for by them Pharaoh conferred his own authority and glory upon Joseph, most notably by giving Joseph his signet ring which bore his personal seal, with which the king’s official orders were sealed. That meant that Pharaoh entrusted the full weight of his personal authority to Joseph, thereby empowering him to act on Pharaoh’s behalf. In the same way, in Philipians 2:9-11, Yahweh conferred on Jesus His own divine glory and authority. Just as the signet ring bore Pharaoh’s name (the name above all names in Egypt) upon it, so, too, Yahweh conferred on Jesus the name above all names, and thereby fully empowered Jesus to act on His behalf.

Yet the fact that the man Christ Jesus will be second only to Yahweh God in all of creation (and we in Christ) seems not good enough for trinitarians. Out of a misguided “zeal for God, but not according to knowledge” (Rom. 10:2; in which I also shared), they insist that Christ has to be absolutely equal with God in every way—something which Christ himself refused to grasp at (Phil.2:6). For some strange (perhaps perverse?) reason they will not have it that Yahweh alone must be “all in all” (1Cor.15:28), even though this is what the Son himself affirms by his own subjection to God, who subjected all things to him (v.28). We do well to be careful lest we allow our misguided “zeal” to bring us into condemnation.

## Man's worth in the Genesis account

The Genesis account has its own powerful affirmation of man's worth to God. Looking carefully at the creation narrative we would be entirely correct to say that a label could be attached to man with the words, "Handmade by God". This is because, physically, man is described as having been individually "formed" by God personally (not via an agent); and spiritually, man is "God-breathed": "Yahweh God ... breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (Gen.2:7). Is it too far-fetched to see here a picture somewhat like "mouth to mouth resuscitation"? Or was such a picture actually intended by this vivid description? Whatever the case, man was created as God's personal image (Gen.1:26,27), designed to make His glory known to all creation.

What is the Biblical basis for speaking of Adam as "handmade" by God? It is the word "formed" in Genesis 2:7, "Yahweh *formed* the man from the dust of the ground". This word is used of potters forming, with their hands, the vessels they make out of clay on their potter's wheel. The *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (BDB) gives the following definitions of the word "form" (יָצַר, *ysr*) "1. of *human activity*: a. of a potter who forms out of clay a vessel Is 29:16; 41:25; Je 18:4 (x2); 18:6 (x2); 1Ch 4:23; La 4:2; Zc 11:13 (x2). 2. of *divine activity*: a. (as a potter) forming Adam out of עֶפֶר [*pr*, 'dust'] from אֲדָמָה [*admb*, 'earth, land'] Gn 2:7; 2:8 (J)".

It is mentioned in Genesis 2:19 that God also formed other creatures, but not to carry His image, as in the case of

man. There is also no mention of God breathing into them as He did in Adam's case. This seems to indicate that Yahweh could have brought Adam to life without breathing into his nostrils, but that He specially chose to do so for His own divine reasons.

The woman, too, was specially "handmade" by God as is stated in Genesis 2:21,22: "Yahweh God fashioned [*bānāh*, "to make, build, construct"] the rib he had taken from the man into a woman" (v.22, NJB). Since Eve was made from Adam's living bone and flesh, it was not necessary for Yahweh to breathe into her nostrils separately, as He did in the case of the lifeless dust out of which Adam had been formed. And, just like Adam she, too, is the bearer of God's image (Gen.1:27).

No doubt someone will tell us that the Genesis account of God's forming man is anthropomorphic in character, and is to be understood metaphorically not literally. We shall consider the question of anthropomorphism later. For now we will only ask: In that case, what would be the "metaphoric" message of the account of man's creation? Are the details about God forming man merely a literary device to add vividness to the story? This is what some writers mean by the "creation myth". But even they cannot deny that the Genesis account intends to show God's intimate involvement in man's creation, and that man's value for Him is thereby indicated.

## The image of God

Verses speaking of Jesus as “the image of God” are often quoted as though they serve as evidence of his deity. But man is likewise spoken of as “the image of God,” yet no trinitarian would cite this as evidence of man’s deity. Moreover, speaking of an image which is adored or worshipped, raises the question: What is idolatry? Is it not the worship of an image? If Jesus is the image of God, as is repeatedly stated in the NT, is it the case that worshipping him is not idolatry? If it is argued that it is all right in Jesus’ case because he is God, then it follows that Jesus as God is being worshipped as the image of God. Can God be His own image?

Or else is it being suggested that the 2nd person of the Trinity is the image of the first person, that is, the Son is the image of the Father? But an image in Scripture is by definition derived from that of which it is a copy or image, such as a picture or statue; and if the Son is derived from the Father so as to be His image, then he is clearly inferior to the Father. On what basis, then, do the trinitarians reject the subordination of the Son? Likewise, a word derives from the speaker, so how can the Word of God be equal to God Himself?

It is important to notice that the Johannine writings, which are the favored source of trinitarian proof-texts, close the first letter with a warning about idolatry in its concluding verse: “Little children, guard yourselves from idols” (1Jn. 5:21). We must joyfully and gratefully honor and love, praise and adore, our Lord Jesus Christ, but there is a line which we may not cross without falling into the heinous sin of idolatry.

We go beyond that line when we proclaim Christ to be God, equal in all respects to the Father, and therefore to be worshipped equally with Him. In the book of the Revelation, the book in which God is worshipped as the One who is supreme, God (Yahweh) is absolutely the central and sole Object of *worship*, while Jesus is accorded adoration and praise in several places, and always as “the Lamb”.

### Jesus the Image of God

In Genesis 1:26,27; 9:6, we are told that man was created in God’s “image” (צֶלֶם). An image is a picture, likeness, or representation of someone or something. In Genesis 5:3 Seth is said to have been in the “likeness” (דְּמוּת) and “image” of his father Adam, that is, he bore a physical resemblance to his father and, perhaps, also resembled him in his character. Does this not mean that Seth could have rightly said, “He who has seen me has seen my father”? This reminds us of Jesus’ words in John 14:9, “He that has seen me has seen the Father.” Jesus was clearly speaking of himself as God’s image. This was not a claim to be God but, on the contrary, was a claim to be the true man, the “last Adam” (1Cor.15:45), the one who truly represents mankind as God intended man to be, namely, the image through whom God reveals Himself.

Both these words, “likeness” and “image,” are applied to man in Genesis 1:26; and, as we have seen, they can refer to the resemblance of a son to his father, as in the case of Seth. Does this not explain why Adam, because he was created in

God's image, is called "son of God" (Lk.3:38)? Man is nothing less than God's representation of Himself for all creation, in heaven and on earth, to see. How exalted is God's purpose for man!

In Numbers 33:52 the same Hebrew word for "image" as in Gen.1:26-27 is used of idols made of metal representing a god that was worshipped by the local people. The word is frequently used of "images" which were statues of gods (2Ki.11:18; 2Chr.23.17; Ezek.7:20; Amos 5:26), and of "images of men" or "male idols" (Ezek.16:17; 23:14). From this it is evident that these "images" were often in human form. Isaiah 44:13 describes a craftsman making an idol of this kind, "The carpenter measures with a line and makes an outline with a marker; he roughs it out with chisels and marks it with compasses. He shapes it in *the form of man, of man in all his glory*, that it may dwell in a shrine" (NIV). The words "form of man" in the Greek are the words *morphē* and *anēr*, which mean a "male form" just as in Ezekiel 16:17.

All this shows that "image" and "form" are essentially the same in meaning. But what is significant for our inquiry here is that the word *morphē* ("form") is the word used in Philippians 2:6, "form of God," which shows that "image of God" and "form of God" are evidently synonymous. This means that the phrase "form of God" is to be understood in terms of God's image as in Genesis 1:26,27; 9:6. Man as created in God's image and likeness can properly be described as being in "the form of God". Yet as trinitarians we did not hesitate to read our own interpretation into this phrase, in spite of the fact we could not produce one shred of Biblical

evidence to support our interpretation of it as meaning that Jesus is God.

Now we must ask the question: do we actually see God's image and glory in man as he is now? Probably almost everyone will answer in the negative. Why? Is it not obviously because of man's present imperfection? *Only the perfect man can truly reflect God's glory.* Now, we begin to understand the significance of Jesus as the only perfect man.

That Jesus is the true image of God is unambiguously affirmed in the NT:

**2 Corinthians 4:4:** "In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing *the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*"

**Colossians 1:15:** "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation."

An image is a representation of that of which it is the image; it must bear his/its likeness or form. Therefore, unless Christ is in God's "form" (Phil.2:6, μορφή, *morphē*, "form, outward appearance, shape," BDAG), he cannot be God's image.

Yet Paul also sees man in general as being in God's image. Contrary to Christian teaching, the Bible does not consider that man has lost God's image because of Adam's sin, nor does it suggest that that image has been destroyed or marred by Adam's sin. This is not a purely doctrinal matter, but one with a serious practical consequence for man. For if man were in any sense no longer in God's image, then the principle



enunciated in Genesis 9:6 would no longer be valid, “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.” The sanctity of human life is rooted in his being in God’s image. Hence killing a person carries serious consequences. But if man is no longer in God’s image, then killing a human being would be little different from killing an animal. Jesus’ endorsement of Genesis 9:6 is reflected in his words to Peter, “Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword” (Mt.26:52, NKJV). This shows that Jesus did not concur with the now generally accepted Christian doctrine. It also shows that when Paul spoke of man as “the image and glory of God” (1Cor.11:7), he was entirely in tune with the OT and with his master’s teaching.

Yet the image of God in man remains to be perfected when Christ appears, for only then shall we be like him, who is the perfect image of God, as is stated in the following verse:

**1John 3:2:** “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we will be like him, because we shall see him as he is.”

The image of God in Christ is evidently far superior to that in man generally; but since both Christ and man are bearers of God’s image and, therefore, have His “form” (though in different degrees of excellence), Phil.2:6 cannot be used to argue for Christ’s deity in the trinitarian sense of being essentially or inherently coequal with God.

### **“Let us make man”**

Some of the more learned trinitarians are aware that the lack of OT evidence for this doctrine poses a serious problem for its validity; they are aware of the fact that there is scarcely a grain of evidence to be found there. So some trinitarians clutch at any straw they think might provide a modicum of support. Pathetically, they would even point to the thrice-holy in Isaiah 6:3 (“Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Host”), as though they did not know that the three-fold proclamation of “Holy” is meant to express holiness at the highest level, much as we speak of the three levels of great, greater, greatest; or high, higher, highest; so also holy, holier, holiest. This is somewhat like Jesus’ use of “Truly, truly” for greater emphasis.

That Genesis uses the first person *plural* in Genesis 1:26 (“let us make man in our image”) is constantly used to argue for the Trinity. The problem with this argument is, first, that “us” and “our” do not tell us anything about the *number* of persons referred to, because it can include any number. Secondly, it proves nothing about the *equality* of any persons comprehended within the first person plural. For example, a commander-in-chief of a nation’s armed forces could say, “Together we shall win this war”; the first person plural “we” in this statement does not give any indication as to how many officers and men will fight under his command, and even less does it suggest that any of them are his equal.

So what more can be accomplished by using the “us” in Genesis 1:26 than to try to make a case for polytheism, where

neither the number nor the rank of the gods matter? But within the monotheism of the Bible no such case can be made because it acknowledges no other than “the only God” (Jn.5:44). Moreover, within the context of the OT, we see from Proverbs 8:30 that Wisdom, spoken metaphorically as a person, co-worked with God in the creation, so the most obvious way to understand Gen.1:26 is that the “us” refers to God and His Wisdom. It could also refer to His Word if the “Word of Yahweh” in Ps.33:6 is portrayed as personified.

Regarding the plural in “let *us* make (עָשָׂה, *āśah*) man in our image” (Gen.1:26), what the average Christian does not know is that, when it came to actually creating man in the next verse, the verbs for “create” are all *singular* in Hebrew, meaning that *only God Himself was engaged in the act of creating man*. This is how v.27 reads: “So God created [singular] man in his own image, in the image of God he created [sing.] him; male and female he created [sing.] them”. The verb “created” (בָּרָא, *bārā*) appears 3 times *in the singular*—as though for emphasis! The same is true in the Greek text. But one would not know this from the English translations because whether it is “they created” or “he created” there is no difference in the English form of the verb “create”. In Genesis 9:6, “for God made [sing.] man in his own image,” the verb “to make” is the same as that in Genesis 1:26 and is *singular*. Also, in all subsequent references to this act of God creating human beings, the Scriptures always speak of it in the *singular* whether within Genesis (5:1; 9:6) or in the rest of Scripture (Job 35:10; Ps.100:3; 149:2; Isa.64:8; Acts 17:24; etc).

Interestingly, this same verb *āsah* (“to make”) used in Genesis 1:26 in plural form is used in 9:6 (“God made man in his own image”) in the *singular*. So it is probably the “we” in Genesis 1:26 which made it possible for Proverbs 8:30 to speak of Wisdom as being involved in the fashioning and forming of all created things, though perhaps not directly with reference to bringing them into existence.

In regard to the difference in meaning between the two words translated “make” (*āsah*) and “create” (*bārā*), the *Theological Wordbook of the OT* (TWOT) has this to say: ‘The root *bārā* has the basic meaning “to create.” It differs from *yāsah* “to fashion” in that the latter primarily emphasizes the shaping of an object while *bārā* emphasizes the initiation of the object.’

So this would indicate that Wisdom’s role was in the fashioning of what had been created, which finds confirmation in the description of Wisdom in terms of a “master craftsman” (Prov.8:30); as such it is described as working alongside Yahweh (“I was beside him,” Prov.8:30) in the making of man in God’s image, and would thus be included by the word “us” in “let us make man”. Apart from this, Wisdom has an important place in the OT. Under “Wisdom” the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* has the following: “the verb Heb: *chakham*, with the adjective Heb: *chakham*, and the nouns Heb: *chokhmah*, Heb: *chokhmoth*, with over 300 occurrences in the Old Testament.”

## Isaiah 9:6

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (NIV)

There is so little of use to trinitarianism in the OT that we are obliged to take a huge leap from Genesis to Isaiah! Isaiah 9:6 is another of the extremely few OT texts that trinitarians can find to use as “evidence” for the deity of Christ, but as usual without any regard for the context. A look at the next verse immediately shows that these words speak of the promised Davidic king, the Messiah:

Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this. (Isa.9:7)

So the “child” or “son” in 9:6 is the heir to David’s throne as verse 7 makes clear. It is to this promised heir that the words in Ps.2:7 are addressed, “you are my son, this day have I begotten you.”

“Mighty God”: That the king could be addressed as “God (*elohim*)” is seen in Ps.45:6. In the very next verse Ps.45:7 Yahweh is spoken of as “your God”: “you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions”. The first verse of this Psalm also plainly states,

“I address my verses to the king” (Ps.45:1). See, too, Psalm 82:6,7, “I said, ‘You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless, like men you shall die, and fall like any prince (*sar*, ruler).” Jesus quoted this verse in John 10:34. The point is that the word “god” is sometimes used in the OT with reference to a person of authority such as a ruler or king and does not imply that that person is divine. But “Mighty God” can also be understood in terms of the exaltation conferred on Jesus described in Philippians 2:9.

“Everlasting father”: A good king was regarded as a father to his people; and since his kingdom would be without end (“from this time forth and forevermore”, Isa.9:7), he could appropriately be called “everlasting father”. In Daniel 7 God gives “the Son of man” an everlasting kingdom: “And to him (“the Son of man,” v.13) was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.” (Dan.7:14)

“*Wonderful counselor*” and “*mighty God*” explain the reason for “the increase of his government”. The increase of his government and peace, being “without end” and “for ever,” in turn explains why he will be called both “*everlasting father*” and “*prince of peace*”.

The capitalizing of the four epithets in the English translations has the effect of raising them to divine status; that shows the effect on the reader of capitalizing the words! These capitals are, of course, in the English and not in the Hebrew text.

That these prophecies find their ultimate fulfillment in Christ is, in view of the NT, without doubt whatsoever. It finds its fulfillment also in the fact that its accomplishment was carried out *by God Himself*, who was in Christ bringing it all to pass. This is expressed in the final part of this prophecy, “The zeal of Yahweh of hosts will perform this.” It is Yahweh Himself that will see to its successful attainment.

But there is yet another possibility which is not excluded by the foregoing exposition: Isaiah 9:6 could be a prophecy of Yahweh Himself coming in the person of the Messiah Jesus in the sense revealed in Colossians 2:9. This may be the simplest and clearest way to understand this prophecy, though it does not rule out the previous exposition as applying to the Messiah, son of David, as man.

The application of Isaiah 9:6 to Yahweh could find confirmation in the title “Wonderful” or “Wonderful Counselor” because in Isaiah 28:29 Yahweh is described as “wonderful in counsel”. In Judges 13:18 “the angel of the LORD” tells Manoah and his wife (the parents of Samson) that his name is “Wonderful,” and then the couple realized that they had “seen God” (Judges 13:22).

The title “Mighty God” has a parallel in Ps.50:1, and “Prince (Ruler) of Peace” is illustrated in the beautiful picture portrayed in Isaiah 11:6-9. Most people understand the word “prince” to mean the “son of a king,” but this is not the meaning of the Hebrew word *sar*, which means “head” (of a family, a tribe, an army), or “chief,” or “commander”. In Daniel 8:25 God is referred to as “Prince of princes” in the King James version and this is followed by virtually all English

translations. “Prince” is the title of the “Commander (*sar*, prince) of Yahweh’s army” in Joshua 5:14f. and who else can that be but “Yahweh of hosts,” for this is what He is called in Daniel: “שַׂר־הַצְּבָאָה [*sar hasava*] the prince of the host (the army) of heaven, i.e. God (Dan.8:11)” (HALOT). “Everlasting Father” or “Father from eternity” (HALOT) surely cannot also be claimed as a title of the Son! In any case, if it be insisted that the titles in Isaiah 9:6 are divine titles only, that would not prove that Jesus is God in some general sense but only that he is Yahweh, seeing that these would be Yahweh’s titles!

Conclusion: While the four titles in Isaiah 9:6 *can* and *do* apply to the promised Messiah, it is also true that they apply even better to Yahweh Himself. By indwelling the Messiah during his ministry, the divine qualities find expression in the life of the Messiah Jesus in such a way that the divine glory is revealed through him as “the image of the invisible God” (Col.1:15).

### **Is it acceptable to God that we worship His image?**

We must return to the discussion about man as having been created as “the image of God”. We have also seen that Christ is God’s image *par excellence* because he alone is the perfect man. But now we must ask the weighty question: Does the word of God permit the worship of “the image of God”? In relation to trinitarianism it is obviously not a purely academic question to ask whether it is right or wrong to worship God’s



image rather than God Himself, or even alongside God Himself.

The description of Christ as the “image of God” (εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ, *eikōn tou theou*), as we have seen, is found in 2Co.4:4; Col. 1:15; Heb.1:3; and while the term is not used in John’s Gospel, the idea is expressed through many important statements, esp. Jn.14:9 and Jn.1:14,18; 12:45; 14:10; 15:24. The emperor’s head on a coin is called an *eikōn* (image), i.e. a likeness or portrait (Mt 22:20 and pars). Obviously, the image of the emperor is *not* the emperor, so is it not evident that Christ as God’s image is *not* God? Is there anything difficult to grasp about this fact? Yet it seems that as trinitarians we were unable to distinguish between image and the one represented by it because of the contorted reasoning of trinitarian dogma.

But the question we set out to answer was: Is it acceptable to God that we worship His image? If the answer is “Yes”, then there is no reason that we cannot worship man, since he is created in God’s image. Yet Scripture forbids not only the worship of man, any man, but even the image of a man, a male or human idol (as we saw earlier, e.g. Ezek.16:17). Accordingly, the Apostle Paul denounces those who turned away from God and “claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images (*eikōn*) resembling mortal man” (Rom.1:22,23). Notice that the word “image” is the same word that the Apostle uses of Christ and of man generally as God’s image. All men are mortal, and Christ was no exception otherwise he could not have died for mankind’s sins. He was raised from the dead,

and so will all true believers; does that mean that once raised from the dead it will be permissible to worship man? And even in the case of a God-man, or divine man, can one worship the one without the other?

The prohibition of worshipping any image of any kind is enshrined in Deuteronomy 4:15-19. We need look only at the first two verses,

<sup>15</sup> “Therefore watch yourselves very carefully. Since you saw no form on the day that the LORD (Yahweh) spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, <sup>16</sup> beware lest you act corruptly by making a carved **image** for yourselves, in the **form** of any **figure**, the **likeness** of male or female.”

Two things stand out immediately: (1) Yahweh is without visible “form” (*tmunah* “likeness, form”), v.15. (2) Four words are used in the next verse to cover all options: “image”, “form”, “figure”, and “likeness”. No form or imagery escapes the prohibition of devising any object of worship besides the living God, Yahweh.

What needs to be realized is that it is the *first* of the Ten Commandments that we are discussing here; it is elaborated in Deuteronomy 5:

<sup>6</sup> “I am the LORD (Yahweh) your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

<sup>7</sup> “You shall have no other gods before me.

<sup>8</sup> “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

<sup>9</sup> You shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the LORD (Yahweh) your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me,

<sup>10</sup> but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.”

It should be observed that the “iniquity” spoken of (v.9) is not sin in general, but refers to what has just been mentioned, namely, the “bowing down” to any “image” or “likeness”. Yahweh alone is the true object of worship because He alone is the Creator and Deliverer (v.6).

Any suggestion that there is some other “god” (v.7) that could be worshipped instead of, or alongside, Yahweh is an insult to Him: “To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him?” (Isa.40:18). Trinitarians seem incapable of grasping the character of Biblical monotheism, hence the notion of other persons besides Yahweh as objects of worship. “To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One” (Isa.40:25). To this question trinitarians reply boldly, “Jesus, God the Son”. They do well to consider the First Commandment carefully, and remember that Jesus himself firmly endorsed the proclamation in Deuteronomy 6:4: “Hear O Israel, the LORD (Yahweh) our God, the LORD is one!”

## **The Divine ban on the worship of any image will be defied**

Not surprisingly there is one individual who will deliberately defy the divine ban on the worship of images: the Antichrist.

The word “image” is used 10 times in Revelation; *all instances refer to the image of the beast* (Rev.13:14,15 (x3); 14:9,11; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4). “Image” (*eikōn*) is a key word in Revelation, appearing more frequently by far than in any other NT book—in fact, 3 times more than in any other NT book.

In Rev.13:15 the image of the beast is given breath of life, that is, it is animated and appears as a living image of the beast; this is clearly an intentional imitation of the fact that man (and Christ the “last man”) is the living image of God (Gen.1:26,27; 1Cor. 11:7; cf. 2Cor.3:18 and 1Cor.15:49). The worship of the beast and/or its image is idolatry imposed upon mankind by the beast as the expression of supreme rebellion against God the creator and redeemer.

Revelation chapter 14 verses 9 and 11 speak of the worship of the beast and its image. Rev.16:2 and 19:20 speak of that image as the object of worship; receiving the mark of the beast and worshipping its image are inseparable. The refusal to worship the image of the beast will be punishable by death, 13:15. And 20:4 indicates that worshipping the beast or its image is actually one and the same thing. From all this it becomes clear that compelling people into idolatry is the central purpose of imposing the “mark of the beast,” and it sums up the aim of the beast’s anti-God campaign. Those who had not

already been deceived into idolatry will be forced into it, or be killed.

In the Revelation those who worship the beast or its image are equally culpable before God, and will face His wrath. To worship the idol of the beast or the beast itself is essentially the same thing. In principle, is the same true of worshipping God or His image (even though the object of worship is different)? That is: Is it essentially the same whether we worship God or His image, at least if that image is Christ and not some other human being?

### **Is Jesus to be worshipped as, or because he is, God's image?**

We have already noted that Christ is the image of God (and so is man generally). Does this mean that it is Biblically acceptable to worship the image of God together with God Himself, because, after all, this is the image of *God*, not of the beast? And since man is also the image of God, as we have seen above, is it then all right to worship man as God's image? If the answer is no, then why is it right to worship the "man Christ Jesus" (1Tim.2:5)? Is not the worship of *any* image an idolatrous act? Did not Jesus himself uncompromisingly declare, "For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him *only* (or, alone, *monos*)'" ; "worship" (*proskuneō*) and "serve" (*latreuō*) are synonymous (Mt.4:10; Lk.4:8). Do we call ourselves his disciples and yet disregard his teaching? If we have decided that it is all right to worship Jesus who is

God's image, then have we not already fallen into idolatry before ever being compelled to another form of idolatry? Is there perhaps a more acceptable form of idolatry than another? If the elect are deceived into one form of idolatry (Mt.24:24), will their state be very much worse if coerced into another?

### **Could Jesus become an idol?**

The question could be asked in another way: Is it possible to make Jesus Christ into an idol? And would that be an exception to the rule against idolatry? Or is it that worshipping Jesus is not idolatry? The trinitarian will, of course, insist that Jesus is God the Son, but can they deny his humanity? If not, then does it not follow that worshipping Jesus still means worshipping a man, even if one insists that he is a divine man? So is it acceptable to worship this particular man? But acceptable to whom? To the trinitarian or to God? Why is it that it is hard to find evidence of worshipping Jesus (as distinct from according him the utmost honor) in the NT? The doxologies in the NT are addressed to the only God, without mentioning Jesus. For example, 1 Timothy 1:17, "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen." (NIV) Similarly, the word "worship" (*proskuneō*) is not used with reference to Jesus, "the Lamb," in the Revelation, but only and always in relation to Yahweh God.

And if it is all right to worship “the man Christ Jesus,” why would it be wrong to worship his mother Mary? And then why not all the saints, as the Catholics do? If man is “the image and glory of God,” then once we consider it permissible to worship one man, on what principle are other human beings to be excluded, and who decides what that principle of exclusion is? Where will the line against idolatry be drawn once the floodgates are opened? We would do well, for the sake of our eternal well-being, to keep the final words of 1John in our hearts and minds, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (5:21).

So we need to press the important question: Is it ever justifiable in Scripture to worship the image? The image of God is not God. If the image is God, we need only worship the image; why do we still need to worship God? The image of the Father is not the Father, but the Son. Even if I had a twin exactly like me so that anyone looking at my twin will think it’s me, that twin is still not me. Yet is not worshipping the image of God as God precisely what trinitarianism does?

## **Does Philippians 2:10 give us the justification to worship Christ?**

<sup>9</sup> Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,

<sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

<sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus did not exalt himself; it was *God* who highly exalted him and gave him a name above every name. Scholars are uncertain whether this means that the name “Jesus” is henceforth exalted as the name above every name, as the next verse seems to indicate; but it is much more likely that the name or title given him is “Lord,” since every tongue will confess him as Lord (v.11). “Lord” here is not “LORD” (Yahweh), but is exactly what the Apostle Peter declared in Acts 2:36, “Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that *God has made him both Lord and Christ*, this Jesus whom you crucified.” “God had made him Lord” reflects exactly what is said in Phil.2:11.

It is, after all, hardly likely that Yahweh would share His own Name with Jesus, for then there would be two persons by the same name, making them practically indistinguishable! Moreover, Yahweh’s words in Isaiah 48:11 rules this out, “For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? *My glory I will not give to another.*” In Scripture “glory” and “name” are often synonymous. What needs to be kept in mind here is that it is *God who exalts Jesus* and that this is done *to the glory of God the Father* (v.11). That is to say, God is both the initiator (the beginning) and the goal (the end) of the exaltation of Jesus. The failure to see this results in misinterpreting this section of the hymn.



It is well-known that Phil.2:10-11 derives from Isaiah 45:23, “To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.” To understand it properly we need to look at its context in Isaiah 45,

21 “I, the LORD, there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me. 22 Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. 23 By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: ‘To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.’ 24 Only in the LORD, it shall be said of me, are righteousness and strength.”

This passage begins and ends with Yahweh, “the LORD,” and there is no mention of anyone else in these four verses. Notice, too, that precisely the words, “every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance,” appear in Philippians. But these words are the contents of an oath which Yahweh Himself has sworn, such that they cannot apply to anyone other than Yahweh. How then can these verses have anything to do with Jesus in Philippians? The answer is not difficult to find if we do not allow our dogma to cloud our perception. A careful comparison of the Philippian passage with the one in Isaiah provides the answer. There is a crucial difference between the two passages: In Isaiah it is “to me (i.e. Yahweh)” that every knee shall bow, but in Phil.2:10 it is “at the name of Jesus” where the Greek is literally “in the name of Jesus (*en tō onomati Iēsou*)”. Now the meaning becomes clear: It is in, by, or at the mention of the name of Jesus that every knee will

bow to Yahweh, “to me”. So, too, “every tongue will confess Jesus Christ as ‘Lord’ to the glory of God the Father (namely, Yahweh)” (Phil.2:11).

It is not *to Jesus* that every knee shall bow, it is *to Yahweh* that every knee shall bow “in Jesus’ name,” or at the mentioning of Jesus’ name. This is how BDAG *Greek-English Lexicon (onoma)* translates this sentence, “*that when the name of Jesus is mentioned every knee should bow*”. BDAG provides many examples of this; one such is, “To thank God ἐν ὀν. Ἰησοῦ Χρ. *while naming the name of Jesus Christ*, Eph.5:20,” which in essence means to thank God because of Jesus. BDAG also makes this interesting remark about “through” or “by the name”: “the effect brought about by the name is caused by its utterance”. Thus the effect brought about by the uttering of Jesus’ name is that every knee will bow to Yahweh, just as Yahweh had sworn would happen.

By now it should begin to be clear from Phil 2:6-11 and the NT as a whole that the superlative value of Jesus’ name does not lie in his allegedly being “God the Son,” but rather in his being uniquely the perfect man who alone was able to say, “I always do the things that are pleasing to him” (Jn. 8:29), and of whom Yahweh said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Mt. 3:17; 17:5). Little wonder Jesus could say, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you” (Jn.16:23; 15:16). In whatever Jesus did or does, his aim is always and only to glorify the Father, “Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son” (Jn.14:13).

## The “form of God” and the “image of God”; Phil.2:6

Though we have discussed the terms “image” and “form” when considering Genesis 1:26,27, for the sake of thoroughness we will here consider them via another route. BDAG:

“Form” (*morphē*) “μορφή, ἥς, ἡ (Hom.+) *form, outward appearance, shape* gener. of bodily form 1 Cl 39:3; ApcPt 4:13 (Job 4:16; ApcEsdr 4:14 p. 28, 16 Tdf.; SJCh 78, 13). Of the shape or form of statues (Jos., Vi. 65; Iren. 1, 8, 1 [Harv. I 67, 11]) Dg 2:3. Of appearances in visions, etc., similar to persons. (BDAG)

Similarly, Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon*:

μορφή [*morphē*], μορφῆς, ἡ from Homer down, *the form by which a person or thing strikes the vision; the external appearance*: children are said to reflect ψυχῆς τέ καί μορφῆς ὁμοιότητα (of their parents).

From the first few lines of the definition given in BDAG we see that its primary reference is to “bodily form,” which would clearly be inapplicable in this case. But the next definition, “Of the shape or form of statues,” shows that the word can mean “form” in the sense of an “image”. But since an actual bodily form of God is not what is in question here, then its meaning must point to the spiritual idea of an image of God, and the NT (and Paul himself) does indeed speak of Jesus as God’s image (2Cor.4:4; Col.1:15).

The use of form in relation to making an image can be seen, for example, in Isaiah 44:13, “The carpenter measures with a line and makes an outline with a marker; he roughs it

out with chisels and marks it with compasses. He shapes it in the form (*morphē*, μορφή) of man, of man in all his glory, that it may dwell in a shrine.” (NIV) The context is about the making (forming) of idols. See the whole section Isaiah 44:13-17; verse 17 reads, “And the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, and falls down to it and worships it. He prays to it and says, ‘Deliver me, for you are my god!’” Clearly, the form has to do with an image, in this case an idol.

The idea of “form” in the sense of “image” can be seen also in Paul’s use of the verb *morphoō* in Galatians 4:19, “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed (*morphoō*) in you.” What else can this mean but that Paul agonizes for the Galatians through prayer and teaching until they finally are “formed” or conformed in their inner being to the *image* of Christ?

Phil.2:7 also speaks of Christ “taking the form of a servant” (ESV) (μορφήν δούλου λαβών, *morphēn doulou labōn*). Jesus was not actually a servant or slave (*doulos*), but it expressed his attitude of heart, i.e. it is to be understood spiritually, just as “the form of God” is to be understood spiritually. Jesus’ attitude of being a servant is seen in his own words in Matthew 20:28, “the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (NJB) (=Mark 10:45).

Jesus is the image of God *as man*, for “he is the image of the invisible God” (Col.1:15), that is, the character of the invisible God is made visible in Jesus. The fact that he was already God’s image during his earthly life (“he that has seen me has seen the Father,” Jn.14:9) would indicate that he had

a status before God which might have caused him to consider grasping at equality with God. Could this have been a central element in the temptations of Mt.4=Lk.4? Was it not at this point that Adam failed, “you will be like God” (Gen.3:5)?

Was it then not necessary that at precisely this point where Adam failed through disobedience, Christ had to succeed in order to be our Savior (Rom. 5:19, “For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.”)? But if this obedience (this refusal to grasp at equality with God) was in a preexistent state, then it was not as man, not as the “last Adam,” and it could not therefore cancel Adam’s disobedience, for as is written in Rom.5:19: “by the one *man’s* obedience”. This means, therefore, that Phil.2:6 cannot be considered in terms of an assumed preexistent state without negating mankind’s salvation “by the one man’s obedience”. For this reason we can appreciate James Dunn’s view that this passage in Phil.2 is to be understood in terms of an “Adam Christology” (see his *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p.282).<sup>11</sup> Adam failed precisely because of his disobedience, and disobedience is in essence an act of rebellion; and rebellion as a rejection of authority is an implicit claim to equality with that authority. It is in this sense that Adam expressed a

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<sup>11</sup> Adam Christology represents the attempt to study Christ as man, “Adam” being the Hebrew word for “man”. But the low view of man generally held by Christians means that this kind of Christology is not widely welcomed by them. During a conversation I had with a certain professor of theology some time ago, he described Prof. Dunn’s Christology as “low”. This is because man in Christian theology is “low”.

claim to equality with God. But Christ, “the last Adam” (1Cor.15:45) refused to grasp at equality with God. He was content with his God-given role as the “last Adam,” with the result that God could make him “the savior of the world” (Jn.4:42; 1Jn.4:14).

And speaking of a God-given role, “form” appears again in the next verse (Phil.2:7) which is usually translated as “taking the form of a servant,” where “taking” is the translation given for the word *lambanō*. But *lambanō* can mean either “take” or “receive”, “accept”. So the phrase can just as correctly be translated as “receiving the form of a servant,” the role given him by God. “Receiving” or “obeying” need not be considered as merely passive. For example, the same word *lambanō* which is translated as “take” in Phil.2:7 is translated as “receive” (in Gk. aor. *active*) in John 20:22, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (also Acts 19:2, etc).

The trinitarian interpretation of Phil.2:6ff has been singularly unconvincing. A major reason for this is that the term “form of God” is a major stumbling block for them. The case would have been clear-cut for them if it had simply said, “Though he was God...” But unfortunately for trinitarianism, it does not say this. Refusing to accept the well-founded meaning of “form” as indicating a representation or image, they fail to come up with an interpretation that properly expresses what the text says, so they daringly read their own interpretation into it.

BDAG states dogmatically that “form” is the “expression of divinity in the preexistent Christ” but gives no explanation whatever as to how, lexically, the word can have this meaning.

Thus a trinitarian lexicon is seen to engage in the dissemination of trinitarianism rather than be faithful to its task of lexicography. Hence, it is often necessary to turn to a secular and authoritative Greek-English lexicon such as that of Liddell and Scott to look for an unbiased view. Consulting my massive unabridged (2042 large pages with small print, not counting the 153 page Supplement) *Greek-English Lexicon* by Liddell, Scott, and Jones (Oxford, 1973), I looked in vain for so much as a hint of any connection between *morphē* and the idea of preexistence in any shape or form (pardon the pun!). For this reason, too, there is no intrinsic connection between *morphē* and the word “God”. Add to this the fact that *morphē* means “outward appearance, shape, *bodily form*” (on BDAG’s own definition), and it is obvious that none of these applies to God because “God is Spirit” (John 4:24). This is why there is absolutely no way to connect “form” with “God” except by way of the Biblical teaching about man as “the image of God”. *In Biblical language, “the form of God” means “the image of God,” which undoubtedly refers to man as God’s image (Gen. 1:26,27, etc).*

Thayer’s argument (*Greek-English Lexicon*, μορφή) that Christ in his preexistence was in “the form of God,” in that it was in this form that “he appeared to the inhabitants of heaven” is, sorry to say, purely the product of imagination; and, not surprisingly, not one piece of Scriptural evidence is produced to substantiate it. Moreover, while it is true that one of the ways that we, *as human beings*, recognize people is by their form or shape (esp. of the face), we also recognize people by *their voices* (e.g. over the phone) even without seeing their

“form”. It is baseless, therefore, to imagine that *heavenly beings* recognize each other by their “form”!<sup>12</sup>

## An analysis of Philippians 2:6-7

“Who (Jesus), though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped” (Phil.2:6)

Once we have been freed from the trinitarian indoctrination which insists that being “in the form of God” simply means “being God,” and once we have regained some degree of clear-mindedness, we should be able to see that if Jesus were God *there would have been absolutely no reason or need for him to “grasp” (harpagmos) at equality with God,* since he already possessed it. Only someone who did not possess equality with God (as in the case of Adam) might desire to grasp at it (cf.

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<sup>12</sup> Though God as Spirit is without *morphē*, “bodily or external form,” so that one cannot properly speak of “the form of God” *except* in the Biblical sense of “the image of God,” it need not be denied that God could assume “form” if He so chooses. Perhaps the special “angel of the Lord” is an example of this in the OT. Perhaps the book of Revelation is another example, if we do not confuse the spiritual with the physical. In the Revelation, the Almighty is “seen” as the One who sits upon the throne (mentioned 12 times). In John’s God-given visions in the Apocalypse, heavenly beings were made “visible” in some spiritual way in order to convey the divine message to John; another possibility was that John was granted spiritual sight, now able to see what is invisible to the eye of flesh for, as Paul said, “The things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2Cor.4:18).



Gen.3:5,6). Therefore, to make this verse say that “being God he (Jesus) did not grasp at equality with God” is to reduce this Scripture to meaninglessness, indeed, to the verge of making nonsense (lit. “no sense”) of God’s word. This is surely a serious offence against the Lord and His word.

In KJV’s translation of Phil.2:6 (“who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God”), there is something which does not quite make sense: If the statement is about two equal persons, under what circumstance would it be necessary to use a word like “robbery” in relation to the question of equality? Even allowing for poetic license, how does robbery come into this kind of discussion? Where *two equal persons* are concerned, there is obviously no relevance whatever for any reference to one “robbing” the other of equality. But even in the case of *two non-equal persons*, is equality a thing or status that one person can be deprived of by the other by means of “robbery”? To rob is not only to seize what is not one’s own, but to remove what rightfully belongs to the other person. So to “rob” is not merely a question of trying by unscrupulous means to attain to equality with the other person, but it is to take away his status so as to make it one’s own. The other person would, if the robbery was successful, not only lose his equality but also become subservient to the one who had taken away that equality, and be thereby reduced to an inferior position.

All of this makes absolutely no sense in regard to Phil.2:6. For if Jesus were God, the question of *attaining equality* with God would be utterly redundant, and what purpose would the word “robbery” serve in this redundant statement? “Rob”

in this sentence would make the statement not only meaningless but absurd. On the other hand, if Jesus were not equal to God, in what sense would it be meaningful to speak of “robbery” in regard to his acquiring equality with God? The only sense one could think of is that the attempt to seize equality would be an act of robbery against God, an act of rebellion, and this was something Jesus definitely did not contemplate. This would make sense—except for the fact that the KJV has, instead, inverted the meaning by saying that Jesus did not think of it as robbery! What a thought to serve as the centerpiece of the “Christ hymn”! Is it even imaginable that this is what Paul called the believers to emulate (v.5)?! What is more, it becomes impossible to make such an outrageous statement connect in any meaningful way to the following sentence: “but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant...” (v.7). Furthermore, if Jesus was already equal with God, then the statement that “God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name” etc (v.9) would have no significance or meaning whatever, since that would not add one iota to the status he already possessed.

Because this verse is of exceptional importance to trinitarians, and because the KJV was the only version of the Bible in general use in the English speaking world for some 300 years (early 17th to early 20th centuries), and still holds considerable sway over many Christians today, it is necessary that we bring the matter into even sharper focus.

In the previous verse (Phil.2:5) Paul exhorts believers to “have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus”. For

this reason Phil.2:6 reveals to us what Jesus thought, what went on in his mind; this is to encourage us to learn to think as he did. Because this verse describes Jesus' way of thinking, his attitude, his mindset, this could be brought out with greater clarity if we hear Jesus expressing it himself. Let us try to understand his mind described from the point of view of either of the two possibilities: (1) that he is God; (2) that he is not God.

What emerges when Phil.2:6 is read from the first point of view? Jesus is God, so he thinks, "I do not consider it robbery to be equal with God." What does such a thought tell us about his attitude and character? He does not think it robbery to be equal with God because he thinks it is *his by right*? But even if it were his by right, why does the idea of robbery come into the thought? Does it not suggest an adversarial attitude towards God? At the least, this way of expressing his thought would suggest some element of arrogance.

From the second point of view: Jesus is not God, but expresses his thought in the words: I don't think it robbery to be equal with God, what does that tell us about his "mind"? Would the thought not indicate that seizing equality with God is not seen by him as robbery; for him it is an acceptable act, not an act of rebellion!

It should now be perfectly evident that there is simply no way to make this statement in the KJV express anything but some form of spiritual perversity. It expresses the *precise reverse* of what Paul intended to exhort the believers to think, namely, that Jesus would never entertain in his mind the thought of seizing equality with God; instead he chose the

status of a servant (slave, *doulos*), and was obedient unto death.

What then has happened in regard to the KJV translation? The thought expressed here is in essence the thought of the devil, whose aim has always been to seize equality with God, indeed, to exalt himself above God's throne, if possible, and whose ambition is declared in the words, "I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high... I will make myself like the Most High." (Isa.14:13,14) How is it that Satan's mind has been allowed to subtly creep into this verse and be attributed to Christ!?

No less serious is the problem: Why is it that as trinitarians we completely failed to detect the fearful problem in the translation of this verse? Not only did we not see the problem, we constantly used it to "prove" that Jesus is God. It now dawns upon me that what trinitarianism has done is in fact perfectly expressed by this verse. Trinitarianism has robbed Yahweh God of His central position as the supreme Object of our faith. It has sidelined Him in order to give the central place to Jesus whom it elevated to deity, making him coequal with God, and none of this was considered as robbery. In other words, Phil.2:6 in KJV perfectly expresses the thoughts and mentality of trinitarianism. It was precisely for this reason that as trinitarians we saw no problem with it.

Returning to the Greek text of Phil.2:6, and examining the word *harpagmos*, which KJV translates as "robbery," and considering the word in the light of several Greek-English lexicons, we find that only BDAG gives "robbery" as one of the definitions for *harpagmos*. But then it immediately goes

on to make the following striking comment regarding that definition: “*robbery, which is next to impossible in Phil.2:6,*” and adds, “the state of being equal with God cannot be equated with the act of robbery”. So BDAG affirms that this equation makes no sense. From all this it becomes evident why most English translations do not use a word such as “robbery”<sup>13</sup> and do not structure the sentence as KJV did. They thereby save the sentence not only from absurdity but from what must be described as spiritual perversion.

Trinitarians simply refuse to face the fact that this verse makes it clear that Jesus was not God, and that he made no attempt (unlike Adam and Eve) to grasp at equality with Him. Some trinitarians, not surprisingly, do not hesitate to go so far as to try to make the word which is translated as “grasp” in a number of English translations (a few, like KJV, translate it as “robbery”) to mean something like: he did not “hold on to” it. But the Greek word *harpagmos* is not amenable to such word-twisting; here is its meaning in the BDAG Greek-English lexicon, “**1. a violent seizure of property, robbery** **2. something to which one can claim or assert title by gripping or grasping**”; but regarding this second definition, the Lexicon admits that, “This meaning cannot be quoted from non-Christian literature, but is grammatically justifiable”. This second meaning is not given in the other authoritative Greek-English lexicons such as that of Liddell and Scott, or Thayer.

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<sup>13</sup> Actually this is not the usual word for robbery in Greek; Woodhouse’s English-Greek Dictionary gives *harpagē* as the equivalent for “robbery,” but not *harpagmos*.

The primary meaning of the word *harpagmos*, “robbery,” is *to seize that which does not belong to you*. The second meaning given by BDAG aims at removing the violent character of the act of “robbery,” and makes it refer merely to the claiming of something by gripping or grasping it. But even this toned down meaning does not remove the fact that it is to grasp at something that *does not belong to the one who grasps at it*.

All this shows that the meaning of Philippians 2:6 is patently clear: it states *the exact opposite* of what trinitarianism tries to argue from this verse. What this verse does say is that Jesus, though he was God’s supreme image, “the form of God,” made no attempt to seize or claim equality with God. He stood in perfect contrast to Adam, and did not sin as Adam did. As perfect man he could fulfill the exalted role of being the Savior of the world.

Far from wanting to claim equality with God, he “emptied” (*kenoō*) himself. In view of the foregoing discussion, we need not waste time discussing the trinitarian speculations about Jesus in his alleged preexistence emptying himself of his divine prerogatives. If they had paid more attention to what this passage actually says, instead of making every effort to read their own interpretations into the text, they would have seen that the meaning of “emptied himself” is explained in this hymnic passage by the poetic parallelism found in the very next line: “he humbled himself” (Phil.2:8), which is the poetic equivalent of “emptied himself” (this translation is not given in some modern versions; NIV, for example, renders it: “made himself nothing”).

By refusing to snatch at, or even to claim, equality with God (in stark contrast to Adam and Eve), it was thereby unquestionably established that Jesus was the image of God par excellence. But he went much further than not claiming that equality. For though Jesus in the Wisdom of God was “born in the likeness of men” (Phil.2:7; cf. Mt.11:19; Lk. 7:35; 11:49)—and according to John 1:14 the Word (Logos) was incarnate in the man Jesus (was “found in human form,” Phil.2:7), something that Jesus was profoundly conscious of, as can be seen in John’s Gospel—yet “he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil.2:8).

### **The spiritual yet practical purpose of Phil.2:6-8**

In interpreting this “Christ hymn” (as Phil.2:6-11 is often called), trinitarians lose sight of the *reason why* the Apostle Paul placed this hymn in this letter to the Philippians. But his purpose was stated explicitly in the sentence immediately preceding the hymn: “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus” (v.5). This hymn was not placed in the midst of a theological discourse. Its chief purpose was to point to Jesus as the exalted example for every believer to emulate. Paul’s purpose, therefore, was intensely *practical*. He was not here intending to teach what later theology called “Christology”; and if the general opinion of scholars is correct, namely, that Paul was here quoting a hymn used in the early church, then he was not the author

of the hymn, but quoted it because it eminently suited the practical purpose he had in mind.

We get sidetracked from the original purpose of this whole passage when we drift off into theological speculations, while losing sight of its call to live a Christ-like life. But if Christ is God, as trinitarians want to use this passage to assert, precisely how can he serve as an example for us human beings? We have no “divine prerogatives” to divest ourselves of, and indeed most people have no real prerogatives or even exceptional privileges to give up, even if they wanted to. Some of those who belong to privileged levels of society might consider giving up some of their privileges, but what about the majority of people? What practical application did Paul have in mind, seeing especially that most of the believers in his time could be classed as “common people”?

This is where the important connection between Phil.2:17 (“poured out”) and 2:7 has generally gone unnoticed, even though the semantic connection between “emptied” (*kenoō*) and “poured out” (*spendomai*) should have been fairly obvious, because a vessel that has been poured out is thereby emptied. Paul always made it his aim to teach by example; what he had said about Christ in 2:7 he applied to himself within the scope of 10 verses!

But just as important (indeed, even more so for exegesis), Phil.2:17 throws light on the meaning of v.7, because it is in this light that the meaning of “emptied himself” becomes clear, all the more so because, as we have noted, it is evident that its meaning is explained in verse 8, “he humbled himself to the extent of becoming obedient unto death”. This



obedience unto death, this pouring out of oneself, is precisely what Paul imitates in being ready to let his life-blood be poured out for the sake of God and His church. In 2Timothy 4:6 he is “already being poured out (*spendomai*, the same word as in Phil.2:17)... the time of my departure has come”. The practical spiritual purpose which Paul aims to emphasize in Philippians 2 can be summed up in his words, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1Cor.11:1).

It should now be clear to us that the trinitarian speculations about Jesus’ “emptying” himself of his divinity, or its prerogatives, are ideas which are read into the text and are practically impossible for us to emulate or imitate—and emulation is, after all, the reason for Paul’s referring to Christ’s “emptying himself” in this passage: “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil.2:5). Moreover, even if the word “emptied” here did not refer to *divine* privileges, but only to human ones, there would scarcely be anything for the Philippians (to whom Paul addressed this letter) to emulate because they belonged to the lower social classes (like most believers at the time, 1Cor.1:26) and were generally very poor (2Cor.8:2). What privileges or rights did they possess that they could empty themselves of? They could, however, be faithful and obedient unto death (Rev.2:10); they could be ready to be “poured out” as Paul himself was (2Tim.4:6; Acts 20:24). Paul wrote this letter from prison, and always lived with the prospect of imminent death for the sake of the gospel. The believers, too, constantly lived either under the threat or the reality of persecution. Paul was therefore calling believers to be especially mindful of the example of Christ,

which was now exemplified for them in his own life, and the death which he readily anticipated.

### **Philippians 2:6-11**

The trinitarian interpretation of this passage is based on the trinitarian interpretation of John 1:1ff. Thus it is assumed that Phil.2:6f refers to the preexistent Logos interpreted to mean God the Son. Take away that assumption and the interpretation of Phil.2:6 in terms of a preexistent Jesus Christ is left without anything to stand on because it depends on the erroneous equation Logos = Jesus Christ which, as we have seen, is without foundation in John's Gospel.

Moreover, Philippians was written *before* John (in the opinion of most scholars, about 30 years before John), so is there any reason to think that the church at Philippi would have understood Paul's letter to them in terms of John 1:1, not to mention the trinitarian interpretation of it? They had been taught by the Apostle Paul personally; where in his teaching does he speak of a preexistent Christ? And there is nothing in the Philippian passage that requires it to be understood in terms of preexistence. Preexistence is read into the text, not out of it (eisegesis, not exegesis). This includes the term "form of God," as understood by trinitarianism.

Even if the attempt is made to interpret Philippians 2 in terms of preexistent Wisdom, one would still be caught by the question: When did Wisdom ever make any attempt to grasp at equality with God? None of the other metaphorical

“entities” such as Torah or Logos did this. This means that even if Christ is thought of as being the preexistent Logos in Phil.2:6, the clutching at equality with God is without any point of reference. The plain fact is that only Adam through his disobedience did something of this kind, and only Adam is relevant in terms of Pauline christology in which Christ is “the second man” (1Cor.15:47), “the last Adam” (v.45).

### **Philippians 2:6-8**

As trinitarians brought up on the doctrine of original sin and the total depravity of man, we were totally at a loss as to how to understand Paul’s statement that “man is the image and glory of God” (1Cor.11:7); not that man *was* (i.e. before “the Fall”) but “*is*” in the *present tense!* Of course, we had no grounds for saying that Paul had made a mistake, nor is there evidence of error in the textual tradition.

Had Paul only said that “man is the image of God” that would have been problematic enough, because according to the doctrine of original sin, that image was tarnished at the very least, or even totally destroyed, as a result of Adam’s sin. But the Scripture goes beyond this with the “double-barreled” statement that man is both “the image *and* glory of God”. That should have left our doctrines in total shambles but, nothing daunted, we simply ignored the Scriptures (as usual) when these contradicted our doctrines.

Had we not ignored these Scriptures we would not have had any difficulty understanding the term “the form of God”

in what some scholars have called a “pre-Pauline hymn” in Phil.2:6-11; for “the form of God” is a term that appears nowhere else in the Bible, but is nevertheless an entirely appropriate way of speaking of “the image and glory of God” in poetic language, such as is used in a song or hymn. This will be discussed more fully below.

God is Spirit (Jn.4:24) and is, therefore, without visible form discernible to the physical eye. Yet He makes Himself “visible” by revealing His glory; Scripture repeatedly speaks of His visible glory: Ex.16:10; Lev.9:23; Num. 14:10; 16:19,42; 20:6; Ps.102:16; Ezek.1:28; 3:23; 8:4; Acts 7:2,55. Thus His *glory* is His visible “form, outward appearance,” which is what the word *morphē* means. Thus Christ as man and therefore as “the image and glory of God” (1Cor.11:7) is “in the form of God” that reveals God to the world—he is “the light of the world” (Jn.8:12; 9:5; cf. believers as light of the world, Mt.5:14).

Considering further the question of “invisibility” and “form” in speaking of God, we may ask: Why is God said to be “invisible” (1Tim.1:17)? Is it not precisely because God as Spirit (John 4:24) does not have “form”? How then can one speak of “the form of God”? Our only options are: either “form” is understood as “image,” or the term “the form of God” is a self-contradiction. Exegetically, therefore, we only have the first option. As was noted earlier, the term “form of God” occurs nowhere else in Scripture outside this poetical phrase in Philippians 2:6.

Philippians 2:

<sup>6</sup> who, though he (Christ) was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,

<sup>7</sup> but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

<sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

This important passage has already been mentioned several times earlier in this book. Here we will make a few further observations:

Two things should be borne in mind in the interpretation of this passage which are generally overlooked or undervalued, and which consequently result in its misinterpretation:

(1) It is not usually noticed that this passage is about “Christ Jesus” (Phil.2:5) in which “Christ (Messiah)” is placed in the emphatic position before “Jesus”<sup>14</sup>, so the whole Philippian passage refers to Jesus as the Messiah. The problem is that the title “Messiah” is virtually meaningless to the non-Jew and that is why he reads “Christ” (the Greek form of “Messiah”) as though it is a personal name rather than a title. The Apostle Paul was a Jew and he certainly did not think of “Christ” as some sort of personal name; to him, as to most Jews of his time, the title “Messiah” carried great significance as the long

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<sup>14</sup> “Christ Jesus” occurs 95 times in the NT, “Jesus Christ” 135 times, while “Jesus” is found 917 times.

awaited savior/king; but the Jews did not think of the Messiah as a divine being. The importance of the title “Christ” to Paul can be seen by a comparison of the statistics:

In a relatively short letter like Philippians, *Christos* (Messiah, Christ) occurs 37 times in the 104 verses of this letter (35.6% or an average of more than 1 occurrence in every 3 verses); in Romans it occurs 65 times in the letter’s 432 verses (15.04% or an average of 1 in 6.6 verses); compare this to John: 18 in 878 verses (2.05% or 1 in 48.7 verses), and Matthew’s 16 times in 1068 verses (1.49% or 1 in 66.7 verses). Statistically, the title “Messiah” or “Christ” occurs far more frequently in Philippians than in any other NT book; in terms of percentages, more than double that of Romans. This clearly indicates that the emphasis on Christ as the Messiah, man’s hoped-for savior and king, is a key to our understanding of Philippians 2:6-11.

The Hebrew “Messiah” (“Christ” in Greek) means an “anointed one”. To explain the significance of this title I shall here simply quote ISBE (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia):

The term is used in the Old Testament of kings and priests, who were consecrated to office by the ceremony of anointing. It is applied to the priest only as an adjective—“the anointed priest” (Lev 4:3,5,16; 6:22 (Hebrew 15)). *Its substantive use is restricted to the king; he only is called “the Lord’s anointed,”* e.g. Saul (1 Sam 24:6,10 (Hebrew 7,11), etc.); David (2 Sam 19:21 (Hebrew 22); 2 Sam 23:1, “the anointed of the God of Jacob”); Zedekiah (Lam 4:20). Similarly in the Psalms the king is designated “mine,” “thine,” “his anointed.” [Italics

added; “Hebrew” indicates verse numbers in the Hebrew Bible where they differ from those in English Bibles]

Notice the italicized words in this quotation, which when applied to “Messiah Jesus” (Phil.2:5) mean that Jesus is Yahweh’s anointed king. To quote ISBE again: “The Messiah is the instrument by whom God’s kingdom is to be established in Israel and in the world.” This fact provides an explanation for why every knee is to bow to Jesus and every tongue confess him Lord to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11). It is clearly for this reason that Jesus is “the Lord’s anointed,” the “king of kings” (Rev. 17:14).

It is a historically well attested fact that kings had the tendency to claim divinity and/or to be deified by others. Nebuchadnezzar was one such case in the OT, and Herod Agrippa I is a case recorded in the NT (Acts 12:21ff). The deification and/or self-deification of the Roman emperors is also well known. The Chinese emperors were called “sons of heaven”. This was precisely something that Christ/Messiah Jesus refused to do (Phil.2:6).

Adam was also a king because he was given the world as his domain over which to rule (Gen.1:28). Judaic lore had some exaggerated descriptions of Adam’s greatness both in physical proportions and in spiritual powers. Yet he fell because of yielding to a perverse desire to “be like God” (Gen.3:5).

This clutching at divinity, or at a certain equality with God, is what Jesus, the new man, God’s anointed Messianic king, declined to do. Instead, he humbled himself in total

submission to the Father, Yahweh, “becoming obedient unto death” (Phil.2:8). He demonstrated a fundamental spiritual principle of the kingdom: that spiritual greatness is not a matter of arrogating glory to oneself but of serving others, for “the greatest in the kingdom is the servant of all” (Mt.23:11; Lk.22:26). For this reason God exalted him above all others.

(2) The whole passage is poetry: a song about Christ/Messiah Jesus as “the Second Man” (1Cor.15:47).

Most people have little understanding of the characteristics of poetry. The result is that poetry is read as if it were prose, and poetic language is read as literal statements. Many English translations help the reader to distinguish poetry from prose by printing poetry in verse form. Those who have such a Bible will quickly see that large portions of the OT, especially the Psalms and much of the prophetic books, are in verse form.

Philippians 2:6-11 is generally considered to be a hymn which Paul incorporated into this letter and, as such, is poetry; yet it is often interpreted as though it is making prose statements. Consider what happens when one tries to read poetry as prose in Ezekiel 28:

<sup>12</sup> Son of man, raise a lamentation over the king of Tyre, and say to him, Thus says the Lord GOD: “You were the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. <sup>13</sup> You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, emerald, and carbuncle; and crafted in gold were your settings and your engravings. On the day that you were created they were prepared. <sup>14</sup> You were an anointed guardian



cherub. I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God; in the midst of the stones of fire you walked. <sup>15</sup> You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, till unrighteousness was found in you. <sup>16</sup> In the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence in your midst, and you sinned; so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and I destroyed you, O guardian cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. <sup>17</sup> Your heart was proud because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor. I cast you to the ground; I exposed you before kings, to feast their eyes on you. <sup>18</sup> By the multitude of your iniquities, in the unrighteousness of your trade you profaned your sanctuaries; so I brought fire out from your midst; it consumed you, and I turned you to ashes on the earth in the sight of all who saw you. <sup>19</sup> All who know you among the peoples are appalled at you; you have come to a dreadful end and shall be no more forever.

This passage is about the king of Tyre. Another king of Tyre called Hiram is mentioned earlier in the OT as helping to supply the cedar wood needed for the construction of the first Temple (2Sam.5:11; 1Ki.5:1; etc).

The attempts to take this passage in Ezekiel as making literal statements meant that no human being could fit the descriptions given, with the result that some have applied the passage to Satan. The problems with this idea are many, not least that Satan is nowhere in Scripture specially associated with Tyre, least of all as its king. For other interpretive problems for this idea, reference can be made to any of the more

scholarly commentaries or even to such popular commentaries as *The Expositor's Commentary*, which rejects the application of the passage to Satan as exegetically unsustainable.

The same kind of problem arises when one takes every statement, or even every word, in Philippians 2:6-11 literally. This is done even by scholars who are (or should be) aware of the fact that this is poetry. They don't even ask the basic question, "If these are literal statements, then why is it in poetic form?" Of course, this is not to say that no factual or literal statements can be made in poetry, but only that when the statements are evaluated, the fact that they are made as poetry should not be overlooked. There is no doubt factual content in Ezekiel 28:12ff, but it is stated in florid poetic language, and when this florid language is taken literally, then it is supposed that the reference is to a supernatural being.

Prof. James D.G. Dunn, in *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* writes, "A vigorous debate still continues around this hymnic passage. However, the suggestion that the hymn has been constructed with strong allusion to Adam or even modeled on the template of Adam christology is still persuasive." (*Paul*, p.282.) "On the nature of allusion" Dunn writes,

For the fact of the matter is that too much of the debate on the exegesis of this passage has displayed rather crass artistic or literary insensitivity. As we have occasion to observe more than once in the present study, allusions by their nature are not explicit. Poets or literary critics who had to spell out every allusion and echo would undermine their art and deprive their more perceptive readers of the moment of illumination, the

thrill of recognition. Their artistic skill would be reduced to the level of high school examination cribs.

So with Paul in particular, we have already suggested a number of allusions to Jesus traditions. And in his use of Adam motifs we noted the allusions (hardly explicit) in Rom. 1:18-25 and 7:7-13; indeed, if our earlier analysis of Paul's christology is at all justified, then Adam was a figure who lay behind a great deal of Paul's theologizing. To make recognition of such allusions depend on precision of meaning in individual terms would run counter to the art of allusion. On the contrary, it is often the imprecision of meaning of a term or the multifaceted imagery of a metaphor that enables the interconnection or imaginative jump, which is the stuff of allusion. The importance of the point justifies its reiteration: exegesis of particular terms which insists on only one referential meaning for each term and denies all the other possible meanings will often be wrong exegesis because it unjustifiably narrows meaning ("either-or" exegesis) and rules out associations which the author may have intended to evoke precisely by using a sequence of such evocative terms. It need hardly be pointed out that such hermeneutical considerations have particular relevance when the passage is a poem or a hymn. The relevance of these reflections in this case should become clear as we proceed.

In assessing Phil.2:6-11 it is not too difficult to identify four or five points of contact with Adam tradition and Adam christology as we have now become familiar with it.

2:6a—in the form of God;  
(Cf. Gen.1:27—“in his own image.”)

2:6bc—tempted to grasp equality with God;  
(Cf. Gen.3:5—“you will be like God.”)

2:7—took the form of a slave [to corruption and sin];  
(Cf. Wis.2:23; Rom.8:3,18-21; 1Cor.15:42,47-49; Gal.4:3-4;  
Heb.2:7a,9a,15.)

2:8—obedient to death;  
(Cf. Gen.2:17; 3:22-24; Wis.2:24; Rom.5:12-21; 7:7-11;  
1Cor.15:21-22.)

2:9-11—exalted and glorified.  
(Cf. Ps.8:5b-6; 1Cor.15:27,45; Heb.2:7b-8,9b.)

(*Paul*, 283-4 and, in brackets, footnotes 78-82)

Regarding Philippians 2:6a Dunn writes,

The hymn uses the term “form (*morphē*)” rather than the term used in Gen. 1:27, “image (*ikōn*).” In a discussion of allusion, however, the argument [i.e. objection] carries little weight. The terms were used as near synonyms, and it would appear that the writer preferred “form of God” because it made the appropriate parallel and contrast with “form of a slave.” Such a double function of a term is precisely what one might expect in poetic mode. (*The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 284-285)

## Lexical comparison of “form” with “image”

Phil.2:6: “form”, μορφή, *morphē*, “*form, outward appearance, shape*”, BDAG. Outside of Phil.2:6,7 only in Mark 16:12 where it means a different but visible form.

Let us compare this definition of the word *morphē* (“form”) with the definition of *eikōn* (“image”) which BDAG gives as follows: “1. *likeness, portrait*, 2. *living image*, 3. *form, appearance*”.

The similarity in meaning is evident. This means that “the form of God” is semantically similar to “the image of God,” for only if Christ was in “the form of God” could he be “the image of the invisible God” (Col.1:15; 2Cor. 4:4). Jesus has made the invisible God visible. What Paul means by speaking of Jesus as “the image of God” in 2Cor.4:4 is explained two verses later by the fact that we see or experience “the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2Cor.4:6). Thus “image” and “glory” are again seen to be linked together.

## Misinterpretation resulting from trinitarian dogma

But the doctrine of man’s total depravity has blinded us to seeing that “the form of God” is a poetically expressive way of speaking about man as “the image and glory of God” (1Cor.11:7). As a result, we exerted ourselves, as trinitarians, to “prove” the deity of Christ from the words “the form of God”. Often we found it simpler not to exert ourselves in pursuing a rather futile enterprise and simply assumed “the form of God” to be equivalent to “God,” even if we could not

demonstrate that to be the case. Most Christians are trinitarians anyway, so what need is there of proof? We were, after all, just “preaching to the converted”.

Also for this reason, it is hardly worth commenting on some of the commentaries on this verse because it is hard to believe that what is written there can pass for serious scholarship, and therefore any evaluation of these commentaries will appear to be harsh. To illustrate the point, one scholarly commentary (*The Expositor's Greek Testament*), unable to determine the meaning of *morphē* (form) beyond something which it admits to be merely “probable,” nonetheless concludes without further ado (in the next sentence) that “He (Paul) means, of course [!], in the strictest sense [!] that the pre-existing Christ was Divine” (exclamation marks mine). The “of course,” though a logical non sequitur, is made to do duty for the lack of evidence, that is, the “of course” simply replaces the needed evidence! In any other academic discipline this way of presenting a case would be thrown out with contempt.

### Three important synonyms

In Philippians 2:6,7 three synonymous words are used:

- (1) *morphē* vv.6,7; “*form, outward appearance, shape*” (BDAG); the only other instance in the NT is in Mark 16:12, “After these things he (Jesus) appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country.”

(2) *schēma*, v.7, “the generally recognized state or form in which someth. appears, *outward appearance, form, shape*” (BDAG).

(3) *homoiōma*, v.7, “state of being similar in appearance, *image, form*” (BDAG), in Rom.1:23 with reference to idols; it is used 6 times in Deut. 4:16-18, and is used with *eikōn* (image) in v.16; in 1Sam.6:5 it means “image”, see also 1Macc.3:48.

From this, the synonymy of “form” with “image” is made even clearer. This is to say that the identity of meaning between “form of God” and “image of God” is well-founded linguistically even without necessarily bringing in the fact of allusion. In contrast, linguistically there appears to be no way to argue for the deity of Christ on the basis of the words “the form of God.”<sup>15</sup>

## **Christ “the second man” is in the form and image of God**

The ideas of form and image are so clearly linked even in the definition of the word *morphē* itself that it seems hardly necessary to point out once more that the Apostle Paul repeatedly spoke of Jesus as “the image of God,” 2Cor.4:4; Col. 1:15. The reason why trinitarianism finds it so difficult to accept this meaning in Phil. 2:6 seems to have no other evident explanation than that trinitarianism has relatively little

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<sup>15</sup> See further Appendix 8: “More evidence from the Hebrew Bible”.

else to hold on to in the NT, so it must try to make “form of God” mean something it can use to support its dogma.

To summarize the foregoing discussion, the point being made in Phil.2:6-11 is that Christ, “the second man” (1Cor. 15:47) was, like the first Adam, in the “form” or “image” of God, but unlike the first, he did not grasp at equality with God or clutch at becoming “like God” (Gen.3:5). On the contrary, “he became obedient unto death, death on a cross” (Phil.2:8), and it is precisely this by which he was “made perfect” (Heb.5:9; 7:28), making him the perfect man necessary for mankind’s salvation.

### **The early date of Philippians as another important factor**

The relatively early date of Philippians (AD 63 or 64) needs fuller consideration. The church at that time was still predominantly Jewish and therefore strongly monotheistic. Paul made it his objective to reach “the Jew first” (Rom. 1:16), so whether at Philippi or in any other city where he preached, the Jews were always his primary “target” of evangelism. His passion for his own people, the Jews, is powerfully expressed in Romans chapters 9-11. He was more concerned about their salvation than his own, something which he expresses passionately at the beginning of that passage (esp. Rom.9:1-3). We can, therefore, easily imagine with what zeal he preached to the Jews wherever he went, and what hostility that zeal



incited in some of the places he went to, as recorded both in Acts and in Paul's own account in 2Cor.11:23-27.

The point here is that Paul was not writing primarily, let alone exclusively, for Gentiles as we usually mistakenly suppose when we read Paul's letters. Certainly, his letters were addressed to cities in the Greek-speaking world, but these were commercial centers where, in many cases, large numbers of Jewish businessmen and craftsmen resided with their families. Paul himself is an example of a Jew who was born and grew up in the Greek-speaking city of Tarsus ("no mean city", Acts 21:39), and learned tent-making as a skill. In writing to Jews, Paul would certainly not have tried to alienate and antagonize them by including as a centerpiece in his letter (e.g. Phil.2:6-11) something contrary to monotheism.

The fact that the congregations to whom Paul wrote were quite certainly largely Jewish at the time of his writing to them, and the early date of his letters (generally considered the earliest of the NT writings), are considerations that have an important bearing upon our understanding of the passage we are considering in Philippians 2. For one thing, it cannot simply be assumed that the "pre-Pauline hymn," as some scholars consider this passage in Phil.2:6-11 to be, was originally written in Greek. It is not unreasonable to assume the possibility that this song about (not to) Christ was written in Aramaic or Hebrew in the early Jewish church, and then translated by someone into Greek. It is even possible that Paul himself translated it (no scholar to my knowledge has suggested that Paul composed it himself).

In view of these observations, it is relevant to bear in mind the Semitic background, especially that of the OT, because the passage abounds with allusions to OT passages as James Dunn has pointed out (quoted above). Its Semitic origin, including Paul's authorship—we keep forgetting that he was a Jew, and was not ashamed to declare himself “a Hebrew of Hebrews” which he stated precisely in this Philippian letter (3:5!)—practically “guarantees” the monotheism of this passage. If we still insist on forcing a polytheistic trinitarian interpretation upon Phil.2:6f by claiming that it speaks of Jesus as a “second divine person,” that surely, in the light of all the gathered evidence, is to “adulterate (*doloō*, also *falsify*, *distort*) the word of God” (2Cor.4:2) to suit our dogma.

## Conclusion

We have examined the word “form” as used in the Greek OT, which was the Bible of the early Greek-speaking part of the church, such as those at Philippi. We have also looked at some of the Hebrew words underlying the Greek translation to gain a more precise idea of the concepts expressed by those words. We looked at the Hebrew word *tmunah* which the Greek OT translates as *morphē* (“form”). The fact that the Hebrew word appears in an ancient work like Job does not at all mean that it is obsolete and that its meaning may have changed. This same word (*tmunah*) was used much later in rabbinic literature with much the same meaning. An example of this is given in M. Jastrow's *Dictionary of the Talmud*, under *tmunah*:

“*form, shape*. Mekh, Yithro, s, 6 (ref. to Ex.XX,4)... I may think (from the word *pesel* [idol]) that one must not make for himself a carved figure, but may make a block: therefore the text says, ‘nor any shape’” (Hebrew script omitted).

It will be recalled that Ex.20:4 appears in the earlier quote from BDB that entered in the discussion on Job 4:16 above. This quotation from Jastrow serves to confirm the definition of *tmunah* and thus also of *morphē*.<sup>16 17</sup>

## Christ’s obedience

The trinitarian interpretation of Philippians 2:6 is that the preexistent Christ at some point in eternity refused to grasp at equality with God but emptied, or humbled, himself so as to become man. This self-emptying or humbling of oneself is the very essence of obedience, an obedience which submitted even to death on the cross. Now if Jesus was already perfect in obedience in heaven, an obedience which reached its conclusion and climax on the cross, then why does Hebrews

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<sup>16</sup> Full name of Jastrow’s work: *Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*, by Marcus Jastrow.

<sup>17</sup> Which Hebrew word would a modern Hebrew translation use to translate “form” in Phil.2:6? The Salkinson-Ginsberg Hebrew NT translates “in the form of God” as בְּדְמוּת אֱלֹהִים *bdmuth elohim*. The definition of *bdmuth* is given as “*likeness, similitude*, of external appearance” in BDB, where Genesis 1:26 (man was made in God’s “likeness”; and “image” and “likeness” are used as synonyms) is cited as an example.

speak of his having “learned obedience through what he suffered” (Heb.5:8), and that he was “made perfect through suffering” (Heb.2:10)? This clearly shows that Hebrews has a very different understanding of the matter than that of trinitarians. Hebrews indicates that Jesus learned obedience *on earth*; it is not something that a supposedly preexistent Christ already possessed in heaven. The gospel accounts confirm this when they describe Jesus’ submission to God in the Garden of Gethsemane in the words, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, *not my will, but yours, be done*” (Lk.22:42).

Moreover, a careful look at the whole Philippian passage (2:6-11) shows that the *only* element characterizing Jesus’ life and death is his obedience. And as far as his salvific ministry was concerned, *nothing else was needed*: “For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.” (Rom.5:19). It is this “one *man’s* obedience,” not that of a divine being, which is absolutely crucial for mankind’s salvation; and it was precisely this obedience that was the key element of Jesus’ life and death on earth. This means that his refusal to grasp at equality with God (Phil.2:6) had to do with his life on earth, and not his alleged preexistence. Now it should also be evident why it is a serious misinterpretation of John’s Gospel to allege that Jesus did actually claim equality with God in that Gospel.

## Philippians 2:9-11

<sup>9</sup> Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,

<sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

<sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

First, the exalted name was *given* to Jesus by God the Father. The word *charizomai* means “to give freely as a favor” (BDAG). If the divine glory had belonged to Jesus by right in his preexistence, it could not now be conferred on him as an act of *grace or favor*. To simply return to him what had already been his before cannot correctly or truthfully be described as giving him something “*freely as a favor*”.

Secondly, because of the *conferring* of the exalted name, every knee is to bow and every tongue is to confess “Jesus is Lord” (vv.10,11a; cf. Isa.45:23). From this it is evident that the title “Lord” (*kyrios*) is also “given freely as a favor” (BDAG) to him by “God the Father” (v.11). Here again it is not his by right. He is spoken of as “the Lord Jesus Christ” precisely because this title was *given* him by God. That is why Peter proclaimed that “God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36).

Notice again that it is God who has made him Lord. Lordship was *conferred* on him by God, and the same is true of his messiahship (Christ). The remarkable thing about Jesus is that everything he has was given him by the Father, including the name “Jesus” (Mt.1:21). Jesus was happy to go

even further than that by saying that “the Son can do nothing of his own accord” (Jn.5:19,30). What we usually fail to see is that precisely herein is found the secret of Jesus’ spiritual greatness—which is something at the opposite pole of grasping at equality with God. And it is precisely for this reason that Yahweh, the Father, conferred upon him the highest possible honor.

Thirdly, this super-exaltation of Jesus is “to the glory of God the Father” (Phil.2:11). What can this mean but that this astonishing act of favor given to Jesus reveals God’s unspeakable graciousness and magnanimity such as to cause everyone to praise and glorify Him? For “God our Father,” by bestowing on Jesus “the name,” in some significant sense bestows on him a place of honor which practically places him on a level with Himself.

In terms of Biblical exegesis our work on this passage is not yet complete until we have examined the evident reference to Isaiah 45:23 in this passage.

“Turn to me (Yahweh) and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other (also v.21). By myself I have sworn, from my mouth has gone forth in righteousness a word that shall not return: *‘To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear (allegiance)’*” (Isa.45:22,23).

It will immediately be noticed that this passage contains strong affirmations of monotheism, “I (Yahweh) am God, and *there is no other*” (vv.21,22). Given Paul’s own explicit monotheism (1Cor. 8:6, 1Tim.1:17, 2:5, etc.), how is the

reference to Isaiah 45:23 in Philippians 2:10 to be understood? Consistent with the synonymity of “form of God” with “image of God,” and Paul’s repeated affirmations of Jesus as God’s image (2Cor.4:4; Col.1:15), what else can “every knee” bending to the image of God mean except adoring Yahweh in His image? As for acknowledging as Lord the one whom the Father has chosen to appoint as Lord, this would surely mean nothing else but the acknowledging of the Father’s absolute sovereignty in what He chooses to do. All this is evidently “to the glory of the Father”.

An image is, in its very nature, a reflection of the one whose image it is, so any honor paid to a true image is honor given to the one represented by that image. This was what Adam was meant to be but failed through disobedience; yet this was precisely what Jesus attained through his absolute obedience, thereby becoming the perfect image of God, reflecting God’s glory and drawing all men to Him. In this way the first part of the quotation in Isaiah is fulfilled in Christ Jesus, “Turn to me (Yahweh) and be saved, all the ends of the earth!” (Isa.45:22). “Christ our savior” (Tit.1:4; 3:6 etc) is the exact reflection of “God our Savior” (Tit.1:3; 2:10; 3:4 etc); in God’s plan of salvation as revealed in the NT, men are drawn to “the only true God” (Jn.17:3) through Christ Jesus the Lord. Yahweh God is adored and glorified *through* His image; for the fundamental principle in Scripture is that everything comes to us *from* God *through* Christ. God is the ultimate source of all things; and He has appointed Christ as the channel. Thus God is the source of salvation, hence He is “God our savior”; Christ is the one through whom God’s

salvation comes to us, hence he is “Christ our savior”. Paul puts it like this: “for us there is but one God, the Father, *from whom* all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, *through whom* all things came and *through whom* we live” (1 Corinthians 8:6, NIV).

Finally, an important principle is established here: *Jesus is only properly exalted when his exaltation brings glory to the Father*; this was the aim of his entire ministry as is also the teaching of the NT. But exalting Jesus at the expense of the Father’s glory, in particular the exalting of Jesus instead of the Father—making Jesus the center, the God, of the Christian religion—is certainly false and therefore “heretical” *where the Scriptures as a whole are concerned*. This Biblical principle—that all things are “to the glory of God the Father”—is definitely beyond any dispute.

It cannot be otherwise because, as God’s image, Jesus is the embodiment of *God’s* glory as is splendidly stated in Hebrews 1:3: “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.” There is, therefore, no way to glorify the Biblical Jesus without glorifying God the Father whose glory he represents—unless another Jesus and another gospel is preached contrary to what is in the Bible. If false teaching is to be avoided it is absolutely necessary to adhere to the principle clearly enunciated here: all true teaching is “to the glory of God the Father”, “the Father” being none other than Yahweh God, the LORD God.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> In what way does trinitarianism glorify God in maintaining that Jesus as the Son was in all aspects equal with the Father from all



## 1Corinthians 15:45-47, 49, “the image of the man of heaven”

<sup>45</sup> Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being” [Gen.2:7]; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

<sup>46</sup> But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. <sup>47</sup> The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven.

The phrase “the second man is from heaven” has led some to assume that Jesus, “the second man,” is here said to be pre-existent. But Prof. Dunn has pointed out that this meaning is negated by the statement in the previous verse that the natural man “is first,” that is, he existed *before* the spiritual man (James Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p.289). Even apart from this valid observation, “from heaven (*ex ouranou*)” provides no proof of preexistence as can be seen from the way this term is used in the NT. For example, Matthew 21:25, “The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven (*ex ouranou*) or from man?” (also Mk.11:30; Lk.20:4) Clearly, the question here is whether John’s baptism was from God or from man. This meaning corresponds with “from heaven” in

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eternity, and merely laid down his glory temporarily at his incarnation? If this were the case, the Father would have merely returned to the Son what was his from eternity. How can this bring glory to the Father? But the trinitarian is, after all, not really concerned about the glory of the Father because he has already replaced the Father with the Son as the true center of the Christian religion, which they declare to be Christocentric.

John 6:31, “Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” There is no suggestion here about the manna being something preexistent but that it was sent down *from God*. Likewise, Jesus is “the true bread from heaven” (vv.32,33, etc).

“From heaven” can also mean “spiritual” as distinct from “earthly” or “natural”. Thus, 2Cor.5:2, “For indeed in this *house* [earthly body] we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven” (NASB), i.e. our spiritual body, the resurrection body. So “from heaven” here means, essentially, “spiritual”. This meaning also fits 1Cor.15:47 perfectly: the first man was earthly, the second man is spiritual. This echoes precisely with vv.46 and 48.

All that concerns us here is summed up in verse 49, “Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, *we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven*”; for we shall become perfectly like him, as 1John 3:2 says, “we will be like him, because we shall see him as he is.” But we have already taken the first steps in this direction: “you have put off the old self (Gk: man) with its practices and have put on the new self (man), which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator” (Col.3:9,10). This being conformed to His likeness is a process which has already begun through the transforming of our minds (Rom. 12:2). If we are in Christ, we are to “put on the new self (Gk: man), created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:24). We *are* “the new man” referred to in Ephesians 2:10, “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus,” so we already now begin to “bear the image of the man of heaven”; and, as

the Apostle put it, “I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6).





## The Trinitarian Deification of Christ

The low view of man in Gentile Christian thought contributed powerfully to the determination to raise Jesus to the level of God, indeed, even to equality with Yahweh! Jesus, the object of Christian faith, could not just be an ordinary man or even an extraordinary man, he had to be more than man, he had to be God! So the church established this by decree at Nicaea; whether or not the Scriptures provided any justification of this was, evidently, a secondary question for them. No Scripture was cited at Nicaea in support of their decree. They considered themselves as having the right to determine the faith of the church, without showing any evident concern about the Scriptures.

However, some effort was made to read the trinitarian faith into some NT passages either by way of interpretation and even, in a number of places, by apparently tampering with the NT text. One of the key passages used by trinitarianism, Philippians 2:6-11, we have already considered in some

detail. We have studied it in the proper context of Christ as being the image of God. We shall now go on to examine some other important NT texts used as proof-texts by trinitarians, though not necessarily in the order in which these texts appear in the NT. The idea of Christ as the image of God is so central to the NT understanding about Christ that it is again a key to another important passage used in trinitarianism, namely, Colossians 1, where Christ as God's image occurs again, in Col.1:15. In order to see the context, we quote the relevant passage:

#### Colossians 1

<sup>12</sup> giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. <sup>13</sup> He (the Father, v.12) has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, <sup>14</sup> in whom (the Son) we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

<sup>15</sup> He (the Son) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup> For by (or in) him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.

<sup>17</sup> And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

<sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

The great problem for understanding this text is the fact that after “the Father” is mentioned in v.12 and “the Son” in v.13, there follows a profusion of the pronouns “he” and “him” which do not specify whether the reference is to the Father or to Christ. This will have to be determined by the context, which in most cases makes it clear who is being referred to—that is, if one is a monotheist brought up on the Hebrew Scriptures.

But the situation is different when one is brought up on trinitarianism. This is notably the case with verse 16 in which *en autō* is translated “by him” by trinitarians such that Christ is the creator of all things. But this is to ignore the following facts:

- (1) This interpretation runs counter to the OT where God, the Father, is without question the creator;
- (2) The previous verse (v.15) speaks of Christ as the image of God, and nowhere in Scripture can it be shown that God’s image created all things;
- (3) The same is true of “the firstborn of all creation” (v.15); nowhere is it stated that the firstborn brought creation into existence;
- (4) Paul uses much the same terms or expressions in Colossians 1:16 as in Romans 11:36, “For *from him and through him and to him* are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.” There is no question that in Romans 11:36, it is Yahweh God

who is the source of all things, as is clear from the previous verses (Rom.11:34f).

(5) So also Hebrews 2:10: “In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, *for whom and through whom* everything exists, should make the author of their salvation (Christ) perfect through suffering.” (NIV)

(6) That it is Yahweh God, the Father, who created all things is the teaching not only of the OT but also of the New: Revelation 10:6, “and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, that there would be no more delay”. Yahweh God is the central figure in the Book of Revelation; Jesus is consistently referred to as “the Lamb”.

(7) The attempt to interpret Col.1:16 as “by him” in relation to John 1:3 is based on the trinitarian assumption that the Word in John’s Prologue is a separate individual from Yahweh, and the further assumption that this individual is the preexistent Christ. That is to make a lot of assumptions which, as we have seen earlier in this work, are unfounded.

If, however, we discard the trinitarian interpretation of Christ as the one by whom all things were created, and understand the Greek as saying “in him” all things were created, then the picture changes completely, and the foregoing objections do not apply to this understanding. This is because “in him” is a concept that is central to Paul’s teaching on *salvation*, and also



to the cosmic effect (“all things”) of God’s salvation “in Christ”. Consider, for example, the following verse:

Ephesians 2:10: “For we are his (God’s) workmanship, *created in Christ Jesus* for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

What does “which God prepared beforehand” mean? This is to be understood in relation to the opening verses of Ephesians, and in particular 1:4: “For he chose us in him (Christ) before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his (God’s) sight.” (NIV) What this verse means will be considered more fully below.

The cosmic extent of salvation in Christ is powerfully described in Colossians 1:19,20: “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him (Christ), and through him to reconcile to himself (God) all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his (Christ’s) blood, shed on the cross” (NIV; see also Eph.1:10). Here we see the term “through him” again, as in verse 16, in the context of salvation.

Redemption and reconciliation with God is the central idea of Colossians 1:13-22: “<sup>13</sup> He (the Father, v.12) has *delivered* us from the domain of darkness and *transferred* us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, <sup>14</sup> in whom (the Son) we have *redemption*, the *forgiveness* of sins... <sup>20</sup> and through him to *reconcile* to himself all things... <sup>22</sup> He has now *reconciled* you in his fleshly body through death.”

## A glance at the commentaries

Checking the commentaries available to me, I see that the major scholars are learned and wise enough to avoid trying to argue for the deity of Christ from this passage, even though many do argue for his preexistence.

A.S. Peake, for example, in *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (which is, of course, trinitarian in its orientation) makes important observations on this passage, such as the following on v.16: “ἐν αὐτῷ [*en autō*]: this does not mean ‘by him’”. Yet many English translations insist on putting “by him” in the text while relegating “in him” to the margin.

Concerning “in him,” after considering ideas such as that “the Son was from eternity the archetype of the universe” which Peake rejects as hermeneutically inappropriate, he mentions that several major commentators understand “in him” “to mean simply that the act of creation depended causally on the Son. This is perhaps the safest explanation”. By “safest” Peake was referring to the avoidance of the pitfalls of exegetical error and misinterpretation.

As to what the statement “the act of creation depended causally on the Son” means, this is spelled out more fully in the following: “The Son is the Agent in creation (*cf.* 1Cor. 8:6); this definitely states the preexistence of the Son and assumes the supremacy of the Father, whose Agent the Son is.” Here Peake argues for the preexistence of the Son while acknowledging the supremacy of the Father. But preexistence is not equivalent to deity; angels are also considered to be preexistent beings, i.e. they existed before the creation in

Genesis 1. Moreover, the supremacy of the Father is not compatible with the trinitarian dogma of the equality of the Son in every respect with the Father. Further, the supremacy of the Father must, of course, mean the subordination of the Son to the Father. Why does Peake concede all this? Is it not because that is all he thinks he can “safely” extract from the passage without himself falling into one of the pitfalls of error or misinterpretation?

Peake, however, also acknowledges that,

The interpretation of vv.15-17 given by Oltramare should not be passed over. He [Oltramare] eliminates the idea of pre-existence from the passage, and says that the reference is throughout to Christ as Redeemer. God had in creation to provide for a plan of Redemption for the entrance into the universe, and only on that condition could it take place. So since Christ is the Redeemer, creation is based on him. He is the means to it, and the end which it contemplates.

It is certain that in Colossians 1:12-22 creation and redemption cannot be considered separately, as is often done. Redemption was not a mere afterthought on God’s part as though man’s sin in the Garden took Him by surprise and He had to hastily devise a plan of redemption. God’s plan for man’s salvation was already in place “before the foundation of the world”. This is stated with perfect clarity in Ephesians 1:4, “For he chose us in him (Christ) before the creation of the world”.

This being the case, creation was carried out through the six days of Genesis 1 with redemption in view all along. This means that “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev.13:8) was central to God’s plan for creation just as he is central to God’s plan of salvation. If, in God’s eternal plans, there could be no redemption without him, then without him there would also be no creation. It is “in him (Christ)” (Col.1:16), in relation to him, that all things were created. It follows that all the statements made in this Colossian passage must be understood in relation to its central concept of redemption.

### **“From the foundation of the world”**

The phrase “from the foundation of the world” occurs 7 times in the NT, and “before the foundation of the world” 3 times. What concerns us here is the phrase “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev.13:8): Is this to be understood to mean that Christ was actually crucified in heaven before the creation? I suppose that no one would be foolish enough to suppose that this is how the phrase is to be understood.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> RSV and some other English versions translate Rev.13:8 as, “every one whose name has not been *written before the foundation of the world in the book of life* of the Lamb that was slain.” This would mean that the names of believers were written into the book of life before they came into existence in this world. This would be saying something similar to Ephesians 1:4. But how did these versions come up with this translation? It was by inserting the equivalent of a comma into the Greek text after the word “slain”; such a reading seems gratuitous.

What then does the phrase mean? Surely, its only possible meaning is that the Lamb was slain *in God's eternal plan* before He brought creation into being. But if we insist on being literalistic then it can be pointed out that as the phrase stands, it *does say* that the Lamb was actually slain before the foundation of the world! If the only correct way to understand such an important redemptive statement about “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” is not in some literalistic way but in the light of God's eternal cosmic plan of redemption, would not the same be true of correctly understanding a passage on redemption such as that in Colossians 1:15-17?

A crucial historical event—the crucifixion of Christ (Col. 1:20,22)—is spoken of as though it had already occurred in eternity. Is this (i.e. Rev. 13:8) the only statement of this kind in the NT? No, as we have seen, we too were “chosen before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4) long before we ever came into existence physically as human beings, before we heard someone proclaim the gospel, and before we turned our backs upon sin and the world and made the commitment of faith! The church, of which Christ is the head, existed in God's eternal plan long before it came into being, and could thus be spoken of as “chosen” when it did not as yet exist on earth.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Can we establish the preexistence of the Lamb on the basis of Rev. 13:8? If we can, then we can also establish our own preexistence on the basis of Ephesians 1:4 (and Rev. 13:8, if we accept the RSV translation).

## Further observations on Colossians 1:12-20

If we look carefully at Colossians 1:12-20 we will see something significant: All the *active* verbs are used in relation to the Father (Yahweh) while the role of the Son is consistently *passive*, e.g. the repeated “in him”. (The Greek probably shows this even more sharply than the English.) This active role of the Father in our redemption, and the Son’s relatively passive role vis-à-vis the Father’s, is precisely what we saw Jesus himself teaching in John’s Gospel. This important fact stands out so clearly in the Colossians passage that it is hardly necessary to elaborate upon it in detail here.

The point that emerges most clearly from this fact is that it is God the Father (Yahweh) who is our Redeemer/Savior in and through Christ. It was He who “was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself” (2Cor.5:19 and Col. 1:22). Christ is our Savior in that all God’s saving work took place in him and through him. To speak of Christ as though he is primarily, if not solely, our Savior is to totally fail to understand the NT revelation, including Jesus’ own teaching. This is why the Apostle Paul commences this Colossian passage with the words, “giving thanks to *the Father...*” (v.12)—without even mentioning the Son as an object of thanksgiving (to our surprise). This is because, as the passage goes on to elucidate, *the prime mover* in the work of our salvation was *the Father*, who was working “in Christ”—a favorite term of Paul’s.

The LORD (Yahweh) as the Redeemer or Rescuer/Savior of His people appears frequently in the Old Testament. Yahweh as Redeemer (Hebrew: *Goel*) of Israel is spoken of 16

times in Isaiah, and is a central concept in that book. One verse which is a striking parallel to Colossians 1, in that it too combines redemption and creation, is Isaiah 44:24, “Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, and the one who formed you from the womb, ‘I, the LORD, am the maker of all things, Stretching out the heavens by Myself, and spreading out the earth all alone’” (NASB; other translations do not differ much in their wording).

Let us also carefully notice the last sentence which declares that in the work of creation Yahweh stretched out the heavens *by Himself*, and spread out the earth “all alone”. This statement proclaims unequivocally that Yahweh had no “partner” when He created the heavens and the earth. Yet in our exegesis of some New Testament verses we do not hesitate to disregard this declaration in favor of a trinitarian interpretation.

## Wisdom and Logos

But will it not be asked again: Does not Proverbs 8 say that wisdom co-worked with Yahweh in the work of creation? Does Proverbs contradict Isaiah such that Scripture contradicts itself? Here we see the danger of ignoring the fact that Proverbs speaks *metaphorically* of wisdom as a (female) person. Proverbs, which is a book about the importance of wisdom, emphasizes wisdom’s importance by pointing out that God Himself employed wisdom when He created the universe.

But trinitarians are so anxious to “prove” their doctrine from Scripture that they do not hesitate to ignore *both* the fact that it is (or should be) obvious to everyone that this is a metaphorical hypostatization of wisdom *and* the fact that wisdom is feminine, even though this is not evident in the English word “wisdom,” though it can still be seen in the feminine pronoun (“she”) used in the translations in reference to it. Once we adhere to the fact that what we have in Proverbs is metaphor, then no Scriptural contradiction with Isaiah exists.

Here we simply cannot have it both ways: Either we acknowledge wisdom in Proverbs for what it really is, namely, a “personification,” *or* we deny the truth of the statement in Isaiah that Yahweh created the heaven and earth without the assistance of any other *person*. Contradictory statements cannot both be true.

But if wisdom is not a person, then there is certainly no problem whatever to say that Yahweh employed wisdom in accomplishing His creative work, any more than saying that a man building a house employed his knowledge in building it. If the man says that he employed his knowledge to guide him through every step of the building process, no one in his right mind will assume that he is speaking literally of a *person* called Knowledge who guided him in his work, even though it does sound as though knowledge is personified in the way it is said.

This kind of metaphor is common in everyday speech, and often seems unavoidable. If someone says, “Pain in my back is killing me,” no one assumes that he means that there is



some kind of being or person called Pain residing in his back who is trying to kill him!

Yet it seems that in the name of trying to support a particular dogma just about any kind of interpretation goes—even if it means insisting that the metaphorical is to be taken literally, such that Wisdom in Proverbs is interpreted as being another name for the “person” of the Word/Logos. I have never in the past considered how a personified interpretation of the Word in John 1 can be reconciled with the monotheism of the OT, or with such a statement as we have seen in Isaiah 44:24 that, on the *personal* level, Yahweh created all things “by Himself,” and He “alone”—notice this twofold affirmation.

No one who has seriously studied the OT can claim that it teaches that Yahweh is a multi-personal divine “substance” (to use trinitarian language), much less could he prove such a claim. This being the case, it should be evident that there is no way to reconcile the OT revelation of Yahweh with the trinitarian insistence on the Word being a divine being equal with the Father, Yahweh, within a divine “substance” called “God”—as though there is something called “God” besides and yet including Yahweh!

It seems that trinitarianism has taught us the art of mental contortion, to the extent that we supposed that we as exegetes had successfully (at least to our own satisfaction) twisted contradictions into paradoxes, and then contented ourselves that these “paradoxes” represented the truth. Even simpler, we simply ignored the contradictions, usually by overlooking the immediate and/or general contexts.

But it must be clearly stated that all this was not done because of any deliberate intention to deceive, not at all, but only because we had already been deceived, and therefore tried by all means to see trinitarianism in the texts before us, even when it was often difficult to reconcile what we honestly thought we saw with other texts which seemed to say something different. How difficult it is to escape the tentacles of error! But for the grace of God it must surely be impossible.

### **A closer look at salvation as the central message of Col.1:12-20**

In verse 13, the verb *rhuomai* (ῥύομαι) in the phrase, “For he (the Father, v.12) has rescued (*rhuomai*) us,” means “to rescue from danger, save, rescue, deliver, preserve, someone” (BDAG). In the OT it occurs most frequently in the Psalms (62 times in LXX) and Isaiah (26 times in LXX), almost always of Yahweh as the One who rescues, which is also the case in Col.1:13. Its most familiar use is in Matthew 6:13 in the plea to the Father, “*deliver* us from evil,” so well known to us from the Lord’s Prayer. Thus, whether in Colossians 1, the OT, or the Lord’s Prayer, it is the Father (Yahweh) who is the Savior/Redeemer to whom we call for deliverance.

Interestingly, there is another connection to the Lord’s Prayer in Colossians 1:14, “the forgiveness of sins” which corresponds to the prayer, “forgive us our sins” (Mt.6:12; Lk.11:4). “The forgiveness of sins” in Colossians expands upon the meaning of the immediately preceding word

“redemption” (*apolutrōsis*, ἀπολύτρωσις), which is defined as “release from a captive condition, *release, redemption, deliverance*” (BDAG). God has released us from the debt and the bondage of sin through the blood of Christ. How God did this “in Christ” is more fully developed in v.20.

Notice how all the key NT words and concepts relating to salvation appear together in this passage: rescued, redemption, forgiveness (vv.13,14), reconciled (vv.20,22), making peace through his blood shed on the cross (v.20), and “to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him” (v.22).

Now let us notice, too, that there are five verses (vv.15-19), all relating to creation, which are “sandwiched” between the verses relating to salvation. In other words, the section begins with God’s work of salvation, goes on to his work of creation, and continues with His salvific work, thus clearly indicating that it is all inseparably connected; it is all part of the one “package”. In God’s eternal plan and purposes, Christ is central to both inextricably related parts. But we must never lose sight of the fact that God (Yahweh) is the Prime Mover in both parts, working out His purposes in and through Christ: “For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Christ” (v.19). This is reaffirmed in 2:9.

Failure to perceive the fact that, both in Colossians 1 and in the whole of the NT, God is always the Prime Mover, will result in falling into the notion that the NT is “Christocentric,” and thence into trinitarianism. As a trinitarian I always emphasized this Christocentricity, always supposing that this

was the NT emphasis. As we can now see, this emphasis is not true to the NT.

Since the five verses relating to creation is “sandwiched” between the verses on salvation, it is surely reasonable to ask whether those verses should be understood in relation to God’s work of redemption in Christ.

### **“The image of the invisible God”**

The first of those five verses (v.15) says, “He is the image of the invisible God”. 2Corinthians 4:4 also affirms that Christ is the image of God. These statements are reiterated in 1Corinthians 11:7 where it is said of man that “he is the image and glory of God”. God is invisible to the human eye, but man is His image. So Christ, like every man, is the image of God. Therefore, in affirming that Christ is God’s image, it is being affirmed that he is man; for unless he is man, he cannot be the savior of mankind. But how can one derive any argument for his preexistence from his being the image of God? If being God’s image involves preexistence, then man is also preexistent!

The problem of trinitarian Christology is tied to the problem of its anthropology. The significance of the assertion in 1Cor.11:7 that man is “the glory of God” has never been understood. To be “the glory of God” means that to see man is to see God, for in Scripture to see His glory is to see Him (esp. Isa.6; Ezek.1, but also in the case of Manoah, etc).

But evidently, when we see man now, we usually have difficulty (with some exceptions) seeing God's glory. Why? Because, as is expounded in Romans, mankind is under bondage to sin, and until the process of redemption is complete, the glory of God will not be clearly seen in him. But on that day when we will be "holy and blameless and irreproachable before him" (Col.1:22) then, indeed, we will truly be "the glory of God". Thus when Paul speaks of man as God's glory (1Cor.11:7), it seems that he is speaking of man *in God's plan and purpose* as God intends man to be, not as he is at the present moment.

But this is entirely different for Christ, because "though he was tempted in all points as we are, he was without sin". Being without sin, he is always truly "holy and blameless and irreproachable before Him (God)". That is why he is the glory of God, and that is why in seeing him we see God in His glory. It is precisely in this fact that trinitarianism has confused its christology with NT anthropology; now we can see that this is because it has failed to understand the vital NT truth that *man is the glory of God*.

The Scriptural revelation also shows that man can never be God's glory independent of Him. It was precisely when man exercised his independence and sought to be "like God," thereby gaining some kind of independence from Him, that he ceased to manifest His glory. Man is, and enjoys, God's glory only through oneness or union with Him, and this can only be realized through the fullness of His indwelling presence, as is perfectly demonstrated in Christ's case: "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (Col.1:19).

And this was a reality in Christ only because of his total and glad submission to the Father (Yahweh).

This also impacts upon our understanding of NT soteriology, the doctrine of salvation. For if Christ is not wholly and truly man, then we would have no salvation, for it was by one man's sin that death came into the world and it was by one man's obedience that we are made righteous (Rom.5:15-19). Since there is hope of salvation for us only if Christ is man, why is trinitarianism always arguing for Christ's deity when this has no relevance whatever for the salvation of mankind? *Nowhere in the New Testament is faith in Christ's deity required for salvation.* Yet the trinitarian church dares, in defiance of God's Word, to declare anyone a heretic who refuses to accept their christology.

You will recall that as a trinitarian I rationalized the soteriological connection between manhood and deity by arguing that if Jesus were only a man, his death could not avail for all mankind, but as God he is infinite, and an infinity can cover any number, no matter how great the number. This argument is not illogical; at least it has a mathematical basis. But the problem is that it is simply an unscriptural argument, for in Scripture the soteriological logic is *not* a mathematical one, but functions on a different principle.

For example, when the Israelites sinned grievously in the wilderness and were perishing because of being bitten by poisonous snakes, God instructed Moses to put a bronze snake on a pole; whoever looked up to that bronze snake suspended on the pole would live (Num.21:7-9). There was only one bronze snake, yet no matter how many people looked at

it, they were saved from death. Clearly, mathematics was not a factor. Obedience to the call to look at the serpent, on the one hand, and the pardoning grace of God, on the other, were the only operating principles. It was to this critical life and death incident in the wilderness that Christ compared his own saving ministry, and specifically to his being “lifted up” on the cross: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (John 3:14,15).

Likewise, the obedience of Christ has cancelled out the disobedience of Adam for all who are in Christ. Indeed, it does more than that, in fact “much more” as is reiterated in Rom. 5:9,10,15,17. Here again it has nothing to do with the logic of mathematics, but has everything to do with the grace and wisdom of God.

Another picture of salvation that derives from the wilderness journey of the Israelites is that of the manna, which Yahweh provided for them daily from heaven. Jesus refers to this remarkable heavenly provision in John 6 where he reveals that he is the true bread from heaven. Jesus is the heavenly bread which Yahweh provides for the salvation of mankind who, when they eat it, will not perish. If Yahweh could provide for the multitudes of Israelites in the wilderness numbering some 2 million people, would it have been any more difficult for the Creator to provide for 2 billion or 2 trillion people? Such numbers may be stunning to us, but hardly to Him who created Adam and Eve (and likewise all of us) with

trillions of cells in each of their bodies!<sup>21</sup> Yahweh can give life to any number of people through Jesus the “bread of life”.

In 1Corinthians 10:3,4, Paul in midrashic (“midrash” was a technique used by Rabbis in interpreting Scripture) fashion writes, “all (those in the wilderness) ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.” The manna is described as “spiritual food” because it was not from some earthly source, but was specially provided by Yahweh. The same is true of the water; it is called “spiritual drink” because it was not from some fountain within the desert rock but was specially provided by Yahweh in His creative power. Paul, here writing in midrashic style (as scholars generally agree), points out that that rock from which they drank was a portrayal or “type” of Christ, who would later be the fountain of the water of life for the world (cf. John 4:13,14). And just as that water was sufficient for the multitudes in the wilderness, it is sufficient for any number of people because Yahweh, who is infinite, is its source.

We now see that Christ does not need to be infinite to be able to save the world, for salvation has its infinite source in Yahweh Himself. Water symbolizes life, and Jesus is the “rock” or fountain through which it flows. The ultimate giver of that water, and of “every good and perfect gift,” is Yahweh Himself (James 1:17).

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<sup>21</sup> Wikipedia, under “Cell (biology)”, says that the human body has an estimated 100 trillion cells.



Where Jesus is portrayed as the sacrifice for sin, as “the Lamb of God,” or simply as “the Lamb” in the Revelation, it must be borne in mind that he is the “Lamb of God” precisely because he is the Lamb that *Yahweh* provided for man’s sin: “He did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all” (Romans 8:32); and could *Yahweh*’s provision for sin ever be inadequate?

### **“The firstborn of all creation” (Col.1:15)**

Both in Col.1:18 and Rev.1:5 Christ is spoken of as “the first-born from the dead,” being the first one to be raised up from the dead by the power of the Father; and because the Father will raise up many more after him and through him, “he is the beginning, the first-born of the dead” (Col.1:18). In the church, Christ is “the firstborn among many brothers” (Romans 8:29).

This is how the whole of Col.1:18 reads, “he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.” One thing will become ever clearer to us as we better understand God’s glorious purposes for man as taught in the NT, and also here in Colossians 1, namely, that Christ who is head of the church is also, for that very reason, head of all creation, or to use the language of 1:15, “the first-born of all creation”.

God’s eternal purposes for man, with Christ as the head of a redeemed humanity, is not described in detail, but causes

wonderment even from the few glimpses revealed in Scripture. For example, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mk.2:27). What are the implications of this statement? If even the holy Sabbath was made for man, then what was not made for man? “He that spared not His own Son but gave him up for us all, how shall he not with him give us all things?” (Rom.8:32) This rhetorical question indicates not only God’s willingness but also His intention to give us all things! Thus Hebrews 1:2 speaks of Christ as the one whom God has “appointed heir of all things,” and this is what Romans 8:17 says: “if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ”. This is to say that we are co-heirs with him who is heir of all things! Paul uses the phrase “owner of everything” in Galatians 4:1 in the context of our being heirs (see the whole section from 3:29-4:7).

In this connection, consider this astonishing statement: “For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s” (1Cor. 3:21-23).

Consider carefully what is included in the “all things” that are yours: It includes even the Apostles (Cephas is, of course, the Apostle Peter); “the world” translates *kosmos*, which in the context of this verse includes everything from life to death, from the present to the future, having the meaning that it most often has in the NT, “the sum total of everything here and now, *the world, the (orderly) universe*” (BDAG). This comprehensive “all” leaves nothing out, except for Christ and God, who are ours nonetheless, though in a different sense,

for they are our Lord and our God respectively. But notice, too, that “Christ is God’s” in much the same way as “You are Christ’s” (1Cor.3:23). The question of Christ’s equality with God is never raised in the NT: Christ is God’s—even as we are Christ’s, and all things are ours (cf., similarly, the order in 1Cor.11:3.)

Can we grasp the implication of all this? Can we begin to perceive the meaning of what is being revealed? Is it not summed up in the last sentence of Col.1:16? “All things were created ... for him”—for him, not as a “private” individual, but as the head and representative of redeemed humanity. That is to say that God created all things for man with Christ as head. That is why Paul could say, “All things are yours” (1Cor.3:21)! Can we really grasp this astonishing, mind-boggling, revelation: Yahweh did not create all things just for Himself, but for us?! Being the self-centered creatures that we are, can we even begin to comprehend a God who brought all creation into being not for Himself, but for His creatures, specifically, us! What is revealed is a God who is totally selfless in what He does, and this gives a totally new meaning and depth to the statement that “God is love” (1Jn.4:8,16).

In this connection, consider also 1Tim.6:17, “God, *who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.*” Do we suppose that God created the myriad variety of flowers which bedeck the earth, all resplendent in multitudes of colors, shapes, and fragrances, for His own personal enjoyment? Such is their splendor that Jesus remarked that king Solomon in all his splendor could not outshine one of these (Mt.6:28,29). Have we considered the enormous variety of trees that

provide delicious fruit, delightful blossoms, wood for all sorts of use, and, not least, oxygen essential for man? It should be evident that God did not create trees solely for His own pleasure or for Christ's use alone.

And shall we go on to speak of all the multifarious diversity of vegetables providing essential nutrition for mankind? Did we suppose that these were created for God's own nourishment? Or of the rivers, lakes, and oceans which God stocked with a huge variety of fish? We need not go on, the point should be clear enough: God "richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment" (1Tim.6:17). This also provides sufficient evidence for what we saw is the NT revelation, namely, that God created all things for man, not just for "the man Christ Jesus," who God made head of the church—but what is a head without a body? And in this case, too, "it is not good for man (Christ) to be alone" (Gen.2:18)! Did not Paul affirm that this account in Genesis spoke proleptically or typologically of Christ and the church (Eph.5:32)?

Though some areas of the world periodically suffer famine mainly due to man's wars, mismanagement, corruption, etc, the earth currently provides food for 7 billion people!<sup>22</sup> God lovingly provides all things for mankind even though man is generally ungrateful. God is, moreover, a God whose reality can be experienced in this life when we seek Him with open and humble hearts, a God who has come to us in Christ.

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<sup>22</sup> 7 billion in late 2011, Wikipedia, "World Population".

In stark contrast to this amazing revelation that God in His love created every good thing for mankind, what kind of a picture of Christ emerges from such an English translation as translates that sentence in Col.1:16 as, “All things were created *by him* and *for him*” (NIV, etc). What else could this mean but that Christ created all things for himself? What a totally different picture from the picture of the selfless God seen in the previous paragraphs!

### **God’s eternal plans for man**

God’s plans for man goes even further than we can imagine, “as it is written, ‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him’” (1Cor.2:9). One of these things Paul puts in the form of a question, “Do you not know that we are to judge angels?” (1Cor.6:3). Angels are spiritual beings, “mighty ones who do God’s word” (Ps.103:20). How can anyone judge angels unless he is given authority over them? What then can this mean but that redeemed man will be granted authority even over the highest spiritual beings in creation under God! And since angels do not have their abode on earth but in heaven, what does this mean but that redeemed man will be granted authority both in heaven and on earth! To Jesus this authority has already been granted in order to bring to completion God’s work of salvation (Mt.28:18ff).

If any problems arise in understanding Colossians 1 in the light of Christ's being truly man, it arises from a failure to see the amazingly exalted role that God envisioned and planned for man already "before the foundation of the world" (Eph.1:4; etc). It is in relation to man, always with Christ as his head and representative and therefore "in him" (that is, in relation to Christ), that God brought the whole creation into being. Once we are freed from the thoroughly negative view of man as utterly degenerate which dominates Christian theology, and once we recover from our amazement at the mind-boggling grandeur of what God wills for man (and which He is in the process of fulfilling), we will see no difficulty at all in understanding what is revealed in this astonishing passage of Scripture.

### **"He is before all things" (Col.1:17)**

As "the firstborn of creation" (Col.1:15), as well as "the firstborn from the dead" (Col.1:18), it can truly be said that "He is before all things" (Col.1:17); and it is God's purpose for him "that in everything he might have the preeminence" (v.18). "Before all things" is used to argue for Christ's preexistence in trinitarianism, but this is of little help for trinitarian dogma because *preexistence provides no proof of deity, not even of preeminence*. Few, for example, would deny that Satan ("the serpent," Gen.3:1ff; Rev.12:9) already existed before the creation in Genesis 1, when everything was created "very good". Yet he already appears in Genesis 3 to tempt

Adam and Eve to sin. Nor would anyone care to suggest that Satan enjoyed preeminence by reason of his preexistence. The preeminence ascribed to Christ is something conferred upon him by the Father. In Scripture, preeminence is usually, but not necessarily, a consequence of seniority. For example, although Joseph was the 11th of the 12 sons of Jacob, and therefore the second youngest among his brothers, God exalted him to preeminence not only over them but also over the great land of Egypt (Gen. 30-50). Jesus said that “many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first” (Mt.19:30).

Is there not also interplay between first and last in the descriptions of Christ as “the firstborn of creation” and “the firstborn from the dead”? “Firstborn” is explained as “pertaining to having special status associated with a firstborn” (BDAG), which this lexicon explains more fully as, “The special status enjoyed by a firstborn son as heir apparent in Israel”. The lexicon also understands the phrase “the firstborn of creation” as pertaining essentially to salvation rather than to the material creation, though, as we have seen, the two are integrally intertwined: “of Christ, as the firstborn of a new humanity which is to be glorified, as its exalted Lord is glorified *πρωτότοκον ἐν πολλοῖς ἀδελφοῖς* [firstborn among many brethren] Ro 8:29” (BDAG). The lexicon adds: “This expression is admirably suited to describe Jesus as the one coming forth from God to found the new community of believers”. Thus “the firstborn of creation” speaks of Christ as the *first*, the preeminent one, in God’s new humanity, the new creation (2Cor.5:17).

“The firstborn from the dead,” on the other hand, reminds us that “he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross” (Phil.2:8), without which there would have been no possibility of becoming “the firstborn from the dead”. In other words, it was only by becoming last, humbling himself to the lowest form of death—that on a cross—that he was raised up by Yahweh God to be the first, not only of the dead but also of all creation (Phil.2:9-11). It may also be for this reason that Jesus is “the first and the last” (Rev.1:17; 2:8).

### **“In him all things hold together” (Col.1:17)**

What does this statement mean? Since “the man Christ Jesus” is the center, the very hub, of God’s purposes for both creation and redemption, then does it not necessarily follow that he gives coherence to all things, or that all things find their coherence “in him”? That is, all things have their purpose and meaning because of Christ and in relation to him; they “fit together to form a harmonious and credible whole” (as Encarta Dictionary nicely defines “coherence”)—but always and only in relation to him.

Thus one could say that God brings everything together, or unites everything, in Christ; this is indeed central to His redemptive purposes for His whole creation: “to unite all things” —which is a good definition of the word translated as “hold together” (*sunistēmi*, συνίστημι) in some translations. Thus BDAG also gives the definition of *sunistēmi* as, “to bring



together by gathering, *unite, collect*”. Consider the following remarkable passage in Ephesians 1:

<sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,

<sup>8</sup> which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight

<sup>9</sup> making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ

<sup>10</sup> as a plan for the fullness of time, *to unite all things in him*, things in heaven and things on earth.

Let us observe that (1) here, too, creation and redemption are inextricably linked, and (2) all this is “in him” or “in Christ” (occurring 3 times in these 4 verses).

Thus, in Christ everything in creation is united into a coherent whole. BDAG also gives this definition of *sunistēmi* (συνίστημι): “to come to be in a condition of coherence, *continue, endure, exist, hold together*, pres. mid. and perf. act.” which is certainly compatible with the previous definition. This definition is stated to be applicable to words in the present middle and perfect active forms of the verb. It is the latter form which appears in Colossians 1:17. Notice, too, that only the definition “hold together” is given in the translation cited above (in the heading). But BDAG shows that the “condition of coherence” extends also to the ideas of continuity, endurance, and even existence. Such is the power, nature, and scope, of the redemptive unity “in Christ”!

## 2Corinthians 8:9

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”

Our trinitarian interpretation of this verse was contingent upon our trinitarian interpretation of Phil.2:6ff: Jesus was rich in heaven but chose earthly poverty so that we might become rich. If this, however, is the incorrect interpretation of the Philippian passage, then it cannot be used here. Moreover, there is nothing in the Corinthian letters that justifies such an understanding of this verse.

First of all, we need to ask what kind of riches and poverty is under consideration here. “That you might become rich” is hardly a reference to material riches as is clear already from the first two verses of this chapter:

We want you to know, brothers, about *the grace of God* that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their *extreme poverty* have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. (2Cor.8:1,2)

The Macedonian churches were the recipients of God’s grace, and the evidence of this grace was their generosity in spite of the sufferings they were enduring and their “extreme poverty”. The grace of God had not made them materially rich but had made them joyful and generous in the midst of their trials and their poverty; therein lies the greatness of God’s grace. Likewise, the riches which the Corinthians would

receive is evidently the same spiritual riches of God's grace in Christ as the Macedonians received; this was something of much greater (i.e. eternal) value to Paul than material riches. Paul hardly had in mind that Christ became poor to make us materially rich.

When Paul spoke of Christ as “rich” would he then have meant that Christ was materially rich? Even heavenly riches are surely not material riches. What is meant by riches is already well defined in 2Cor.8:2: it is “the abundance of joy” and the “wealth of generosity” which neither the “severe test of affliction” nor “extreme poverty” could affect in any way. This is true riches indeed, especially when some of us have personally witnessed the misery of millionaires and, by contrast, the joy of the penniless who walk with God and who daily experience His provisions, His love and His care.

What then does it mean that “for your sake he became poor”? Paul, as an “imitator” of Christ (1Cor.11:1), illustrates this in his own life: “For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things” (Phil. 3:8). Now left with nothing, he still had one last thing to offer: his life—“Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all” (Phil.2:17). He used this imagery of being “poured out as an offering” once again when the time came for him to lay down his life: “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come” (2Tim.4:6). To be “poured out” is truly to be “emptied” (cf. *kenoō*, Phil.2:7), and here we see it in two stages: first the intention, an expression of the heart and will, as expressed in Phil.2:17 (also Ac.20:24), and then at its

actualization at “the time of departure” as in 2Tim.4:6. It seems that this is also how the “emptying” in Christ’s case in Phil.2:7 is best understood because Paul’s life is patterned upon Christ’s; he has Christ’s “mind” (Phil.2:5), his way of thinking.

All this makes it clear that Christ’s becoming “poor” has reference above all to his “death on a cross” (Phil.2:8). On the cross he endured “for your sake” (2Cor.8:9), a poverty which no one else could endure because, as Paul had said earlier, God “for our sake made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2Cor.5:21). For us to become “the righteousness of God” is to become eternally rich indeed, for that means reconciliation with God and eternal life as its result (2Cor.5:17-20). But to obtain such “riches” for us, Christ apparently also experienced the deepest level of poverty not just in physical suffering and death but in the inner experience of deprivation of the Father’s presence as expressed in the poignant words of Ps.22:1, ‘And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”’ (Mt.27:46; Mk.15:34). He who enjoyed the incomparable spiritual riches of a life of intimacy with the Father as described in John’s Gospel, now “for your sake” endured the unspeakable pain of separation because of becoming the sin-bearer, sin having the effect of separating man from God: “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear” (Isaiah 59:2; NIV).

It was evidently this fearful prospect of separation from God that explains his sweat and tears in the Garden of Gethsemane; but it was also because of this “godly fear” that he was heard: “In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear” (Hebrews 5:7, RSV). Jesus had known, as no one else had ever known, the “rich” life of communion with the Father, such as could be described as being “one” with Him; no privation or poverty could compare with being deprived of His presence even for a moment, and such a moment must have seemed like all eternity. Some people have endured for a time this kind of privation which was described by John of the Cross as “the dark night of the soul,” but certainly no one could have experienced it at the depth that Jesus did, and all this “for your sake”—as Paul would have the Corinthians (and others) remember.

### **1Timothy 3:16**

Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory. (1Timothy 3:16)

Regarding 1Timothy 3:16, we know, of course, that it is usually made to refer to Christ by trinitarians, even though Christ is not mentioned in the immediate context in relation to this verse. Typically, for example, *The Expositor's Greek*

*Testament* bases the assumed reference to Christ on the pure conjecture that with regard to 3:16f “it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that what follows is a quotation by St. Paul from a primitive creed... about Jesus Christ”. This kind of purely conjectural conclusion should be avoided, especially when there is not a shred of evidence given for this alleged “primitive creed”. There are in fact a number of manuscripts in which the reading “God was manifested in the flesh” is found, but these recensions could be the work of trinitarians trying to “prove” the deity of Christ. But the possibility remains that the statement “God was manifest in the flesh” echoes John 1:14 where it says that “the Word (‘Memra’, metonym of Yahweh) became flesh”.

### 1John 5:7,8

“For there are three that testify: the <sup>k</sup> Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement”. (1John 5:7,8, NIV)

The NIV version is given here because it shows, in the following NIV footnote, the later trinitarian insertions:

“7,8 Late manuscripts of the Vulgate *testify in heaven: the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one.*  
<sup>8</sup>*And there are three that testify on earth: the* (not found in any Greek manuscript before the sixteenth century)”.

On this passage the comments of Prof. Küng will suffice, “In 1John there was once a sentence (*comma johanneum*) connected with the saying about the Spirit, the water and the blood, which went on to speak of the Father, the Word and the Spirit, which, it said, are ‘one’. However, historical-critical research has unmasked this sentence as a forgery which came into being in North Africa or Spain in the third or fourth century.” (H. Küng, *Christianity*, p.95)

In a footnote on this passage, Küng provides an explanation of the meaning of the verse: “The original text 1John 5:7f. speaks of spirit, of water (=baptism) and of blood (=eucharist) which ‘agree’ or ‘are one’ (both sacraments witness to the power of the one spirit).”

## 1John 5:20

1John 5:20, “And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.”

Jesus came to give us understanding. What is this understanding? It is to know “Him (God) who is true” and to be “in Him (God) who is true”. How can we be “in Him”? It is through being “in His Son Jesus Christ” (also 1Jn.2:24). In the words which follow immediately, “He is the true God” must surely refer to the twice mentioned “Him” and also to the “His” in the words “His Son” mentioned in the preceding sentence. That “the true God” refers to Yahweh God rather than Christ

is placed beyond any doubt by the fact that God is described as “Him who is true” in the preceding sentence of the same verse.

Typically, disregarding the syntax of the verse, many trinitarians still insist that “the true God” refers to Jesus Christ. By so doing they disregard also what Jesus himself said: “And this is *eternal life*, that they know you *the only true God*, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3). Notice how precisely these words correspond to 1John 5:20 in that they speak likewise of “the true God” and of “eternal life.”

## John 1:18 and its textual problems

John 1:18 “No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, {Or *the Only Begotten*} {Some manuscripts *but the only* (or *only begotten*) *Son*} who is at the Father’s side, has made him known” (NIV).

The NIV translation gives an idea of the textual problems in this text; because of these problems, this verse may not be particularly useful for the purpose of this study, but we shall discuss it for the sake of completeness, and also because it may provide some evidence of tampering with the text, resulting in a considerable number of textual variations. These can be seen in the various translations: “The only Son” (RSV, NJB), or “the only begotten Son” (NKJV), or “the only begotten God” (NASB), or even “God the One and Only” (NIV), “the only God” (ESV), etc.



This large variety of translations makes it difficult to pursue a meaningful discussion of the text, without first trying to sort out the reason for such a confusing variety. The problem appears to arise from the fact that the original text has been tampered with, so the problem becomes one of trying to determine which one of the ancient texts was most likely to have been the original one. But since this cannot be determined with any absolute certainty at this point in time, this means that the discussion of this text becomes merely a matter of possibilities or probabilities, which greatly reduces its value for the present study.

The one word common to all the various Greek texts is *monogenēs*. The problem lies in what is, or what is not, attached to this word. Some texts have *monogenēs theos* (only begotten God, or the only God), others have *monogenēs huios* (only son, or only begotten son), others *monogenēs huios theou* (only begotten son of God), while some have *ho monogenēs* (the only begotten). It is clear that a text of this kind cannot serve as a solid basis for a doctrine.

We can, however, briefly discuss the word *monogenēs*, since this word is evidently the central element to which other words are attached in the various texts. This word has basically two definitions as given in the BDAG Greek-English lexicon: (1) it refers to an “only child” (son or daughter); in Hebrews 11:17 it refers to Isaac as Abraham’s only son, as also in Luke 7:12; 9:38, or to an only daughter, Luke 8:42; (2) it has the meaning “unique, one of a kind” as in John 3:16,18 and 1John 4:9 referring to Jesus as the “only,” or “unique son

of God,” in the older translations usually as “the only begotten son of God”.

1) Regarding *monogenēs* we can ask: Why must it be assumed that “the only begotten Son” is a description that proves divinity? Luke explains that the title “Son of God” (Lk.1:35) was given to Jesus because of his virgin birth. That this title was not meant to convey the idea of divinity or deity seems clear from the fact that Adam is also called “son of God” just two chapters later (Lk.3:38). Also, in consequence of that birth, Jesus can be called “the only begotten” because no one was ever begotten in this way. When Scripture provides perfectly clear and intelligible explanations, why do we read our own ideas into the term?

2) “Who is in the bosom of the Father” (cf. BDAG “Bosom”); the present tense “who is in the bosom” provides no reason to argue for preexistence. The Logos was spoken of as having “become flesh” in v.14, and the verses following it speak of events *after* that event, so there is no reason to suppose that v.18 (which comes after v.14) returns to preexistence.

3) The description of Jesus as being “in the bosom of the Father” beautifully describes the living relationship between Yahweh and man in Christ, bringing out its proximity and intimacy, “i.e. in the closest and most intimate relation to the Father, John 1:18 (Winer’s Grammar, 415 (387)),” *Thayer Greek-English Lexicon*. The same expression “in the bosom of” is used of the “disciple whom Jesus loved,” usually thought to be John, in relation to Jesus, in Jn.13:23.

## “The only begotten God”

Most of the oldest Greek manuscripts have *monogenēs theos* (“only begotten God”), so from the textual standpoint, the reading “God” has better manuscript support. B.D. Ehrman, who chairs the Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and is an authority on NT texts, writes, “It must be acknowledged that the first reading (i.e. “God”) is the one found in the manuscripts that are the oldest and generally considered the best—those of the Alexandrian textual family.” (*Misquoting Jesus*, Harper San Francisco, 2005, p.161f.) But Prof. Ehrman surmises that the original text was “Son” and was changed by the anti-adoptionists (the later trinitarians) to “God” to counter the adoptionist teaching that Jesus was only man, not God, but was “adopted” by God as His Son at his baptism when the heavenly voice declared, “You are my Son...” (Mark 1:11).

From the point of view of monotheism, neither reading is problematic. Because if the reading is “Son,” as we have seen in our preceding discussion, preexistence is not necessarily implied in John 1:18, even though trinitarians would read that into it. But if the correct reading is “God,” then it would be a reference to John 1:14, “the Word/Memra became flesh”. This would add strong confirmation to the exposition of John 1:1ff as expounded in this book. But my exposition does not need to depend on this reading for support.

In other words, trinitarians suppose that the reading “God” supports their doctrine, but that is only because they *assume* that “God” refers to Jesus, disregarding the fact that

“God” (as distinct from “god”) in Scripture always refers to Yahweh. Ehrman also affirms that “only begotten God” can only refer to the Father because he maintains that *monogenēs*, generally translated as “only begotten,” here means “unique,” and writes, “The term *unique* in Greek means ‘one of a kind.’ There can be only one who is one of a kind. **The term unique God must refer to God the Father himself—otherwise he is not unique.** But if the term refers to the Father, how can it be used of the Son?” (*Misquoting Jesus*, p.162, italics his, bold lettering mine).

Clearly, to speak of Jesus (or the Son) as “the unique God” would be to eliminate the Father; for if Jesus is “the one of a kind God,” where does that leave the Father? It is evidently for this reason that Ehrman says, as far as the Bible is concerned, “the term *unique* God must refer to God the Father himself”.

Ehrman’s conclusion on this point: “Given the fact that the more common (and understandable) phrase in the Gospel of John is ‘the unique Son,’ it appears that that was the text originally written in John 1:18.” (Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, p.162) The point is that if the changing of “unique Son” to “unique God” was the work of an Alexandrian scribe(s), then by failing to remove the word “unique” he thereby gives his alteration away and defeats his own efforts.

## **OT sayings about Yahweh applied to Jesus in the NT**

We have seen an example of this in Philippians 2:10,11 where there is a clear reference to Isaiah 45:22,23. How are these to be understood? The answer to this question is relatively easy because the logical options available are very limited: (a) The “man Christ Jesus” (1Tim.2:5; Rom.5:15,17; Acts 4:10) is Yahweh—an impossible identification because Yahweh is “God and not a man” (Hos.11:9; 1Sam.15:29; Job 9:32; etc), or (b) Jesus is the embodiment of the glory of God (Heb.1:3; Jn.1:14, etc), the fullness of God (Col.2:9; 1:19; Jn.2:21, etc); he was the one in whom the Father lived and worked (Jn.14:10). Clearly, (b) is the only correct option.

But if Jesus is neither (a) nor (b), then to apply OT Yahweh verses to him would mean that he is a second Yahweh which, Biblically speaking, is absolutely impossible; even worse, this could rightly be considered as blasphemous. Moreover, identifying Jesus with Yahweh does not help trinitarianism in the least because Yahweh is the Father not the Son, so the Yahweh verses cannot in any way be made to provide evidence for the existence of a “second divine person”.

The application of the Yahweh verses to Jesus provides further confirmation that the “fullness” of God came into the world bodily, and “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself” (2Cor.5:19).

## Questions about the Day of the Lord and Melchizedek

Closely related to the previous question are the following two questions which were sent to me and which I shall leave as received. The reply also remains essentially unchanged. This correspondence is included here because it is likely that some readers have questions similar to these.

“I hope you don’t mind me asking a couple of questions here. First, it’s about the term ‘Day of the Lord’. It is used about 25x in 23 verses in the combined OT/NT. It seems that the ‘Lord’ in the OT generally refers to Yahweh. But the 5x in NT (Acts 2:20; 1Co 5:5; 2Co 1:14; 1Th 5:2; 2Pe 3:10) seem to refer to Jesus as Lord. Acts 2:20 is a quote from Joel 2:31. So, in the term ‘Day of the Lord,’ who does the ‘Lord’ refer to? I understand that the ‘day of the Lord’ can mean different things at different times and events, but it is rather confusing that sometimes it refers to Yahweh and other times, particularly in NT, the term refers to Jesus.

“The 2nd question I have is about the mysterious person Melchizedek (Heb 7:3), having no father and no mother, no genealogy. Jesus follows the priestly line of Melchizedek. Who is Melchizedek? Jesus has an earthly line and a spiritual line. Would people conceive that he is both man and divine?”

My reply: The “Day of the Lord” has to do with judgment. On this matter Jesus has already given a clear description of the situation, “The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son” (Jn.5:22). That is to say, Jesus will exercise all judgment as Yahweh’s appointed judge, that is, as

His plenipotentiary acting in His Name, on His behalf. The same point is made in Peter's message from which you quote (Acts 2:20) and which he concluded by saying, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (v.36). The same point is made here: God has appointed Jesus as His plenipotentiary. This means that "the Lord" will act on behalf of "the LORD (i.e. Yahweh)"; for this reason "the Day of the Lord" refers to either or both without essential difference.

As for the second question, there does not seem to be any logical connection between the Melchizedek priesthood and Jesus' being conceived of as "both man and divine". Hebrews does not speak of Jesus as a physical descendant of Melchizedek, so whether Melchizedek was divine or not has no bearing on Jesus' person. In fact no direct personal connection between Melchizedek and Jesus is anywhere postulated in Hebrews. Only his priesthood is under discussion, and it addresses a serious problem for the Jews (Hebrews): How can Jesus be a priest, let alone a high priest (a central theme of Hebrews), when he was not descended from the priestly tribe of Levi? Hebrews' answer to this is that it had already been prophesied (Ps.110:4, a messianic psalm) that the Messianic Davidic king would also be a priest—the Messiah will combine kingship and priesthood in himself—but being from the tribe of Judah he would not be a priest from the tribe of Levi, but his priesthood would be like that of Melchizedek who was also both king and priest. But none of this has anything to do with Jesus' being both man and divine.

## Another trinitarian proof text: John 12:41

“Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him.”

Trinitarians usually assume, without regard for the exegesis of this verse, that what is said here is that Isaiah saw Jesus’ glory and spoke of him. Actually, not a scrap of evidence can be produced from the passage in Isaiah that Isaiah spoke of Jesus, or that the glory he saw was Jesus’ glory. All this has to be read into the passage in Isaiah. Nor is there any evidence that John was claiming that Isaiah saw the man Jesus in his vision of Yahweh. But this is the kind of blatant disregard for proper exegetical procedure on which trinitarianism thrives.

The discussion of John 12:41 can be simplified by noting carefully that (1) it refers to Isaiah’s vision in Isaiah 6, where Isaiah’s account is of a vision of *Yahweh*; but (2) no one can see Yahweh and live (Ex.33:20, etc), so what Isaiah saw is explained in John 12:41 as “His glory,” which the Jews spoke of as His Shekinah; therefore (3) if John had any intention of applying these words to Jesus there are only two possibilities: a. the man Jesus is being identified with Yahweh as one and the same person, which is impossible, and would in any case not serve the trinitarian purpose, or b. identify Jesus as the expression of Yahweh’s glory, the embodiment of His Shekinah, and this would fit in perfectly with John 1:14. But, of course, none of this provides any support for trinitarianism, and this is fundamentally because there is simply no trinitarianism in John’s Gospel.



So this text is actually of no value to trinitarianism because either the “his” (in “his glory”) is taken to refer to Yahweh, in which case, it does not serve as a proof text, or if it is taken to refer to Jesus it would equate Jesus with Yahweh, which is to confuse the “First Person,” the Father, in trinitarianism with the “Second Person,” “God the Son”.

When we compare John 12:41 with 1:14 we immediately see that “his glory” (*tēn doxan autou*) occurs in both verses, so the one explains the other: “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen *his glory*” (1:14a,b). The subject of John 1:14 is the Word, so it is evident that “his glory” refers to the glory of *the Word*. Since the Word/Memra in the Johannine Prologue is a metonym or synecdoche of Yahweh (we shall study this more closely later in this book), then it is clear that “his glory” refers essentially to Yahweh’s glory, which is precisely what John 12:41 speaks of as the glory which Isaiah saw. But the further point in both these verses in John is that this glory of Yahweh was now “revealed in the flesh” (1Tim.3:16) because “it became flesh and dwelt among us”. It was in that “flesh” that “we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn.1:14). Having come in the flesh he was known as “the only Son from the Father” who is named three verses later as “Jesus Christ” (v.17).<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See further “A few notes on the exegesis of Jn 12:41”, Appendix 5.

## “I have seen the Father”: evidence of preexistence?

In John 12:41, “Isaiah *saw* his glory”; “saw” is the word *horaō*. This is the same word used of Jesus’ seeing the Father:

**John 3:32**, “He bears witness to what he has **seen** and heard, yet no one receives his testimony.”

**John 6:46**, “not that anyone has **seen** the Father except him who is from God; he has seen the Father.”

**John 8:38**, “I speak of what I have **seen** with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father [and therefore reject me].”

But is it necessary to assume (yet another assumption) that these references refer to a “seeing” during the supposed preexistence of Jesus? Or is it something that takes place after his birth? Notice the *present tense* in Jesus’ statement in John 5:19, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.” This indicates that Jesus’ “seeing” of the Father was something he was experiencing on *earth*, and surely not only at the time of making this statement, but already during the past years of his earthly life. So it is purely a matter of reading one’s own trinitarian dogma into the text to argue that the perfect tense in “I have seen with my Father” (Jn.8:38) *had to be something which took place in Jesus’ preexistence*. On the logic of this argument we would have to accept the preexistence of Isaiah because he

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said “I saw the Lord”, “for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD (Yahweh) of hosts!” (Isa.6:1,5)!<sup>24</sup>

### **John 16:15, “All that the Father has is mine” — evidence of divinity?**

This corresponds to another statement in John 17:10, “All I have is Yours, and all You have is mine.” This is evidently a part of the meaning of being one with the Father, a oneness in which believers are called to participate, “that they may be one even as we are one” (17:22b). As for the second part of 17:10 (“all You have is mine”), we find a striking echo in Paul’s words, “So let no one boast of men. *For all things are yours*, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—*all are yours*; and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s” (1Cor.3:21-23).

But “all things” certainly belong to God, for there is nothing that does not belong to Him; yet now as a result of His uniting us to Himself through Christ, all things—including the Apostles, the world, life, death, the present and the future (what an astonishing list!)—all belong to us, and this is repeated again: “all are yours,” ensuring that we did not miss this amazing point!

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<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, these sayings about “seeing” could also be considered as instances of the Logos (like Wisdom, Mt.11:19; Luke 7:35 cf. 11:49) speaking through Christ.

This point is unequivocally affirmed in another striking verse: Romans 8:17, “Now if we are children, then we are heirs—*heirs of God* and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.” (NIV)

All things belong to God, therefore to be “heirs of God” is to be heirs to all things and “co-heirs with Christ”. Now we understand why Jesus was able to say, “All that the Father has is mine”—for he is God’s heir because of being His Son. Now, by the saving mercies of God, we can say with Christ, “All that the Father has is mine” because He has made us co-heirs with Christ; through him we are heirs of God!

All these remarkable and important spiritual truths enable us to better understand the significance of Jesus’ words in John 16:15 (“all that the Father has is mine”), and it clearly shows that it does not prove Christ’s inherent equality with the Father. What it does prove is the Father’s love for him, just as 1Corinthians 3:21ff (quoted above) proves the Father’s amazing love for us.

What is also usually overlooked is that to say that Christ is God’s appointed heir is also to say that everything Christ has is *given him by the Father*, and that he possesses nothing apart from what the Father gives him. This is, in fact, precisely what Jesus himself affirms in John 17:7: “Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you.” Barrett (*John*) writes that this could be expressed as “Everything I have is from thee’... John as ever emphasizes the dependence of Jesus, in his incarnate mission, upon the Father” (on Jn.17:7). Likewise, saying that we, by His grace, are co-heirs

with Christ, is also to say that whatever we have, we received from the Father because of His unfathomable love for us—we of ourselves have nothing whatsoever.

## John 17:5

“And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.”

This is one of those verses which trinitarians are quick to point to as implying Jesus’ deity. There are two elements in this verse which they suppose support their view: (1) glory: “the glory that I had with you” and (2) preexistence: “before the world existed”. The error of the trinitarian argument lies in the fact that their own ideas are read into the meaning of these two elements, because they fail to understand what these elements mean in John’s Gospel and in the NT. In other words, it is another of the many cases of trinitarian eisegesis: reading into the text what is not in the text and not intended by it.

In regard to (1), “glory,” trinitarians simply assume that the glory being referred to here is *divine* glory, though there is no evidence for this in the text itself, so the idea of divine glory is simply read into it. Paul speaks of there being many kinds of glory (1Cor.15:40-43).

But the fact is that in John’s Gospel, “glory” has an unusual and, therefore, unexpected meaning; it is characteristic of this “spiritual” gospel that human values are *inverted* so that what is not glorious in human eyes is glorious in God’s eyes.

It is just as it is written in Isaiah, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD (Yahweh)” (Isa. 55:8). Accordingly, in the Beatitudes, Jesus told his disciples that persecution is a cause for great joy (Mt.5:10-12), and what is seldom noticed is that he used the word “blessed” twice in this section, thus making it a “double blessing”; yet, strangely enough, the Beatitudes are frequently spoken of as “the eight blessings” (e.g. in Chinese) when in fact there are nine. But joy is hardly the usual reaction of Christians to persecution. Not many regard being persecuted as a glorious experience. Yet in John, Jesus speaks precisely of his crucifixion as his exaltation, his being “lifted up,” his being glorified.

The special character of glory in John—“lifted up”:

**Jn.3:14,15:** “And as Moses *lifted up* the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be *lifted up*, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”

**Jn.8:28:** “So Jesus said to them, ‘When you have *lifted up* the Son of man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me.’”

**Jn.12:32-33:** “‘and I, when I am *lifted up from the earth*, will draw all men to myself.’ He said this to show by what kind of death he was to die.”

**Jn.13:31:** “When he (Judas) had gone out, Jesus said, ‘Now is the Son of Man *glorified*, and God is glorified in him.’” (The passion narrative constitutes a large proportion of

John's gospel, about one third of it, thus indicating its enormous importance; it "kicks into high gear" from this point of the narrative.)

**Jn.7:39:** "Jesus was not yet glorified"—at this point he had not yet been "lifted up".

**Jn.12:23,24:** "And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

The connection of Jesus' being "glorified" and the grain of wheat which can only "bear much fruit" by dying is made explicitly clear. Death is the "glory" of the grain of wheat precisely because the grain becomes greatly fruitful by means of it, and *only* by this means, because there is no other way for a seed to become fruitful and multiply. The ancient adage, "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church," proclaimed this same truth.

The idea of death as glorifying God is seen also in John 21:19, "This he (Jesus) said to show by what death he (Peter) was to glorify God."

But how can suffering and crucifixion be the "glory" that Jesus had with the Father *before the world began*? This takes us to the second element: "preexistence".

## (2) “Before the world existed” (Jn.17:5)

Trinitarians assume that these words speak of *Jesus’* preexistence, but this is exegetically problematic because (a) on the principle that Scripture is its own best commentary, no direct parallel to these words of John 17:5 can be found anywhere else in Scripture (excluding for now the trinitarian interpretations of John 1 and Philippians 2), so no Scriptural evidence can be adduced to support the idea of Christ’s preexistence here. (b) But even if, with trinitarianism, it is assumed that this verse speaks of a preexistent glory of Christ, it would in no way provide proof of his deity. *Preexistence is not evidence of deity.* Angels and other spiritual beings are also preexistent in the sense that they existed *before* the world was created, as can be seen from the fact that they are not mentioned as being created as part of the present material creation in Genesis 1. (c) The phrase “with you” (in the statement, “the glory I had *with You* before the world existed”) is not a direct parallel with John 1:1 (“the Word was with God”) where the word “with” in Greek is *pros*; in John 17:5 it is *para* as in Proverbs 8:30 of Wisdom, “I was with (*para*) Him as a master craftsman” (see Prov.8:22-31). This could suggest that here the Logos in Christ is speaking as Wisdom. But this would mean having to understand “glory” in a different sense from the one Jesus uses of his being “glorified,” and in John 17:5 it is Jesus who is speaking.

In order to avoid reading our own ideas into the text, we need to carefully examine the concept of preexistence as it



appears in the NT. The Apostle Paul puts the matter clearly and succinctly like this in Romans 8:

<sup>29</sup> For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. <sup>30</sup> And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Here a chain of events is laid out as follows: foreknew → predetermined (to be conformed to Christ) → called → justified → glorified. Notice that it is Yahweh God who is the author of all these five events, which all begin with His *foreknowledge* as the omniscient One.

What must be borne in mind is that there is a long *interval of time*, or time-gap, between Yahweh’s knowing all things “before the world existed” and the time that the believer is called and justified. And there is yet another (perhaps lengthy) interval or time-gap between the believer’s calling and justification to the time when he will be glorified at the resurrection from the dead and enters the fullness of eternal life. That is to say, the period from the “foreknew” to the “glorified” in Romans 8:29,30 spans the preexistence in *the eternity which stretches into the past* all the way to *an eternity extending into the future*: as it is written “from everlasting to everlasting you are God” (Ps.90:2).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Or “from forever to forever You are God”, *The Book of Psalms*, Norton 2007, Robert Alter’s translation of Psalm 90:2.

What is relevant in all this for our understanding of the Biblical concept of preexistence is that Yahweh God foreknew the believer long before he actually existed, indeed, “before the world existed”; the believer existed in God’s omniscient foreknowledge long before his actual appearance in the world. This is, of course, exactly the same for “the man Christ Jesus”. People and events existed in God’s foreknowledge, and He was therefore able to act on that foreknowledge, such as that everyone whom He called would be conformed to the image of His Son according to His eternally predetermined (predestined) plan of salvation for mankind.

This is confirmed by considering another Johannine reference, this one in the Book of Revelation, where eternal realities are revealed:

“All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world. {Or *written from the creation of the world in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain*}” (Rev. 13:8, NIV).

The syntax, or sentence structure, of the Greek text would favor the NIV translation over the alternative enclosed in brackets. On this reading, the Lamb, Jesus, was slain already at the creation of the world, that is, in the mind and saving purposes of God, long before he was born in Israel. Now we can see how the glory of his being “lifted up” on the cross is linked to “before the world existed” in Jesus’ words in John 17:5—a statement of astonishing spiritual depth.

## The preexistence of God’s plan for mankind’s salvation in Christ

Salvation was something already in existence in God’s plan before the world came into existence. In the following verses we see further examples of “before the world existed” applied to all believers:

**Matthew 25:34:** “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom *prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*’” The kingdom was prepared for “you” long before “you” had even come into existence, indeed, already “from the foundation of the world”!

**Revelation 13:8:** “and all who dwell on earth will worship it (the beast), everyone whose name has not been *written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain.*” This is the other possible way of translating the Greek text of this verse; so “before the foundation of the world” refers either to believers or to the Lamb, but either way they existed in the foreknowledge of Yahweh God before they entered the world. If this translation is accepted, then it means that those who did *not* worship the beast were those whose names were *written in the Lamb’s book of life before the foundation of the world.*

**2 Timothy 1:9:** “(God) who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus *before the beginning of time* [i.e. in eternity, *pro chronōn aiōniōn*, πρὸ χρόνων αἰωνίων]” (NIV).

It is said of Christ himself that, “He was *foreknown before the foundation of the world* but was made manifest in the last times for your sake” (1Pet.1:20; cp. 2Tim.1:9,10). He was “foreknown” by God, but there is no mention of preexistence. The next verse (1Pet.1:21) goes on to say, “who (you believers) through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead *and gave him glory*, so that your faith and hope are in God”; here the glory given to Christ by God is *not a preexistent glory* but was given him *after* God had raised him from the dead.

### **Romans 4:17: God “calls things that are not as though they were”**

“The God who ... calls things that are not as though they were” (Rom.4:17, NIV). James D.G. Dunn (*Word Biblical Commentary, Romans*) agrees that this translation is correct, but considers it too “weak,” preferring “who calls things that have no existence into existence” or “calls things that are not so that they are”. Certainly both translations are possible, and are not mutually exclusive. But Dunn’s preferred translation serves primarily to underline the statement which immediately precedes it (“the God who gives life to the dead”). Even so, the NIV translation expresses a profound truth: To God things that have not yet come into existence are, for Him, “as though they were,” i.e. already in existence.

Thus, for example, *how could God have acted for our salvation before the foundation of the world when we did not yet*

*exist?* The answer is found precisely in Rom.4:17: In His mind and foreknowledge, we had already existed, and He acted on that foreknowledge by taking concrete steps in relation to us even before the world was created! Is this not exactly what Paul says, “Whom He foreknew He also...called” (Rom. 8:29,30)? The verses we considered in a previous paragraph, such as Mt.25:34; 2Tim.1:9; and Rev.13:8, all exemplify this same truth about God, who gave us His saving grace in Christ “before the beginning of time” (2Tim.1:9).

This means that a purpose formed in God’s mind is as good as though it had already been fulfilled or come into existence. In this sense, we already existed “before the foundation of the world,” and “whom He foreknew...He glorified” (Rom.8:29,30)—God glorified us before the creation was brought into being! Such is the certainty of the accomplishing of Yahweh’s purposes, regardless of how near or how far the future, that the words (called, justified, glorified) are all in the *past tense* (Greek: aorist)! Paul was granted a profound understanding of God; it was on this basis that he was able to make such remarkable statements. As applied to himself, he understood that God in His unfathomable love and grace had chosen him and glorified him from eternity.

If Paul understood this, would not Jesus have known this too? Certainly. This can be seen in John 17:5, “And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed,” if the words are correctly understood. In view of the preceding discussion, we are now in a position to conclude our study of these significant words of Jesus:

(1) “Now, Father, glorify me in your own presence,” at the start of the sentence, clearly indicates that Jesus is preparing to enter the Father’s presence through his death and resurrection: cf. “I go to the Father” (Jn.16:10); “I go to prepare a place for you” (Jn.14:2,3); “I have not yet ascended to the Father” (Jn.20:17), but he was going to very soon.

(2) “Glorify me”. We have already seen the special meaning of “glory” and “glorify” in John. What needs to be observed here is that “glorify” is in the *active* form, indicating that this glorifying is *the Father’s* action: Jesus’ being “lifted up,” his death on the cross for sin is, ultimately, God’s accomplishment, not man’s; the death of Christ for our salvation was *God’s* plan, not man’s. Jesus was “the Lamb of *God*”. The priest in the temple who slaughtered the lamb was merely acting on behalf of the one who offered the lamb; it was not the priest’s lamb. “The Lamb of God” is so called because it was presented *by God* for our salvation: “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1John 4:10; NIV). The death of Christ as atoning sacrifice for us is, therefore, ultimately God’s act. When we fail to see this we mistakenly lay blame for his death on the Romans or the Jews who were merely serving as instruments in God’s plan for mankind’s salvation.

(3) These plans of salvation were not the result of some after-thought on God’s part, but had already been laid out in eternity “before the world existed” and were now being implemented by God’s love, power, and wisdom. Considering such things as these, the Apostle exclaimed, “Oh, the depth of the

riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!” (Romans 11:33)

Finally, the truth that God “calls things that are not as though they were” (Rom.4:17) is not merely an item of Biblical theology of some intellectual interest to us; it was written for a very practical purpose, namely, to show that faith is not some form of wishful thinking but rests upon the bedrock of God’s own character, whose plans and purposes cannot fail. Faith, even in the face of apparently insurmountable obstacles, will certainly triumph, not because of anything inherent in faith itself, but because of the One in whom faith rests. This is why the context of Romans 4 is primarily concerned with the practical application of faith in our lives even in the most apparently adverse circumstances, and Abraham is held up as an example of this very thing:

<sup>19</sup> He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb.

<sup>20</sup> No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,

<sup>21</sup> fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. <sup>22</sup> That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.”

Even more remarkable is Jesus’ unshakeable confidence in the Father’s eternal plan of salvation now being carried out through him, especially now that his being “lifted up” was the

event looming immediately before him. It is in this light that we begin to understand the depth and power of his words in John 17:5. With steadfast resolve Jesus asks the Father to “glorify me” *now*, and what other glory could be given him at that crucial moment in “salvation history” but his “exaltation” in his death on the cross, which would then be vindicated through his being “raised from the dead by the glory of the Father” (Rom.6:4)? The “now” (*nun*, “at the present time”) which begins the sentence in John 17:5 (“Now, Father, glorify me in your own presence”), is no mere florid introduction to what follows, but points specifically to the moment at hand: he asks that his glorification according to Yahweh’s plan, established “before the world existed”, begin *now*.<sup>26</sup> Herein we see the worthiness of Christ to receive acclaim by the multitudes in heaven proclaiming, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” (Revelation 5:12)

### **“The Lord of glory,” 1 Corinthians 2:8; James 2:1**

In view of the extended discussion of “glory” in the foregoing section on John 17:5, this would be an appropriate place to insert a discussion of the title “the Lord of glory” which appears only in two places in the NT (1Cor.2:8 and James 2:1). We first consider the one in Paul’s letter:

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<sup>26</sup> The *time* factor is seen also in the previous sentence: “I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do,” John 17:4.



<sup>7</sup> But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.

<sup>8</sup> None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified **the Lord of glory**.

<sup>9</sup> But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.” [Isa.64:4]

We see at once that the title “the Lord of glory” (v.8) is sandwiched between two verses that speak of the *glory* that God has prepared for believers (“our glory”, v.7), that is, for “those who love him” (v.9). And he prepared this “before the ages” (v.7). This makes it evident that Jesus is the “Lord of glory” precisely because it is *through Christ* that Yahweh God makes this predetermined glory available to “those who love Him,” that is to say that God glorifies Jesus as the glorious “Lord,” and through him fulfills his glorious purposes in all who believe. But here the connection with the “glory” in John (understood in terms of being “lifted up”) must not be overlooked for, as in John, Paul here speaks of “the rulers of this age” as having “*crucified* the Lord of glory”. Thus “the Lord of glory” and “crucified” are inseparably related. As in Phil.2:9-11, he is the “Lord of glory” *because* he was crucified. To use “the Lord of glory” as a divine title, which we did as trinitarians, is to wrench it out of its Pauline context and, therefore, to misuse it.

In the OT, *Yahweh* is described as “the King of glory”: “Who is this King of glory? The LORD (Yahweh), strong and mighty, the LORD (Yahweh), mighty in battle!” (Ps.24:8). But

this is of no use to trinitarianism because to identify Jesus as Yahweh does not serve the trinitarian purpose: it would only serve to confuse “the First Person” with the “Second Person” of the Trinity.

G.G. Findlay (formerly Professor of Biblical Literature, Exegesis, and Classics, Headingly College, UK) observes correctly, “The expression *kyrios tēs doxēs* (‘Lord of glory’) is no synonym for Christ’s Godhead; it signifies the entire grandeur of the incarnate Lord, whom the world’s wise and great sentenced to the cross” (*The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, on 1Cor.2:8; the Greek has been transliterated and translated). Although it is true that “Lord of glory” contains no reference to Christ’s deity, could it nevertheless contain a reference to Yahweh’s glory as indwelling Christ in his incarnation? The well-known OT scholar W.E. Oesterley thought that this was quite certainly the case, and discusses this at considerable length in his commentary on James, particularly on James 2:1. This verse is variously translated in the different modern translations. Their main problem is with how to translate the Greek phrase in this verse which, translated literally, is “our Lord Jesus Christ of glory” (τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τῆς δόξης). The following are some examples of how James 2:1 is translated:

ESV: “My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory” (also RSV). This provides an obvious parallel to 1Cor.2:8 (“they would not have crucified the Lord of glory”), but the problem with this

translation is that “Lord” occurs twice when it actually only appears once in the Greek text.

NIV: “My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don’t show favoritism.” Here “of glory” is taken as a descriptive genitive, hence “glorious”.

NJB: “My brothers, do not let class distinction enter into your faith in Jesus Christ, our glorified Lord.”

No matter how James 2:1 is translated, the words “the glory” (*tēs doxēs*) certainly appears in the Greek text, and on this W.E. Oesterley wrote,

... the intensely Jewish character of the Epistle makes it reasonably certain that the familiar Jewish conception of the *Shekinah* is what the writer is here referring to. The *Shekinah* (from the root *skn* “to dwell”) denoted the visible presence of God dwelling among men. There are several references to it in the N.T. other than in this passage, Luke 2:9; Acts 7:2; Rom.9:4; *cf.* Heb.9:5; so, too, Targums, *e.g.*, in Targ. Onkelos to Num.6:25ff. the “face (in the sense of appearance or presence) of the Lord” is spoken of as the *Shekinah*. A more materialistic conception is found in the Talmud where the *Shekinah* appears in its relationship with men as one person dealing with another; *e.g.*, in *Sota*, 3b, it is said that before Israel sinned the *Shekinah* dwelt with every man severally, but that after they sinned it was taken away; *Pirqe Aboth*, 3.3: “Rabbi Chananiah ben Teradyon [he lived in the second century, A.D.] said, Two that sit together and are occupied in words of *Torah* have the *Shekinah* among them” (*cf.* Matt.18:20). The *Shekinah* was thus used by Jews as an

indirect expression in place of God, the localized presence of the deity... If our interpretation of *doxa* ('glory') is correct it will follow that the meaning of the phrase... *Iēsou Xristou tēs doxēs* ('Jesus Christ of glory') is free from ambiguity, *viz.*, "... Have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the *Shekinah*" (literally "the glory"); this is precisely the same thought that is contained in the words, "who being the effulgence of his glory..." (Heb.1:1-3). (*The Expositor's Greek Testament*, on James 2:1; the Greek has been transliterated and translated.)

Oesterley began his discussion of "the glory" as referring to the *Shekinah* and points to "the intensely Jewish character" of James, but it could hardly be more Jewish than Paul was, for Paul could exultingly speak of himself as "a Hebrew of the Hebrews" (Phil. 3:5); hence what is true for James would hardly be less true for Paul. So it is interesting that Oesterley points to Romans 9:4 as an example in Paul's writings where "the glory" (the same word as in James 2:1 and 1 Cor.2:8) is the *Shekinah*: "They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, *the glory*, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises" (Rom.9:4). It is not easy to find a better explanation of "the glory" in this verse, as a look at other commentaries will show. The *Shekinah* will be discussed in greater detail later in this book.

## John 17:22: The oneness of Jesus with the Father

John 17:22, “I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one.” (NIV)

Jesus’ oneness with the Father is another argument used by trinitarianism, it being simply assumed that oneness proves equality. But it actually does nothing of the kind. This should have been obvious in the light of 1Cor.6:16,17, but we paid no attention to it, at least insofar as its relevance for John 17 was concerned:

1Corinthians 6:17, “But he who is united to the Lord becomes *one spirit with him.*” (RSV)

The believer’s union with the Lord is, in essence, the same in meaning as that in John 17:22, yet no one is likely to be so presumptuous as to suppose that this union with the Lord in any way implies equality of the believer with Him.

## John 17:23: Jesus says that the Father loves us just as He loves him

Let us consider Jesus’ astonishing statement in John 17:23 that the Father has loved us *just as* He has loved Jesus as His Son, and that this is something to be made known to the world. Every believer is familiar with John 3:16, “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son,” but how many know 17:23, “you have loved them (the disciples) just as you have loved me”? The Father loved the world to the

self-sacrificial extent of giving what was dearest to Him, His Son; just how much more could He love those who have turned their backs upon the present age and are united to Him in Christ? The answer we discover is that He loves them just as He loves Christ!

Amazing as it is, yet upon giving the matter further thought it becomes clear that it is also inevitable. Why? Well, is it conceivable that the Father, having united the disciples with Christ as Body to Head, would then love the Head more than the Body? What, indeed, is a Head without a Body? For a head finds its fullness and completeness in its body. Moreover, in this case, Yahweh purposely brought the Body into being through Christ according to His eternal plan, revealing thereby the glory of His saving power and wisdom, just as it is written in Ephesians 3:21 “to Him be glory in the church (the Body) and in Christ Jesus (the Head) throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”

That God loves those in Christ just as He loves Christ is surely cause for rejoicing—rejoicing in the Lord who loves us. It is this unspeakable love that is the cause of our rejoicing in God under all the circumstances which we must experience in the world. This is certainly the reason for Paul’s exhortation to “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” (Phil.4:4, NIV). Paul had already exhorted the Philippians to “rejoice in the Lord” in Philippians 3:1; but this phrase occurs nowhere else in the NT. It does, however, occur 9 times in the OT (4 times in the Psalms), which is quite certainly the source from which Paul derives these words. It should also be noted that in every one of these OT occurrences, “the Lord”

is “the LORD,” i.e. Yahweh. Philippians was written under the harsh circumstances of a Roman prison, so it may well be that Paul had Habakkuk 3 particularly in mind:

<sup>17</sup> Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, <sup>18</sup> yet I will *rejoice in the LORD*; I will take *joy* in the God of my salvation.

Even when there is nothing in our circumstance to rejoice about, Yahweh Himself is always the true cause of our rejoicing, because He has loved us just as He loved His beloved Son, and we are beloved in Christ Jesus, this being “His glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved” (Eph.1:6)—we are beloved in the Beloved!

The Beloved, Christ Jesus, is the head of the community of the beloved, the church. As a result, we take for granted the term “the church of Christ”. What was my surprise to discover that this term does not exist in the NT! Instead, the term “the church of God” is found 7 times in the NT. The concept that the church is ultimately God’s as His unique possession has become unfamiliar to most of us, for we appear to have forgotten that Christ himself belongs to God: “Christ is God’s” (1Cor.3:23). Here we can see another instance of how trinitarianism affects our understanding of the Biblical revelation, in this instance our concept of something as fundamental as the church. We keep speaking of “the church of Christ” when there is not a single instance of this term in the NT!

## **The ministry of Christ and the church reaches its completion and climax in the ultimate exaltation of Yahweh God as “all in all”**

One of the places in which Paul makes reference to “the church of God” is in the important 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians (v.9). Many important truths are revealed uniquely in this chapter. Here the truth that God (Yahweh) alone is supreme over all, including over the Son, is stated with absolute clarity. Going from one weighty point to another we come to v.28: “When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him (God, the Father, v.24) who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.” This verse was very problematic to me as a trinitarian, as it is for all trinitarians, because it states plainly that even the authority that the Son exercised up to that point in time will be returned to the Father, Yahweh God, and “the Son himself will be subjected to Him”.

The usual way to try to evade the difficulties posed for trinitarianism was, of course, to engage in “double talk” with which we are all familiar, namely, to argue that this did not apply to Jesus as God, but only as man. But this argument ignores at least two serious problems: (1) although nowhere else in this chapter does the term “the Son” appear, it is exactly in this crucial verse that it appears! It is as though God foresaw this double talk! “The Son” is precisely the title by which trinitarians refer to “God the Son”; (2) this verse speaks about the *future*, not the past, when “the Son” (in the trinitarian sense) subjected himself to God the Father as the *man* Christ



Jesus (Phil.2:6-8). The remarkable thing, moreover, is that even though Christ is exalted by God the Father after his death and resurrection (Phil.2:9-11), yet in the eternal order of things “the Son himself will also be subjected to him”; for it is of the essence of eternal reality that God alone is “all in all” (1Cor.15:28). Yahweh God from whom all things came, and to whom all things will return, will finally be recognized and glorified as being absolutely everything to everyone in every way—“all in all”.

What is seen in the NT is that Christ’s ministry has as its single ultimate goal the exaltation of Yahweh God alone as the One supreme over all. When this objective is successfully reached, his ministry is therewith concluded. This means that his glorious and ultimately triumphant ministry is “time-limited”; it does not go on indefinitely without reaching a conclusion: it has a specific goal to attain and, when that is attained, Christ’s work is triumphantly concluded at that point. A work that goes on indefinitely would also be a work that never reaches a conclusion; but that is not the case with Christ. Once mankind is successfully redeemed, then obviously the work of redemption and salvation is concluded. Once sin has been atoned for once and for all, the work of our great high priest Jesus Christ is accomplished, and there is no longer any need for the sacrificial ministries of the Temple. The high priest has no further sacrificial duties. But since we have not yet attained to perfection (Phil.3:12) and could, therefore, be guilty of unwitting sin, our great high priest continues to make intercession for us (Heb.7:25; 1Jn.2:1),

which he will do until we are perfected on the day when “we shall be like him” (1Jn.3:2).

Likewise, once reconciliation has been accomplished there is no further need of a mediator (1Tim.2:5). Moreover, salvation in the NT goes beyond reconciliation to the grace by which “we are children of God” (Rom.8:16), “and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (v.17), and surely no child requires a mediator to come to his father. So a good mediator (like a good physician) “puts himself out of business” by successfully effecting reconciliation. This is the glory and beauty of Christ as the successful mediator, to whom all who have been reconciled will remain eternally grateful, giving praise to God who provided mankind with such a wonderful mediator.

“The Son” in 1Cor.15:28 (“then the Son himself will also be subjected to him...”) is certainly used in the usual way as a title of the Messiah, or the “Christ,” and in this sense it poses no problems whatever. On the contrary, it emphasizes the triumphant completion of the Messianic ministry of Christ Jesus, just as it was stated in verse 24, “Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to *God the Father* after destroying every rule and every authority and power,” that is, destroying every power that had refused to be subjected to him. All this has as its ultimate objective “that God (the Father) may be all in all”. The absolute monotheism of the New Testament can hardly be made clearer than this.

## John 20:28

Trinitarians constantly point to Thomas worshipping Jesus with the words, “My Lord and my God” (Jn.20:28). Perhaps they suppose that Thomas did not know or did not care what Jesus had said to the devil when he was tempted: “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only (*monos*) shall you serve (or worship, Phil.3:3; Acts 26:7 cf. Heb. 9:9; 10:2; *latreuō* “to render religious service or homage, to worship,” Thayer’s *Greek Lexicon*),” Mt.4:10; Lk.4:8? Or perhaps Thomas did not know Jesus’ teaching, or his prayer addressed to “the only true God” (Jn.17:3)? Perhaps trinitarians assume that Thomas was not a Jew or a monotheist? That Jesus had forgotten his own teaching and did not, therefore, rebuke Thomas? Such thinking is out of touch with the Biblical facts. A fundamental problem of trinitarian interpretation is that it constantly disregards the *context* of the verses or passages that it uses or misuses. It is a basic fact in interpretation that “a text taken out of context is a pretext.” Thomas’ words are only correctly understood within the whole context of John’s Gospel. Here we can only consider a few directly relevant points:

The memorable conversation which Jesus had with his disciples not long before his crucifixion would undoubtedly have imprinted itself on Thomas’ memory; it was about seeing the Father, who is none other than Yahweh:

John 14:

<sup>8</sup> Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.”

<sup>9</sup> Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”

<sup>10</sup> Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works.

<sup>11</sup> Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.”

In view of this discourse, when Thomas saw the crucified Christ, now “raised from the dead by the glory of the Father” (Rom.6:4), standing before him, Jesus’ words “whoever has seen me has seen the Father” now quite literally “came to life” before his eyes. He now saw the Father in Christ in a way he had never done before and exclaimed “My Lord and my God,” a phrase which would readily come to the lips of a Jew at seeing such a vision. It echoes Isaiah’s words, “For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD (Yahweh) of hosts!” (Isa. 6:5). Undoubtedly, Thomas spoke for all the other apostles in the room.

It should also be noticed that the reason Jesus gives for saying that anyone who has seen him has seen the Father is expressed in the words, “I am in the Father and the Father is in me,” which is stated twice (Jn.14:10,11), thereby emphasizing their importance. This repeated statement is not meant

only to affirm the intimacy of his relationship with the Father in metaphorical language but to state an actual spiritual fact, namely, that the Father lives in him and that “the Father who dwells in me does his work” (v.10). In other words, the indwelling of the Father in him is the dynamic spiritual reality of Jesus’ life and ministry. Jesus, for his part, lives wholly in the Father which, in practical terms means living wholly under His authority: “The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority” (v.10).

The indwelling of the Father in Jesus was something that Jesus had mentioned not only towards the end of his earthly ministry but already at its beginning. Thomas would certainly have remembered that Jesus had spoken of his body as Yahweh’s temple (Jn.2:19), all the more so because what Jesus said was quoted against Jesus himself at his trial (Mt.26:61; Mk.14:58). And since Jesus’ body was Yahweh’s temple, it is evident that Yahweh dwelt in him bodily (Col.2:9). In regard to the resurrection, it is specifically stated in John 2:22 that “When therefore he was raised (by Yahweh God) from the dead, *his disciples remembered* that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.” Would not Thomas be one of the disciples who remembered this? And would not this astonishing experience of Christ standing before him because of having been raised by the power of Yahweh, just as Jesus had said would happen, have caused Thomas to burst forth in praise and adoration to Yahweh in the words often addressed to Him by His people, “My Lord and my God”? In view of these facts, what is the

more likely: that Thomas worshipped Jesus or worshipped the God who had raised him according to His word?

As a monotheist, Thomas could *only* have properly addressed the words “My Lord and my God” to Yahweh alone. But the significance of this confession lies in the fact that Thomas had now come to realize that Yahweh had indeed come into the world bodily in the man Jesus the Messiah, having “made His dwelling among us” (Jn.1:14). The phrase “Yahweh (the LORD) my God” occurs no less than 36 times in the OT; it was therefore a frequent form of address to Yahweh and would thus readily come to the lips of a Jew.

Consider, too, the fact that the Jews prayed facing the temple (when it still stood in Jerusalem) and its “holy of holies”. This was in accordance with the Scriptures, as can be seen in Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the temple as recorded in 2Chronicles 6:

<sup>21</sup> “And listen to the pleas of your servant and of your people Israel, *when they pray toward this place*. And listen from heaven your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive.”

<sup>26</sup> “When heaven is shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against you, *if they pray toward this place* and acknowledge your name and turn from their sin, when you afflict them, <sup>27</sup> then hear in heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel.”

<sup>29</sup> “Whatever prayer, whatever plea is made by any man or by all your people Israel, each knowing his own affliction and his own sorrow and *stretching out his hands toward this house*,  
<sup>30</sup> then hear from heaven your dwelling place and forgive and

render to each whose heart you know, according to all his ways, for you, you only, know the hearts of the children of mankind.”

When the Jews uttered their prayers toward the temple, were they praying to the temple or to the One whose Presence was in it (2Chr.6:2)? Thomas had, evidently, finally come to understand the truth Jesus had spoken in John 2:19 about his being God’s temple, and his teaching about the Father as the one who spoke and acted in him. Now seeing with his own eyes the fulfillment of the temple (Jesus) having been raised up by the power of Yahweh God and now standing before him, is it at all strange that he would have cried out “My Lord and my God”? Why, then, must trinitarians assume that the words Thomas spoke were not addressed to Yahweh, who had now through Jesus become his Lord and his God in a profoundly experiential way?

Another thing that the indoctrinated trinitarian mind seems incapable of grasping, even though it stands in plain view throughout the OT, is that the title “Lord God” is the standard form of address to *Yahweh*. Without having to refer to the Hebrew text, anyone can see that “LORD God” or “Lord GOD” (where the word in small caps represents the name “Yahweh”) occurs in 383 verses in the ESV (210 times in Ezekiel alone!). But “Lord” and “God” occur with far greater frequency when they are used separately though in close conjunction, which is the case in Thomas’ exclamation where “Lord” and “God” are connected by the conjunction “and”. Thus when “Lord” and “God” are not joined together

as the one title “Lord God,” but nonetheless occur together in the same verse, the count immediately increases to 2312 occurrences (ESV), 281 times in Deuteronomy alone, and 110 times in the Psalms. (The last two numbers refer to number of verses; in terms of number of hits, it would be 487 in Deuteronomy and 133 in Psalms.)

What all this means is that Thomas’ exclamation is something that comes straight out of the Hebrew Bible, and would have come out spontaneously from the lips of anyone steeped in the OT. What is also absolutely clear is that “Lord” and “God” are titles applied to Yahweh, especially when used in combination. Therefore, applying this combination to Jesus does not prove that Jesus is God (as many trinitarians suppose) but could only prove that Jesus is *Yahweh*, yet this is not a “proof” that trinitarians would want to arrive at because it would confuse their “God the Father” with “God the Son”.

In short, John 20:28 is of no value whatever to trinitarianism. But what it does proclaim is that Thomas had come to see the reality of Yahweh in and through Christ. He saw “the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God” (Isa. 35:2). The words that Thomas uttered remind us of words in the Psalms such as, “Awake and rouse yourself for my vindication, for my cause, my God and my Lord! Vindicate me, O LORD, my God, according to your righteousness” (Ps.35:23,24).

In view of the Biblical evidence, will we insist that these words in John 20:28 referred to Jesus? Or were they addressed to God in response to Jesus’ appearance to Thomas, which was so overwhelming an experience? It is not unusual even



today in the secular world for people to exclaim in astonishment “My God”. We feel repulsed by this exclamation when it comes from the mouth of an unbeliever; but are there no circumstances in which a believer might make such an exclamation to God, especially when, in the words of C.S. Lewis, they are “surprised by joy”?

### **John 21:17, “Lord, you know everything”**

He [Jesus] said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”

The words “Lord, you know everything” have been used by some trinitarians to argue for Jesus’ omniscience. This could be considered an instance of trinitarianism trying to make “a mountain out of a molehill” (here turning relative into absolute), because in this context it need not mean more than “Lord, you know me through and through; you know that I love you”. To turn a statement relative to Peter into a statement of absolute knowledge is typical of trinitarian argumentation. It also goes against Jesus’ own declaration that there was indeed something important that he did not know, namely, the time of the end of the age and the coming of the Son of man; this is known only to the Father, He alone having absolute knowledge of everything:

**Matthew 24:36-37** “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man [i.e. his coming will be unexpected, v.38].” (NIV)

Elisha was credited with knowing everything the Syrian king spoke in regard to his plans against Israel. As a result, Israel was constantly forewarned by the prophet and was prepared for Syria’s attacks. Bewildered by the fact that he could never catch Israel off-guard, the king tried to find out whether someone in his inner circle was betraying his plans to Israel. He was then told the true source of his problem, “Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom.” (2Kings 6:12)

What God can do through a man who is wholly yielded to Him is truly wonderful, and the Bible furnishes us with many examples of what God has accomplished through faithful men. Jesus was granted to know all that was necessary for him to complete his mission for the reconciliation of mankind with God; so there is no doubt that far more was revealed to him than was revealed to Elisha. Jesus as the only perfect man is certainly unique among men, and through him God was able to accomplish the matchless work of “reconciling the world to Himself” (2Cor. 5:19), “making peace by the blood of his cross” (Col.1:20).

## **The importance of the teaching about Christ in Acts**

The messages in Acts that immediately followed the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost were spoken as a direct result of the filling of the Holy Spirit, so these are determinative for the understanding of the person of Christ. Yet it is hard to find so much as a hint of the deity of Christ in Acts, while his humanity stands out clearly. Since the alleged deity of Christ is not a factor in the earliest Spirit-filled apostolic preaching in Acts nor, indeed, anywhere else in Acts, there is nothing in particular to discuss in this important book relevant to trinitarianism.

But there is an important observation that should be carefully considered: The church was equipped with power from above at Pentecost, and in that power went forth to proclaim the Gospel to the ends of the earth. That power is no longer evident in the churches today, and this must clearly be related to the fact that the church is today proclaiming a message which is based on a different theology and Christology than that proclaimed in Acts.

### **Romans 9:5**

Because there are no punctuations in the Greek text, the meaning derived from the text depends on the way the translator chooses to punctuate it. The possible ways of translating Romans 9:5 are made very clear in NIV:

Theirs (i.e. of the Jews) are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! {Or *Christ, who is over all. God be forever praised!* Or *Christ. God who is over all be forever praised!*} Amen.

The two main alternative translations, which are not substantially different from each other because both attribute the praise to God not Christ, are given in the brackets for Romans 9:5. NIV, being a trinitarian translation, places their preferred translation in the main text. The other trinitarian Bible versions obviously follow this same preference, but the RSV is a notable exception: “to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ. God who is over all be blessed for ever. Amen.”

The RSV translation (and those in the NIV brackets) is definitely the correct translation for three very strong reasons:

(1) Paul has clearly declared his monotheism in several places, and in 1Cor.8:6 he stated plainly that “for us there is *one God, the Father*, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and *one Lord, Jesus Christ*, through whom are all things and through whom we exist”. For this reason Paul would never describe Jesus as “God”. Jesus is always consistently “Lord” in the Pauline writings. The following are other examples of Paul’s monotheism:

**1Timothy 1:17**, “To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only (*monos*) God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.”

**1Timothy 6:** “<sup>15</sup> which (i.e. Christ’s coming again, v.14) God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only (*monos*) Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, <sup>16</sup> who alone (*monos*) is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.” (NIV)

(2) Exactly the same words of praise as in Rom.9:5, “he who is blessed forever,” refer to Yahweh God in the Greek text of 2 Corinthians 11:31, “The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever”. It is, therefore, not directed to Jesus in Rom.9:5; Jesus is the *cause* of the praise not its object. For ease of comparison, the two texts are placed side by side:

**Rom.9:5:** *ho ōn (epi pantōn theos) eulogētos eis tous aiōnas*

**2Cor.11:31:** *ho ōn eulogētos eis tous aiōnas*

Apart from the words placed in parentheses to facilitate comparison, the phrase “he who is blessed forever” is precisely the same in both verses. In 2Cor.11:31 the reference to God as “the God and Father of the Lord Jesus” is made *before* this phrase, while in Rom.9:5 the reference to God is placed *within* the phrase as the One who is “over all God” (*epi tantōn theos*). Since the Apostle used this phrase specifically of “the God and Father of the Lord Jesus” in 2Cor.11:31, there is no reason to suppose that in Rom. 9:5 he would refer to Jesus as “God over all,” a phrase which we can be certain that no Jew, including Paul, would apply to anyone except to Yahweh.

(3) Examining the matter within Romans itself, what puts the matter beyond any dispute is (a) that the same phrase translated here as “blessed forever” (*eulogētos eis tous aiōnas*) is also applied to Yahweh God as the Creator “who is blessed forever! Amen” (Rom.1:25). And (b) the concluding “Amen” is a special feature of praise to Yahweh God in Romans where it occurs five times. Apart from Romans 1:25 and 9:5, there are the following:

**Romans 11:36**, “For from him (Yahweh God, cf. v.33ff) and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”

**Romans 15:33**, “May the God of peace be with you all. Amen.” Here God is praised as the Giver of peace to all with whom He resides (*meta*, “gen. with, in company with, among; by, in; on the side of,” UBS *Dictionary*)

**Romans 16:27**, “to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.”

In all these verses in Romans, Yahweh God is the object of praise, and there is no reason whatever to suppose that Romans 9:5 is an exception.

## Hebrews

The Israelites were also known as “the Hebrews” or “the Jews,” so the letter to the Hebrews was written to the Jews; it was written by Jews for Jews. What trinitarians do not seem to grasp is that the Jews, especially in the first century, were

monotheists through and through, so neither the writers nor the readers would have had anything to do with trinitarianism, which cannot be reconciled with Biblical monotheism. It is, therefore, futile to attempt to extract trinitarian proof texts from Hebrews; this was something I also attempted in former days, and thus have firsthand knowledge of it. It can be accomplished only by ignorant misinterpretation or else by eisegesis, which is the usual trinitarian practice of reading one's own dogma into the text.

The first chapter of Hebrews, which is where trinitarian attempts at gathering proof texts are made, is primarily a collection of *Messianic* passages from the OT which were used by Jewish believers to convince fellow Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. These OT passages were, of course, generally familiar to the Jews and were therefore useful as a means of discussing the Messiahship of Jesus. So the letter to the Hebrews clearly shared the same goal as John's Gospel, namely to convince the Jews (and others) that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (Jn.20:31). The "Son" occurs already at the beginning of Hebrews (1:2); but this letter shares other important themes with John, specially that of Christ as "the lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world" (Jn.1:29,36). Christ as the one eternally effective sacrifice for sin is a central theme of Hebrews; the other central theme, inseparably joined to the first one, is the unique fact that Christ is both sacrifice and high priest! John 17 is frequently described as "Jesus' high priestly prayer."

Another strong point of contact between Hebrews and John is the emphasis on believing or faith. “Believe” is a key word in John’s Gospel (*pisteuō*, 98 times, far more frequent than in any other NT book), while “faith” is a key word in Hebrews (*pistis*, 32 times), concentrated mainly in chapter 11, where every instance is about faith in Yahweh. There can be no doubt that Hebrews and John not only have these major themes in common, but are also united in their unquestionable commitment to monotheism.

In Hebrews, the term “the Son” refers to the Messiah but trinitarians want to make it mean “God the Son,” which is something unthinkable to the Jews, and is certainly *not* the meaning in Hebrews or anywhere else in the Bible. Yet as trinitarians we supposed that Hebrews 1:8 provided an excellent proof text of Jesus’ deity. We did not concern ourselves with the fact that it is a quotation from Psalm 45:6, nor did we really care what those words mean in the context of that psalm:

<sup>8</sup> “But of the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.

<sup>9</sup> You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.” (Heb.1:8,9; Ps.45:6,7)

If we pay attention to Heb.1:9, we would see that, also concerning the Son, it says, “God, your God, has anointed you”. The word “anointed” is what the word “Messiah” means in Hebrew, and what “Christ” means in Greek, so the messianic



character of this passage (and of Psalm 45, from which it is quoted) is stated explicitly. Psalm 45 is a song about the enthronement of the king of Israel, who having been anointed by Yahweh acts as Yahweh's servant and regent. So if the words in Heb.1:8, "Your throne, O God," are applied to the Messianic king, then the word "God" should properly be spelt as "god" and understood in the sense in which Jesus used it in John 10.34,35 (quoting Ps.82:1,6,7) where it refers to servants and representatives of God. OT scholars are well aware of the fact that "O God" in Psalm 45:6 can only be applied in this sense in the light of OT monotheism; this is reflected in some of the translations:

*"Your divine throne* endures for ever and ever. Your royal scepter is a scepter of equity" (RSV)

*"Your throne is from God,* for ever and ever, the sceptre of your kingship a sceptre of justice" (NJB)

Robert Alter (Professor of Hebrew and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Berkeley) translates the first line as "Your throne of God is forevermore" and comments, "Some construe the Hebrew here to mean "Your throne, O God," but it would be anomalous to have an address to God in the middle of the poem because the entire Psalm is directed to the king or to his bride" (*The Book of Psalms, A Translation with Commentary*, Norton, 2007, on Ps.45:7).

Hebrews 1:10-12 quotes Psalm 102:25-27 from the Septuagint. Psalm 102:1: “Hear my prayer, O LORD (Yahweh); let my cry come to you!” The whole Psalm is a prayer of faith to Yahweh, who is mentioned many times throughout this prayer. This means that “Lord” in Ps.102:25 and Hebrews 1:10 can only refer to Yahweh. Why is this passage inserted into this collection of OT messianic passages in Hebrews 1? Is it in order to substantiate the certainty of the promise in Hebrews 1:8 that “Your throne is for ever and ever”? Or is there, too, a recognition of the unique relationship between Yahweh and Jesus in the Johannine sense that the Word/Memra of Yahweh was embodied in Jesus?

That the author of Hebrews understood Jesus in terms of both the Memra and the Shekinah is extremely likely, indeed one could say quite certainly, in view of Hebrews 1:2,3. Verse 3 speaks of Jesus as “the radiance of the glory of God” which could properly be understood by the Jews, to whom the letter was written, as a reference to the Shekinah of God. The next phrase speaks of Jesus as the image of God, which is “the exact representation of his being” (NIV); Christ as God’s image was considered earlier in this study. It then goes on to say, “sustaining all things by His (God’s) powerful word” (NIV). What is particularly interesting here is that “word” here is not *logos* but *rhēma*. It would be hard to explain the reason for this use of a different word from John except for the quite striking fact that *rhēma* is the word used in the Greek OT for God’s “word” in Isaiah 55:11. This important passage (Isa. 55:10,11) is discussed in detail in chapter 7 (“The OT roots of ‘the Word’”). The Greek OT was the Bible that the readers

of Hebrews (and other Greek speaking believers) would have been using at that time, as is widely known; so this use of the word *rhēma* could have served to indicate to them that Hebrews 1:3 points to Isaiah 55:11.

On the other hand, the humanity of Christ is emphasized more strongly in Hebrews than in any other NT letter. Hebrews 1:3 speaks also of Jesus “making purification of sins”. There is strong emphasis on the sacrificial blood in Hebrews: “blood” *in this sense* is a key word in this letter, and is far more frequent than in any other book in the NT; it occurs 21 times in Hebrews. (“Blood” occurs 19 times in Revelation, but a large proportion of these refer to blood as a consequence of divine judgment on the world.) “Flesh and blood” is a common way by which Scripture refers to a human being (Heb.2:14; Mt.16:17; 1Cor.15:50; Eph.6:12). From this it becomes perfectly clear that the humanity of Christ is absolutely essential to his “making purification of sins” for mankind’s salvation. In contrast to this, nowhere in Hebrews, or anywhere else in the NT, is it ever said that Jesus had to be God in order to make purification of sins or to “give his life as a ransom for many” (Mt.20:28; Mk.10:45).

## **The monotheism of the book of Revelation**

The Johannine book of Revelation is regarded as having a “high Christology,” mainly because of what appear to be divine titles ascribed to Christ in it. As the latest of the NT writings, it is thought to have the most developed NT

Christology. We shall take a careful look at its key features. The first thing that strikes the reader of the Revelation is the fact that the title given to Jesus above all other titles is the “Lamb” (*arnion*). This word occurs 29 times in Revelation, but one reference (Rev.13:11) refers to the antichrist who also appears as a lamb, or we might say “anti-lamb”. This means that there are 28 (= 4 x 7) references to the Lamb, and this number fits in precisely with the inbuilt pattern of the number 7 in Revelation. Thus the Lamb is central to the description of Jesus in the book. The explanation is also given explicitly in the book, for the Lamb is described as one that “was slain” and, by its blood, has redeemed the saints (Rev.1:5).

Every Jewish believer knew that the sacrificial lamb had to be “without spot or blemish” of any kind if it was to be offered up in the temple, that is, it had to be *perfect* to qualify as a sacrifice. What this means should be clear: Jesus was the perfect sacrifice for mankind. In other words, Revelation is concerned above all else with Christ as the perfect man. The Lamb is the perfect symbol of the perfect man!

The deity of Christ is, accordingly, not something that emerges in the Revelation. This becomes strikingly clear from the fact that “the Lamb” is *never* the sole object of veneration or praise; he is adored *always* and *only* together with God, and even then this only occurs on 2 or 3 occasions. On one occasion it seems as though the Lamb is the sole object of veneration even though the word “worship” is not used (5:8ff) but in v.13 God is adored together with the Lamb, and at the end of the section the word “worship” is used very probably

in relation to God together with the Lamb (v.14, but cf. next paragraph).

It is significant that the word “worship” (*proskuneō*) is used 8 times in Revelation with reference to God alone, and *never* of the Lamb alone. In only one instance it *could*, and perhaps does, refer to both God and the Lamb *together* (5:14). The uncertainty expressed by the word “could” in the previous sentence is based on the way “worship” is used in Revelation as a whole. Consider, for example, the scene of worship in Rev.7:9-12 in which countless multitudes offer veneration and praise “to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb” (v.10). Then in the very next verse (v.11), to my great surprise, all the exalted spiritual beings of the highest order in heaven “fell down on their faces before the throne and *worshipped God*” (without reference to the Lamb just mentioned in the previous verse), and offered to Him alone (“our God for ever and ever,” v.12) a seven-fold doxology.

Remarkably, even though the Lamb is said to have some kind of central position in regard to God’s throne (7:17), this is most likely to be understood as exercising God’s reign and authority over all things as His fully empowered agent or representative, as mentioned also elsewhere in the NT (Mt. 28:18; 1Cor.15:25-28); *even so*, he is never the sole object of worship. Even in the very passage where this verse (Rev.7:17) appears, we read (v.15), “they (the saints) are before the throne of *God* and serve (*latreuō*) *Him* day and night in *His* temple; and *He who sits on the throne* will spread *His* tent over them”. There is mention of the Lamb in the first part of v.17,

but the section closes with the reference going back to God alone.

Something similar to the previous examples is found in Revelation 22:3, “No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve (*latreuō*) *him*.” This is the only other place in Revelation where the word *latreuō* (to serve in a religious sense and can therefore mean ‘worship’, e.g. Rom.12:1) appears; the other is in 7:15 quoted in the previous paragraph. In both verses we read the words “serve him (sing.)” There is no problem with regard to 7:15 since only God is mentioned there; but notice that in 22:3 there is reference to both God and the Lamb, then notice the double singular: “his (sing.) servants will serve him (sing.)” Since this is very evidently an echo of 7:15, there can be no doubt that the reference is to God. So even though the Lamb is granted a place on God’s throne (Rev.3:21), God still remains the One who alone is worshipped. This pattern in Revelation shows how remarkably God-centered it is.

Throughout the whole of Revelation 4, the Lord God Almighty (v.8) is the *sole* object of worship. Chapter 5 is a continuation or extension of the heavenly scene in chapter 4. This means that the adoration of the Lamb takes place *within the context* of the worship of the One who sits on the throne mentioned in 4:2 and 5:13, and is not a separate event.

If all this strong evidence of theocentricity in Revelation was not sufficiently surprising to me, because of my strong trinitarian background and emphasis on Christocentricity, there were more surprises to come in the course of my

investigation. For example, looking at the scene of worship in Rev.15:1ff, the “Lord God Almighty... King of the ages” is once again the sole object of worship, but what struck me is that this song of worship is “the song of *the Lamb*,” which in the same verse (v.3) is compared to “the song of Moses”—the song that Moses taught the Israelites to sing in praise and worship to Yahweh (Ex.15:1-18). In other words, *it is the Lamb himself who teaches the saints to worship (proskuneō appears in v.4) “the Lord God Almighty”!*

Nor is this the only instance. At the end of Revelation, we find that John is so overwhelmed by all that has been revealed to him through that special angel (who had been commissioned to serve as his heavenly guide) that he “fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. But he said to me, ‘Do not do it! ...Worship God!’” (22:8,9). There would be nothing particularly remarkable about these words of the angel until we read that “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches” (22:16). What does this mean? It means that this angel is not just one of the many angels in heaven but *Jesus’ angel*, one sent specially by him. Significantly, it is this angel of Jesus who instructs John to worship God alone. This instruction is consistent with the use of “worship” (*proskuneō*) in Revelation as a whole, where the Lord God Almighty is always the central object of worship (4:10; 7:11; 11:16; 14:7; 15:4; 19:4,10; 22:9). The consistent monotheism of Revelation should now be clear to us; and we should not be surprised

when we find that the same is true of all the Johannine writings.<sup>27</sup>

## Revelation 1

Revelation 1 is another passage used for arguing for Jesus' preexistence and deity. But the portrayal of Jesus as the high priest in heaven in this chapter does not provide any basis for arguing for his preexistence because the vision is seen long *after* Jesus' resurrection and exaltation. In fact the picture is strikingly akin to the portrayal of "one like a son of man" in Daniel 7:13 (the same words are found in Rev.1:13; also 14:14). There is also the same reference to his "coming in the clouds of heaven" (Rev.1:7).

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<sup>27</sup> Note on Rev.22:8: We have seen that in Revelation the word "worship" is never used except in relation to God alone, yet strangely enough John says: "I fell down to worship *at the feet of the angel*" (Rev.22:8). This seems almost incomprehensible especially in view of the fact that the worship of angels is among the things condemned in Colossians 2:18,19; but it is also utterly incompatible with the monotheism of Revelation itself. It seems that the only way it can be understood in this context is in light of what was said shortly before this, "the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place" (Rev.22:6). It seems that John may have thought that what these words indicated is that the angel standing before him was none other than "the angel of Yahweh," frequently mentioned in the OT, who was *a manifestation of Yahweh Himself*. It is only revealed to John some 8 verses later that this angel is in fact an angel sent by Jesus (Rev.22:16); so this angel was certainly one of God's angels but not that "angel of Yahweh" well known in the OT.



James D.G. Dunn suggests that some of the language in Revelation 1 is reminiscent of the descriptions of visions of angels in ancient literature. Daniel, for example, describes a vision in these words, 10:5,6:

<sup>5</sup> I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist.

<sup>6</sup> His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude. (Daniel 10:5,6)

*The Expositor's Commentary* remarks, “Verses 5-6 are probably the most detailed description in Scripture of the appearance of an angel”. Noting the description, “his eyes like flaming torches,” the commentator says that ‘Revelation 1:14 states that Christ appeared to John with “eyes ... like blazing fire”’.

But there are other important similarities that this commentary does not mention; for example:

- Daniel 10:5, “a belt of the finest gold around his waist” (NIV), cf. Rev.1:13, “a golden sash around his chest” (NIV), cp. “a long robe tied at the waist with a belt of gold” (NJB).
- Daniel 10:6: “legs like the gleam of burnished bronze,” cf. Revelation 1:15: “His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace” (NIV), cp. “his feet like burnished bronze when it has been refined in a furnace” (NJB).

- Daniel 10:6, “his voice like the sound of a multitude” (NIV), cf. “the sound of his voice was like the roar of a multitude” (NJB), cp. Rev. 1:15 “his voice was like the sound of rushing waters”. The words translated as the “sound of a multitude” can refer to the sound of crowds of people, of water (e.g. rain), or even the rushing of chariot wheels, as *The Expositor’s Commentary* also mentions.

Thus Revelation 1 certainly describes the risen Christ in terms of the grandeur and glory of a heavenly being but does not provide the basis for arguing for his deity. Indeed, another angelic being is portrayed in similarly splendid terms in Revelation 10. Again I quote *The Expositor’s Commentary* on Daniel 10:4ff: “Note Rev 10:1, where the angel is depicted as robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head, his face shining like the sun, and his legs like fiery pillars—a description with striking similarities to this one in Daniel.”

Since *The Expositor’s Commentary* has mentioned Revelation 10:1, notice, too, that the description of this “mighty angel coming down from heaven” says that “his face was like the sun” which is exactly how the face of Christ, as the resurrected one, is described in Rev.1:16.

But the similarities between the vision in Daniel 10 and Revelation 1 extend still further. There is also the similarity of the effect on Daniel and on John, respectively: “I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale ... I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground” (Dan.10:8,9), which is not essentially different from “I fell at his feet as though dead”

(Rev.1:17). Again, in both instances, a hand is placed upon them while the person they have seen speaks to them.

In view of all this, there can be no doubt that Christ is portrayed in angelic terms in Rev.1. But the inclusion of the title “I am the first and the last” (Rev.1:17), which may be a divine title, could suggest that a reference to the OT “angel of the Lord” is intended. However, “The first and the last” is a title used of Christ on three occasions (1:17; 2:8; 22:13), though never of God in the Revelation.

But there may be a relationship in substance with Isaiah 41:4, “I, the LORD, am the first, and with the last. I am He” (NASB), but some uncertainty of meaning is underlined by the variety of translations, such as: “I, the LORD—with the first of them and with the last—I am he” (NIV) and “I, Yahweh, who am the first and till the last I shall still be there” (NJB). Even so, the parallels with Isaiah 44:6 and 48:12 are very close in their wording.

But it is always necessary to exercise caution when trying to prove a theological point by the use of similar titles. For example, all true disciples are called “the light of the world” by Jesus (Mt. 5:14), and he also speaks of himself by the exact same title, “the light of the world” (Jn.8:12; 9:5). Can we argue from this that if Jesus is God, so are we? If not, then why is it constantly assumed that when a divine title is applied to Christ it must mean that he is God? If, in the case of “the light of the world,” it can only be properly understood to mean that we are “the light of the world” *because* the Spirit of Christ who indwells us shines through us with the light of Christ, then does it not mean the same thing in regard to

Christ? Christ is “the first and the last” by virtue of the fact that the Father who indwells him is “the first and the last”. This fundamentally important point is simply disregarded by trinitarians. Moreover, as usual, trinitarians intentionally or carelessly overlook the fact that all three references in Isaiah (mentioned in the previous paragraph) refer to *Yahweh* by “first” and “last,” so to argue for the identity of the references in Revelation with those in Isaiah only results in identifying Jesus with *Yahweh* and, as we have seen before, this is not the result that trinitarians wish to achieve because it results in reducing the First and Second Persons of the Trinity to one and the same person, thereby eliminating the Trinity.

Moreover, “first” and “last” in Isaiah has a meaning which could not possibly apply to Christ in the use of these terms in Revelation, thus Isaiah 43:10b,11: “Before me no god was formed [therefore *Yahweh* is “the first”], nor shall there be any after me [therefore *Yahweh* is “the last”]. I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior.” The meaning here is evident: Since He is both first and last, He is the *only* God and Savior. In other words, “the first” and “the last” is another way in which the absolutely resolute monotheism of Isaiah’s message is proclaimed.

We can conclude from the discussion in the preceding paragraphs that it is indeed possible that Christ is portrayed in Rev.1 as “the angel of the Lord,” an epiphany of *Yahweh*. If the preceding exegesis is on the right track, then it shows a link between Christ in the NT and the angel of the Lord in the OT, even though Revelation 1 may provide the only such link with the angel of the Lord.

## God and the Lamb in the Book of Revelation

We can see in the book of Revelation how the phrase “to the glory of God the Father” (Phil.2:11) is revealed with wonderful clarity.

Many references to the book of Revelation have been made because, as we have seen, trinitarian Christology has considered it fertile ground from which to dig up proof-texts without any regard for the context in which they are found, that is, the main themes of Revelation are simply disregarded, and texts are torn out of their context. For example, it should have been observed that Yahweh God *alone* is spoken of as “the One who sits on the throne” no less than 12 times in the Revelation. “Throne” is a key word in Revelation, occurring 47 times in 37 verses; it is the symbol of power, authority, and sovereignty. Most of these references to “throne” refer to *God’s* throne, that is, to His kingship and sovereignty; but a few refer to the delegated (by God) authority of other beings. In 2:13 there is even a reference to “Satan’s throne”; he always seeks to usurp God’s kingship.

Jesus, in direct contrast to this, always sought to live in total obedience to his Father (cf. Rev.1:6, “his God and Father”), for he was “obedient unto death” (Phil.2:8), a truth captured in the striking picture of “the Lamb that was slain” in Revelation. It is clearly because of this (cf. Phil.2:9-11) that the truly beautiful picture emerges at the conclusion and finale of the Revelation in which God is seen to share His throne with the Lamb: “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne

of God and of the Lamb” (Rev.22:1, cf.3). This sharing of God’s throne fulfills what Jesus mentioned in Rev.3:21, “The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.” This is also to say that the throne he is granted to sit on is essentially the Father’s throne. The phrase “the throne of God and of the Lamb” appears only in these two verses in the Revelation.

As we noted earlier, the “Lamb” as applied to Jesus appears 28 (4x7) times in Revelation and is, therefore, a key word. The slain Lamb portrays Christ as the sacrifice for sin through his death and resurrection. Having faithfully and victoriously completed the mission which God our Father had entrusted to him, he was granted to sit upon God’s throne (cf. again Phil.2:9-11), just as all those who conquer will be granted a place on Christ’s throne (Rev.3:21). Peter in Acts 2:36 proclaimed that “God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, *both Lord and Christ,*” which is also why Paul speaks of him as “the *Lord Jesus Christ*”. Notice again that it is God who has made him Lord. Lordship was *conferred* on him by God, and the same is true of his messiahship (Christ). This is something that we who were brought up as trinitarians must not lose sight of if we are not again to stray from the truth of God’s word.

The fact is that in Revelation the central object of worship is *God*, our Father. This is specifically stated, indeed commanded, in Rev.22:9, “Worship God”. This is all the more significant when we realize that here it is *Christ* who is speaking through his angel (Rev.22:16).

The many references to God’s “throne” in Revelation speak of His universal reign; we are thereby reminded of the “kingdom of *God*” so central to Jesus’ teaching. “The kingdom of God” is a term which occurs 31 times in Jesus’ teaching in Luke; its equivalent “the kingdom of heaven” also occurs 31 times in Matthew, where “heaven” is a metonym for God. What this means is that God’s kingship is a central and vital element in Jesus’ teaching. From this it should also be evident that Yahweh God is Himself central to Jesus’ teaching. Has it ever crossed our minds that exalting Jesus to innate equality with Yahweh God is contrary to his teaching? And if by so doing we are disobedient to him, what will happen to us on that Day?

### **“God” in the Book of Revelation is Yahweh**

This is made clear at the very beginning of Revelation: “Grace to you and peace from *him who is and who was and who is to come*” (Rev.1:4), and again in verse 8, “the Lord God, *who is and who was and who is to come*, the Almighty.” This is easily recognized, as Bible commentators have observed, as the equivalent of Exodus 3:14, “God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM. {Or *I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE*} This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you’” (NIV). It also reminds us of such descriptions of God as “from everlasting to everlasting you are God” (Ps.90:2); “they (the heavens) will pass away, but you are the same, and your years

have no end” (Ps.102:26,27); and “I, Yahweh, do not change” (Mal.3:6).

The same divine description as in Revelation 1:4,8 occurs also in 4:8 in the following magnificent way, “day and night they never cease to say, ‘Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, *who was and is and is to come!*’”. The thrice holy recalls the vision in Isaiah 6. “The Lord God” is the familiar title of Yahweh in the OT.

In the NT, “The Almighty” (*pantokratōr*) as a title of Yahweh is unique to the Revelation, where it occurs 9 times (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 16:14; 19:6; 19:15; 21:22; it appears in a quotation from the OT in 2Cor.6:18). *Pantokratōr* (“the *Almighty, All-Powerful, Omnipotent (One)* only of God”, BDAG Greek-English lexicon) occurs frequently in the Greek OT (including the Apocrypha), where it occurs 181 times, and is used to translate two titles of Yahweh: “The Lord of Hosts” and *El-Shaddai*. It occurs an astonishing 55 times in the relatively short book of Zechariah, where it usually translates “Yahweh Sabaoth” (NJB, or “the LORD of hosts” in most other versions, but “the Almighty” in NIV). “Therefore say to them, Thus declares the LORD of hosts: Return to me, says the LORD of hosts, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts” (Zech.1:3).

“*Shaddai*” appears 48 times in the Hebrew Bible, of which 31 times are in Job: “Blessed is the man whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty [Hebrew *Shaddai*]” (Job 5:17, NIV). Its first occurrences in the Bible are in Genesis 17:1, “the LORD (Yahweh) appeared to him (Abraham) and said, ‘I am God Almighty (Heb: *El-Shaddai*);



walk before me and be blameless’,” and Genesis 28:3, “May God Almighty {*El-Shaddai*} bless you and make you fruitful” (NIV). When we look at these examples, we cannot help being struck by how closely “the Almighty” relates to man in spite of His unimaginable exaltedness and power. This is a striking characteristic about Yahweh; it is evident throughout the Bible. In Revelation we see that the Almighty is closely involved in what goes on in the world, and that He is using such means as are necessary to accomplish His purposes for mankind.

We have already noted that “throne” is a key word in the Revelation. The concept of God seated upon His throne and reigning over the world and the universe occurs frequently in the OT, particularly in the Psalms: “Yahweh has fixed his throne in heaven, his sovereign power rules over all” (Ps.103:19, NJB); “You, O LORD, reign forever; your throne endures to all generations” (Lam.5:19). In Matthew 5:34 Jesus speaks of heaven as “God’s throne” and the earth as “His footstool” (Mt.5:34,35).

Especially relevant for the Revelation is Isaiah’s vision of God seated upon His throne, “In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple” (Isa.6:1); and all the more so because of verse 3, “And one called to another (i.e. the seraphim, v.2) and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD (Yahweh) of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!’”; this thrice repeated “holy” is echoed in Revelation 4:8: “day and night they never cease to say, ‘Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!’” The throne

(Ezek. 1:26), in what is often called Ezekiel's heavenly "chariot vision," is also a vision of Yahweh's throne: "The radiance of the encircling light was like the radiance of the bow in the clouds on rainy days. The sight was like the glory of Yahweh" (Ezek. 1:28, NJB).

### **"I have made you like God" (Exodus 7:1) —a man appointed to function as God's representative to carry out His purposes**

In the heavenly atmosphere of the book of Revelation there seems, almost inevitably, something God-like about Jesus the Lamb. This is perhaps what gave us the impression that we could easily find material in it to demonstrate the trinitarian doctrine of his deity. We simply assumed that the titles used of him were divine titles, such as "I am the first and the last" (Rev. 1:17, which we discuss elsewhere in this study), and are surprised when upon analysis it turns out that these are not necessarily divine titles. This raises the question: "Does God's granting of divine titles, such as 'the Lord,' to Jesus mean that he should be worshipped on the same level with Yahweh God?" We thought that the answer should be in the affirmative, but we discover to our surprise the answer which Revelation gives does not correspond to our ideas.

Evidently, there is something concerning the divine revelation about Jesus that we failed to perceive, and therefore understood the matter wrongly. In this matter of God-likeness, there is striking similarity with the case of Moses where

God said, “*I have made you like God to Pharaoh*” (Ex.7:1, NIV) or, “I make you *as* God to Pharaoh” (NASB). God’s own divine status and authority are conferred upon Moses, so that interaction between Moses and Pharaoh now becomes the interaction between God and Pharaoh, who is the king of the world as far as the Israelites who lived in Egypt were concerned. Moses now comes to Pharaoh not just as a servant of God or a prophet of God (as one having power and authority to act in God’s Name), he *is* God as far as Pharaoh is concerned. But the same was true already in regard to Moses’ relationship to Aaron (and therefore to the priesthood) Ex.4:16, “He shall speak for you to the people, and he shall be your mouth, and *you shall be as God to him.*” Thus the conferring of a divine status on a person is not a totally new idea in Scripture. Jesus, in fact, confirmed this fact in Jn.10:34,35 quoting Ps.82:6.

We have already considered Psalm 45 (NIV: “A wedding song” for the king of Israel) where the king (v.1) is spoken of as “God” in verse 6. But the very next verse makes it clear that this “God” or “god” is not *the supreme God*, because “the Most High God” (Ps.78:35,56; etc) is “your God” who has conferred upon this “god” a place “above your companions” (Ps.45:7). The description or title “Most High” (Elyôn, עֶלְיוֹן) is applied to Yahweh 53 times in the OT, of which 22 are in the Psalms. There was never any question of worshipping the earthly king of Israel, not even the greatest of the Israelites, Moses. This is because ultimately *only Yahweh is the true King of Israel* and, as the Most High, He alone is the object of worship. See, for example, the majestic declaration: “Thus

says the LORD (Yahweh), *the King of Israel* and his Redeemer, the LORD (Yahweh) of hosts: ‘I am the first and I am the last; *besides me there is no god.*’ (Isa.44:6); and again: “The LORD (Yahweh) has taken away the judgments against you; he has cleared away your enemies. *The King of Israel*, the LORD (Yahweh), is in your midst; you shall never again fear evil.” (Zep.3:15) Perhaps all this will help us to understand a little better the fact that in Biblical monotheism no one, no matter how highly exalted by God he may be—and Jesus is certainly more highly exalted than any other—can ever be the object of worship *instead of* Yahweh.

What these examples show is that the transcendent God carries out His saving work immanently through the holy vessels that He has chosen. Jesus is His chosen one (“My Chosen One,” Lk.9.35; cf. Lk.23.35, Gk.) above all others. In the NT we see that God does everything in and through the Lord Jesus Christ, hence the familiar terms “in Christ” and “through Christ” so frequent in Paul’s letters. However, what we tend to forget is that Christ is *God’s* chosen vessel to carry out *God’s* (not Christ’s own) eternal purposes.

Another instance, which was the subject of much discussion in Jewish literature, was the remarkable angel who was appointed by God to lead the Israelites through the wilderness and guard them along the way. What is remarkable about this angel is that he is the bearer of God’s Name, “My Name is in him” (Ex.23:21). From v.22 it is clear that to obey him is to obey God, for it is God who speaks and acts in and through him. This angel is, as far as Israel is concerned, God Himself by virtue of being the bearer of God’s Name. Even

so, there was never any question of worshipping this angel, for they were only to “Worship the Lord your God” (v.25).

The problem for us is that we have been so deeply indoctrinated by trinitarianism that we find it easier to accept ditheism or tritheism, in regard to Christ, than monotheism. Our minds have been so shackled by the trinitarian form of polytheism that, when unshackled, we don't even know what to think. It is rather like those prisoners who have spent most of their lives in prison with the result that, when released, they have no idea where to go and, consequently, choose to return to prison as the only home they have known. To avoid returning to error will, evidently, only be possible through an abundant supply of God's grace and strength to love His truth no matter what the cost, for it is the narrow and difficult road that leads to life.

## **What can we do in the present situation of the church?**

Is there anything that we, on our part, can do in the current situation of the Christian church to prevent ourselves from sliding back into error? By the grace of God, there is. We can learn, as Jesus' disciple, to be like him in his single-minded devotion to his Father. The whole NT testifies unequivocally to the fact that he loved his Father with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mt. 22:37; Mk.12:30; Lk.10:27). What he taught us to do, he first did himself. When we love God our Father in this way we will find our hearts wholly united

with Christ, because it was he who taught and practiced it. Moreover, loving the Father should not be difficult when we realize that it was He who first loved us (1Jn.4:19) and loved us to the extent that “He did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all” (Rom.8:32; cf. Jn.3:16). “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!” (1John 3:1, NIV)—“And we have *known* and *believed* the love that God has for us” (1Jn.4:16, NKJV).

As for prayer, we can learn to call upon God our Father as “Abba, Father” just as Jesus himself prayed (Mk.14:36), and as the Spirit of God, “the Spirit of adoption,” enables us to pray (Rom. 8:14,15). Galatians 4:6 reads, “And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying (*krazō* is a strong word, expressing intensity), ‘Abba! Father!’” These words make it very clear that if the Spirit of Christ is in us, we will call or cry out from our hearts, “Abba, Father”. It may also be of significance that this verse states that it is not the Son who sends His Spirit into our hearts, but it is God our Father Himself who does this.

Further, we can learn to meditate on heavenly things by meditating, for example, on the heavenly scene described in Revelation 4 and 5, noticing how the heavenly multitudes worship “the One seated upon the throne” (Yahweh God, the Father, is described in this way, or its equivalent, 12 times in Revelation). “Throne” is a key word in Revelation occurring 47 times (of these, 14 times in Rev.4, and 5 times in Rev.5). As mentioned above, the Lamb was granted to sit with God our Father on *God’s* throne, just as the overcomers will be granted to share Christ’s throne with Christ (Rev.3:21). After

the opening of the seal in Rev.5, the Lamb is praised and adored together with God. By visualizing these wonderful scenes of worship, and learning the meaning of the doxologies in them, we could learn to worship in that same heavenly manner, for are not these things written for our instruction? Paul exhorted us to set our minds on the things above (Col.3:2). Rev.4 and 5 can certainly help us do this in a deeper way.

Perhaps it was some such heavenly vision of worship that inspired Paul to burst forth in the intensity of his beautiful doxology, “Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen” (1Tim.1:17, NASB). We may wonder what had caused him to suddenly pour forth this doxology in the midst of writing his letter. Was it the reference to eternal life in the previous verse? Would our hearts similarly rise in praise to God our Father at the thought of eternal life? Let us also not overlook his strong monotheistic affirmation of “the only (*monos*) God (*theos*)” in the center of that doxology.







## Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible

### **“Yahweh” in the Hebrew Bible (“the Old Testament”)**

**T**he Name Yahweh (יהוה, YHWH) occurs 6828 times in the OT; this figure does not include the 49 occurrences of “Yah,” such as in Exodus 15:2; Psalm 68:5; and the many expressions of “Halleluiah” or Hallelu-Yah, “praise Yahweh,” in the Psalms. (If we include the suffixed –iah (=Jah or Yah) in such names as Isaiah and Jeremiah, and the prefixed Je- or Jeho- (e.g. Jehu, and Jehoshaphat, “Yahweh judges”), the number would be further increased by thousands.) The total number of references to Yahweh in the OT amounts, therefore, to far beyond 10,000.

The word “God,” Elohim (אלהים), is found 2600 times; but a considerable portion of this number refers to the many other gods mentioned in the OT. So the number of references to “God” (especially if the references to other gods are excluded) in the OT amounts altogether to little more than

1/3 of the references to “Yahweh”. The absolute preponderance of “Yahweh” is perfectly evident. The combination “Yahweh (‘LORD’) God (Elohim)” (יהוה אלהים) appears 891 times in 817 verses.

From these figures it is clear that Yahweh is by far the predominant Name in the OT. Moreover, nowhere is there any sign of there being another person equal to Yahweh or that there is more than one person within Yahweh Himself.

### **What will the trinitarian do about Yahweh?**

What is truly remarkable is the fact that in spite of the huge number of references to Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible, *His Name does not appear in the major versions of the English Bible*; it has, in effect, been eliminated from all of them! (The New Jerusalem Bible is a notable exception.) This serves the trinitarian purpose perfectly because it thereby avoids having directly to face the crucial question: *How exactly is trinitarianism compatible with Yahweh?* The truth is: trinitarianism has no answer to this question! That is because Yahweh, who is consistently revealed as the only true God besides whom there is no other, simply cannot be made to fit into the trinitarian scheme of things. It is no more than a subterfuge to identify Him with “the Father” in the Trinity, besides whom there are two other persons co-equal with Him—something abominable to Yahweh, as anyone who has so much as read the OT ought to know, but, blinded by trinitarian dogma, failed to see or care.

What a trinitarian must come to grips with is that he or she is faced with a stark choice: Either Yahweh *or* the Trinity but not both. Either God is one or there are three. Trinitarianism tried to “have its cake and eat it,” that is, tried to have the best of both worlds, monotheism *and* trinitarianism, by reducing “God” to a “divine nature” in which the three co-equal persons are made to participate. The final outcome of trying to ride two horses at the same time is not difficult to imagine; and the spiritual end of those who suppose that they can get the best from two totally incompatible worlds (monotheism versus trinitarian polytheism) should also not be difficult to foresee. From the point of view of Scripture, it is utterly foolish to suppose that a choice could be avoided, because the final spiritual outcome will be disastrous. Elijah put the choice before the Israelites on Mount Carmel: “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD (Yahweh) is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.” (1Kings 18:21) But long before the remarkable events on Mount Carmel, Joshua had already called the people of Israel to face up to the same kind of choice, “choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve” (Joshua 24:15). He made his own stand unequivocally clear before all the people: “as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD (Yahweh).” May the Lord grant us courage to make the same stand today.

## The Name “Yahweh”

In NT times the Jews (including, of course, the members of the Jewish church) would for the most part have known the Hebrew Bible because it was regularly read in the synagogues (Lk.4:16f). But Hellenistic Jews (Jews brought up in Greek society and/or culture) would have been less conversant with Hebrew, and therefore had to rely on the Septuagint (LXX) in which YHWH (Yahweh) was translated as “Lord” (*kyrios*); this was in accordance with the exilic and post-exilic practice of not enunciating or pronouncing God’s Name for fear of His Name being “taken in vain” (Ex.20:7). English Bibles (with notable exceptions such as the *New Jerusalem Bible*) follow the Septuagint in translating YHWH as “LORD,” but with the difference that the word is put in small caps (which is irrelevant when the word is spoken). *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (TWOT) informs us, “Only in pre-NT times was God’s personal name [Yahweh] replaced with the less intimate title ădōnāy (Gr. *kyrios*) ‘Lord’.”

TWOT also makes the following instructive observation about “Yahweh”:

Scripture speaks of the Tetragrammaton (YHWH) as ‘this glorious and fearful [awesome] name’ (Deut 28:58) or simply ‘the name’ (Lev 24:11). But *it connotes God’s nearness, his concern for man, and the revelation of his redemptive covenant.* In Genesis 1 through Genesis 2:3, the general term elōhîm “deity,” is appropriate for God transcendent in creation; but in Gen 2:4-25 it is Yahweh, *the God who is immanent* in Eden’s revelations. (TWOT, יְהוָה (yāh) Yahweh, italics added).

The result of the Jewish fear of pronouncing God’s revered Name was that in time the pronunciation of His Name eventually became unknown or, at least, uncertain. The Name of God is now generally unknown to most Jews and Christians. *God, for them, is now nameless!* But the Scripture says, “Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD (Yahweh) will be saved” (Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21; Romans 10:13). Should we then not ask: How shall they call on His Name when they don’t know what it is? For the verse does not merely say, “Call on God,” but to call on “His Name”. The phrase the “Name of Yahweh” (*shem YHWH*) occurs 97 times in the Hebrew Bible. If calling upon His Name is a matter that concerns man’s salvation, then it must be a matter of near insanity to eliminate His Name from daily use. Moreover, who initially authorized the non-pronunciation of the Divine Name? Who has authority to forbid the use of His Name? It seems impossible to trace the origin of the ban on the use of Yahweh’s “glorious name” (Dt.28:58). Its development long ago seems to have been much like the way a rumor is spread, its origin can no longer be discovered—yet, though false, it is believed!

But the spread of this “rumor” or, more precisely, a lie (because it not only has no authorization in God’s word, but is contrary to it), has spiritually disastrous consequences, in particular for the church, for the only true God has now been deprived of, indeed, robbed of His Name! The Jews at least still address Him by the title “Adonai” (“Lord”). But for Christians “Lord” is primarily the form of address for Jesus Christ, so Yahweh is actually left without any specific title! Some Christians may refer to Him as “Father” but, of course,

in the trinitarian sense in which “Father” is one of three persons, thus constituting a third of the Trinity. But even this use of “Father” is not necessarily consistently applied because some Christians use the term “Father” for Jesus according to their interpretation of “everlasting Father” in Isaiah 9:6. So Yahweh is left without Name or specific title in the church! What a shocking state of affairs! Yet it would seem that few, if anyone, in the church has discerned the seriousness of the spiritual condition of the church as revealed by this appalling situation. This would seem to indicate that a certain spiritual numbness, blindness, or even paralysis has taken hold of the church. We may wonder: Where are those who belong to Yahweh, who care about His Name and His glory?

Christians can sing the hymn, “How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer’s ear” without ever being disturbed that Yahweh’s glorious and beautiful Name has been relegated to oblivion. It is also something of a mystery as to why the English translations (except the Jerusalem Bible) choose to follow the Septuagint when it is not the Septuagint they are translating but *the Hebrew Bible!* Moreover, I am not aware of Christians ever having considered themselves bound by the Jewish refusal to pronounce the Name. The Septuagint was a Greek translation of the Old Testament produced by Jewish translators in Alexandria (Egypt) during the 2nd century BC to meet the needs of Greek-speaking Jews who were no longer conversant with Hebrew; there was the further aim of introducing their Scriptures to the Gentile world. These translators, bound by the post-exilic taboo among Jews prohibiting the pronunciation of the Name “Yahweh,” replaced it with

“Adonai” (Lord). What is the Christian translator’s reason or excuse for following this taboo? Is it because it happens to suit trinitarianism better?

As for the “beautiful” name of Jesus, it is actually Yahweh that makes that name beautiful, because “Jesus” in Hebrew means “Yahweh saves” or “Yahweh is salvation,” or simply the “salvation” which Yahweh provides; so in an indirect sense to call on Jesus’ name is to call on the Name of Yahweh. But Christians do not think of Yahweh when they pray to Jesus, so it would not amount to calling on Yahweh’s Name. Yet Christians do think that when they pray to Jesus they are praying to God, that is, to “God the Son” in trinitarian terminology. And since Jesus to them is God, what need do they have of Yahweh?

As for the word “Jehovah,” BDB (*Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*) explains its origin in the Western church: “The pronunciation *Jehovah* was unknown until 1520, when it was introduced by Galatinus; but it was contested by Le Mercier, J. Drusius, and L. Capellus, as against grammatical and historical propriety.” In spite of this, the Darby translation, made at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, uses this word in place of “Yahweh,” as does the Chinese (Union) translation.

## The pronunciation of the Name

Note: Some readers may find some of the material in the following short section too technical. It is included for the sake of completeness, and for the convenience of those who desire such information but may not have access to the reference works mentioned here.

The pronunciation “Yahweh” seems to be well-founded because the first part “Yah” (יְהוָה) appears frequently in poetic use (38 times in the Psalms, twice in Exodus, and twice in Isaiah = 42 times in OT). This is familiar to us from “Halleluiah,” where “iah” is the same in Hebrew as “Yah”. This also appears in many Biblical names, e.g. Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc., and also in contracted form in Joshua = Yeshuah (“Jesus” in Greek).

BDB, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, also notes the “traditional Ἰαβέ [*Iabe*] of Theodoret and Epiphanius”. Similarly, *The Theological Wordbook of the OT* (TWOT) says, “Theodoret in the fourth century A.D. states that the Samaritans pronounced it ‘iabe’. Clement of Alexandria (early 3rd century A.D.) vocalized it as ‘iaoue’.” Some earlier sources appear to have been available to these church leaders (the Samaritans in the case of Theodoret).

‘Iabe’ (Ἰαβέ) is pronounced “Yaveh,” and is the equivalent of “Yahweh” because the Hebrew letter י (“w”) is pronounced as an English “v” (“w” in German is also vocalized like the “v” in English), while the Koine Greek “b” was probably



pronounced like the English “v”, as it still is in modern Greek.<sup>28</sup>

## The meaning of “Yahweh”

It is generally recognized that the meaning of the Name “Yahweh” is given in Exodus 3:14: ‘God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. {Or *I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE*} This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” (NIV)

The Hebrew word translated as “I am” is in the imperfect tense. That is why the NIV is here quoted to show that what is translated as “I am who I am” can also be translated as “I will be what I will be” (as can be seen in the margins of various other translations; this was also how Luther (1545 German Bible) translated it: “Ich werde sein, der ich sein werde.”) So, too, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Koehler and Baumgartner): “אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה I shall be who I shall prove to be, Ex.3:14.”

In a previous section, attention was given to the important observation made in *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (TWOT) that the Name “Yahweh” is indicative of *His immanence, His nearness to man*: “Scripture speaks of the Tetragrammaton [YHWH, Yahweh] as ‘this glorious and fearful name’ (Deut 28:58) or simply ‘the name’ (Lev 24:11).

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<sup>28</sup> Seeing that there is no “v” sound in Chinese (Mandarin; there is in Shanghainese), the “w” in “Yahweh” will have to be pronounced as “ou” (cf. Clement of Alexandria above).

But *it connotes God's nearness, his concern for man, and the revelation of his redemptive covenant.*" (TWOT, יהָ (yāh) Yahweh; italics mine)

On Exodus 3:14, TWOT concludes that the Name "Yahweh" expresses His *"faithful presence"* with His people:

God's immediately preceding promise to Moses had been, 'Certainly I will be with you' (Exo 3:12). So his assertion in verse 14 would seem to be saying, 'I am present is what I am.' Indeed, the fundamental promise of his testament is, 'I will be their God, and they will be my people' (Exo 6:7; etc.; contrast Hos 1:9); thus 'Yahweh,' 'faithful presence,' is God's testamentary nature, or name (Exo 6:2,4; Deut 7:9; Isa 26:4). (TWOT, יהָ (yāh) Yahweh; italics mine)<sup>29</sup>

Commenting on Exodus 3:14, Prof. Robert Alter provides the following useful observations:

'Ehyeh-'Asher-'Ehyeh ["I AM WHO I AM" in most English translations]. God's response perhaps gives Moses more than he bargained for—not just an identifying divine name but an ontological divine mystery of the most daunting character. Rivers of ink have since flowed in theological reflection on and philological analysis of this name. The following remarks will

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<sup>29</sup> Similarly BDB *Hebrew and English Lexicon*: "יהוה [YHWH]... is given (in) Ex 3:12-15 as the name of the God who revealed Himself to Moses at Horeb, and is explained thus: אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ *I shall be with thee* (v:12), which is then implied in אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה *I shall be the one who will be it* v:14a (i.e.: with thee v:12) and then compressed into אֶהְיֶה v:14b (i.e. with thee v:12), which then is given in the nominal form יהוה *He who will be it* v:15 (i.e. with thee v:12)."

be confined to the latter consideration, which in any case must provide the grounding of the former. ‘I-Will-Be-Who-I-Will-Be’ is the most plausible construction of the Hebrew, though the middle word ‘asher could easily mean ‘what’ rather than ‘who,’ and the common rendering of ‘I-Am-That-I-Am’ cannot be excluded. (‘Will’ is used here rather than ‘shall’ because the Hebrew sounds like an affirmation with emphasis, not just a declaration.) Since the tense system of biblical Hebrew by no means corresponds to that of modern English, it is also perfectly possible to construe this as ‘I Am He Who Endures.’ The strong consensus of biblical scholarship is that the original pronunciation of the name YHWH that God goes on to use in verse 15 was ‘Yahweh’. (R. Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, Norton, 2004; italics added)

Alter’s observation that what Yahweh reveals to Moses is “not just an identifying divine name but an *ontological divine mystery* of the most daunting character” is an important one. This is to say that the Name reveals something about the very nature of His Being or Person. “I-Will-Be-Who-I-Will-Be” would, for example, indicate the timeless or eternal nature of His Being, as expressed also in “I Am He Who Endures.” This implies complete control of the future, which in turn implies omnipotence. But Alter points out that the Hebrew word “‘asher, could easily mean ‘what’ rather than ‘who’”. The ‘what’ would point strongly to the ontological element in the divine Name. Yet Exodus 3:14 does not appear to reveal explicitly the ‘what’ of the divine character. This is precisely what is done in magnificent fullness later on in Exodus.

When Yahweh first appeared to Moses in Exodus 3, Moses was so overawed that he could scarcely have borne a fuller revelation of the divine Being than what was then initially given him. In Exodus 34 we find Moses ready and eager for a fuller revelation of the divine Person and His character. “Then Yahweh passed before him and called out, ‘Yahweh, Yahweh,<sup>30</sup> God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in faithful love and constancy’” (Exodus 34:6, NJB). In the whole statement, including v.7, five fundamentally important elements about Yahweh’s character are revealed which provide us with a unique and profoundly deep view into the nature of His inner Being. It is also most reassuring to know that these five elements of His character are firmly undergirded by an uncompromising commitment to justice and righteousness that will pursue wickedness to the extent necessary to terminate it (Ex.34:7). To know that this is the character of the God who created all things, and who is working out His eternal purposes for His creation, must surely inspire us with hope and courage.

The revelation given in Exodus 34:6 is of foundational importance for Biblical monotheism as can be seen from the fact that it echoes through the Hebrew Bible no less than 9 times.<sup>31</sup> Yahweh’s loving-kindness is a frequent theme in the

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<sup>30</sup> This double proclamation of the Name of Yahweh is found nowhere else. It is unique in the OT. The fact that it is proclaimed by Yahweh Himself indicates the exceptional significance of the self-revelation recorded in this passage.

<sup>31</sup> Ex.34:6; Num.14:18; Neh.9:17; Ps.86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jon.4:2; Nah.1:3.

OT, and it is beautifully expressed in these words in Jeremiah, “I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you” (Jer.31:3; NKJV).

The echo of Yahweh’s loving-kindness is also heard throughout the NT, where God’s redeeming love in Christ is its key element, and which is immortalized in the well-known words of John 3:16. It is powerfully reflected in the person of Christ who, as the visible image of God, manifested God’s love on the cross in the one “who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal.2:20).

### **Exodus 3:14 in the Greek Bible**

We get some further insight into how the Name “Yahweh” would have been understood by those who read the Greek Old Testament (LXX), which was the Bible of the early Greek-speaking church. The first part of Exodus 3:14 reads, “God said to Moses, ‘I am who I am (ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὄν, *egō eimi ho ōn*)’.” The importance of God’s words is not in the first “I am (*egō eimi*)” but in the second “I am” which translates the very different words “*ho ōn*” (“he who is”), for the Greek text has, “I am *ho ōn*” (ὁ ὄν, lit. ‘the One who is’ or ‘the existent One’). Now notice carefully the second part of Ex.3:14, “This is what you (Moses) are to say to the Israelites: ‘*Ho ōn* has sent me to you.’” What emerges from the Greek is the understanding of Yahweh as the eternal, self-existent One; the One who owes His existence to no one, but is the ultimate source of all that exists.

The book of Revelation refers to “the Lord God,” “the Almighty,” three times by the description “him who is and who was and who is to come,” a description which gives excellent expression to the meaning of the Name “Yahweh”:

**Revelation 1:4**, “John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from *him who is and who was and who is to come.*”

**Revelation 1:8**, “I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, ‘*who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.*”

**Revelation 4:8**, “And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, ‘Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, *who was and is and is to come!*”

From the foregoing discussion it becomes clear that “Yahweh” is no ordinary name. An ordinary name such as “John Smith,” for example, tells us virtually nothing about who that person is. In contrast to this, the Name “Yahweh” is profoundly self-revelatory, revealing His unique nature and character. “Yahweh” is, therefore, undoubtedly the most outstanding and distinctive name in the Hebrew Bible (what Christians call the “Old Testament”) not only because of the frequency of its occurrence (almost 7000 times) but because it reveals the wonderful character of the only true God. This is the Word par excellence of the OT. So it should not be surprising that this is the word which underlies “the Word” of the Johannine Prologue.

## Anthropomorphism in relation to Yahweh

What has long been noticed by those who read the OT is the strikingly “anthropomorphic” descriptions of Yahweh, that is, describing Him in language that makes Him appear to be rather like a human being. If the Scriptures are indeed the inspired word of God which we believe to be true, then we should be careful about using this term “anthropomorphic” because the use of this term usually implies that the *human* author is describing Yahweh in human terms, i.e. that this is a human work attempting to describe Yahweh in human terms. But if Scripture is inspired by God, then the striking thing is that it is *Yahweh* (not the human author) who is speaking of Himself in human terms.

What can this mean? Is this to be understood as meaning that Yahweh is using human forms of description to make Himself understood to us? But in so doing, is there not the danger that we will actually misunderstand, rather than understand, the description by taking it literally and assuming that what we read is an actual description of Yahweh, as so many teachers of Scripture both Jewish and Christian warn against? But could it be that Yahweh Himself did not fear the possibility of such “misunderstanding”? Indeed, could it be that understanding Yahweh in this way is no misunderstanding at all, but precisely what Yahweh intended? That is to say, Yahweh portrays Himself in human terms because that is the way He *actually* related to Adam and Eve, to Abraham (e.g. Gen.18:1ff), and to others. One could say that He humbled Himself to relate to them on their level.

In fact, if we dehumanize the language of Scripture in these accounts, how then are we supposed to understand them at all? What exactly would emerge from a dehumanized rendition of those significant accounts? Would we not be left with little more than a nebulous or even ghostly encounter of Yahweh with those He approached and spoke to? Why is it so inconceivable that Yahweh should appear in human form? And is it utterly impossible according to the Scriptures that the human form is really His form? Does not Scripture affirm that man is made in *God's* image and glory (1Cor.11:7, etc)?

By ruling out the possibility of Yahweh's actually having a "human" form, we must then seek some other explanation as to what it means that we are created in His image. As is well known, a variety of explanations are offered, none of which is satisfactory, or at most offer a partially acceptable explanation.

Would it not be true to say that we are in "divine" form, having been created in His image, rather than that Yahweh appears in "human" form? If this is true according to Scripture, then the gap between God and man, from God's point of view, is not so wide as we have supposed or been led to believe. So, instead of speaking of God having appeared anthropomorphically we can say that man was created theomorphically, which is what the Scriptures explicitly state.

Elliot R. Wolfson (Professor of Hebrew Studies and Director of Religious Studies at New York University) in his essay 'Judaism and Incarnation,' in *Christianity in Jewish Terms* (Westview Press, 2000), writes,



One must distinguish between the prohibition of depicting God in images and the claim that God cannot be manifest in a body. One may presume, as indeed the evidence from the Bible seems to suggest, that God is capable of assuming corporeal form, although that form should not be represented pictorially.

Needless to say, many passages in Hebrew Scriptures presuppose an anthropomorphic conception of God. This conception, moreover, is predicated on the notion that God can assume an incarnational form that is visually and audibly available to human perception. There is no reason to suppose, as have apologists of Judaism in both medieval and modern times, that the anthropomorphic characterizations of God in Scripture are to be treated figuratively or allegorically. I will cite here one example of what I consider to be a striking illustration of incarnational thinking in biblical religion. In the narrative concerning Jacob's struggle with the mysterious 'man,' who is explicitly identified as *Elohim* and on account of whom Jacob's name is changed to Israel, Jacob is said to have called the place of the theophany '*Peniel*,' for he saw Elohim face-to-face (*va-yikra ya'akov shem ba-makom peni'el ki ra'iti elohim panim el panim* Gen.32:30). The anthropomorphization of God in this biblical text suggests that in ancient Israel some believed that the divine could appear in a tangible and concrete form. The issue, then, is not how one speaks of God, but how God is experienced in the phenomenal plane. In this light, it becomes quite clear that in some cases the anthropomorphisms in Hebrew Scripture do imply an element of incarnation. (p.242)

There is ample evidence, however, that the biblical conception (at various stages reflected in the redactional layers of Scripture) maintain the possibility of God manifesting himself in anthropomorphic form. For example, God is frequently depicted in regal terms: in the theophany related in Exodus 24:10-11, in Isaiah's vision of God enthroned in the temple (6:1-3), in Ezekiel's vision of the glory enthroned upon the chariot (chapters 1 and 10), and in Daniel's apocalyptic vision of the Ancient of Days (7:9-10). These epiphanies of the divine in human form have the texture of a tangibility that one would normally associate with a body of flesh and bones. Clearly, the God of Israel is not a body in this sense, but this does not diminish the somatic nature of the divine appearance attested in various stages of the history of the biblical canon. (p.243)

What cannot fail to seize the attention of any attentive reader of the Torah—the Pentateuch—is how remarkably “human” Yahweh appears in His self-revelation. Therein lies the beauty and power of His self-revelation, because He thereby closes the distance between Him and us, revealing His remarkable immanence which, strangely enough, scholars prefer to expunge in favor of His transcendence, as though they think it their business to protect God from us, that is, from our coming too close to Him!

There is another way that this Biblical anthropomorphism has been dealt with, and that is by declaring it to be mythological language, written in much the same way as children's stories are told. Alternatively, it could be read as fictional literature, like those “who are prepared to read the

Bible in something like the same spirit in which they read Shakespeare” (Harold Bloom, *The Book of J*, Grove Press, 1990, p.12; Bloom uses “J” as abbreviation for “Yahweh,” and “*The Book of J*” refers to the Pentateuch as edited by “the Yahwist”). Bloom’s more recent book is *Jesus and Yahweh, The Names Divine* (Riverhead Books, 2005; Bloom is Professor of Humanities at Yale University). In the latter book he makes it clear that he is not a believer; so in what other way can he read the Bible if not as literature? Can Biblical language be demythologized, and if so, what would it mean? What meaning or significance does it have as literature?

What Prof. Bloom does recognize is that the attack upon Biblical “anthropomorphism” has its roots in Greek thought:

Greek philosophy demanded a dehumanized divinity, and Jewish Hellenists rather desperately sought to oblige, by allegorizing away a Yahweh who walked and who argued [?], who ate and who rested, who possessed arms and hands, face and legs.

Philo of Alexandria, the founder of what I suppose must be called Jewish theology, was particularly upset by J’s Yahweh, since Philo’s God had neither human desires nor a human form, and was incapable of passion, whether anger or love. But even the less Platonized great rabbis of second-century C.E. [Common Era] Palestine tended to argue these same difficulties, as in the celebrated disputes between Akiba and his colleague Ishmael, who also followed allegorical procedures in order to expunge the anthropomorphic. (*The Book of J*, p.24).

In any case, it seems clear that man simply refuses to believe that God could or would walk and talk with man in the ways described in Genesis—it just cannot be; it’s impossible, according to them. Why? Don’t they believe that all things are possible with God? He is transcendent, but not immanent?

Very shortly before the manuscript of this book was sent on its way to the publishers, I came across the thought-provoking work by James L. Kugel (Professor of Hebrew Literature at Harvard University) entitled *The God of Old: Inside the Lost World of the Bible*, 2003, just in time to insert a reference to it here. As the title and subtitle of his book indicate, the thesis of the book is that the concept of God as seen in the earlier parts of the Bible, where God interacted with men, was later replaced by a concept of God who is cosmic in the sense that He becomes too great to interact with puny human beings in the way that “the God of old” did. Thus the God of the Bible who could and would appear at any time in the world of men became an idea belonging to “the lost world of the Bible”. This is how Kugel describes the world of the Bible:

There is, I think, an important difference between the way that most people nowadays (indeed, starting as early as the author of the Wisdom of Solomon “written just before the start of the common era,” p.21) are accustomed to conceive of the spiritual and the way this same thing was conceived in ancient Israel, at least in the texts that we have been examining. There are not two realms in the Bible, this world and the other, the spiritual and the material—or rather, these two

realms are not neatly segregated but intersect constantly. God turns up around the street corner, dressed like an ordinary person...He appears in an actual brushfire at the foot of a mountain [when He first spoke to Moses]" (p.35).

Kugel points to the fact that in the world of the Bible, God made Himself visible to man in one way or another. He mentions the interesting ancient suggestion that the name Israel means "a man seeing God" from the Hebrew 'ish ra'ah [*or ro'eh*] 'El (*The God of Old*, pp.101,230).

The spiritual cost of this loss of the Biblical concept of "the world of the Bible" is expressed boldly and quite satirically by the great Jewish scholar G. Scholem:

"The philosophers and theologians [of medieval times] were concerned first and foremost with the *purity* of the concept of God and determined to divest it of all mythical and anthropomorphic elements. But this determination to ... reinterpret the recklessly anthropomorphic statements of the biblical text and the popular forms of religious expression in terms of a purified theology, tended to empty out the concept of God... *The price of God's purity is the loss of His living reality. What makes Him a living God... is precisely what makes it possible for man to see Him face to face.*" (G. Scholem, *Kabbalah and Myth*, quoted by Kugel in *The God of Old*, p.201; italics added in the last two sentences.)

The force and satire of Scholem's statements are better understood if the words "purity" and "recklessly" are seen in quotation marks.

## **Biblical “anthropomorphism” versus trinitarian Christology**

We have seen that the Hebrew Bible can speak of the “hands” of God, or His “feet,” and even His “face” in what is called “anthropomorphic” forms of describing God. Indeed, Yahweh of Hosts is even described as a “man of war” (Ex. 15:3). He appeared to Abraham in human form. Perhaps He also appeared as “the angel of Yahweh,” generally recognized as being a theophany, who was seen as being in human form. Yahweh’s appearance in human form is repeatedly recorded in Scripture, especially in the Pentateuch. The immanence of Yahweh is thus strongly emphasized in the earlier books of the Old Testament. His transcendence, however, is not lost sight of. As mankind—and Israel in particular—sank ever further into disobedience and sin, man’s distance with God increased; and we see in the Old Testament that God seemed to become ever more remote, and His presence became correspondingly harder to find: “Truly, you are a God who hides yourself, O God of Israel, the Savior” (Isa.45:15).

But this will change with the coming of Jesus Christ. God will come to save His people as He had said through His servants the prophets. The mind-boggling message of the Gospels and of the NT is that God had done what He had promised He would: Yahweh Himself came in Christ “in order that the world might be saved through him” (Jn.3:17). But He came into the world incognito, “the world did not know Him” (Jn.1:10).

John, particularly in his Prologue (1:1-18), stated this as clearly as he possibly could and as simply as he could. The message is that God, in His dynamic self-revelation called the Word (Memra), came into the world embodied in the man Jesus the Messiah. The “flesh” or body of Jesus was the Temple in which God dwelt, which is why Jesus could speak of his body as the temple of God (Yahweh), John 2:19. God, for His part, came into the world in Christ in order through him to reconcile the world to Himself (2Cor.5:19); and the true man Christ Jesus, for his part, lived and died to bring us to God.

To crystallize the whole matter as clearly as possible, the matter can be put like this: As trinitarians we believed that “God the Son” became a human being called “Jesus Christ” in order to save us. The Biblical teaching, in stark contrast, is that God our Father (Yahweh) came into the world by indwelling “the man Christ Jesus” as His living temple. This He did in order to save us by uniting us with Christ through faith so that we ourselves become living temples through that saving union with Christ (1Cor. 3:16,17; 6:19). In short, trinitarianism teaches an incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity. The purpose of this study is to show that the NT proclaims the coming in the Body of Christ of the “First” and Only Person, the one and only God, Yahweh.

## Transcendence-immanence

Let us now study some of the instances in which God draws near to man. In the following section I quote some extracts from a transcript of a message I gave about a year ago to a group of church leaders.<sup>32</sup> The following extracts from that message have been edited and condensed for inclusion in this study, but the colloquial style is retained and not re-written in a more literary form:

— Start of Transcribed Excerpt —

Let us now try to understand Yahweh God as both **L**immanent and transcendent in the Biblical sense of these terms, but not transcendent in the Greek sense of the word: a “dehumanized” God. Try to understand Him as immanent in the sense that “God is very near,” or in the words of Jacob’s awe-filled experience in Genesis 28:16, “Truly, Yahweh is in this place and I did not know!” (NJB) Try to re-read the Bible one more time, without your old concept of a transcendent God high up and far away in the heavens. Read it again and see what it is that you are reading. When I read it again, I was surprised by what I had read. Let’s try a bit of reading in Genesis. Let’s go back to Genesis and see if you really know your Bible as well as you may think you do. After all, you are in the ministry this long; surely you know your Bible, right?

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<sup>32</sup> The original transcription of this message was done by Elena Villa Real and Rhoda Batul; their work is here acknowledged with thanks and appreciation.



Go back to Genesis 1 to see whether God is that remote, that transcendent, that far away. Now, in verse 27 it says:

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” (Gen. 1:27, RSV)

*“God created man in his own image”*. Why would you create a person in your own image? Presumably it is so that you could communicate with the person, is it not? Can you think of any other reason why God would create us in His image? What else but to commune with us?

The next thing which I find very touching and which had never struck me before, is this: After God had created man, what was the first thing He did? *He blessed them*. This had never struck me before; it seems that I had never seen this verse before. *He blessed them!* That’s the first thing God did to man. He blessed us. Look at verse 28:

God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” (Gen.1:28, RSV)

Is God remote? Is He distant? According to the Greek idea of God, He doesn’t care much about earthly affairs. Not so with Yahweh! After having created them, the first thing He does is to bless them. After that, He keeps on talking to them. Have you noticed that? Now, would a God who is very remote even

bother to talk to the creatures He has made? In the next verse we read:

God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. (Gen.1:29, NRSV)

“*And God said...*” and you know what? I marked all the places in Genesis where it says, “*and God said,*” and I was amazed. Genesis was beginning to turn red with my markings. God spoke a lot to man! But did anybody listen to Him? God is still speaking to us today. And so, right from the beginning, He blessed us and spoke to us. In verse 7 of the next chapter, more detail is given:

Then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. (Gen.2:7, NRSV)

Notice the words “the LORD (YHWH) God”—*the LORD God*. The first occurrence of *Yahweh* is seen in verse 4, “...*the LORD God made earth and heaven*”—Yahweh God. Now, you can learn to stop saying just *Lord*, because with the word “*Lord*” you don’t know who you’re talking about, whether it’s the Father or the Son or someone else. Remember that every occurrence of the capitalized word LORD is Yahweh. “*And Yahweh God made...*” So which God are we talking about? The God that is being referred to here is Yahweh. Why use the two words “Yahweh God” together? Because the Scriptures want to specify which God we are talking about:

not the god of the Babylonians, nor the god of the Assyrians, but Yahweh God.

Chapter 2 verse 7, “Yahweh God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living being.” Notice the word “formed”. What does it mean? To give shape to something. It is the word used in the Hebrew Old Testament for a potter who is forming the clay. Think of this: He did not just say the words, “Man, come into existence,” thereby bringing him into existence by a word of command (as He did with other things in Genesis 1) such that man immediately became a human being walking around with eyes, a nose and a mouth, and hair that stands up because he hadn’t got the chance to comb it yet. No, God took this clay, this mud, and formed it with His own hands. How does a potter form the clay? With his own hands! Here the word “formed” is specifically and purposely chosen. He *formed* the man. The shape of the man is formed by the very fingers of God. And if we didn’t get the point, it is repeated at the end of verse 8:

And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. (Gen.2:8)

“... he placed (into the garden) the man whom he had *formed*.” There is the word again. Chapter 1 made the general statement that *God created man*. But now it tells us what that creating of man involved: Yahweh took the mud and, like an artist, carefully shaped his nose, his eyes, his ears. Every part of his body was made with the fingers of God. And then Adam was formed. We too were formed, in Adam, by God’s

fingers. Think about it. No word in the Bible is wasted. No word is put there for no reason. And if we don't bother to look at what the word means, we won't get the point. Our hair didn't suddenly appear on our heads. Do you remember what the Lord Jesus said? *Not a hair of your head will fall to the ground without your Father* (cf. Mt.10:29-31). God created every hair on your head. And how many strands of hair drop off every day when you comb it? How much does God care? How much does Yahweh care? We may not care too much about small things like sparrows (Mt.10:29), or the strands of hair that fall on the ground, but God does.

Is God transcendent in the sense that He is far away? Not according to the Bible. Yahweh cares about us because He was the one who formed us. That's the beauty of it. Is man of any value? Well, God took the time to form man. How long does it take a potter to make a vessel? Not very long actually, because a vessel is relatively simple to make. But have you ever seen an intricate carving which took an artist weeks or months to carve?

In China I watched a program about the skills involved in the carving of ivory (which was legally obtained, or else it probably wouldn't have been shown on state TV). The beautiful and exquisitely detailed artwork could almost be described as fantastic. One such work could occupy the artist for weeks or months, depending on how detailed the work is and how many balls, one within another, were to be carved. They were all formed from a single piece of ivory. I didn't know that there could be as many as 34 balls within the one ball. Could you imagine the skill and work that goes into carving this

ball—34 layers—one within the other, each able to rotate within the next? I am told that 34 is the absolute maximum that has ever been achieved. A lesser work may have only 4 or 5 free-floating balls within it. As remarkable as this is, just think how incomparably more complex is the living human body which Yahweh God had made. Making it could have taken some considerable amount of time. The intricate details! The wonderful workmanship!

Contemplating these things, the Psalmist exclaims, “I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.” (Psalm 139:14, NIV) We can read this simply as an elated expression of praise and admiration for Yahweh’s work in the course of meditating upon it; or, on a higher level, it could express the elevation of the spirit of one who is carried *into communion with Yahweh* through having been granted a profound spiritual perception of the wonder of His Person as revealed in His works.

I say this because I was given such an experience—unexpectedly—of Yahweh’s presence when, on one occasion, I was contemplating His creation of man and some of His other wonderful deeds. I would suppose that this is what His Word is meant to accomplish for every one of us, namely, to lead us into an experience of Him as the living, loving, and creative God.

If God didn’t care about man, why would He waste time on us? Why doesn’t He just speak His almighty word, and presto, a man comes into existence? But that’s not what the word “formed” means. Presumably he could have done it that

way, but He chose not to. Clearly the Genesis account shows how much God cares about man.

For this reason, too, God constantly speaks to man, and notice here, “*the LORD God*”—Yahweh God—“*commanded*”:

And the LORD God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; (Gen.2:16, RSV)

Yahweh provided the food that man needed. He cares about what is good for man, so He provided him a companion:

Then the LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.” (Gen.2:18, NASB)

More than that, Yahweh Himself came to visit them, to be with them.

They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. (Gen.3:8, NRSV)

*God was walking in the garden.* What an amazing statement! What does He walk in the garden for? I mean, He’s got the whole of heaven to be in and He chose to walk in the garden. Why? Well, if it’s not to commune with man, then He would have nothing to do in the garden. He, the almighty God, is indeed transcendent but not solely transcendent. In the Old Testament, the transcendence of God is spoken of much later on, as we shall see. But it begins with His immanence. He walks in the garden—we read about it and do not understand.

It says that Adam and Eve had sinned, and they suddenly realized that they were naked. They tried to sew some fig leaves together, not exactly artwork I suppose, but quite an interesting way to get dressed. And then, “*They heard ... God walking in the garden*”. Note carefully the text: “*They heard the sound of Yahweh*”.

Let’s stop and think about it. Do we ever read our Bibles with any serious attention? Can you imagine that? Nowadays we can buy shoes that make almost no sound. With these shoes I am wearing now, I can walk up to a person and he doesn’t hear me coming. But they *heard* Yahweh—“the sound of Yahweh”—walking in the garden. How did they manage to hear Him? Obviously Yahweh was not walking softly, softly, so that He could steal up on them and say “Boo!” and they jump! You can actually hear Him coming. Maybe it’s the sound of the leaves on the ground. Maybe it’s the sound of the grass that He is walking on. I presume they didn’t have paved roads in the Garden of Eden, on which you could walk with rubber-soled shoes that don’t make a sound. He was walking, and they heard Him coming.

Now, a God who is transcendent and “light as air” would surely make no sound as He walks on the ground, right? Can you imagine a ghost walking and making a boom-boom sound? Is it a special kind of ghost? You may think that God is just floating through the air, but no, He walks on the ground in such a way that there is contact with the ground. And this creates a sound of something moving, maybe the brushes, maybe the leaves of the trees. They hear Him coming and they hide themselves. If God had sneaked up on them,

they wouldn't have a chance to hide; it would be like treating them as children—so cute and so sweet. Do you think God doesn't know where you are, and that you can play hide and seek with Him? He comes along and, like a loving father, He says, "Adam! Eve! Where are you?" An all-knowing, omniscient God doesn't know where they are? That must be a joke. But He relates to us at our level, sort of plays our game, if you like, as if to say, "You want to hide? Okay, I'll play hide and seek." It's really remarkable. And in case we missed that statement about "*heard the sound of him*," it is stressed again in verse 10:

He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." (Gen.3:10, NRSV)

They could actually *hear* God walking in the garden? Do we ever think on these things? No, we were taught that God is transcendent and that we must not read this literally. It is all metaphor and symbolic language. But a symbol of what? Can you tell me what it is a symbol of? If it is a symbol, it must symbolize something. Why can't we just take it as it is written there?

Going back to chapter 2 verse 8, we might not have noticed something else there. There it says, "*Yahweh God planted a garden*". Think about it. He is doing the work of a gardener or farmer! Yahweh God planted a garden. It did not come into being simply by His "speaking the word". He brought light into being, He brought the creation into being, with a word, but now He is working in the garden. Amazing!



If this is symbolic of something, would you kindly tell me what it is symbolic of? And He planted a garden for whom? For man! He fashioned man into existence, then He planted a beautiful garden for him. But we are told that what we read about God and His actions should not be taken literally. He is all transcendent and therefore somewhere else. Transcendent? What are we doing? Are we dismissing God from His creation? That's what we have been doing all the time because of the corrupted teaching we have received. God planted a garden (or assisted by angels, as some would have it)—can you imagine that? It means that He had to plan it and design it. He made a garden and put man there to enjoy it:

And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. (Gen.2:8, NRSV)

Then we come to the part about God walking in the garden and their attempt to hide from Him, as seen in the words “from the presence of the LORD God” in chapter 3 verse 8:

They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. (Gen.3:8, NRSV)

How do you hide from an omnipresent God? Yet they tried to hide from Him. Did they suppose that God was transcendent, high up in the heavens, and was unaware of what they had been doing on earth, so they could still try to hide from Him? They hadn't read Psalm 139!

Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. (Psalm 139:7-8, NASB)

Sinners, to the extent that they believe in God at all, would undoubtedly prefer to believe that He is transcendent, far away from human affairs, and does not concern Himself with their sins. Such an idea of transcendence would be a good way to hide from God, at least in the sinner's mind. But even after Adam and Eve had sinned, we continue to see the words "Yahweh said". He continued to talk to this couple. God still talked to man after he had sinned; He mercifully did not completely close the door on communicating with man.

And then what happened in chapter 4? Cain murdered Abel out of jealousy because Abel's sacrifice was accepted and his was not. When I re-thought this whole passage, freeing myself from the theological concepts I had been taught from the beginning, I began to see things there that I hadn't seen before. For example we read,

The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen?" (Gen 4:6)

Here it does not speak of "LORD God" but simply "LORD" (Yahweh). Yahweh says to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen?" Then He goes on to warn him that if he does well, he will be accepted; but if he does not, his desires will master him. Then Cain tells Abel about what God had said to him. The story goes on to say that Cain,

out in the field where he thinks nobody is watching, kills Abel. A wicked man! The first murderer. But wait, there's something else. The account goes on to say that even after Cain had murdered his brother, Yahweh continues to talk to him. Have you noticed this? If Cain is such an evil person, why is Yahweh talking to him? In the following passage, we see that Yahweh (again the word "God" does not appear) talks to Cain:

Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" And the LORD said, "What have you done? Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground!" (Gen.4:9-10, NRSV)

That's quite a conversation with Cain. And the amazing thing is that Yahweh protects Cain from being killed. Why would Yahweh do this? Doesn't the Law say that if you kill someone, you must pay for it with your own life? That's the Law of Yahweh. Yet Yahweh protects Cain from death, by putting a mark on him so that nobody would kill him:

Then the LORD said to him, "Not so! Whoever kills Cain will suffer a sevenfold vengeance." And the LORD put a mark on Cain, so that no one who came upon him would kill him. (Gen.4:15, NRSV)

Yahweh speaks to Cain. Notice again that the word "God" does not appear, so the focus is on the name "Yahweh" alone. Yahweh says to Cain: "Whoever kills Cain will suffer a sevenfold vengeance". What a protection He puts on Cain!

But Cain's a murderer. Why doesn't somebody in Sunday school explain to us why Cain is protected? But it reminds us of someone who, in the New Testament, is called a friend of sinners, presumably including murderers. Jesus is indeed called a friend of sinners (Mt.11:19; Lk.7:34). How amazing!

Yahweh asks Cain, "Why are you angry?" God had rejected his offering and that greatly disturbed him. He could not cope with Yahweh's rejection. Cain took the rejection of his offering as indication that Yahweh had rejected him altogether. He could not accept being rejected by Yahweh. He was so desperate that it drove him quite insane, such that he killed Abel. Do you get what I'm saying? If God rejects you, does that worry you? Maybe, maybe not. The average person on the street would hardly be worried about being rejected by God. But Cain was so disturbed by Yahweh's rejection that he couldn't take it.

Now why should it disturb Cain that Yahweh didn't accept him? Is there any reason but that he loved Yahweh? Can you think of another reason? You wouldn't endure being rejected by somebody you love, would you? If you are rejected by someone who hates you, you wouldn't care less; you simply reject him back. But if you are rejected by someone who had loved you or whom you love, you can't cope with that. Some people commit suicide over rejection. Cain didn't commit suicide, but he killed his brother instead. He was jealous because Abel was accepted. But jealousy comes from love, does it not?

In other words, Cain committed murder out of love, which is what people still do today. If somebody gains the girl you love, you might go out and kill that guy so you can have the girl all to yourself. Cain wants Yahweh's love and acceptance, but Yahweh doesn't accept him. He accepts Abel instead! That won't do, so remove Abel!

I can't think of any other explanation for God's sparing Cain. God knew his heart. He knew that Cain loved Him, but loved Him in the wrong way. Otherwise God would have put him to death for having killed his brother. But God instead put such a protection on him that anybody who dares to touch Cain will suffer a sevenfold vengeance. That's frightening. What other purpose could there be in sparing Cain from immediate death than to give him the chance to repent of what he had done, and thus to be saved? Yahweh cares even for the worst sinner.

Let's backtrack a bit. Adam and Eve too had sinned grievously. And what did Yahweh do? Why didn't He immediately put them to death? After all, He had warned them, "in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die". Yet He doesn't put them to death. What did He do instead? He did something extraordinary. Why I couldn't see all this in the past, I don't understand.

And the LORD God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and clothed them. (Gen.3:21, NRSV)

Read it again: Yahweh himself made garments! First He was a gardener, now He is a tailor! But more than a tailor. How do you get skins from animals? You have to kill an animal.

You have to shed its blood. Do you get the picture? Yahweh Himself was the priest! The animals He had created, He slew in order to take their skins. He made garments from them both as tailor and priest, and covered Adam and Eve. Covered! Do you know what the word *atonement* in the Old Testament means? It means “covered”. The Hebrew word for “cover” is the word we translate as “atonement, to atone for”. He covered their sins with the blood of these animals, taking the skins and covering them.

Yahweh is amazing. But is this too hard to swallow? Too down to earth and too bloody? We are told that He’s transcendent, that He doesn’t do such things as killing animals. But if you don’t kill an animal, how do you get the skin to make a garment? The blood of the animal has to be shed in order to get the skin. Certainly no one enjoys killing innocent animals. But that’s what the priests did in the temple. They slaughtered the animals and offered atonement (covering) for the sins of the people with the blood of the animals.

All this was already seen in this early Bible account. It’s not as though the Old Testament Law and the sacrificial system sprang out of nowhere. It was already there in Genesis in seed form. Even more amazing, we now realize that all this foreshadowed God’s plan of salvation for mankind which He accomplished when He “gave up His own Son for us all” (Rom.8:32), ransoming us “with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (1Pet.1:19).

Does it not bring tears to our eyes to think that Adam and Eve—whom Yahweh had formed with His own fingers, and for whom He had planted a garden and had given this

wonderful life in the garden—could go and sin? If Yahweh had been like most people (so perhaps He is transcendent in the sense of *not* being like most human beings in character), He would have blown up in anger: “Okay, I’m done with the two of you.” No, instead He takes an animal, slaughters it, and takes its skin to cover Adam and Eve. That’s amazing. But aren’t we reading it too literally? Can we read it in a non-literal or symbolic way which brings out the rich meaning of the passage? I haven’t found a way, have you?

What Yahweh did to cover and protect Cain from death was not something new. He had already done that kind of thing for Cain’s parents. He had provided a covering, an atonement, for Adam and Eve. Of course He couldn’t allow them to stay in the garden. They had to face certain serious consequences for their sins. They had to leave the garden, but they did so in the covering which Yahweh had given them to wear. For the rest of their lives these garments would remind them, “Yahweh was merciful to us. We did not die on the day we sinned; instead Yahweh clothed us and covered us in His mercy.”

Do you think Yahweh is far and remote in the heavens? Or that only Jesus is very near? What have we learned about God? What have we learned about Yahweh? Not much? How close can He be? His love for sinners is not something new. It didn’t start with Jesus. It came long, long before that, right from the Garden of Eden. That is the beauty of Yahweh. Why was all this hidden from us? Was it because we thought that only Jesus is a friend of sinners who saves us from a wrathful God? If so, would the term “God our Savior” (1Tim. 1:1; Tit.1:3,

etc) have any meaning for us? Let's begin to see how different from ours is the concept of Yahweh in the Old Testament, a God who is very close and very caring, who watches over us. And when we sin, He does not always condemn us, does He? He himself prepared a way by which He covered our sins.

In Genesis chapter 6, we see that man is becoming thoroughly corrupted by his sins. But there is still one person whom Yahweh can communicate with, and that is Noah. With mankind falling increasingly under the dominion of sin, we find that Yahweh still tries to communicate with man, but can do so only with certain individuals who are still open to Him, who have an ear that listens to Him, whose heart is what is called *perfect* in relation to Him—perfect in complete openness to Him. “And Noah found favor” it says in chapter 6 verse 8, “in the eyes of Yahweh.”

Then it goes on to say that Yahweh spoke with Noah. And oh, He spoke a lot with Noah. I counted over 30 verses in which Yahweh spoke to Noah. Yahweh kept on communicating with Noah. Doesn't that tell us how close He was to Noah, and Noah to Him?

Then the flood came to wash away the corruption that had polluted the earth. Yahweh is holy. He will forgive sin but there is a measure of sin beyond which, once you fill it up, He cannot do anything more about it. It is beyond rescue. When people are beyond rescue, there is nothing left for Yahweh to do but to deal with them in judgment. But even in judgment He shows mercy: there is still Noah and his family. You would remember that Noah had built an ark that looks like a gigantic box; it floated on water while transporting pairs of animals of



all kinds. It's a cute story, isn't it? But did you see what Yahweh did when Noah and all these animals had gone into the ark and were ready to face the coming flood?

Those that entered, male and female of all flesh, entered as God had commanded him; and the LORD closed it behind him. (Gen.7:16, NASB)

Yahweh closed the door behind him. Have you ever noticed these words? This is amazing! He planted a garden, He made clothes, and like a priest He made atonement for the sins of Adam and Eve. Like a builder He designed an ark for Noah to build, in order to save Noah, his family, and a multitude of animals. But who shut the door of the ark? Why not let Noah close the door? Was it too big and heavy for Noah? Whatever the reason, Yahweh put the final touch on this huge saving operation: He himself shut the door of the ark. Or do we think that it would have been more appropriate that He appoint an angel to do this sort of thing, rather than stooping to do it Himself? Such a thought would show that we don't really know the Yahweh who is revealed in the Bible. The kings and presidents of this world do not open or shut doors for their subordinates, but that is precisely the point: Yahweh is not like them. His character is perfectly exemplified in Jesus ("the image of God," 2Cor.4:4), who not only washed his disciples' feet and cooked breakfast for them by the Lake of Galilee even after his resurrection (Jn.21:9,12,13), but offered up himself on the cross for their salvation. As for shutting the door of the ark, it is somewhat like a father standing at the

door to say goodbye to the children going off to school in the morning.

These little touches show something beautiful about Yahweh. There is no detail that He overlooks. He deeply cares. Why does this verse mention that Yahweh closed the ark? It's because that's what He did. And why did He do it? Because He cared! Is there any other reason for what He did? Perhaps He wanted to make sure that the water won't get into the ark and drown everyone inside, so He had to make sure that the door was closed properly. It's like when you're taking your kids in a car, you make sure the door is closed properly for their safety. If we may say so reverently, all this reveals something very sweet about Yahweh. The way He does things is really amazing. If the Bible were of purely human origin, it would be hard to imagine that anyone would have dared portray God in this way.

As we go on in Genesis, who is the next person God talks to? There were others who had walked with God. We won't go in detail about Enoch, who walked with God for 300 years and was raptured. What does walking with God mean on Enoch's part? Walking for 300 years! It wasn't just a few days. For 300 years he walked with Yahweh. What an experience, what a life! No wonder he was lifted up!

Then Abraham came into the scene. He is known as the friend of Yahweh. Does God need a friend? Does He need you and me? No, He doesn't need us, but He wants us to be His friends; it's not that He needs us. God finds a friend in Abraham. This whole story is truly beautiful: Abraham is sitting at the door of his tent in the heat of the day (Genesis

18). He is probably trying to catch some breeze at the door of the tent. And he sees three men walking towards him. Being the gracious person that he is, he gets out of his tent and bows with his face to the ground, in much the same way as Muslims pray today. Abraham has his face to the ground as he welcomes the three men. And one of them turns out to be Yahweh, as the account reveals.

Then comes the amazing story in which Abraham bargains with Yahweh over Sodom which is about to be destroyed. “Now, if there are 50 good people, will you spare Sodom? ... Sorry, don’t be angry with me, Yahweh, but what about 40?” He is bargaining with Yahweh as if he’s in an oriental market. And Yahweh is patiently going along with him. “Yahweh, please don’t be angry with me. Will you spare Sodom for 30?” Yahweh says, “Yes, 30, I will.” One more time: “20?” “Yes.” “Please bear with me, but how about 10?” He said, “Yes, 10.” And poor Abraham does not dare go any lower than ten. Even when you bargain in the marketplace, you have to be reasonable. If the other person is asking for \$100, do you give him \$2? Come on, don’t be ridiculous. Abraham bargains down from 50 to 30 to 20 and finally 10. Come on, it’s a whole city—you can’t go lower than 10, right? But Yahweh says, “Yes, even 10”. Abraham thinks, “Okay I’m content. Surely there must be at least ten good people in the city of Sodom.”

But there weren’t even ten. Even if Abraham had gone lower than ten, it wouldn’t have helped because there was in fact only one: Lot. That doesn’t say much for Lot’s wife, and indeed she turned into a pillar of salt afterwards. There was no decent person left in all of Sodom except one. Can you

imagine that? This story of Abraham bargaining with Yahweh brings out His incredible patience! What makes us think of Him as a raging judge, a wrathful God up in heaven, ready to destroy all sinners? Are sinners actually frightened into repentance by our preaching the wrath of God? Or does God not rather draw us with His love, as can be seen in the gospels? He hardly tries to frighten us by His power. Do sinners repent out of fear, or are they drawn more by love?

As we look at the panoramic picture of Yahweh in his relationship to man as seen in the Bible, we begin to discover that, as in the case of Sodom, the righteous are so few that there's almost nobody for Yahweh to talk to. Nobody! Then Moses appeared on the scene, and it says that God spoke with him face to face (Ex. 33:11; Dt.34:10). Isn't that beautiful? There you see the account of how Yahweh God took the people—the Israelites—out of Egypt. What you see again is not a God who is transcendent in the sense of being remote, but a God who was constantly relating to the Israelites. Where? In a pillar of cloud, in a pillar of fire, He traveled with them in the desert. While they walked, He walked with them in the desert, as a shepherd with his sheep as described in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, "The LORD is my Shepherd". He led them through the wilderness as a shepherd leads his sheep. If you go to the wilderness in the Middle East today, you can still see shepherds leading their sheep.

And He met with the people to commune with them. Do you remember how Yahweh came down on Mount Sinai? The whole mountain burned with fire! He revealed the greatness of His majesty and power to the multitudes—some two

million Israelites in the wilderness—so that this homeless people wandering in the wilderness wouldn't need to fear for their future as they go forward under Yahweh's leadership and under His constant care and provision for their daily needs ("give us this day our daily bread"). How do you feed two million people in the desert? Yahweh provided the bread, the manna, daily. How else could two million people be fed in the desert? From a human point of view, the logistics of supplying for the needs of such a multitude is mind-boggling. What about water? The most desperately needed thing in the desert is water, if they are not to die of thirst in the scorching heat. And Yahweh saw to that need as well. He did this over a period of 40 years! Try leading two million people through the desert today and see how far you will get. You will soon realize that Yahweh did an amazing miracle, not just for a few days but for 40 years. Moreover, He did all this for a stubborn and disobedient people who incessantly tried His patience. The prophet Micah put it beautifully: "Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love." (Mic.7:18)

This is clearly echoed in the New Testament. The feeding of the 5,000 or the feeding of the 4,000—what does it call to mind? It calls to mind what Yahweh did in the wilderness for His people. And Jesus was doing the very thing that Yahweh had been doing in the Old Testament. Or more precisely, Yahweh was doing through Jesus what He had been doing in the Old Testament. Wonderful! The same is true regarding water, but on the spiritual level. Jesus said to the Samaritan

woman, “If you had asked me for water, I would have given you water to drink that would well up within you into a fountain of living water” (Jn.4:10,14). It will keep on flowing like a river. Wonderful!

John 6 refers to the events in the wilderness, “I am the bread (manna) that Yahweh sent down from heaven. If you eat this bread, you won’t die. But those in the wilderness died. If you eat of this spiritual bread that Yahweh gives you—I being that bread—you will live forever.” (cf. Jn.6:51,58) God still provides the manna of life for those who, in the present time, look to Him for that provision.

In the wilderness, miracles occurred daily which the Israelites could see. So the miracles in the gospels were not something altogether new, though they were generally on a much smaller scale as compared to those which took place in the wilderness (e.g. feeding 5000 as compared to feeding two million). These were not meant to match the scale of what had taken place in the wilderness, but to *remind* the people of what Yahweh had accomplished for His people in the past, indicating that Yahweh, in some significant way, has again come to His people in the person of Jesus Christ, and is again doing the things they had heard were done by Him before.

As we go on from Genesis through the Old Testament, we see that there were gradually fewer and fewer people who communed with Yahweh or with whom He was able to communicate. That’s not because Yahweh was becoming less inclined to communicate with people, but because people were apparently becoming less and less sensitive to Him. After Moses it was a long time before another prophet of some

spiritual stature appeared, but none communed with Yahweh with the kind of intimacy (“face to face”) that characterized Moses’ relationship with Him—that is, until Jesus came.

Regarding Moses, I want to show you another little touch that is quite remarkable. You would know that the Torah, the five books of the Law, ends with Deuteronomy. The account of Moses’ death was added to the end of Deuteronomy. He was 120 years old, but he still had his health and strength, and was not sick. Apparently it is not always necessary for God’s people to fall sick in order to die. When the time comes, they simply “fall asleep,” as one preacher said about his father who had been a faithful servant of the Lord. He was not known to have any sickness, but when his time came, he just sat in his chair. His head bowed and he went to be with the Lord. That’s wonderful.

It was said that “Moses was 120 years old when he died. His eye was undimmed, and his vigor unabated” (Dt.34:7). His work was complete, his time had come, so Moses died or simply “fell asleep”. But notice again that remarkable touch about Yahweh that we tend to miss. What is that little touch? He took Moses’ life away but of course his body stayed on earth. So what happened to the body? You would remember that Moses died by himself, alone, on Mount Pisgah from which he looked into the Promised Land which he was not permitted to enter because of just one serious failure in his life. Yet Moses was not alone by himself, for Yahweh was with His faithful servant right to the end. It says in Deut.34:6,

And He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth Peor; but no one knows where his grave is to this day.

Have you noticed the three little words: “He buried him.” And who is “He”? Who else but Yahweh? This is amazing. Think of it again: He forms Adam and Eve like a potter; He plants a garden like a gardener; He slays an animal like a priest; He makes garments like a tailor and covers Adam and Eve; and so on it goes. At the end He personally buries His friend on a mountain—a final act of love and a final tribute to Moses’ earthly ministry.

Of course we can read the whole account in some symbolic or metaphorical way, as is usually done, by insisting that Yahweh is transcendent and that none of this is to be understood literally. But what would it mean non-literally? What exactly is being accomplished by insisting on our theological dogma but removing the poignant beauty of Yahweh’s character as revealed in these accounts? I look at these words and find them powerfully touching.

Moses was given a private burial; this was evidently to prevent him from being made into an idol by the people he had led for a very long time, because if that had happened, Moses would have ended up as a stumbling block rather than a blessing to his people. But Yahweh had also revealed Himself openly and publicly to the people of Israel as, for example, when He came down on Mount Sinai and multitudes were there to see it. The elders actually saw the glory of the Lord with their own eyes. You see that for example in Ex.24:10-11



where it says that the elders of Israel “saw the God of Israel, and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself. Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel, and they beheld God and they ate and drank.”

They saw God and lived. Verse 16 says, “the glory of the LORD (Yahweh) rested on Mount Sinai and the cloud covered it for six days.” And verse 17: “to the eyes of the sons of Israel, the appearance of the glory of the LORD (Yahweh) was like a consuming fire on the mountaintop.” There we get the phrase “*a consuming fire*” (Heb.12:29). On the one hand, He is a consuming fire; on the other hand, He gently takes Moses his friend and buries him in the ground, like planting a seed. And Moses will rise again! Yahweh will call him forth from the dead; but for the moment, he must rest.

What we discover in the progression of the Biblical narrative is that, though the Lord still spoke to people, the distance between God and man gradually became greater and greater. But the distance between God and man was increasing not because God wanted to be remote, but because man no longer cared about seeking Him. Eventually, they didn’t even call His Name anymore. But Yahweh still communed with a few persons like Samuel the prophet, whose heart was open to Him and who was still speaking for God. Then there was Isaiah who, when he was in the temple, was granted a vision of the glory of God. Ezekiel, too, saw a vision of the glory of God. What he saw was someone who had the appearance of a man. It’s important to note this fact: Yahweh revealed Himself to Ezekiel in a human form (Ezek.1:26,28).

Theologians have argued that in the Old Testament, God is presented in anthropomorphic terms, that is, God is presented as though He is a human being, or in language that would be used to describe human beings. Well, it is more likely that we've gotten the matter the wrong way around. According to Scripture, man is *theomorphic*; that is so because man is created in God's image. "Theomorphic" literally means in God's (*theos*) form (*morphē*) or image. This is the Biblical teaching. The reason why man was created theomorphic—in God's image—was so that he could commune with God. That's what God created him for. The last great person to commune with God intimately was Moses. God talked with him "face to face" (Dt.34:10). Face to face! How close was their communion!

Later on, the great prophet Isaiah still spoke the word of God and still saw the glory of the Lord. There was still a great sense of awe but not with the kind of intimacy that Moses had enjoyed. After Moses, all this was disappearing gradually. As you go on in the OT, the distance becomes greater and greater. After Ezekiel, we hear of visions; we still hear of the word of the Lord spoken through people, but the intimacy of the prophet with Yahweh is no more there. After the last prophet, Malachi, there was only silence—400 years of silence. The word of the Lord spoke no more. There was nobody, apparently, that Yahweh could communicate with. Is there someone in this generation whom Yahweh can communicate with? But the promise remained:

A voice is calling, “Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.” (Isaiah 40:3, NASB)

Why would you want to prepare a highway in the wilderness? Well, this highway is declared to be specifically for “Yahweh” and “for our God”. Why? Because He is coming: “the glory of Yahweh will be revealed and all humanity will see it together, for the mouth of Yahweh has spoken.” (Isa.40:5, NJB) Yahweh is coming!

Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel. (Isaiah 7:14, NASB)

A child will be born but, significantly, the child bears divine names:

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6, NASB)

Divine names point to a divine person. Not all the names in this verse are necessarily divine, but some are harder to explain in non-divine terms, especially “Eternal Father”. As trinitarians we applied this verse to Jesus. But to do this is to confuse Father and Son, and also to contradict Jesus’ teaching in which he had said, “And call no man your ‘father’ on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven.” (Mt.23:9) We can be sure that Jesus never asked anyone to call him “Father”.

But if “Eternal Father” refers to Yahweh as it should, then we are left with the mind-boggling thought that Yahweh will come into the world in the person of Jesus, and already at Jesus’ birth. How else can this verse be understood as it stands?

In Malachi, the last book in the Old Testament, God says:

“Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,” says the LORD of hosts. (Mal.3:1, NASB)

Again, a promise: “The Lord will suddenly (unexpectedly) come to *His* temple” in Jerusalem. Who can “the Lord” be but Yahweh, seeing the temple being referred to is “His temple”.

But when will this take place? As I said, there were four hundred years of silence. When will the silence end and God speak again? The prophecy in Malachi says that, first, Yahweh will send a messenger “before Me”. Jesus pointed to John the Baptist as that messenger (e.g. Mt.11:9-11; Lk.7:26-28). The long silence ended suddenly and unexpectedly, and Yahweh came to His temple as promised. We shall look into this more fully in what follows.

— End of Transcribed Excerpt —

## Further observations on God’s immanence-transcendence

Yahweh’s immanence is seen not only in the Torah and the OT as a whole, but especially in the NT, for example:

**Acts 17:28**, “In Him we live and move and have our being”.

**Matthew 10**, “<sup>29</sup> Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. <sup>30</sup> But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. <sup>31</sup> Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.”

**Luke 12:7**, Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered [by God]. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more [to God] than many sparrows.

But the “enfleshment,” or incarnation, of the Word in Messiah Jesus, such that Yahweh lived in him bodily, is the supreme example of His choice to be immanent, though this in no way negates His transcendence. In fact, what we have failed to see is that in Scripture God’s transcendence is such that it involves, or even requires, His immanence:

**1Kings 8:27**: “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!”

Yahweh’s transcendence is of a kind that defies theological categories, for His transcendence is such that not even “heaven and the highest heaven” can contain Him—hence His transcendence “overflows,” as it were, out of the heavens

encompassing the earth. God can never be thought of in Scripture as confined to heaven. It is Scripturally erroneous to think that “heaven” refers to His transcendence, while earth speaks of His “immanence” as we usually do. This notion is also shattered by such a verse as:

Thus says the LORD: “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool”. (Isaiah 66:1, quoted in Acts 7:49)

These words give a striking picture of Yahweh seated on His heavenly throne with His feet resting on the earth. This picture of Yahweh’s transcendence-immanence is incorporated in Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount: “But I tell you, do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King.” (Matthew 5:34,35)

Since His feet rest firmly upon the earth, the phrase “Father in heaven” is not to be understood as meaning that He is remote from the earth; rather it serves to distinguish Him from earthly fathers. “Father in heaven” occurs 14 times in Matthew, once in Mark, and once in Luke, indicating its importance in Jesus’ teaching in Matthew. For example, the Lord’s Prayer (Mt.6:9-13) begins with “Our Father in heaven,” yet He is close enough to listen to our whispered prayers and even the unspoken supplications of our hearts. The word “father” in Jesus’ mind speaks of one who hears and cares: “Which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent?” (Mt.7:9,10)

Moreover, the idea of God as Father is not something that first appeared in the NT. In the OT there are at least six men and two women who have the name Abijah. “Abi” means “my father” and “Jah” is the short form of “Yahweh”. Here is the definition as given in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*: “Abijah, Heb: *’abhiyah* or Heb: *’abhiyahu* (2 Ch 13:20,21), ‘my father is Yahweh,’ or ‘Yahweh is father’”.

The notion of heaven as some transcendent place far above the stars is another erroneous idea. In Scripture the heavenly is the spiritual, in contrast to the earthly or what is physical and material. The physical has a geographical location, but not what is spiritual. “God is spirit” as Jesus said, and spirit is not confined to any particular earthly or cosmic location. To understand this is to realize that geographical location does not matter; what matters is that “God is spirit; and they that worship him must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). God’s transcendence-immanence abolishes any notion of His being remote and unreachable in some distant heavenly place.

But trinitarianism has left us with the notion that the Father is far away in heaven while “Jesus is very near” (in the words of a once popular song). It is little wonder that Christians prefer to pray to Jesus, even though the Biblical warrant for doing so is lacking. To Christians, Jesus’ being “near” makes him more accessible. Even though the Father may be able to hear us if He is willing to do so, yet was it not Jesus who gave us the assurance that “I will certainly not reject anyone who comes to me” (Jn.6:37, NJB)? These words are interpreted in such a way as to imply that we can be more certain of acceptance by Jesus than by the Father; this is because the

Father (Yahweh) is the transcendent God, while Jesus is the immanent God, who for that very reason is more approachable. This is the kind of misrepresentation of God that we learned from our trinitarianism. All this is very far from the truth about God as revealed in the Scriptures, as we have seen in the preceding paragraphs.

### **Yahweh's love**

What does all that we have seen in Genesis (and the rest of Scripture) tell us about Yahweh's attitude towards man? An answer can be found in Jesus' words in John 17:23: "I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me *and have loved them even as you have loved me*" (NIV). Consider the staggering implications of the last statement in this verse, "You (Father) have loved them *even as* (καθώς, *kathōs*) you have loved me"! Can it really be that the Father (Yahweh) loves us even as He loves the one of whom He declared, "This is my beloved Son," the one who is "the only begotten of the Father"? Or perhaps we should understand this as meaning "in a similar way" but not "to the same extent"? The definition of *kathōs* (καθώς) as given in BDAG is, "of comparison, *just as*". An example of its use (it appears frequently in various contexts) can be found in 1John 3:2, "We know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as (*kathōs*) He is". Surely the point here is not that we shall see Him as He is in some generalized or approximate way (whatever that might mean)



but that “we will see Him as He really is” (1Jn.3:2, NJB). Does this not mean that in John 17:23, Jesus is saying that the Father loves the disciples in exactly the same way as He loves Jesus?

### **He comes to save us because of His love for us**

It is worth pausing for a moment to consider who the “He” is in 1John 3:2 (“but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is”). In the preceding verse, the Father is the subject, and there is no reference to the Son. Also, there is no instance in the Johannine writings in which the word “appear” (*phaneroō*) refers to the second coming of Christ. The word *phaneroō* does occur a few verses before 1John 3:2, namely in 2:28, with reference to the Lord’s appearing but, significantly, there is again no reference to Christ in the context from v.27ff. But in the next verse (v.29) “born of him” must surely refer to God (the Father), not Christ, since nowhere in the NT are believers said to have been “born of Christ” or “born of the Son,” but only “born of God” (1Jn.3:9; altogether 7 times in 5 verses in 1John).

Can it be that John is indicating an “appearing” of Yahweh Himself? This would not be at all surprising to those familiar with the words of Isaiah 40:3-5. This is how the New Jerusalem Bible translates it,

<sup>3</sup> A voice cries, ‘Prepare in the desert a way *for Yahweh*. Make a straight highway for *our God* across the wastelands. <sup>4</sup> Let every valley be filled in, every mountain and hill be levelled,

every cliff become a plateau, every escarpment a plain; <sup>5</sup> then *the glory of Yahweh will be revealed and all humanity will see it together*, for the mouth of Yahweh has spoken.

Here is a prophecy of His “appearing” as in 1John 2:28. Moreover, this prophecy can refer to the “first coming” in view of the references to this verse in all four gospels (Mt.3:1-3; Mk.1:2-5; Lk.3:2-6; Jn.1:23), as well as the reference to a future “second coming” of His glory in Christ, seeing that the part of the prophecy (shown in italics) which declares that “the glory of Yahweh will be revealed and all humanity will see it together” (v.5) does not yet appear to have been fulfilled (cf. 2Thess.2:8). Significantly, it is precisely in this context, and immediately before John speaks about our “seeing Him as He is” (1Jn.3:2) that he exclaims, “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1Jn.3:1).

Yahweh’s love is seen in His coming to be with us, as is expressed in the name “Immanuel”: Isaiah 7:14, “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel {*Immanuel* means *God with us.*}” (NIV). The BDB Hebrew-English lexicon says:

“Immanuel (*with us is God*); Is 7:14 עִמָּנוּ אֵל name of child, symbolizing presence of, [Yahweh] to deliver his people; 8:8; 8:10 is declaration of trust and confidence, *with us is God!* (cf. Psalm 46:8; 46:12)”. [BDB’s references in the Psalms are those of the Hebrew text; in English they are Ps.46:7 and 46:11, and both read, “The LORD (Yahweh) of hosts is with

us [Heb. *immanu* (*with us*)]; the God of Jacob is our fortress.”]

The prophesied coming and consequent presence of Yahweh in relation to the conception and birth of Jesus is seen in Matthew 1:

<sup>21</sup> “She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” <sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: <sup>23</sup> “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel’ (which means, God with us).” [quoting Isa.7:14]

In view of the explicit reference to Yahweh in Isaiah 40:3-5, and of the notion of “God with us (Immanuel)” through Christ’s birth, it can be reasonably concluded from these verses that it was Yahweh who was prophesied as coming into the world in Christ. If this conclusion is rejected then the only option left is to deprive “Immanuel” of substantive meaning in regard to Jesus by generalizing it in the way it is often used in greetings to mean something like “let God be with us”; in this sense “Immanuel” would mean little more than “God will be with Jesus in some special way”. But the word does not mean that God will be *with Jesus* but that, in Jesus, God will be “*with us*”. That is to say: God will be present in Jesus in such a way that He is the God who is present with us. Trinitarians, of course, accept this understanding of “Immanuel,” but by “God” they mean “God the Son,” not “the only true God” Yahweh. But this option is not available to them

for the reason which should by now be perfectly clear: there is no such person in the Scriptures as “God the Son”.

## The Angel of the Lord

Yahweh’s love for His people, as well as His practical care and concern for them, is seen in the way His presence is with them in all the crises of their lives. The Psalmist expresses it like this, “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble” (Ps. 46:1, NIV). This is a statement of experience, not merely of religious faith. One way in which Yahweh interacted with His people was through the figure or form of “the angel of Yahweh”. In the following section we shall often refer to “the angel of Yahweh” simply as “the Angel”.

The “angel of the LORD (Yahweh)” (מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה, *malach Yahweh*) is a term that occurs 52 times in the OT<sup>33</sup>. But not all of these refer to what *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* describes as the “Angel of Theophany”; some are “ordinary” angels sent by God to fulfill a specific task (e.g. Zech.1:12). On the other hand, there are a considerable number of appearances of “the angel of Yahweh” where there can be no doubt that these are theophanies, that is, God appearing in a visible form. Angels usually appear in human form (see below), so “the angel of the Yahweh” provides another highly significant example of “anthropomorphic” theophany. Thus

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<sup>33</sup> There are 54 occurrences; but the reference in Haggai 1:13 is to the prophet Haggai as Yahweh’s messenger, and in Malachi 2:7 it is the priest who is His messenger.

this “Angel” could, for this reason, be described as a visible “form” of God.

Yahweh’s self-revelation in Exodus 3:14 is of great importance, which we discussed earlier. It is precisely in this connection that there is the appearance of “the angel of the LORD”. Here we need to observe how the whole event is described in Exodus 3:

<sup>1</sup> Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

<sup>2</sup> And **the angel of the Lord (Yahweh) appeared** to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed.

<sup>3</sup> And Moses said, “I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned.”

<sup>4</sup> When **the Lord (Yahweh) saw** that he turned aside to see, **God** called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.”

<sup>5</sup> Then he said, “Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.”

<sup>6</sup> And he said, “**I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.**” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at **God**.

There can be no doubt that the appearance of “the angel of Yahweh” in this passage is none other than an appearance of Yahweh Himself, so the term “the Angel of the Theophany”

is entirely appropriate here. A long and important conversation between Yahweh and Moses about rescuing the enslaved people of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt extends all the way from Exodus 3:7 well into the following chapter. It is in this context that God's self-revelation as "I am that I am" (Ex.3:14) is given. It will be seen, too, that His appearances in the form of "the angel of the LORD" happen consistently at crucial points in Israel's history. This again powerfully reveals Yahweh's character as One who is deeply concerned about the plight and needs of His people.

In addition to the 52 references to "the angel of Yahweh" there are another 9 that refer to "the angel of God" who, at least in some cases, seems to be none other than "the angel of Yahweh". Judges 6:20 speaks of "the angel of God" whereas in the following two verses he is referred to as "the angel of Yahweh". This parallel also comes out in Judges 13 where verses 6 and 9 speak of "the angel of God" who in verses 13-22 is "the angel of Yahweh". Moreover, from verses 8-11 we see that Manoah and his wife, to whom the angel of God had appeared, thought that what they saw was a "man of God," so *he was clearly in human form*. This remains true even after the reference is changed to "the angel of Yahweh" (from v.13 onwards). "Manoah did not know that he (i.e. "the man of God") was the angel of the LORD (Yahweh)" (v.16), but Manoah and his wife later realized that they had seen God in human form and were terrified of the consequences: "Manoah said to his wife, 'We shall surely die, for we have seen God'" (v.22).

The “Angel” appeared at crucial points in the “salvation history” of the OT. His first recorded appearance was in Abraham’s time when he appeared to Hagar, the mother of the Arab peoples, and made her a promise very much like the promise Yahweh had made to Abraham (Gen.16:7-11; cp. 13:16). Yahweh’s fairness or justice is here made evident.

The “Angel” appeared to Abraham at the crucial moment when Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac his son in his absolute devotion and obedience to Yahweh (Gen.22:11ff). But Yahweh mercifully spared Abraham from actually having to sacrifice his son. Yet Yahweh Himself, for the sake of mankind’s salvation, “did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all” (Rom. 8:32). Paul’s remarkable choice of words in this verse would seem to indicate that he was thinking about Abraham’s sacrifice, which was an act of great significance in Judaism.

How the nation of Israel received its name is interestingly narrated in Gen. 32:24-30 where Jacob, the father of the nation, wrestled with a “man” all night and ended up crippled with a dislocated hip; yet the “man” graciously said that Jacob had “prevailed” (v.28) and gave him the new name “Israel”: “Then the man said, ‘Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, *{Israel means he struggles with God}* because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome” (v.28, NIV). Jacob then realized that he had been “face to face” with God: “So Jacob called the place Peniel *{Peniel means face of God}* saying, ‘It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.’” (v.30, NIV). There is no mention in this passage of “the angel of the LORD,” but the “man” with whom

Jacob “wrestled” was evidently a human form in which God chose to appear to Jacob.

This causes us to realize that quite apart from the considerable number of references to the “Angel” there are other important events in which the Angel may have appeared but is not named. An example of this may be found in the remarkable account recorded in Joshua 5:13-15 where, on the eve of the attack on Jericho at the beginning of the conquest of the Promised Land, Joshua saw a “man” with a sword in his hand (see below for instances where the “Angel” appeared with sword in hand). When Joshua, who Moses had appointed as his successor to lead the armies of Israel, asked the “man” on whose side he was, he was informed that this “man,” not Joshua, was “commander of Yahweh’s army”; Joshua immediately prostrated himself before him. This was certainly because Joshua now became aware of who the “man” really was. Yahweh’s army was not known to have any commander other than Yahweh Himself, hence the title “LORD of Hosts” (literally, “Yahweh of Army”), with “host” being the old English word for “army”. Here the term “Yahweh’s army” may be intended to include the armies of Israel which were about to enter Canaan.

Another confirmation that it was actually Yahweh who appeared to Joshua is seen in the fact that Joshua was instructed to “take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy” (5:15)—which is exactly what the angel of the Lord had instructed Moses to do at the burning bush: “take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground” (Ex.3:5).



The angel of the Lord appeared with sword in hand in Numbers 22. There are 10 references to the “Angel” in this chapter, and we may wonder why there should be so many references in what seems to be a relatively trivial event concerning Balaam. But when we perceive that what was at issue here was the cursing of Israel by Balaam (v.17), then we see that this was not at all a trivial matter in God’s sight. The whole section extends from verse 22 to verse 35. In verse 23 we find exactly the same phrase as that in Joshua: the Angel stood with “drawn sword in hand,” and again in v.31 (another instance is the fearful event chronicled in 1Chr.21:16).

2Ki.19:35 mentions another frightening act of judgment, this time against the Assyrian armies which had come to destroy Jerusalem and to subjugate Israel. To save Israel, the angel of Yahweh struck dead 185,000 Assyrians in one night, causing the invading Assyrian army to withdraw. Though the word “sword” does not appear in this passage, the sword of judgment (and of deliverance for Israel) is undoubtedly intended.

The “Angel” is involved in the pivotal events of OT history. Since the “Angel” was a theophany, what does his activity mean if not Yahweh’s intense care and concern for His people, that is, “those who love him, who have been called in accordance with his purpose” (Rom.8:28)?

In view of what we have studied, we can in general endorse *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia’s* observations:

It is certain that from the beginning God used angels in human form, with human voices, in order to communicate with man; and the appearances of the angel of the Lord, with his special redemptive relation to God's people, show the working of that Divine mode of self-revelation which culminated in the coming of the Saviour, and are thus a foreshadowing of, and a preparation for, the full revelation of God in Jesus Christ. (ISBE "Angel," under the section "The Angel of the Theophany")

Prof. E.R. Wolfson, referring to the many passages in the Hebrew Bible which speak of the Angel of the Lord, says that in them "God appears in the guise of the angel". He then continues,

One scriptural verse that is extremely significant for understanding this ancient Israelite conception is God's statement that the Israelites should give heed to the angel whom he has sent before them and not rebel against him, for his name is in him (Ex.23:21). The line separating the angel and God is substantially blurred, for by bearing the name, which signifies the power of the divine nature, the angel is an embodiment of God's personality. To possess the name is not merely to be invested with divine authority; it means that ontologically the angel is the incarnational presence of the divine manifest in the providential care over Israel. (Wolfson, chapter on "Judaism and Incarnation," *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, p.244)

On the same page, Wolfson continues:

The ancient belief was that God could appear as an angelic presence to human beings, and the shape that this presence took was that of an anthropos [man, or human being]. The angelic form, therefore, is the garment (as later kabbalists expressed the matter) in which the divine is clad when it is manifest in the world in the shape of an anthropos. (p.244)

Very shortly before the manuscript of this book was about to go to the publishers, I had the good fortune to come across an insightful and thought-provoking book by Professor James L. Kugel (he is Starr Professor of Hebrew Literature at Harvard University) entitled, *The God of Old*. Here I include some of his concluding observations following his study of the Biblical texts about the angel of the Lord:

“Here, then, is the most important point about the angel in all these texts. He is not so much an emissary, or messenger, of God as God Himself in human form”.

“The angel, in other words, is not some lesser order of divine being; it is God Himself, but God unrecognized, God intruding into ordinary reality.”

“The angel looks like an ordinary human being for a while, but only for a while; then comes the moment of recognition, when it turns out that, oh yes, that was God and no ordinary human”

(*The God of Old*, 2003, pp.34,35)

## Yahweh's loving-kindness

What this means is that the idea of Yahweh coming into the world in human form is not something strange or foreign to the Bible. On the contrary, the notion of God's personal intervention, often appearing in human form at crucial times in the history of His people, is something frequently mentioned in the Scriptures. It can rightly be said that, given His nature and character as revealed in the Scriptures, Yahweh would not, and could not, be indifferent or unconcerned about mankind and his needs, and especially his sufferings, even when these sufferings were brought upon man by his own sins.

One of the most frequently used words in the Hebrew Bible in relation to Yahweh's character is *hesed*. The word occurs 251 times, of which a large proportion has to do with Yahweh. The difficulty of translating this word is shown by the variety of ways it is rendered in the various translations: "lovingkindness" (NASB), "mercy" (KJV), "steadfast love" (ESV), "unfailing love" (NIV), "faithful love" (NJB), "loyal love" (NET). All these variations are found in the translations of Exodus 15:13. The translation of the word may vary even within the same version. But what is clear from the variety of words used is that *love* is the common element in all of them, including "mercy". This is how *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* summarizes a lengthy academic discussion on *hesed*:

... it refers to an attitude as well as to actions. This attitude is parallel to love, *rahûm*, goodness, *tôb*, etc. It is a kind of love, including mercy, *hannûn*, when the object is in a pitiful state.

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It often takes verbs of action, ‘do,’ ‘keep,’ and so refers to acts of love as well as to the attribute. The word ‘lovingkindness’ of the KJV is archaic, but not far from the fulness of meaning of the word.

Yahweh’s character is beautifully expressed in these tender words, “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness (*hesed*).” (Jer.31:3, NIV).





# Christianity has Lost its Jewish Roots: The Serious Consequences

## **Christianity has lost its Jewish roots**

**T**he church we see in the book of Acts was a Jewish church in the 30s and 40s of the first century thriving through God's dynamic power and under Jewish leadership. One of the most vigorous and learned among these first leaders was, of course, the Apostle Paul, the "apostle to the Gentiles" (Rom. 11:13); he is the chief figure in the Book of Acts, and his evangelistic activities are the subject of most of that book. But Gentile Christians appear to have forgotten not only that he was a Jew, but how Jewish he was, and how proud he was of it. In a recent book, Garry Wills (Professor of History Emeritus at Northwestern University, Illinois) does a good job of reminding his readers of this fact:

There is no more Semitic a Semite than Paul. ‘If one relies on lineage, I can do so more than others—circumcised on the eighth day, by race a man of Israel, by tribe of Benjamin, Hebrew from Hebrews, in Law a Pharisee, in dedication a persecutor of the gathering [the church], in vindication under the Law a man faultless’ (Phil 3:4-6). ‘For Jewishness I outstripped many contemporaries of my own lineage, extreme in my zealous preservation of the patriarchs’ traditions’ (Gal 1:14). Paul is just as Jewish as Jewish can be ... He boasts only of his Jewish roots and observance. (*What Paul Meant*, Penguin, 2006, p.129,130).

Clearly, Paul did not desert his Jewish roots when he became a follower of Messiah Jesus. A fundamental defining mark of the Jew was his monotheism, and Paul was as monotheistic as any monotheist, as is perfectly clear from his letters (Rom.16:27; 1Cor.8:6; 8:4; Rom.3:30; Eph.1:3; 3:14; 4:6; 1Tim.1:17; 2:5, etc). As apostle to the Gentiles, Paul saw his mission as being that of bringing Gentiles into “the commonwealth of Israel” through faith in Jesus Christ (Eph.2:12); they thereby become members of “the Israel of God” (Gal.6:16).

But within a hundred years, the church had evolved from being under dedicated Jewish leadership to becoming a predominantly Gentile church under Gentile leaders. *A quantum shift had taken place.* The church was now composed of people from a polytheistic background who lacked the ardent commitment to monotheism which is characteristic of the Jews. It soon became apparent that the Gentile church was not particularly averse to adding one or two more persons



to the Godhead, while nominally acknowledging the monotheistic character of the faith and the Scriptures (both Old and New) that they had inherited from the Jewish church.

The Gentile church proceeded boldly with the process of the deification of Christ in spite of the fact that they could not find one verse in their New Testament which plainly stated that Jesus is God. The fact that trinitarianism could find nothing in the NT that supported them is hardly surprising given the fact that all except one (i.e. Luke) of the writers of the New Testament were Jews. Little wonder that the Nicene Creed, which had become determinative for the (Gentile) Christian church, and in which Jesus is raised to full deity so as to be coequal with the Father, does not quote a single verse in support of this new dogma.

Most Christians to this day are unaware of just how feeble the Biblical foundation of trinitarianism is. The Scriptural situation for trinitarianism, where the New Testament is concerned, is put clearly and concisely by J.H. Thayer: “Whether Christ is called God must be determined from John 1:1; 20:28; 1 John 5:20; Rom.9:5; Titus 2:13; Heb. 1:8f, etc.; **the matter is still in dispute among theologians.**” (Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon, under θεός, sec.2, emphasis added). Yes, 1700 years after the Nicene Creed had been established as official church dogma, Christian theologians are still unable to ascertain whether Christ can be called God according to the New Testament! To put the situation in another way, whether Jesus can be called God depends on the *interpretation* of a small number of verses, but the validity or correctness of these interpretations is disputed.

This situation was the inevitable result of the church's having lost its connection to its Jewish roots. How could one extract trinitarianism from the monotheistic writings of the New Testament? Voluminous efforts expended in countless books and articles could not accomplish this. All that could be (and has been) done was to impose interpretations on the unyieldingly monotheistic writings that are fundamentally incompatible with them. These interpretations, sitting insecurely on foundations that will not support them, can be easily overturned. Is it not time for the church to return to its monotheistic Jewish foundation rather than continue to try to build on a foundation that is incompatible with it?

The church received God's revelation of Himself as recorded in the Hebrew Bible, which Christians call the Old Testament. What most Christians today don't know is that *the early church had no other Bible except "the Old Testament"*. What was circulated in the early churches were some letters, such as those written by the apostles Peter and Paul, originally written to specific churches whose names are still attached to them. Some churches may have had one or more of the four gospels we now have. Not until the late 2nd century were these letters and gospels collected together into something like our present NT.

What all this means is that the early church was built up on the solid foundation of the monotheism of "the earlier Scriptures," the Hebrew Bible. The NT writings are likewise firmly built on the foundation of the OT as its many allusions to, and quotations from, the OT show. The inextricably close relationship between the earlier and the later Scriptures,

between the Old and the New Testaments, finds expression in the saying, “The New is in the Old concealed; the Old is in the New revealed”.

What we learn in the OT is that God created the world and chose a line of faithful individuals through whom He worked out His plans for mankind. God began to reveal Himself to these persons, and through them to the world. He then chose the people of Israel, not because they were a great nation but precisely because of their insignificance among the nations (Dt.7:7). This exemplifies the way God works as enunciated in 1Corinthians 1:27, “God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong”.

Jesus, God’s uniquely “chosen one” (Lk.9:35), was a Jew and so were all his apostles. The first Christian church in Jerusalem was made up of Jews. But the destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple in AD 70 by the Roman armies, together with further uprisings, resulted in the end of Israel as a nation for almost 1900 years. The short-lived Bar Kochba uprising against the Romans was put down in AD 135, with even harsher consequences for the Jewish people in Palestine. The gospel, however, through the missionary efforts of Paul and others, had already been spread far and wide in the Roman Empire. But one result was that the church by the latter part of the 2nd century had become a predominantly non-Jewish church which quickly lost its connections to its Jewish roots. Its leaders had grown up in the religious and cultural atmosphere of paganism and polytheism. Those who had some degree of education had already drunk deeply from the fountains of Greek religious and philosophical ideas. These ideas

had shaped their minds, and would prove to be difficult to unlearn even when they became Christians. This would, inevitably, have profound consequences when it came to formulating doctrines. The doctrine of the Trinity, established as the official dogma of the Gentile church 300 years after Christ, is an almost natural product of this series of events, beginning with the separation of the church from its Jewish origin.

The Bible was now being read as though it were a trinitarian book instead of what it really was: a monotheistic one. Every effort was made to find trinitarian proof-texts in the New Testament, even though practically nothing could be found in the Old Testament for this purpose. Accordingly, NT texts were often given a trinitarian meaning without proper reference to their OT background. Even today, OT scholarship and NT scholarship function as separate domains (perhaps thanks also to this age of specialization) such that there appears to be little interaction between the two. Years ago I met an acquaintance at a library in Cambridge where he was completing a doctorate in some OT subject. He asked me what I was doing at that time. When I told him that I was studying some questions in the NT, he smiled and said, "Oh, I didn't think there were any questions left in the NT to study!" Of course he said this jokingly, but that the idea would even cross his mind that there may be no more questions left to study seemed at least to indicate that he did not really know what those questions might be.

The church's separation from its Jewish roots meant that it no longer knew the religious and cultural atmosphere of the

time of Christ and his apostles, or of those who wrote the NT. Most Christians today don't even know what Jesus' mother tongue was, or in what language he taught, because they have no idea what was the spoken language in Palestine in Jesus' time. Most have not even heard of the word "Aramaic," let alone know that this was the language which Jesus spoke in his daily life because this was the language spoken in the land of Israel at that time, and for about 500 years before that.

Even in the world of New Testament scholarship, insufficient attention has been paid to Aramaic. After all, most theological seminary graduates have scarcely attained even an elementary knowledge of Hebrew, let alone Aramaic, a related but different Semitic language.

But the appreciation for the importance of Aramaic began to change in NT scholarship with the discoveries at Qumran beginning in 1947, when it was found that substantial parts of the Qumran writings were in Aramaic. Also around that time the discovery was made of a complete Aramaic Targum; previously only portions were available. "Targum" is the Aramaic word for "translation," and the Targums were translations into Aramaic of the Hebrew Bible. These translations became necessary because from the time of Ezra and Nehemiah the people who returned from the Exile could no longer speak Hebrew. Having lived in exile for several decades, they spoke the Aramaic language of the lands in which they lived. This is a situation which is replicated by the Jews today who have lived in foreign countries for generations, very few of whom are able to speak Hebrew. When I went to Israel to learn Hebrew in my student days, most of those in my

language class were Jews who had come to learn the language of their early forefathers.

Certainly, the importance of Aramaic for the understanding of the NT was known to a relatively small number of scholars (Wellhausen, Burney, M. Black, and others) already before the above mentioned discoveries. But it did not receive the attention it deserved until the impetus given by those new discoveries. Scholars such as M. McNamara (*Targum and Testament*) have made significant contributions in this direction. Some examples of these contributions are given expression by a group of scholars in their studies published in *The Aramaic Bible*, ed. D.R.G. Beattie and M.J. McNamara, JSOT Press, 1994.

One of the articles in *The Aramaic Bible* is titled “The Aramaic Background of the New Testament” by Prof. Max Wilcox. Of the many points he makes at the conclusion of his article, one is that “*the material from the Targumim* [Heb. for Targums] *and from Qumran should be utilized to the full*” (p.377; italics and explanation in brackets added). This is precisely what we intend to do when we come to the crucial study of the “Word” (*logos* in Greek; *memra* in Aramaic) in John 1:1 and other verses where applicable. But first we need to gain a better understanding of the significance of Aramaic for the study of the Scriptures.

## **The extremely serious spiritual consequences of the shift away from the Jewish mother church**

Few Christians today seem to be aware of the fact that all churches that claim to be “Christian” grew out of the first church at Jerusalem which can, therefore, be appropriately called “the Jewish mother church”. We have an account in the first several chapters of the book of Acts about how that church came into being at Pentecost in or about the year AD 33. The tragedy is that the mother church would be unable to recognize her “children” if she were to see them as they are today. In regard to the matter of prayer, for example, there is no doubt whatever that the Jewish church knew God only as the one true God, and prayed to Him alone and absolutely no one else. The words of Deuteronomy 10:17 would have characterized their concept of the only God: “For Yahweh your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God”; that is to say in the strongest possible terms that Yahweh alone is the one true God. This was epitomized in the *Shema* (Deut.6:4) which was central to their faith and could never be compromised. *The New Jerusalem Bible* rightly expresses the spirit of the *Shema*: “Listen, Israel: Yahweh our God is the one, the only Yahweh.”

What, therefore, would the shock and horror of the Jerusalem mother church be if they could see the non-Jewish churches today? They would find some Christians praying to “God the Father,” who is no longer the only God because to them there are two other persons who are equally God besides him. They would find most Christians praying to and

worshipping Jesus, who is one of the two persons besides “the Father,” and who himself is now “God the Son”. What has happened to the church? Or is this really the church? It now has nothing of spiritual substance in common with the Jerusalem church; almost everything has been changed or distorted.

The early Jewish church certainly loved and honored Jesus as God’s servant (*pais*, Acts 3:13,26; 4:25,27,30), a title found primarily in the early chapters of Acts and was apparently their preferred way of referring to him. But it would have been inconceivable to them that Jesus would have been worshipped alongside Yahweh and on the same level with Him. They saw Jesus as their Savior and friend, whom they could approach as their great high priest who intercedes for them with Yahweh at “the throne of grace” (Heb.4:16). But the Jews did not pray to the high priest, but only to Yahweh, who was “enthroned above the cherubim,” or in the words of king Hezekiah’s prayer, “O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, who is enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone” (Isa.37:16; 2Ki.19:15; 1Chr.13:6; cf. Heb.9:5). We have a record of how the Jerusalem church prayed in a time of crisis: “they lifted their voices together to God and said, ‘Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them...’”, and it is in this prayer that Jesus is twice referred to as “your holy servant Jesus” (Acts 4:27,30). King David is referred to by the same word “servant” (*pais*, v.25). They honored Jesus as both “Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36), but their prayers were not addressed to him; they prayed only to the God who alone is God.



## **Prayer was not made to Jesus in the NT**

This fact should be considered decisive against any argument for Jesus' deity. The Jerusalem church both knew and declared that "God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36), but the prayers of this spiritually dynamic church were directed to God, not to Jesus.

When Stephen was being stoned to death, he committed his departing spirit to Jesus' care (Acts 7:59). Shortly before this he had a vision in which he saw Jesus standing in attendance at the right hand of God as "the Son of man" (Acts 7:56). No matter how exalted a being "the Son of man" might be, no Jewish believer would have prayed to a man, which is essentially what "the son of man" means in both Hebrew and Aramaic. So Stephen's interaction with the resurrected Jesus is not something on the level of praying to God. It is at most on the level of communicating with a heavenly being in much the same way that John conversed with the angel in the Revelation. This was not something unfamiliar to the Jewish mind. Consider, for example, the extended story of The Rich Man and Lazarus told by Jesus in Luke 16:19-31. Whatever may be the genre and nature of this story (that is, whether it is factual or not, which does not concern us here), in it Jesus describes how when the rich man died, his spirit departed to Hades and was in torment. There he looked up and saw Abraham. He pleaded with Abraham to send Lazarus to bring him a little "water" to cool his "tongue"; but since the rich man is no longer in the body, clearly "water to cool the tongue" is metaphorical for relief of his spiritual torment. But

we need not here discuss the details of this story. The only point of relevance for us here is whether this “prayer” to Abraham constitutes prayer according to the NT, and exactly how it differs from Stephen’s “prayer” to Jesus. As far as the Scriptures are concerned, prayer (properly so called) was addressed only to God, “the only God” (Jn.5:44).

It would be absurd to suggest that Jesus taught, by that story, that people should pray to Abraham in time of need. Yet a substantial part of the Christian church endorses “praying” to the saints; and though Abraham is not a “saint” of the church, yet since praying to a saint is praying to a human being, then praying to Abraham should not be a problem for this part of the church. But since the NT church addressed prayer only to God, Jesus’ story of Lazarus should not be used in the church in support of prayer to the saints. Moreover, a major doctrine about prayer cannot be based upon one story. The rich man in Hades made a plea to Abraham (for those in Hades without access to God, whom else could they plead with?), but not every plea or request is a prayer.

In Stephen’s case, being a follower of Jesus he had *already* committed his life to following Jesus and did not need to plead to be accepted again; he was now faithfully following Jesus right into heaven, and giving notice of his coming to him with the words “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” (Acts 7:59). A much fuller communication was that between Jesus and Saul on the Damascus road (Acts 9:3-7). In another instance, Jesus communicated a message of assurance to Paul at Corinth in a vision at night (Acts 18:9,10), but this was apparently a one way communication. The point is that there

is simply nothing in the book of Acts that can be cited as evidence for praying to Jesus. The same is true for the whole NT. If the Apostolic church thought of Jesus as God, then this fact is totally inexplicable. “Maranatha” or “Come, Lord Jesus” (1Cor.16:22; Rev.22:20) are prayers only *if* every invitation to “come” is considered a prayer.

### **Is there anyone here who prays to Yahweh?**

This was a question I asked a room full of pastors and preachers. No one raised his or her hand. Yahweh has effectively been eliminated from Christianity. Is this a matter for concern? There is no cause for concern *if* salvation does not matter to us. But what do the Scriptures say?

**Romans 10:13:** “For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’”

**Acts 2:20:** “The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. <sup>21</sup> And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

These are quotations of Joel 2:31,32: “The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD (Yahweh) comes. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD (Yahweh) shall be saved.”

But do we realize that the statement in Romans 10:13 (and Acts 2:20), which concerns the weighty matter of eternal

salvation, refers to calling on Yahweh? And does Yahweh have any place at all in the prayers, thoughts, and lives of Christians today? Has not Yahweh been practically eliminated from Christianity? Has not even the Name “Yahweh” become foreign to us (somewhat like “Allah”)? How has this come about?

Christianity today has made itself into a self-contained package or system which does not need Yahweh; He is, for all practical purposes, quietly and politely set aside by this system. Within this system, Christ is everything, he is center and circumference. He is the object of prayer and worship, for he is the one who came into the world out of love for us, and proved this by giving himself for us; he rose from the dead and took his place of honor beside the Father. By his suffering and the blood of his cross he secured the salvation of all who have faith in him and call on his name. He is coming again to reign upon the earth together with those who are faithful to him, his saints. This is the trinitarian doctrinal “package”.

Actually, what did the Father do for our salvation, apart from sending Jesus into the world to die? Or did He really need to send him? Was not Jesus more than willing to come, whether or not he was sent? But at least the Father did raise him from the dead, or was even that necessary? For does not the Scripture say that death could not keep God’s “holy one” in its grip (Ps.16:10; Acts 2:27ff); that being the case, would not death be obliged to release him because death could have no hold on the sinless one? Moreover, does Scripture not also say that Jesus is “the everlasting Father” (Isa.9:6)? So the Son is also the Father!

Thus in this Christocentric, Christ-all-sufficient system, what need is there for the Father, beyond merely acknowledging His existence? After all, without the Father there could be no Trinity; indeed, without the Son there could also be no Trinity. As for the Holy Spirit in this Christo-centric system, he is for all practical purposes an extension of Christ, for is he not called “the Spirit of Christ” (Rom.8:9) or “the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (Phil.1:19)?

In trinitarianism, Christ is coeternal and coequal with the Father in every respect, but if that is the case, then it would not be easy to explain why he is called “God the Son,” for a son derives his being from his father. Or perhaps it is just because he was called “the son of God” on earth, so the title “the Son” is applied to him retroactively into eternity because there is no other convenient title available. After all, did not Jesus himself speak of “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” (Mt.28:19)?

Since Jesus is coeternal and coequal with the Father in trinitarianism, it logically follows that when we use the word “God” it does not necessarily refer to the Father. So when we talk about “God,” or read about God in the OT, it could just as well be referring to Jesus.

From the moment the church declared Jesus to be God, they inevitably made the Father redundant. If Jesus is both God and man, he would clearly mean more to us than one who is “only” God and not man. We can relate to a God who is also man far better than one who is only God, for we feel that we can identify with him because of his humanity. This God-man, therefore, relates to us as man, and is all sufficient

as God, so what use does the trinitarian have for the Father who does not have the advantage of being human like the God-man Jesus? So for all practical purposes, in trinitarianism we can forget about the Father. In any case, Christians don't really know who the Father is and are not concerned about this, because Christ is His image, and this image is more than adequate for them.

Moreover, is not the total sufficiency of Christ for everything in the Christian life and for salvation summed up in the words "Christ is all and in all" in Colossians 3:11?

But the answer to this question is, exegetically speaking, a definite "No, it does not support this trinitarian Christ-all-sufficient system of doctrine." Look at Colossians 3:11 in full, "Here (that is, in the new man, v.10) there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all." This verse addresses specifically the question concerning *relationships*, especially that of Jew and Gentile, in the church. In the "new man," which is the church with Christ as its head, there are no ethnic, cultural, or social distinctions of any kind, because here Christ is everything that matters to everyone—which is what "all in all" means. It is specifically *within the context of the new man* that Christ is all in all.

Ephesians 2:15 addresses the same issue (also Acts 15:5ff) with the words, "that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two (Jew and Gentile), so making peace". Christ is all that matters in the context of all relationships within the church. This same point is reaffirmed in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave

nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” All this makes it perfectly clear that “Christ is all” is a statement made *in the context of relationships within the church*, especially that between Jew and Gentile, and is therefore misapplied when made into a universal or cosmic principle. Ultimately, Yahweh God alone will be “all in all” (1Cor.15:28).

The other reason for failing to understand verses like Colossians 3:11 correctly is that Gentiles, generally having an inadequate foundation in the OT, usually have little appreciation for the significance of the Messiah in Scripture. And though “Christ,” like “Messiah,” means “Anointed One,” the significance of this has also evaporated. No Jew could have thought of the Messiah as God, yet Gentiles can readily declare that “Jesus Christ is God” without hesitation. Here is Colossians 3:11 according to the ancient Syriac Peshitta (Murdock), “there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, neither Greek nor barbarian, neither bond nor free; but *the Messiah* is all, and in all.”

### **The loss of Jewish roots meant the loss of pure monotheism, resulting in the trinitarian corruption of the concept of God**

What does “God” mean in trinitarianism? Well, it could refer to the Father, or the Son, or the Spirit, or any combination of them (e.g. Father and Son), or all three persons together. The God of trinitarianism is not a person, not even a “person” in

some generalized sense because “he” refers to the “substance” of which the three persons consist. To speak of a substance as “he” is contrary to language and logic, for a substance is an “it”. So trinitarianism has reduced “God” to an “it”.

Moreover, since God consists of three persons, he (or rather “it”) should be spoken of as “they,” as would be true of speaking of more than one person in any language. Trinitarianism has so corrupted the meaning of the word “God” that when a trinitarian speaks of God one does not know exactly who he is talking about (i.e. which of the three persons); but in most instances he is likely to be talking about Christ. It is not uncommon for Christians to pray to Jesus and then end their prayer “in Jesus’ name”!

This fuzzy concept of “God,” allegedly derived from the NT, stands in complete contrast to the God revealed in the Bible, who revealed His Name as “Yahweh”. There is simply nothing in the OT that can properly be called “evidence” in support of “three persons in the Godhead”. If Christians are to be delivered out of their doctrinal fog, they will have to see that their God is simply not Yahweh. And if they wish to equate Yahweh with “the Father” of trinitarianism, then they should realize that Yahweh has no co-equal “Son,” and that His Spirit is not a distinct person from Him. One can certainly call Him “Father,” but not in the trinitarian sense of the word. Sadly, trinitarianism has corrupted even the use of “Father” such that one has to define in which sense the word is being applied to God.



And the same is true in regard to “Son,” a term which is applied to the Messiah (meaning God’s “anointed one”) in Psalm 2:2, and with reference to whom Yahweh declares, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you” (v.7). “Today” marks an event *in time*, not eternity (“eternally begotten”), and this event is mentioned in the previous verse, “I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.” Yahweh appoints His messianic king to reign over all the nations of the world, even to “the ends of the earth” (v.8ff). This is the basis of Jesus’ statement in Matthew 28:19f. So the term “Son” describes the Messiah, and not an “eternal Son”.

The church needs to return to Yahweh and put an end to all distortions of the concept of God. Only so can we be delivered from the evil of falsehood and return to the truth which is found only in Yahweh. “I the LORD (Yahweh) speak the truth; I declare what is right” (Isaiah 45:19). “Teach me your way, O LORD (Yahweh), that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name” (Psalm 86:11).

Because the words “God” and “Father” have been corrupted by trinitarianism, these terms need to be redefined when the intention is to refer to “the one true God” (John 17:3). Trinitarianism has even robbed us of the vocabulary with which to correctly refer to the only God! Biblical monotheism cannot be expressed by means of trinitarian terminology. How then are we now to refer to Him? Is there any better way than to return to calling on His Name again as “Yahweh”? This may offend some Jews, who have made the pronouncing of His Holy Name taboo according to their tradition—in spite of the fact that their Scriptures instruct

them to call on His Name, also commanding them to “swear (i.e. take their solemn oaths) by His Name” (Deut.6:13). Therefore when relating to the Jews, one could use their preferred metonym “Adonai” when referring to Yahweh; in any case, to religious Jews, when talking about the Bible, the word “God” generally refers to Yahweh. People should be free to speak of “Yahweh” or “Adonai”.

There is actually no reason why it is necessary to abide by the man-made prohibition of speaking the Name “Yahweh”. The prohibition is to be rejected because *it is un-Biblical* as is evident from the obvious fact that the Bible itself delights in abundant references to His Name—some 7000 references in all! It makes no sense whatever to argue that the Name should not be used for fear of misuse when the Scriptures use it with such frequency that “Yahweh” appears several times on almost every page. If anyone brought forward the argument that we should not use money, or a car, or anything else for fear of misusing it, we would surely regard such an argument as quite absurd. Similarly, I doubt that anyone in the United Kingdom would consider it sensible to suggest that speaking the name “Elizabeth” should be prohibited for fear of insulting her majesty the Queen. On the contrary, do we not delight in speaking the name of the one we love—like the proud father who delights to speak of his son or daughter? It seems to me that this is one of the reasons why the Name of Yahweh appears so frequently in the Scriptures—His people delight in speaking His Name.

## **Getting to the root of the matter: “Their olive tree”—and ours**

But the matter goes even deeper. Jesus summed it up concisely in the words, “salvation is from the Jews” (Jn.4:22). This is not an ethnically motivated statement, but a statement about spiritual reality, as Jesus said, “My words, they are spirit and they are life” (Jn.6:63). To understand his words on the level of the flesh is to misunderstand them. In John’s gospel, Jesus is stern with the Jews because of their obstinate unbelief (a sternness also expressed by the great prophets of the OT); because of this some scholars have alleged anti-Semitism in John. But the succinct statement that “salvation is from the Jews” (Jn.4:22) effectively shatters such an allegation. The spiritual point of the reference to the Jews as the conduit of God’s salvation is to put into focus the “salvation history” delineated in the Old Testament. Moreover, the Jews are not a merely dispensable channel of salvation in the sense that once we have received salvation through the Jews, we can dispense with them. “Salvation” and “Jews” are linked in such a way that to be severed from the Jewish “tree” is to be severed from salvation. Let us consider this matter carefully from the Scriptures.

In Romans 11, Paul portrays the people of God as an olive tree whose roots stretch back in Biblical antiquity to Abraham and earlier; these godly men together constitute a holy root (Rom.11:16), rooted in a deep relationship with Yahweh God. Jews are branches of this olive tree, but because of their unbelief some of them were broken off by God (v.17); but the

believing Jews, including Paul and the members of the early Jewish Church, remain a part of the tree. The breaking off of the unbelieving “branches,” even if many, did not mean that God had rejected Israel as His people. It was with this very fact that Paul started this portion of his letter: “I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.” (Rom.11:1,2) In God’s wisdom and mercy, the breaking off of the unbelieving branches created an opening into which believing Gentiles could be grafted into the olive tree; this olive tree represents the people whom God has chosen, also called “the elect” (Rom.11:5,7). In this way “through their trespass, salvation has come to the Gentiles” (Rom.11:11).

But with this gracious provision of salvation for the Gentiles comes a stern warning in Romans 11:

<sup>17</sup> But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, <sup>18</sup> do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you.

Salvation is portrayed as being grafted into the olive tree and drawing spiritual life and nourishment from its root. A branch stays alive only so long as it remains firmly grafted in the tree; no branch can survive being cut off from the tree. To remain in this tree is life; to be cut off from it is death. Jesus,

the “deliverer” or “redeemer,” is an essential part of this tree (cf. Rom.11:26; Isa. 59:20, etc); therefore, to be united with Christ through faith is another way to explain how one is grafted into the tree. That is why in John 15:1ff Jesus also speaks in terms of a vine and its branches. Grafting is a regular procedure in viticulture; it is Yahweh God who grafts in or cuts off, because He is the “vinedresser”. As Jesus said, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser” (Jn.15:1). He also warned that unfruitful branches could be cut off and thrown away, “If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned” (Jn.15:6, NIV); but “whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit” (v.5).

What all this means is that to be cut off from the spiritual “olive tree” (or “vine,” cf. Isa.5:1-7) of Israel is to be cut off from salvation, whether he be Jew or Gentile, which is precisely what Paul warns could happen, and has happened to unbelieving Jews (Rom.11:22). Here is the whole passage:

<sup>19</sup> Then you will say, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.” <sup>20</sup> That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe. <sup>21</sup> For if God did not spare the natural branches, *neither will he spare you.* <sup>22</sup> Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God’s kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. *Otherwise you too will be cut off.*

In spite of these perfectly plain statements, there is no lack of Christians, especially in certain Protestant circles, who maintain that they cannot be cut off from salvation under any circumstance! How blind can one be even in the light of the clear language of Scripture?

On the other hand, those Jews who are willing to return to their God will be grafted back into the olive tree:

<sup>23</sup> And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. <sup>24</sup> For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree.

Notice these last words, “their olive tree,” for it was theirs by God’s grace in the first place, although it also becomes the Gentile’s by God’s grace, by their being grafted into it through faith; for it is through faith that we become members of “the Israel of God” (Gal.6:16). When we are grafted into the olive tree through faith, then “their olive tree” also becomes *our olive tree*.

**Galatians 3** <sup>7</sup> Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham ... <sup>29</sup> And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.

**Romans 2** <sup>28</sup> For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. <sup>29</sup> But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the

heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

**Romans 4** <sup>12</sup> (The purpose was) to make him (Abraham) the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

**Romans 9** <sup>6</sup> But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, <sup>7</sup> and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.’ <sup>8</sup> This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.

**Philippians 3** <sup>3</sup> For we are the real circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.

Can we grasp what the Apostle is saying in all these passages? Is he not declaring that it is through *faith* that a person becomes a descendant of Abraham, and “heirs according to promise” (Gal. 3:29)? It is by faith, not physical descent, that one becomes a child of God. Being a Jew is not a matter of race or religion but “a matter of the heart” (Rom. 2:29), so being an Israelite is not a matter of physical descent from Israel; to belong to Israel is a matter of being “children of the promise” (Rom.9:8) through faith. So he tells the Philippians, a proportion of whom are Gentiles, that “we are the real circumcision”. “Circumcision” is another word used

to describe Jews (Eph.2:11; Col.4:11; Rom.3:30; 4:9, etc), so Paul is saying to the Philippians, “you and I, we are the real Jews”.

The point is that the true believer (and not just any Christian) *is the real Jew before God*, the spiritual Jew whose praise comes from God, not man (Rom. 2:29). Becoming a believer is to become a true Israelite, a real Jew! Little wonder that Paul declared that *in Christ* “there is neither Jew nor Greek” (Gal.3:28; Col.3:11)—there are only real Israelites, the true descendants of Abraham (Gal.3:29), the heirs of God’s promises, the chosen people of God, the spiritual Jews! In the church of God there are only spiritual Israelites, all of whom are circumcised in heart (Rom.2:28,29; Phil.3:3) even though not all were circumcised in the flesh. James Dunn, in his large commentary on the Greek text of Romans, puts this in theological language when he writes of “the Christian Gentile rejoicing in the gift of the eschatological Spirit—the eschatological Jew is Gentile as well as Jew!” (*Romans, Word Biblical Commentary*, p.125, on Rom. 2:28,29).

The Apostle Peter wrote to encourage persecuted believers by reminding them that “you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1Pet.2:9). In this verse the terms applied to Israel in the OT are applied to the church (still largely made up of Jews when 1Peter was written); what Peter writes echoes a passage like Deuteronomy 7:6, “For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his



treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth” (cf. Mal.3:17, etc).

It should now be clear that when speaking about “Jewish roots” we are not speaking primarily about Judaism in its various forms but in particular about the Scriptures which the Jews have zealously guarded, preserved, and transmitted with utmost care through the centuries. Their unwavering commitment to the word of God and to monotheism is something which should put the church to shame. The Jewish root is the rich *spiritual* heritage made available to us, above all through the Jewish Scriptures.

It must be remembered that Islam, too, grows out of this same Jewish root, which is visible everywhere in the Qur’an. The Qur’an freely acknowledges the Jewish Scriptures and also the gospel as being the word of God. Muslims, too, acknowledge themselves to be the descendants of Abraham.

Yahweh has chosen in His wisdom and kindness to provide life through the Jewish root. We do well to remember that no branch can survive if it is severed from the tree. If we now realize, even if we have never realized it before, that we are the true Israelites, the real Jews, then why would we want to be severed from the olive tree into which God has graciously grafted us?

That Gentiles had become Jews through conversion was something the Jews were familiar with; it was through the process of proselytizing (i.e. converting people to Judaism) that Gentiles entered into the Jewish religion. This was accomplished through the vigorous missionary efforts of Judaism. Jesus pointed to the missionary zeal of the Pharisees

who “travel over land and sea to win a single convert” (Mt.23:15). Anyone visiting Israel even today will see Jews who are black (e.g. from Yemen) as well as Jews who are white, both among its civilians as well as in the army. For the Jews, being a Jew was not exclusively or even primarily a matter of race but of religion. The New Testament concept differs from theirs not on the question on *whether* Gentiles can become Jews, but on *how* the transition is made; Paul proclaims that it is through faith in Christ. This is stated clearly in Ephesians 2:

<sup>11</sup> Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called ‘the uncircumcision’ by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— <sup>12</sup> remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth (or, citizenship, membership) of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

In Christ, then, we are no longer “alienated from the people of Israel” (BDAG, *politeias*, re. Eph.2:12), but are now members of God’s elect people. “‘The Israel of God’ is still God’s covenant people... into whom believing Gentiles are being incorporated” (Dunn, *Romans*, p.540, on Rom.9:6). The profound consequence of this incorporation into Israel is that the Gentile, who is now a member of “the real circumcision” (Phil.3:3), is no longer a “stranger to the covenants of promise” (Eph.2:12), but becomes “the Gentile convert

entering into Israel’s promised blessings” (Dunn, *Romans*, p.534, on Rom.9:4). Everything that God promised Israel becomes ours in Christ (2Cor.1:20). So Paul could say that in Christ “all things are yours” (1Cor. 3:21), such are the unimaginable riches of our inheritance: “as it is written: ‘No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him’” (1Cor.2:9, quoting Isa.64:4); so there is abundant cause to give “thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col.1:12).

Yet there are very few Christians today who realize that the true believer is “the real circumcision,” the true Israelite. This shows how completely disconnected the Christian church is from its Jewish roots *and from the New Testament teaching* on this vital matter. Let us remember: no branch can survive once it is cut off from the tree and its roots—here we are, of course, speaking about *spiritual life* and survival. Little wonder that the Gentile church, having separated from its Jewish roots, strayed into serious doctrinal error. Error leads to death; it is time to realize this and to heed the word of God, to “come back to Yahweh your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, rich in faithful love, and he relents about inflicting disaster” (Joel 2:13). Yahweh, the God of Israel, is not only the God of the Jews but of all who belong to “the Israel of God” (Gal.6:16), God’s spiritual Israel. Sadly, most Christians scarcely know His Name, but the true Israelite will aim to love Him wholeheartedly (Mk.12:30, etc) and learn to honor His name, for “it is wonderful” (cf. Judges 13:18; Isaiah 28:29, etc).





## The Old Testament Roots of “the Word” in John 1:1

The “Word” in the phrase “The Word of Yahweh” is basically a collective noun for referring to a string of words which conveys a command of Yahweh (e.g. “Let there be light,” Gen.1:3). Referring to a message from Yahweh, the phrase “the word of the LORD came” (to Abram, or Elijah, or Jeremiah, etc) occurs over 100 times in the OT.

To appreciate the importance of “the word,” there are some basic facts we need to understand about it. For example, how do human beings communicate with each other if not by means of words? We need only go to a foreign country whose language we do not understand to appreciate the fact that without knowing their language we find ourselves unable to communicate even on the simplest level. Even knowledge of a few local words could prove helpful. We soon realize that *words are the essential way by which people communicate*; all communication relies on words whether spoken (in a variety of sounds), written (in whatever forms, signs, or symbols), or

(as in the case of computers) digitalized. Without language there is simply no way of communicating—apart perhaps from telepathy, the existence of which appears to be, scientifically speaking, doubtful. Not even husbands and wives who know each other well, and can therefore guess what is in the other person’s mind under various circumstances, can be sure of what the other person actually thinks in everyday matters without verbal communication. Facial expressions can communicate certain emotions, but the contents of those emotions can only be communicated by words. But we take language so much for granted in our daily lives that we tend to forget how indispensable it is for human life as a whole.

The word is equally indispensable for God’s communication with man. Here, too, there is no other way to communicate effectively or intelligibly. A sign, such as a miracle, communicates a message *if* we are able to interpret its significance; and words are still needed to interpret it. In Scripture, the meaning of divine actions is usually explained, so that people are not left to guess at their meaning and end up misunderstanding it. God’s desire is that we come to know Him, hence the importance of His Word. In relation to God, there is something fundamentally important to grasp: *all communications between God and man are mediated* either audibly or in written form through His word. If, as we have seen, all human communication is essentially mediated by words, it is all the more so in relation to God because “God is Spirit” (John 4:24); moreover, He is holy, as is frequently reiterated in the Scriptures, such that no one can have a direct, unmediated

vision of Him and live (Ex.33:20); so it is primarily by verbal communication that He reveals Himself to man.

There is no possibility, during man’s earthly life, of a direct, unmediated, or “unfiltered” vision of God. When it is stated, for example, that Isaiah had a vision of God (Isa.6:1ff), it is explained that what he saw was the “glory” of God (Jn.12:41), not a direct vision of Him. The same is true of Ezekiel’s vision of God which he was granted to see, looking upward through something like a crystalline pane of “glass,” which he described in this way, “Over the heads of the living creatures there was the likeness of an expanse, shining like awe-inspiring crystal, spread out above their heads” (Ezek.1:22). There above the living creatures he saw a throne, “and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness with a human appearance” (v.26); “such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD (Yahweh)” (v.28). Like Isaiah, what Ezekiel saw was the “glory of Yahweh”; indeed, he goes further to say that it was only “the likeness” of His glory. The important point is that all God’s interactions with man are mediated either through His word or His glory, or both: for example, Ezek.1:3, “the word of Yahweh came to Ezekiel,” and “I saw visions of God” (Ezek.1:1; “the glory of Yahweh”, v.28). It is for this reason that both “the Word” and “the Glory” (e.g. 1Sam. 4:21,22; 15:29; cf. Heb.1:3; 8:1) serve as metonyms for Yahweh God; but the Word is the main way God interacts with man.

All this is of the greatest importance for understanding John’s Gospel, and especially the only two verses in John where “the Word” is mentioned: verses John 1:1 and 1:14. It

is significant that verse 14 speaks of both “word” and “glory” (as in Ezekiel 1) because it is in this verse that “the Word became flesh” with the result that “we have seen his glory”. Whom does “his” refer to? The subject of the sentence is “the Word,” so clearly the glory which the apostles saw was the glory of the Word. His glory was made visible by His becoming “flesh” in the person of Jesus Christ. So the term “the Son” does not just refer to Jesus, but to the Word incarnate in him; the glory of the Word is the glory made visible in this unique or “only” Son: “glory as of the only Son from the Father” (v.14). This is crucial for understanding John’s Gospel. To suppose that “the Son” refers only to the man Christ Jesus is the error of unitarianism, whereas to suppose that “the Son” refers to “God the Son” incarnate as man is the error of trinitarianism. Only when “the Son” is understood in terms of the Shekinah—Yahweh God (as the Word) dwelling among men—is it correctly understood in terms of the Biblical revelation.

## **The foundational verse of trinitarian Christology:**

### **John 1:1**

The first few verses of John’s Gospel are undoubtedly the most crucial for trinitarian Christology; it is the foundation stone upon which it builds its case. With regard to the fundamental importance of the Johannine Prologue for Trinitarian theology, Ben Witherington III (Professor of New



Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary in Kentucky), in his book *Jesus the Sage*, rightly observes:

Without question, John 1:1-18 has had more impact on Christian thinking about the Son of God as preexistent and a divine being than any other New Testament passage. Here is where the early church derived its *logos* (i.e., the Son of God as the “Word”) Christology and its basic understanding of the incarnation.

Witherington, like most other scholars, recognizes the crucial importance of the Prologue, particularly the first verse, for trinitarianism. We shall, therefore, begin this part of our study with an in-depth examination of this first portion of John’s Gospel.

Continuing his discussion on John’s Prologue, Witherington writes:

The evidence that this is an independent hymn that has been incorporated into this Gospel is strong, for there are various key terms in this hymn that one finds nowhere else in the Gospel, including the word *logos*, the word for grace (*charis*), the word for fullness (*pleros*). Further, the idea found in v.14 of the Word coming and tabernacling or setting up his tent in our midst is found only in this passage of the Gospel.

The best way to describe this hymn is to call it poetry with some lapses into prose, or poetic prose at the end. In the Greek it has a certain rhythmic cadence which can even be picked up in a good English translation.” (*Jesus the Sage*, p.283).

It is worth noting that the major NT passages which trinitarianism relies on to support its christology are passages which are generally recognized to be hymns and, therefore, of a poetic character. Apart from John's Prologue, there is Philippians 2:6-11, also possibly Colossians 1 and, less likely, Hebrews 1. But what should also be carefully noted is that these hymns are *about* Christ (and God) but are *not* addressed to him (that is, in worship, as is often wrongly supposed).

Witherington traces the origins of the Logos to the Wisdom literature in the Old Testament and other early documents, as many other Biblical scholars do. In this chapter we shall consider this and other important elements in the Hebrew Bible to which the roots of the Logos in John 1:1 can be traced and which together contributed to its meaning. We shall begin by examining the term "Word" in those places where its meaning must surely have a bearing on our understanding of the Word in John 1.

## **Word = Logos = Dabar = Memra**

### **What is "Logos" (Word) in the Hebrew Bible?**

In both the United Bible Societies Hebrew NT (1976) and Salkinson-Ginsberg Hebrew NT, "Logos" (Word) in John 1:1 is correctly translated by the Hebrew word *dabar*.

*Dabar* (word) refers to any kind of verbal communication; so the verb can mean "to speak, declare, converse, command, promise, warn, threaten, sing, etc."; and as a noun it means,

“word, speaking, speech, thing, etc.” As in every language, it is a common word: “These two words [verb and noun] occur more than 2500 times in the OT, the noun more than 1400 times and the verb more than 1100” (TWOT).

It was mentioned at the end of Chapter 5 that loving-kindness is central to Yahweh’s character. Since His Word is the chief means of expressing Himself verbally, it is the means of His self-revelation. That is where the significance of the word lies. Yahweh in His kindness desires above all to bring blessing to everyone on earth through His Word. Rain is one of the ways Yahweh’s blessings are poured out upon the earth, watering the plants which provide food for man and animals. So, rain was an appropriate and potent symbol of His word.

### **Dabar—“Word” in Isaiah 55**

The gift of rain from heaven, so vital for life on earth, portrays God’s word:

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word (דָּבָר *dabar*) that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:10,11; NIV)

There are several important points of parallel with the Word (Logos/ Memra) in John 1. In the Isaiah passage we note that:

1. It comes down from heaven, it “waters” (*ravah*, רָוַח, to “saturate, water,” *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, BDB) the earth.
2. It brings life to plants (and the animals that feed on them) which provide food for mankind.
3. The word is “sent” and then returns.
4. It will not return to God empty but will accomplish the purpose for which it was sent. This is emphasized by the parallel statements, “will accomplish what I desire” and “achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”
5. When its work is accomplished it will return to God, just as rain water rises again to the skies as vapor, thus depicting its “resurrection”.

It is surely no coincidence that all these points are key elements in John’s Gospel, thus providing a strong indication of the OT root of Logos in John 1. The counterpart of these five points in John can be set forth concisely as follows:

1. “I am from above” (Jn.8:23)
2. “I am the life” (Jn.11:25; 14:6)
3. The Father sent the Son (Jn.10:36)
4. “I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do” (Jn.17:4); “It is finished” (Jn.19:30)
5. “I go to the Father” (Jn.16:10); “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God” (Jn.20:17)

The picture of rain is interesting for another reason: Rain is not something that comes only once, but is “sent” from heaven and then “returns” to heaven, and then it comes again. This portrays the Word as having come from above, having been sent by the Father. The Word brings life to those who dwell on earth, and thereby glorifies the Father on earth. It then returns to the Father, but will come again. This point recurs repeatedly in Jesus’ teaching in John’s Gospel, and not only in the five points just mentioned as examples, but frequently and especially in his final discourses in John chapters 14 to 17. Here it becomes very clear that *it is the Word (Logos/Memra) that is speaking in the person of Jesus*, precisely because the Word is “embodied” in Jesus. Already in John 13:33,36 the incarnate Word speaks about his departure, and this extends into the following chapters (14:3,4,18,19,28; 15:22; 16:5,7,10,16,17,22,28; 17:3,8,11,13,18,23).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Note on Isaiah 55:10f: The reason why this important OT root of the Logos has generally been overlooked is almost certainly because the LXX translator of this passage in Isaiah used the word *rhēma* (ῥῆμα) instead of *logos* to translate the Hebrew *dabar*. *Rhēma* and *logos* are synonymous; both words are used to translate *dabar*, but *logos* is used more frequently (to give an idea of the relative frequency in LXX, including the apocrypha: *logos* 1239 times; *rhēma* 546 times). But the fact that this LXX translator used *rhēma* instead of *logos* in this verse has served to conceal the significance of this verse for the understanding of the Logos in John 1. Had expositors taken note of the Hebrew text, this oversight could have been avoided.

## The Word and the Spirit

Jesus, in whom the Word was incarnate, promises his disciples that he will return to them after his departure, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you” (Jn.14:18). This does not just refer to his appearances to them during the relatively short time after his resurrection and before his ascension, for would he not again leave them as “orphans” when he leaves them at the ascension? How then would he come to them in such a way as not to leave them as orphans? He had anticipated this point in the previous sentence, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth” (Jn.14:16,17).

To understand the connection between the Word and the Spirit we must return to the OT, for example, “By the word of the LORD (Yahweh) the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host” (Ps.33:6). Those unable to read the original texts will be unaware of the connection of “word” and “spirit” in this verse. In the Greek OT, the “word” here is *logos* as in John 1:1,14, and “spirit” is *pneuma* which is the word used of the Holy Spirit throughout John and the NT. In the Hebrew text, “word” here is *dabar*, and “spirit” is *ruach*, which is the usual word used to refer to God’s Spirit.

“Word” and “Spirit” parallel each other in the Scriptures; that is why Jesus could make such a simple transition from his departure to the coming of the Spirit in such a way that the disciples are not left “as orphans”. This is also why the Spirit can be spoken of as the “spirit of Christ” (Rom.8:9;

1Pet.1:11) or the “Spirit of Jesus” (Acts 16:7; Phil.1:19), and thus “I am with you always” (Mt.28:20). All this is intelligible *only* if we understand that the Word “became flesh” (Jn.1:14) in Jesus; for *the Word of Yahweh and the Spirit of Yahweh are, in the Scriptures, different forms of Yahweh’s operations, they are not two different persons*. Thus he who is “born of the Spirit (*pneuma*)” (Jn.3:5,6,8) is “born again through the living and abiding Word (*logos*) of God” (1Pt.1:23) and has experienced “birth through the word (*logos*) of truth” (James 1:18). Here again it is evident that *Word and the Spirit are not two different entities or persons but two aspects of the one spiritual reality*.

In contrast to this, trinitarianism has considerable difficulty explaining the relationship between Jesus and the Spirit. It is also a point of dissension between the Orthodox churches and the Roman Catholic church. Their conflict is over the issue of the *Filioque*, which means “and from the Son,” that is, whether the Spirit came only from the Father or also “from the Son”. The Orthodox church firmly rejects the *Filioque* while the Catholic church insists on it. The relationship between these two churches was officially broken in the 11th century (AD 1054) mainly over this dispute. Thus the Spirit of unity and oneness (Eph.4:3) is made the cause of division and discord.

There are many other problems which arise because of the trinitarian distinction of “the second person” (Christ) and “the third person” (the Spirit) as different divine persons. One example is the fact that though the church is called “the body of Christ” (Rom.7:4; 1Cor.10:16, etc) and Christ is its head (Eph.5:23; Col.1:18, etc), yet the functional operations

within the body are directed by another person, the Spirit (1Cor.12:11, and vv.7-10). Does this not reduce Jesus to a “figure head” of the church? Are we not left with the rather strange situation in which the head does not direct its body, but has to do it through another person? This, frankly, makes little sense, and hence the difficulty of coming up with any plausible explanation.

### **Rain as a dynamic symbol of the Word**

<sup>10</sup> “For as the *rain* and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving *seed to the sower* and bread to the eater, <sup>11</sup> so shall my *word* be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:10,11)

Like the Word in John 1, the rain comes down from heaven to bring life to the earth. Without the life-giving water of rain to drench the land and fill the rivers and lakes, there would be drought, and drought brings death. Rain brings life by giving itself to be absorbed into the thirsty ground and drunk by needy plants, animals, and human beings. It is well known that human beings can survive for weeks without food, but cannot survive without water for more than a few days. Rain can be compared to the seed that is sown upon the ground by the hand of the sower (Mark 4:26); “seed” like “rain” portrays “the Word,” Lk.8:11; 1Pt.1:23; cf. Mt.



13:19ff). It is also significant that, in the OT passage quoted above, the rain is spoken of as “giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater” (Isa.55:10). Also like the seed, which after it “falls into the earth and dies” it “bears much fruit” (Jn.12:24), the rain “dies” in the sense of being absorbed by the ground and the plants that live in it; it is soaked into the ground and “buried”. But in due time, when it has served its purpose, having fulfilled its function of bringing life and thereby “bears much fruit,” it evaporates and rises to heaven in the invisible form of water vapor and, as such, it portrays the water returning to the clouds of heaven in this “spiritual” form; it will then return again as rain.

It is significant that the term “poured out,” used of the Holy Spirit given to the church at Pentecost in Acts 2:33, is also used of rain: “The clouds *poured out* water; the skies gave forth thunder” (Psalm 77:17). The same Greek word is used in Luke 5:37 of wine which is *poured out* or spilled. Jesus uses the same word at the Last Supper where the wine represents his life-giving blood, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is *poured out* for many” (Mk. 14:24; Lk. 22:20). All this beautifully confirms the function of the Word so vividly and effectively symbolized by the rain.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> The picture of God’s Word as rain (Isa.55:10) which comes down from heaven is also, not coincidentally, used with reference to the Spirit of God. Compare Joel 2:23 with 2:28,29. In the NT, of the Spirit “poured out,” besides Acts 2:33 also 10:45; Titus 3:6; cf. 1Peter 1:12: “the Holy Spirit sent from heaven”.

The Word “enfleshed” or incarnate in Jesus is, like the rain, the water of life for the world (Jn.4:14). He is also the “bread of life” (Jn.6:33,35), portrayed by the manna which, like rain, descended from heaven and fed the hungry Israelites for forty years in the wilderness. But water does not benefit us unless we drink it, and bread does not nourish us unless we eat it; that is why, speaking metaphorically and spiritually, “Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (Jn.6:53, also 54-56,63). The point is that the Word does not give life until it is “eaten” or *internalized*, that is, until it is received into the heart, or as Paul put it, “Let the word (*logos*) of Christ dwell in you richly” (Col.3:16).

The coming down of the Logos/Word can thus be compared to God’s gift of life-giving rain, bringing the blessing of life to the whole world.

## Psalm 107

“The word,” Hebrew *dabar*, is used in the following important passage; here the Greek (LXX) for *dabar* is *logos*:

Psalm 107: <sup>19</sup> Then they cried to the LORD (Yahweh) in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. <sup>20</sup> *He sent out his word (logos) and healed them, and delivered them from their destruction* (Hebrew, the “pit”; LXX, “corruption,” meaning: death and the grave).

Verse 20 has enormous significance for the understanding of the Logos in John and for NT soteriology in general. “Delivered them from their destruction” is translated as “He rescued them from the grave” in the NIV. The miracles of physical healing which Jesus performed underlined the fact that Yahweh had “sent forth his word and healed them,” which in turn indicated that He was delivering them from their destruction through His saving work in Christ.<sup>36</sup>

Yahweh, through His *Logos* embodied in Jesus, fulfilled the words of Psalm 107:20: “*He sent out his word (LXX: Logos) and healed them, and delivered them from their destruction (LXX: corruption)*”. From this it is clear that Yahweh’s saving Word accomplishes our salvation in and through the person of Jesus the Messiah; it is equally clear that His Word is not a being who is independent or separate from Yahweh.

Yahweh cannot be separated from His Word because it is integral to His Person, any more than His truth or His salvation can be received apart from Him. In the case of human beings, it is conceivable that once their word is spoken or written and sent forth, it has a certain existence of its own, but this is not possible in God’s case because He is *omnipresent*.

Moreover, the Word was embodied or “enfleshed” in Jesus; but the very fact of its embodiment in Jesus indicates that it is not one and the same entity with Jesus. Yahweh functions in Jesus as Word, but Yahweh God and Jesus are not to be confused as one and the same being or person.

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<sup>36</sup> For further exegetical details on Psalm 107 see Appendix 9.

Interestingly, the Qur'an (4:171) speaks of Jesus as both "Spirit from God (Allah)" and "God's Word". Is this an insight that came from the human mind or a revelation of God? But the Qur'an does not elevate these elements or realities (Word and Spirit) within the Being of God into independent beings or persons distinct from God, which is the error of trinitarianism. Thus the Qur'an affirms that these vital realities within God's Being are sent forth by Him and incorporated in the person of Jesus Christ. This is entirely in accordance with the NT revelation.

### **"The Word of the LORD (Yahweh)"**

This term occurs 242 times<sup>37</sup> in the OT where it means a message, declaration, or command from Yahweh. At times this message came by way of a vision (e.g. 1Sam.3:1), usually given to a prophet, and then delivered by the prophet to the person(s) for whom it was intended. There is no instance in which it is hypostasized, that is, spoken of as a person.

The same is true in the NT where it appears 12 times (including 1Thess.4:15), 9 of which are in Acts. In no instance in the NT is it applied to Jesus as a title.

"The word of the Lord" occurs in Psalm 33:6, "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath

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<sup>37</sup> TWOT (דָּבָר (*dabar*) word): 'Gerleman notes that the singular construct chain d<sup>e</sup>bar YHWH "The word of the LORD" occurs 242 times and almost always (225 times) the expression appears as a technical form for the prophetic revelation'.

of his mouth all their host.” This verse has some relevance for John 1:3, although it speaks only of the creation of the heavens by Yahweh’s word; but it is of no value to trinitarianism because it provides no hint of the “word” as a distinct person from Yahweh, much less one who is His equal.

### **“Logos” in the Greek OT (LXX)**

As for the word *logos*, it occurs 1,239 times in the Greek OT and generally means nothing more than words used in speech or conversation. The term “the word of the LORD (Yahweh)” or the “word of God” means the message which God communicates to and/or through His servants. Unlike Wisdom, there is no clear instance of it being personified. This is the kind of problem that the interpretation of *logos* as person must face up to.

Given the fact that there is virtually nothing that trinitarianism can use in the OT, most Christian theologians (followed by trinitarian NT commentators) are obliged to argue that the Johannine Logos concept derives not primarily from the OT, but from Greek philosophy (the Stoics, Plato, etc.) modified by the Alexandrian Jewish philosopher Philo and then adapted by John for his own purposes. This is to say that John borrowed his “Logos” from pagan (Gentile) sources, not from the Word of God, the OT. This amounts to saying that the “Word” (Jn.1:1) of God is not derived from the Word of God! Is it not strange that this trinitarian “Logos” or “Word” of God comes not from the Word of God, but from Gentile

philosophical teaching? Yet (as perhaps should be expected) the Gentile church sees nothing incongruous or unacceptable about this incongruity!

The average Christian doesn't have any idea where this trinitarian Logos concept came from. They are simply told that Logos is the name of the Son, the 2nd person in the Trinity. They don't know that *Logos is nowhere in John's Gospel applied to Jesus, or to the Son, as a title*. In fact, it is not explicitly applied to Jesus anywhere in the NT, not even in the Apocalypse, where the title appears only once, in Rev.19:13, but almost certainly refers to the Lord of Hosts, as evidenced by His armies following Him (described in the next verse). This is consistent with the "Word," or Memra, as a metonym of Yahweh, who is described as "the King of kings and Lord of lords" three verses later (19:16 and cf. 1Tim.6:15).

## **The origins of the "Logos"?**

If we are finally to understand the Johannine Logos, we must first be clear about one important fact: When surveying the enormous amount of Christian (trinitarian) literature on the subject of the Logos in John 1, one fact emerges with complete clarity, namely, the failure to find a satisfactory explanation of its origin *outside* the Bible. Trinitarianism is likewise unable to find anything *within* the Bible to support their interpretation of the Word as "God the Son".

(1) Those who suggest a source in Greek philosophy seem to presume that John was writing for people versed in that philosophy and fail to observe the fact that most people, even today, know next to nothing about philosophy, so any supposed philosophical allusion would have been lost on the general reader.

(2) The same is true of those who assume some connection of the Logos idea with Philo, a Jewish religious philosopher living in Egypt. First of all, we can be quite sure that the average man on the street in Israel in NT times had never even heard of Philo. Aramaic was the language spoken in Israel at that time, but Philo wrote in Greek, a language not many people would have been familiar with in Israel, not to mention the fact that the level of education was low, as was the level of literacy in the general population, which was true for the whole world at that time, including the Greek speaking world. So, if John himself knew about Philo, which is doubtful, it would have been useless for him to use a Logos concept that the people generally knew nothing about. Even today, few theologians know much about Philo’s ideas. Secondly, although Philo did write about the Logos, his Logos was not a distinct person from Yahweh, but was personified somewhat like Wisdom in Proverbs. Philo’s Logos was never a person coequal with God, so his Logos is not of any real use to trinitarians.

(3) There are only two or three verses in the OT which speak of God’s “Word” that can be pointed to as a possible source of “the Word,” and this really is too slender a foundation on

which to base a trinitarian “Logos Christology”. Moreover, as we have seen, none of these suggested sources speaks of the Logos as a personal divine being, much less one who is coequal with Yahweh.

(4) Given this situation, some trinitarians have gone so far as to suggest that John had himself invented the Logos idea by means of a “synthesis” of elements derived from Greek philosophy and Philo’s adaptation of it. This should be discerned for what it really is: a piece of baseless speculation motivated by the determination to read trinitarian dogma into the Logos by whatever means available.

(5) The only truly viable understanding of *Logos* (Word) in John 1:1 is to realize that it is the Greek word for “Memra,” a word well known during the time of the Jewish church because of its frequent occurrence in the Jewish Targums that were used in the synagogues at that time. But this understanding of *Logos* was rejected out of hand by trinitarians for no other reason than that it is a metonym for “Yahweh” and therefore does not serve the trinitarian purpose! How this kind of reasoning can pass for “biblical scholarship” truly boggles the mind! Truth is accepted or rejected depending on whether or not it is acceptable to trinitarianism. They make dogma determine the understanding of the Bible, not vice versa. The final spiritual consequences for so doing are hard to imagine.



## The Old Testament roots of the Logos

Why were we led to think that *Logos* has its origin in Greek thought when the Prologue states absolutely unambiguously that the reference derives from the OT, and specifically from the first chapter of Genesis, by means of the words “In the beginning”—the opening words of the Bible? These very words, “in the beginning,” appear again in 1John 1:1 with reference to the “*logos* of life”. So what is the excuse for attempting to find its origin outside the Scriptures?

We could paraphrase John 1:1 in this way: “The Word that was ‘In the beginning’ (i.e. Genesis 1:1) was the Word that was with God (i.e. the Word that is constantly associated with God in our Jewish Targums as “the Word of the Lord,” the Memra), and this Word (as we know from the Targums) was in fact none other than God Himself.”

The Hebrew Bible did not have chapter and verse numbers (these were put into the Bible at a much later date), so a particular book was often referred to by its opening words. Thus to refer to Genesis, or specifically to the first chapter, one would use its opening words “In the beginning,” just as in John 1:1,2.

Anyone who reads (not to mention studies) the Scriptures should have been aware of the fact that the God who reveals Himself in those Scriptures is One who has manifold faculties within Himself: His spirit, mind, wisdom, power, etc. Why then do we assume that the Word that was “with” Him in the beginning, and by which or with which He brought all creation into being, has to be understood as another divine

being distinct from Him and not as the expression of an essential faculty *within* His own Being? Why is “*with*” to be understood in terms of separation or distinction rather than in terms of participation or oneness? What else but Gentile polytheistic tendencies would have inclined the Gentile mind to take the “with” as implying a distinction of being, and thereby claiming the existence of another being who is coexistent and coequal with Yahweh Himself, an idea totally foreign and contrary to the Bible and utterly repugnant to the Biblical monotheist.

But the reason for the trinitarian interpretation of John 1:1 is even more complex than the facts mentioned in the previous paragraphs. For with the emergence of a Gentile church with leaders who had little knowledge of the church’s Jewish roots, the Christian church soon lost its connection with its Jewish origins. For example, many or most of the leaders of the Latin speaking churches, including their leading theologian Augustine, had scarcely any knowledge of New Testament Greek, let alone Hebrew. Even the fact that Jesus was a Jew was lost sight of, and the fact that the NT, with the exception of Luke, was written by Jews was forgotten. So the NT was interpreted as though it were a Gentile work. And when speaking of God, it was virtually forgotten that in the Bible this refers above all to Yahweh. God was spoken of as though He were some universal Gentile God. Certainly “God is the King of all the earth; God reigns over the nations; God sits on his holy throne” (Ps.47.7,8). But “let them [the Gentiles] know that you, whose name is the LORD (Yahweh)—that you alone are the Most High over all the

earth” (Ps.83:18, NIV). Note, however, the inappropriateness of the translation “whose name is the LORD,” for it should be obvious that “the LORD” is *not* a name but a title; the Hebrew, of course, reads “whose name is *Yahweh*”.

But the problem is more complex than even that: incipient anti-Jewish feelings (it would be going too far to speak of a full-fledged anti-Semitism) had already begun to take root in the church. For was it not the Jews who were the first persecutors of the church, having first of all rejected Jesus, and then turned their hostilities upon the infant church? Did not even Paul (Saul) help to implement these hostilities before his encounter with Christ on the Damascus road (1Cor.15:9; Gal.1:13)? These perceptions would have served to increase the distance between Christian and Jew. (Cf. also Dunn, “The Question of the Anti-semitic in the New Testament Writings of the Period” in J.D.G. Dunn, *Jews and Christians, the Parting of the Ways*, p.177ff)

## **The Word and the Law**

The message of Jesus (and Paul) was seen by the Jews as decentralizing the position of the Law (Torah). Given the place of the Torah in the religion, life, and practice of the Jews, the leading rabbis worked to rally the Jewish people around the Torah after the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD and the collapse of the Jewish nation. (See J.D.G. Dunn, *Jews and Christians, the Parting of the Ways*, p.199, parag.3.)

John wrote around this time, and one important fact that we have overlooked so far is that the Torah or Law of God is frequently spoken of as the Word of God in the OT (e.g. the very long Psalm 119). So it is likely that at the very time when the rabbinic council at Javneh<sup>38</sup> was in the process of establishing the centrality of the Torah, the Word, for Israel, the message was being declared through John that God's Word had become incarnate in the person of Messiah Jesus. In the circumstances in which the Jewish nation found itself at that time, this would have been a very relevant and striking message.

The Jews believed that the Torah, God's Word as Law, existed at the time of the creation and even before it. So while John may not have meant the *logos* to be the Torah exclusively, it was included within the wider meaning of the *logos*.

Professor C.K. Barrett (who was professor of New Testament at the University of Durham at the time of writing his commentary) recognized the significance of Torah for the understanding of the meaning of Logos. He also noted that in rabbinic teaching, "Torah is said to be pre-existent, creative, and divine" from which he went on to make the perceptive observation that "*such notions are the root of John's statement*" (on "the Word was with God," *The Gospel According to John*, p.129, italics mine). In the subsequent sections of his commentary Barrett repeatedly refers to the Torah and Wisdom to support and elucidate his points.

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<sup>38</sup> Or Jabneh, Greek: Jamnia; an ancient city of Palestine, in modern Israel called Yibna, it is about 15 miles south of Tel Aviv.

## The Word (Logos) and the Law (Torah)

Psalm 119:89, “Your word, O LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens.” Here the “word” is specifically the Law (Torah) of Yahweh. This, the longest Psalm (176 verses), has as its central theme the Law (also referred to as “commandments,” “statutes,” etc); and the Law is repeatedly described as “Your word”.

One way to help us further is to recall Yahweh’s giving of the Law as summed up in the Ten Commandments:

**Exodus 31:18**, “When the LORD finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the Testimony, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God” (NIV).

**Deuteronomy 9:10**, “And the LORD (Yahweh) gave me the two tablets of stone written with the finger of God, and on them were all the words (LXX *logoi*, pl. of *logos*) that the LORD (Yahweh) had spoken with you on the mountain out of the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly.”

On Sinai the Word of Yahweh came to Israel written in stone; in Christ the Word of Yahweh came to the world “written” in flesh, in a human life.

The comparison and contrast of the Law and the gospel is something that is frequent in the NT. This is seen even within the Johannine Prologue, “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). The relationship between the Law and Christ is referred to frequently in Romans (3:21-22; 5:20-21; 7:4,25;

8:3; 10:4), and is a central topic in Galatians (e.g., 2:16,19,21; 3:13,24; 5:4). Comparison and contrast between Moses and Christ is also made (2Cor. 3:13,14; Heb.3:5,6; 8:5,6; 11:24-26). All this means that what Moses and the Law were to Israel, Christ and the gospel are to the world, but on a scale that far exceeds the former both in terms of saving power and life-giving effect.

The connection of Law and Word can be seen in the OT:

**Proverbs 6:23:** For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching (*torah; nomos*) a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life.

In the English translation of this verse, no reference to the Law is evident except to those who know that the word “torah” also means teaching or instruction. In this context, “torah” is better translated as “law” because it stands in parallel with “the commandment”. Notice, too, that in this verse three things are linked together: *Law (nomos)*, *light (phōs)*, and *life (zōē)*. The connection with John 1:4 can easily be discerned, “the life (*zōē*) was the light (*phōs*) of men”.

Logos is linked to light also in Psalm 119:105: “Your word (*logos*, referring primarily to the law) is a lamp to my feet and a light (*phōs*) to my path”; for “you are my lamp, O LORD, and my God lightens my darkness” (2Sa.22:29).

## **Logos and Torah, further observations**

What non-Jews generally do not grasp is the pivotal significance of the Law for the Jewish people. The Torah is that around which the life of the Jewish people revolves, defining every facet of their daily lives. This was true for the Jews in Palestine in the time of Jesus and his apostles, and for the Jews of the diaspora (i.e. the Jews who were dispersed to other parts of the world).

It must be understood that the policy that generally governed the preaching of the gospel in the early church, and especially for Paul, was “to the Jew first” (Rom.1:16; cf.2:9,10) and then also to the Gentiles. There can be no doubt that this was the object of John’s Gospel, because in John 20:31 he states the purpose of writing the Gospel as being “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” “The Christ,” of course, is the Greek form of “the Messiah,” a term that was rich in meaning for the Jews, but not for Gentiles. This makes it clear that John’s Gospel was written in the first instance for Jews.

This being the case, it should be evident that “the Logos (Word)” must also have been a term that was familiar to the Jews. So we should make it our aim to discover with as much clarity as possible what it meant to the Jews to whom John wrote. The fact is that the Jews were actually familiar with the idea of “the word” of the Lord because:

1. It referred to the Law, as we have just noted;
2. It could refer to Wisdom, which Jesus speaks of as embodied in him (Mt.11:19; Lk.7:35; 11:49);
3. The “word of the LORD” which spoke to Israel through the many prophets of the OT (Isa.1:10, etc), was also the word He sent forth to accomplish His purposes in the world (Isa.55:10f);
4. Yahweh’s creative word, as in Ps.33:6; and
5. above all, the Memra (Word) was familiar to the Jews from their Targums, which we shall consider in greater detail below.

Given these expressions of “the Word” in the Hebrew Bible, it should be clear that references to it in the first verses of John would not have been something unheard of to the Jews who first read (or heard) it. But what would surely have been astonishing to them is the assertion that this Word has now taken on a body of flesh—in the person of Jesus the Messiah. This would have been for them a mind-boggling declaration.

### **The identification of ‘word’ and ‘law (torah)’ in Jewish thought and teaching**

Most Christians have little or no knowledge of how the Jews in John’s time (and subsequently) viewed the Law as God’s Word. Consider the following excerpts from the *Jewish Encyclopedia*:



**“Preexistence of the Torah.**

“The **Torah** is older than the world, for it existed either 947 generations (Zeb. 116a, and parallels) or 2,000 years (Gen. R. viii., and parallels; Weber, ‘Jüdische Theologie,’ p.15) before the Creation. The original Pentateuch, therefore, like everything celestial, consisted of fire, being written in black letters of flame upon a white ground of fire (Yer. Shek. 49a, and parallels; Blau, ‘Althebräisches Buchwesen,’ p. 156).

“God held counsel with it at the creation of the world, since it was wisdom itself (Tan., Bereshit, *passim*), and it was God’s first revelation, in which He Himself took part. It was given in completeness for all time and for all mankind, so that no further revelation can be expected. It was given in the languages of all peoples; for the voice of the divine revelation was seventyfold (Weber, *l.c.* pp.16-20; Blau, ‘Zur Einleitung in die Heilige Schrift,’ pp.84-100).

“It shines forever, and was transcribed by the scribes of the seventy peoples (Bacher, ‘Ag. Tan.’ ii. 203, 416), while everything found in the Prophets and the Hagiographa was already contained in the **Torah** (Ta’an. 9a), so that, if the Israelites had not sinned, only the five books of Moses would have been given them (Ned. 22b). As a matter of fact, the Prophets and the Hagiographa will be abrogated; but the **Torah** will remain forever (Yer. Meg. 70d). ‘Every letter of it is a living creature... not one letter of the **Torah** shall be destroyed’ (Lev. R. xix.; Yer. Sanh. 20c; Cant. R. 5, 11; comp. Bacher, *l.c.* ii. 123, note 5). The single letters were hypostatized, and were active even at the creation of the world (Bacher, *l.c.* i. 347),

“Israel received this treasure only through suffering (Ber. 5a, and parallels), for the book and the sword came together from heaven, and Israel was obliged to choose between them (Sifre, Deut. 40, end; Bacher, *l.c.* ii. 402, note 5); and whosoever denies the heavenly origin of the **Torah** will lose the future life (Sanh. x. 1).” (*Jewish Encyclopedia*, “Torah”)

## Torah as Word of God

It can easily be seen that if the *logos* is identified as the Word of God, which to the Jews was above all the Torah, then the idea of the preexistent Torah as having become flesh in the person of Messiah Jesus would have been to the Jews truly something astonishing.

When we look at the passages in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* quoted above, we can see a remarkable parallel with John 1:1. Note the following parallels:

**In the beginning was the word**—“The Torah is older than the world, for it existed... before the Creation.”

**The word was with God**—“God held counsel with it at the creation of the world, since it was wisdom itself (Tan., Bereshit, *passim*)”

**The word was God**—“and it was God’s first revelation, in which He Himself took part.” (i.e. it was a revelation of *Himself*)

The parallels are the more striking when we realize that the *Jewish Encyclopedia* was written not by Christians but by Jews, who are here simply giving an account of what the Jews firmly believed from early times. An adequate understanding of the Jewish faith in general, and their belief in the Torah in particular, is obviously of great importance for understanding the way the gospel was preached to the Jews both in John’s gospel and in the NT as a whole. These Jewish beliefs are not in themselves always stated in Biblical terms, but were considered to be legitimate extrapolations from the Biblical revelation.

But the parallels do not end there; here are several more points of comparison:

(1) “It (the Torah) was given in completeness for all time and for all mankind, so that no further revelation can be expected. It was given in the languages of all peoples; for the voice of the divine revelation was seventyfold (Weber, *l.c.* pp. 16-20; Blau, ‘Zur Einleitung in die Heilige Schrift,’ pp. 84-100). *It shines forever...*” (*Jewish Encyclopedia*, italics added)

**John:** The *logos* was the light (of divine revelation), and in Messiah Jesus it is “the light of the world” (Jn.8:12; 9:5).

(2) “The Torah will remain forever... Every letter of it is a living creature [i.e. the Torah has life in itself]... The single letters were hypostatized, and were active even at the creation of the world” (*Jewish Encyclopedia*).

**John:** The Father “gave to the son to have life in himself” (Jn.5:26). Compare also Matthew 5:18, “For truly, I say to

you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”

(3) (a) The Torah came “*from heaven...*and whosoever denies *the heavenly origin of the Torah* will lose the future life (Sanh. x. 1).”

(b) “Whoever separates himself from the Torah dies forthwith (’Ab. Zarah 3b); for fire consumes him, and he falls into hell (B. B. 79a);

(c) “From the earliest times the Synagogue has proclaimed the *divine origin* of the Pentateuch, and has held that Moses wrote it down from dictation.” (a-c, *Jewish Encyclopedia*, italics added)

**John:** The Son was “from heaven” (Jn.3:13,31; 6:38).

In Judaism, faith in the Torah was considered essential for eternal life or “the future life”. Likewise, faith in Christ is necessary for eternal life in John and in the NT generally.

## Romans 10:6-9

We find further confirmation of this identification of the Torah with Christ also within the NT, in Romans 10:6-9:

<sup>6</sup> But the righteousness that comes from faith says, “Do not say in your heart, *‘Who will ascend into heaven?’*” (that is, to bring Christ down) <sup>7</sup> or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). <sup>8</sup> But what does it say? “The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart”

(that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); <sup>9</sup> because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (NRSV)

Verses 6 and 8 are quotations from Deuteronomy 30:11-14 which reads:

<sup>11</sup> For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach. <sup>12</sup> It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘*Who will go up to heaven* for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?’ <sup>13</sup> Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?’ <sup>14</sup> But *the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart*, that you may observe it. (NASB)

A comparison of the text in Romans with that in Deuteronomy shows how Paul identifies the Law with Christ. Even more remarkable is the fact that the words spoken by Moses (the “I” in Deut.30:11), Paul declares as being spoken by “the righteousness that comes from faith” (Rom.10:6). Moses is thus the spokesman for faith-righteousness! This is factually correct because Moses was both a man of faith (Heb.11:24-29, where “faith” occurs 4 times) and a model of righteousness for all time. Far from rejecting Moses, Paul claims him as speaking for Christ.

Some Christian scholars portray Paul as the adversary of the Law, regardless of his declarations to the contrary, “Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law” (Romans 3:31, NASB). “Love

is the fulfilling of the Law” (Rom.13:8,10; Gal.5:14). If the Law had been nullified or abolished, why would Paul concern himself with fulfilling it? <sup>39</sup>

### **What is the relevance of studying the relation of “the Word” to “the Law”?**

In the book *Christianity in Jewish Terms* (Westview Press, 2000), in an essay entitled “Judaism and Incarnation,” the Jewish scholar E.R. Wolfson (Professor of Hebrew Studies and Director of Religious Studies at New York University), shows that the notion of incarnation (cf. the Word in John 1:14) is not something strange or unknown in Judaism. The following are some of his instructive observations:

“God as Torah

“In my view, there is much evidence in the rabbinic corpus of an incarnational theology, all be it modified in light of Judaism’s official aniconism [the prohibition of images]. Of course, I do not wish to ignore the fact that within rabbinic literature itself one finds statements that unequivocally reject the Christological doctrine of incarnation. Does that mean, however, that there is no justification for using the word ‘incarnation’ to characterize ideas espoused by the rabbis themselves? I do not think so, and, as the cluster of motifs to be discussed below will illustrate, incarnational theology is

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<sup>39</sup> On Christ and the Law, see also Appendix 3.

vital to the rabbinic worldview.” (p.246, explanation in square brackets added)

“Just as early Christian exegetes saw in Christ, God made flesh, so the rabbis conceived of the Torah as the incarnation of the image of God.” (p.247)

“I would like to concentrate on an incarnational tendency discernible in the rabbinic view that the study of Torah is the means by which one lives in the immediate presence of God. Far from being merely rhetorical in nature, these pronouncements are predicated on the presumption that Torah embodies the divine glory.” (p.247)

Wolfson also points out that in rabbinic thought, there is the idea that “the name of God is symbolically interchangeable with the Torah,” that “the name is identical with the Torah,” and that “the name is implied in the rabbinic claim that the Torah is the instrument through which God created the world” (all quotes are from p.248).

What is striking about the quotations in the previous paragraph is that “the Torah,” if replaced by “the Word” in each of the three statements quoted, would make perfect sense in understanding “the Word” in John 1: It will become clear, when we study “the Word” in its Aramaic equivalent “the Memra,” that “the Name of God is symbolically interchangeable with the Word,” that “the Name is identical with the Word,” and that “the Name is implied in the Johannine claim that the Word is the instrument through which God created the world”. None of these paraphrases of Prof. Wolfson’s

statements would be objectionable to rabbinic Judaism *provided that they are not understood in terms of trinitarian Christology*, as he has pointed out.

On the next page of his essay (p.249), Wolfson again mentions “the equation of Torah and YHVH” in rabbinic thought which can “speak of the Torah as the name,” and also “the archaic belief that heaven and earth were created by means of the name of God, an idea attested in apocryphal, rabbinic, and mystical sources as well, specifically in terms of *yod* and *he*, the first two letters of the Tetragrammaton used to signify the complete name.” This last quotation in particular throws light on the repeated references in the Johannine Prologue that all things were created by means of the Word, John 1:3,10 (*dia* with genitive: “through, by means of”).

## **Metonyms in Biblical language**

If we wish to avoid falling into confusion and error we must understand that a term like “the Word” is a metonym; the only question then is: a metonym for what? Closer attention should be paid to metonymy or synecdoche in Biblical language, that is, figures of speech in which a part represents the whole. A common example is “bread” as a synecdoche for “food” or sustenance in general (e.g. “give us this day our daily bread,” Mt.6:11; Lk.11:3). In English a “hired hand” is a workman and a “deck hand” is a sailor; so “hand” serves as a metonym for “person”. There is also the phrase “the long arm of the law” by which is meant that the power of the agencies



of law and order which can reach out and seize evildoers even if they try to hide in remote places. “Arm” is here a metaphor for action and power, very similar to its use in the Bible. Thus “the arm of the Lord” speaks of His powerful actions. There are several metonymic figures of speech in the OT such as “the hand of the Lord,” or His Wisdom, His light, His Spirit, etc. where, in each case, the part stands for, or represents the whole.

The failure to understand Biblical metonymy has resulted in the kind of notion about the Logos seen in trinitarianism. The following are examples of this important form of speech in the Scriptures:

### **The Logos and the Arm of the Lord (Yahweh)**

The “word” (*dabar*; *logos*) of the Lord is no more an independent person from God than is His “arm”. For a fuller picture of the “arm of the Lord” we can consider the following verses:

**Isaiah 51:9**, “Awake, awake, put on strength, *O arm of the LORD*; awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago. Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon?”

**Isaiah 40:10**, “Behold, the Lord GOD (Yahweh) comes with might, and *his arm* rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.”

**Isaiah 30:30**, “And the LORD will cause his majestic voice to be heard and the descending blow of *his arm* to be seen, in furious anger and a flame of devouring fire, with a cloudburst and storm and hailstones.”

**Isaiah 48:14**, “Assemble, all of you, and listen! Who among them has declared these things? The LORD loves him; he shall perform his purpose on Babylon, and *his arm* shall be against the Chaldeans.”

**Luke 1:51**, “He has shown strength with *his arm*; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.”

Also John 12:38, “so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: ‘Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has *the arm of the Lord* been revealed?’” which quotes Isaiah 53:1 “Who has believed what he heard from us? And to whom has *the arm of the LORD* been revealed?”

## The Lord’s arm spoken of in a personalized way

**Isaiah 63:12**, “who caused *his glorious arm* to go at the right hand of Moses, who divided the waters before them to make for himself an everlasting name.”

Yahweh’s “arm” appears here as though it were a distinct individual who went at the right hand of Moses, divided the waters of the sea, and “made for himself an everlasting name”!

## The Hand of the Lord

Consider the parallel between Yahweh’s “hand” and His “word (LXX, *logos*)”:

**Isaiah 48:13a**, “*My hand* laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand spread out the heavens.”

**Psalms 33:6**, “By *the word of the LORD* the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host.”

Would it be right for us to conclude from Isaiah 48:13 that God’s “hand,” by which He created heaven and earth, is another person distinct from Him? If not, would it be right for us to conclude that “the word” of Yahweh in Psalm 33:6, by which He created the heavens, and which is used as an OT basis of John 1:1, is a person distinct from Yahweh, as trinitarianism insists?

## John 1:1, “In the beginning”: the explicit link to Genesis

We have noted earlier that the Hebrew Bible was not numbered in the way that most Bibles now have chapter and verse numbers. Reference to a particular book was often done by quoting the first words of the book. Thus one referred to Genesis by its opening words, “In the beginning”. In so doing, there may be more meaning to these words in Genesis 1 that is intended than from merely referring to its first verse or chapter; the intention could be to include reference to the whole book and specifically to the remarkable and unique

self-revelation of Yahweh in Genesis. The message would then be: Yahweh who was so close to man, and so caring of man as seen in Genesis, has now drawn so close to man that He has become incarnate in Christ; in this way He “tabernacle among us” (Jn.1:14).

We have also seen that Yahweh God frequently *communicated* with people in Genesis; He spoke to them, so the notion of “word” is found throughout Genesis both as God’s creative word as also His communicative word. The concept of “the word of God” is firmly rooted in Genesis, and from there it continues through the whole Bible. The importance of “the word” does not lie in itself but in *whose* word it is, in this case, *God’s* word. It is therefore God’s communication. And with whom does He communicate in this world but with us, His creatures, His people? Thus, in this sense, “the word” is the expression of God’s immanence.

By His Logos God communicates with us and to us. What He communicates to us is the manifold *contents* of His word, whether it is truth, light, or life. In so doing, God does not just communicate something to us, but thereby *gives of Himself to us*. We cannot have life from Him without also having Him; this is because the life which He gives is not something which can exist independently of Him. No living being exists independently of Him whether or not they are aware of it. That is why Jesus could say, “Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father” (Mt.10:29). Accordingly, the Apostle Paul could quote with approval the words of one of the Greek

poets who rightly perceived that “in him (God) we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

So the Word in John 1:1ff is not something mysterious. But what may properly be called a “mystery” is that “the Word became flesh” (Jn.1:14) which is certainly the central element of John’s Prologue (1:1-18). This is surely what is meant by “the mystery of Christ” (Eph.3:4; Col.4:3). We shall consider this more fully in relation to the Memra.

### **The Word/Logos as the Memra**

We have considered in some detail the OT roots of “the Word” and we should now begin to realize that we cannot go much deeper in our understanding of it on the OT basis alone. This is precisely what trinitarian scholars perceived, and thus assumed that there was no other way to go than to try to extract something they could use from Greek philosophy. But here, too, they soon found that they could not get very far, hence their rather desperate conclusion that the idea of the Word was John’s own idea or invention. But this conclusion ran on to the rocks of this scholarly finding: what constitutes John’s Prologue is actually a *poem* which John incorporated into his gospel; in other words, it was *not* composed by John. This shatters all meaningful talk about the Word as John’s own idea. On the contrary, the evidence seems indisputable that the Word was something familiar to the early church, and was incorporated into this profound poem, song, or hymn used by the church, which John then

used as an appropriate and effective introduction to his gospel.

It is true that the material that can be gathered from the OT alone does not in itself provide an adequate basis for understanding the Word in John's Prologue. But up to now, when we talked about the OT, we were mainly talking in terms of the *Hebrew Bible*. We have already mentioned that in the time of Christ and the early church, Aramaic, not Hebrew, was the primary language of the people. The failure to take this crucial fact into account resulted in the discussion about the Word either coming to a dead end or getting sidelined into the error of the Biblically baseless trinitarian interpretation of it as "God the Son".

In NT times, the Jews who went to the weekly synagogue services would hear the Hebrew Bible read aloud, but it had to be interpreted for them in Aramaic. These interpretations were called "targums" (meaning "translations"). It is these that constitute what scholars call *the Aramaic Old Testament*. What can be learned about "the Word" (Aramaic: *Memra*) in the Aramaic OT will clarify, strengthen, and confirm the understanding of the Word gained from our study of the Hebrew OT. This means that the OT roots of the Word in John 1:1 can ultimately be traced to the *Memra* of the Aramaic Old Testament.<sup>40</sup>

*Memra* is the Aramaic word for the Greek *logos*. Because Aramaic was the language spoken in Israel (Palestine) at the time, *Memra* was a word that the Jews would have often heard

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<sup>40</sup> On the Aramaic Targums of the OT, see also Appendix 4.

in their synagogues, and which they understood to be a well-known form of reference to the Name of Yahweh, or simply to Yahweh Himself. The *Jewish Encyclopedia* gives a concise and clear definition of *Memra*: “‘The Word,’ in the sense of the creative or directive word or speech of God manifesting His power in the world of matter or mind; a term used especially in the Targum as a substitute for ‘the Lord’”. We are on firm ground when we conclude that John was undoubtedly familiar with the Aramaic OT (the Targums), as indeed were the people in Israel generally in John’s day.

Why, then, did Gentile Christian theology fail to question its own assumptions and ask: Why would the gospel written by the Jewish Apostle John derive the central theme in its prologue, namely the *logos*, from a Greek (Gentile) source when an obvious (or what would have been obvious to a Jew in the first century AD) Jewish source (the Aramaic OT) was at hand and well known to the Jews? The answer, obviously, is: What was well known to the Jews was not well known to the Gentiles. Gentiles think as Gentiles, and very few (if any) of them were versed in Jewish life, literature, and language.

Few of the early “Fathers” of the Christian church could be shown to have any knowledge of Judaica or Judaism. The same is generally true of Christians and church leaders today. Judaism is not usually a subject listed in the curriculums of Christian theological seminaries, and even Biblical Hebrew is usually an optional subject. How many Christians have heard of the *Memra*? So when we are constantly told that the *logos* derives from Greek thought, who is in a position to know that

there is a better option which has its basis in the OT, especially the Aramaic Targums?

## Trinitarianism and the Old Testament

The solid and undeniable fact is that nowhere in the OT is there even a single reference to the *logos* as *person*. In the LXX, *logos* occurs 1239 times, yet not one of these so much as suggests that *logos* had any personal traits or characteristics. This means that *logos* as a personal being simply does not exist in the OT. Trinitarian scholars are, of course, fully (and sorely) aware of this fact. *The Expositor's Commentary* (on Jn.1:1) manages only to quote Ps.33:6 (LXX 32:6) ("By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host."). But what exactly is its contribution to understanding John 1:1? In Psalm 33:6 "the *logos* of Yahweh" is equated (by way of parallelism) with "the breath (*pneuma*)" of Yahweh, and while the reference is to the Genesis 1 account of the creation, it is limited (unlike John 1:3) to the creation of the heavens with its "starry host" (NIV). But the point is: here, too, there is no indication whatever that the *logos* is a personal being.

The evidence indubitably indicates that the trinitarian notion of the Logos in John 1:1 as providing evidence for the second person of the Trinity simply does not stand up to investigation. The OT does not provide a single shred of concrete evidence for it. A survey of the learned reference works shows that none is able to provide any OT basis for the idea



of a preexistent person called Logos. If, therefore, we want to construct a doctrine of God the Son (without which there could be no doctrine of the Trinity) by using the Logos as its foundation stone, we simply cannot find any basis for it in the OT, either Hebrew or Aramaic. Can any help be found in the OT concept of Wisdom?

### **The Logos as Wisdom: Wisdom Christology**

Wisdom (the word is feminine in both Hebrew and Greek, not masculine like *Logos*) is spoken of in personal terms in Proverbs, yet everyone is aware that the language there is poetic and metaphorical, and was therefore not meant to be understood literally. In the Bible, Wisdom is never thought of as a person, much less a person distinct from God, or another person in the “Godhead”.

Continuing his discussion on the Johannine Prologue, Prof. Witherington writes:

There is in this hymn (a ‘wisdom hymn’, p.287) an obvious drawing on material from Genesis 1. Both documents begin with the words, ‘In the beginning.’ Then too the Genesis story is about how God made a universe by means of his spoken words. Here too creation happens by *the* Word. But whatever debt the author of this hymn has to Genesis, *Genesis 1 is not about either a personified attribute, much less a person assisting God in creation.* It is the use of the Genesis material in the hymnic material about Wisdom both in the Old Testament and in later Jewish sapiential [wisdom] writings that provides the font of ideas and forms used in

creating this hymn. *Not only Prov.3 but also Proverbs 8:1-9:6 should be considered. There one learns that personified Wisdom was present at creation, but also that she called God's people back to the right paths and offered them life and favor from God (cf. 8:35). (Jesus the Sage, p.284, italics added)*

It is evident from the above passage and from the title of his book (*Jesus the Sage*) that Witherington interprets the Logos in terms of what is called "Wisdom Christology". That Wisdom in the OT is important for the understanding of the Logos in John 1:1ff is undoubtedly true, and we shall give this fact further consideration later in this work. But in his last sentence of the section quoted above, there appears to be insufficient concern to draw attention to the fact that "the personified Wisdom" in Proverbs was a hypostasized way of describing Wisdom and was certainly not an actual person. But it may be that Witherington assumes that his readers already know this. Trinitarians, of course, want to maintain that the Logos is a divine person distinct from God, but one who shares his nature and is therefore coequal with Him. But none of this can be derived from the Wisdom of Proverbs, and also not from Genesis 1 as Witherington also affirms. *The plain fact is that there is simply no personal Logos mentioned in the OT.*

## The Word and the Spirit of God

It should be noted that in the following section where the “Spirit” is capitalized, it is *not* because the spirit is a person, but is used where the emphasis needs to be brought out clearly that the spirit being referred to is not the human spirit, or “the spirit of man,” but to “the Spirit of God,” Yahweh’s Spirit. Since “Holy Spirit” is considered a name it is usually capitalized.

(1) References to the Spirit are remarkably few in the OT:

- The “Spirit of Yahweh” (*ruach Yahweh*, רוח יהוה) 26 times, of which 7 are in Judges
- The “Spirit of God” (*ruach elohim*, רוח אלהים) 16 times, of which 8 are in 1 Samuel
- “My Spirit” 12 times
- “His Spirit” 4 times
- “The Spirit” once in 1 Chronicles, 4 times in Numbers, 7 times in Ezekiel, and once in Isaiah (32:15) = 13

This adds up to a total of only 71 times, indicating that references to the Spirit in the OT are few and that statistically, therefore, the Spirit is not a figure of central importance in the OT revelation. Compare this, for example, with “Abraham” who is mentioned 110 times *in Genesis alone*; or David, to whom there are 1025 references in the OT.

(2) The Spirit is never conceived of as a person apart from Yahweh

More important than the relatively few references to the Spirit, the OT provides no basis whatsoever for supposing that the Spirit is a person distinct from Yahweh. This means that, certainly where the Spirit is concerned, there is no basis in the OT for the doctrine of the Trinity.

### **“The holy spirit was God himself conceived of as speaking with Israel” (McNamara)**

“For Judaism the holy spirit (*ruach haqqodes*) is God conceived of as communicating his mind and will to man.” (McNamara, *Targum and Testament*, p.107)

“The holy spirit was God himself conceived of as speaking with Israel. Rabbinic texts can express the same idea in other ways. In some contexts ‘the holy spirit’ can be replaced by such terms as ‘the Shekinah,’ ‘the Dibbera’ (Word) and ‘Bath Qol’ (Voice). In point of fact, where in one text we find ‘holy spirit,’ in parallel texts we read one of the others, these being more or less synonymous in certain contexts.” (McNamara, p.108)

“‘Spirit’ is generally not capitalized [in Rabbinic texts] to avoid the Christian idea of the Spirit as a distinct or separate being from God. From the following quotation it is again

clearly shown that the Word, like ‘the holy spirit’ (as mentioned in the previous quotations), are identical in Judaism in that both communicate God’s will to man:

“*Dibbura* (Neofiti: *Dibbera*), i.e. the Word, is, as we said, the term generally used in the Palestinian Targum when reference is made to God’s communicating his will to man.” (McNamara, p.109)

The following is a fuller excerpt about the Spirit from the book *Christianity* by the renowned German theologian Hans Küng:

### **What is the Spirit?**

Here too we do best to approach from the Jewish tradition. According to the Hebrew Bible and then also the New Testament, God is spirit, Hebrew feminine *ruach*, which originally means breath, breathe, wind. Tangible yet intangible, invisible yet powerful, as important to life as the air that one breathes, laden with energy like the wind, the storm—that is the spirit. What is meant is none other than the living force and power emanating from God, which works invisibly in both the individual and the people of Israel, in the church and in the world generally. This spirit is holy in so far as it is distinguished from the unholy spirit of human beings and their world: as the spirit of God. The understanding of Christian faith is that it is the driving force (*dynamis*, not law) in Christianity.

But we should beware of misunderstandings: in the light of the New Testament the Holy Spirit is not—as often in the history of religions—some third element distinct from God which is between God and human beings; it is not a magical, substantial, mysterious-supernatural fluid of a dynamic kind (no spiritual ‘something’), nor is it a magic being of an animistic kind (some spiritual being or ghost). Rather, the **Holy Spirit is none other than God himself**. God himself, in so far as he is near to human beings and the world, indeed works inwardly as the power which grasps but cannot be grasped, as a life-giving but also judging force, as a grace which gives but is not under our control. So as God’s Spirit, the Spirit can no more be separated from God than the sunbeam from the sun. Thus if we ask how the invisible, intangible, incomprehensible God is near and present to believers, the answer of the New Testament is unanimous. **God is near** to us human beings **in the Spirit**: present in the Spirit, through the Spirit, indeed as Spirit. (Hans Küng, *Christianity*, p.42, all bold letters are his)

## The Logos and the Spirit

The essence of the Word is the Spirit; these are inseparably related in Scripture. “By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth” (Psalm 33:6, NIV). The word translated as “breath” is *ruach* in Hebrew and *pneuma* in Greek, and these are the words for “spirit” in both languages. Job 33:4 says, “The *Spirit* of God has made me; the *breath* of the Almighty gives me life.” (NIV)

The relationship of God’s word to His Spirit is seen also in 1Corinthians 2:12,13; John 3:34; 6:63. So, too, John 3:8 speaks of being “born of the Spirit” while 1Peter 1:23 speaks of being born again “through the living and abiding word of God.”

The relation of Word to Spirit could be stated in this way: *the Word is the form, the Spirit is the substance*. The word is compared to a “seed” (Mt.13:19,20, 22, etc) which carries within it the Spirit of life. Hence, as we have just seen, the Apostle Peter could speak of it as “the *living* word of God”. Thus, when “the Word became flesh and lived among us” (Jn.1:14) in the person of Christ, God’s Presence as life, light, truth, grace, salvation and, above all, His Spirit, was manifested in Christ; for, as John says, it is “from this *fullness* (of God in the Logos) that we have all received” (John 1:16).

Since life is embodied in the Word (Logos), it is “the word of *life*” (1Jn. 1:1). In Scripture, life is frequently associated with the Spirit; this is true even on the level of the human spirit, James 2:26, “the body without the spirit is dead”. The Apostle speaks in Romans 8:2 of “the Spirit of life,” and in Romans 8:10, “the Spirit *is* life”. On the level of “the word,” in 2Corinthians 3:6 Paul both compares and contrasts the Law (also God’s word) with the Spirit, “the letter (of the Law) kills, but the Spirit gives life” (cf. Rom. 7:6b). In John 6:63, Jesus says, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is of no avail. The *words* that I have spoken to you are *spirit and life*.” “The word of life” can also be described as “the word of truth” (Col.1:5; 2Ti.2:15; etc), “the word of righteousness” (Heb.5:13), and “the word of faith” (Rom.10:8)! This is

fullness indeed—a fullness which, according to John 1:16, all those in Christ have received.

That this refers to “the fullness” of Yahweh’s Memra/Logos/Word is unmistakable because it is not until the following verse (v.17) that “Jesus Christ” is mentioned for the first time in John; it is “the fullness” which filled the person of Christ. The word “fullness” (*plērōma*) is the same word used in Colossians 2:9, “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily”. Thus the fullness of the Word is, evidently, “the fullness of deity”; see also Colossian 1:19, and Eph.3:19 “the fullness of God”. From this we see that the Word in John’s Prologue functions as a metonym for God, and points in particular to important aspects of His Being, such as His life, His light, His truth, etc, which are highlighted in John’s Gospel as a whole. But no demonstrable connection of the Word to some supposed “second person in the godhead” can be found.

What is remarkable about Ephesians 3:19 (“the fullness of God,” quoted in the previous paragraph) is that we too can be filled with God’s fullness through Christ, for this verse exhorts us “to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

Three paragraphs earlier we saw the association, in Scripture, of life with the Spirit. What if we read “the Spirit” in place of “the Logos” in John 1:1? It would read like this, “In the beginning was the Spirit, the Spirit was with God, and the Spirit was God.” We would not have much problem with such a reading, especially because it would, without difficulty, fit into what follows,



<sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

If it be argued from verse 3 that the Spirit is not said to have been involved in creation, then let us take note of Job 33:4, “The Spirit of God has made (אָשָׁה, *asah*, just as in Genesis 1:26) me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.”

The point of drawing attention to the parallel of the Logos with the Spirit is that in the OT there is absolutely no suggestion of the Spirit being a distinct person from Yahweh. Even so, the Spirit would fit seamlessly into John 1. Even the incarnation as being applicable to the Spirit would be unproblematic for the NT as can be demonstrated without difficulty from the fact that the Spirit of God is also described as “the Spirit of Christ” or “the Spirit of Jesus,” a fact that is otherwise without satisfactory explanation. There is also the (for trinitarians) inexplicable statement of Christ that “if I do not go away, the Helper [i.e. the Spirit] will not come to you” (Jn.16:7). If the Spirit is a third person, why should He be unable to come while Christ was on earth? As a trinitarian I was unable to give or find any satisfactory answer to this question.

Though the Spirit is never referred to as a distinct person, yet the NT enlightens us by revealing that he functions in relation to God in the same way as the spirit of man functions in relation to man:

For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. (1Cor.2:10,11)

So to the question, "Who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" (Rom.11:34; also 1Cor.2:16; both quotations from Isa.40:13), the Biblical answer is that the Spirit of God knows the thoughts of God in the same way as the spirit of a man knows the thoughts of the man. That is why a man can "examine himself" (1Cor.11:28), for just as "the Spirit searches the depths of God" (1Cor.2:10), so man's spirit can search the depths of his own being.

This also helps us to understand the phrase in Genesis 1:26 "let us make man" in a way not previously thought of because of our failure to grasp the truth revealed about God and His Spirit as stated in 1Corinthians 2:10,11. In this light we can see that the "us" with whom Yahweh took counsel was His own Spirit.

Similarly, how many people understand the relationship of a man's spirit to the man himself? Paul could speak of his spirit as being able to experience things apart from his physical being as in 2Cor.12:2,3: "whether in the body or out of it I don't know"; or, "though absent in the body, yet present in spirit" (1Cor.5:3,4). The spirit is understood as a distinct reality within man, but not as a separate person. The same is true of God as shown in 1Cor.2:10,11. The Spirit (like the Logos) is a reality within God, which, like man's spirit, has a definite function within God and can sometimes even be

spoken of as though it functioned on its own (cf. too “the arm of the LORD,” Isa.51:9, etc), yet it is not an independent or separate person.

If even the Spirit of God cannot be shown from Scripture to be a distinct person from God, it is hard to imagine how trinitarianism could have misled us into supposing that the Logos, a previously unknown entity, is a separate person called “God the Son”. It does appear that it is not, after all, very difficult for even “the elect” to be deceived (Mt.24:24; Mk. 13:22).<sup>41</sup>

## The Holy Spirit and Yahweh’s Presence

Psalm 51:11, “Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.”

The parallelism of Hebrew poetry indicates that these two sentences are parallel to each other, the second rephrasing and complementing the first. Thus “your presence” and “your Holy Spirit” are semantic parallels. This means that the Spirit refers to Yahweh’s special presence, and to all the divine qualities (such as His power, wisdom, word, etc) which His presence brings. When this meaning of “His Spirit” is applied to other verses where the term occurs, it fits in perfectly and, indeed, helps to explicate more precisely what is meant.

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<sup>41</sup> This is not to suggest that these sayings of Jesus have already been completely fulfilled; a future fulfillment is possible because “false christs and false prophets” would find the present spiritual state of the world favorable for their activities and teaching.

This also helps to explain more specifically the connection between the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost and the promise “I am with you always” (Mt. 28:20)—the promise of his abiding presence (the Spirit of Christ is none other than the Spirit of God) for the fulfillment of the great commission. The disciples received power at Pentecost so as to be able to fulfill that commission; but there is no divine power independent of the divine presence. The aspect of power which comes with God’s special presence is mentioned specifically because the tiny infant church had to be reassured, as well as empowered, to accomplish what was entrusted to them.

As we saw in 1 Corinthians 2:10,11, the Holy Spirit is to God what the spirit of man is to man; He is not a separate person from God any more than our human spirit is a separate person from us. To be filled with the Spirit is not to be filled with a “third person” but to be filled with Yahweh’s own presence. The problem of speaking of the Spirit as “he” is that it gives the impression that the Spirit is a distinct person from Yahweh; but the Scriptures teach us that the Spirit of God is integral to God’s Person, just as our spirit is an integral part of us, yet a distinguishable element within us.

There are very many distinguishable elements (for lack of a better term) within God’s Person mentioned in Scripture, such as His power (“His arm,” or “His hand”), His wisdom, His holiness, His love, etc., and all these find expression through His Word (Logos). But just as we would not think of His love, etc, as a distinct being from Him, why do we think of His Word as a distinct or separate being from Him?

## The Spirit: Yahweh’s gift to believers

Even more important than the question, What is the Spirit?, is the question, What is the function of the Spirit in relation to us? Or, What is the meaning of the Spirit for our lives? We understand the answer to these questions better when we know:

(1) The Spirit of Yahweh is *given* to believers as His gift which, when *received*, has transforming effect on the life of the believer.<sup>42</sup>

(2) The Spirit as God’s seal upon us (the seal signifies that the believer belongs to God and carries His authority to represent Him, to function as His image) and as guarantee, or down payment, from God 2Cor.1:22; 2Cor.5:5 (guaranteeing the receiving of eternal life, and the fulfilling of all God’s promises to us).

(3) The Spirit is the means by which we are joined or united with the Lord, 1Cor.6:17.

(4) The Spirit is in us (Jn.14:17), which is what makes us the temple of God: 1Cor.3:16; 6:19; 2Cor.6:16; Eph.2:22; 1Pet.2:5.

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<sup>42</sup> See the words “give” e.g. Acts 5:32; 10:45 (“gift”); 15:8; Rom.5:5; 1Thess.4:8; and “receive” e.g. Acts 2:38 (“gift”); 8:15,17; 10:47; Jn. 7:38, 39; Rom.8:15; 1Cor.2:12; Gal.3:2, etc.

Because the Spirit is Yahweh God's Spirit, in giving His Spirit to us He has, in effect, *given Himself to us*, to be with us and to live in us. The union and communion that this brings is the dynamic of all true Christian life.

## Chapter 8



# “The Word” is “the Memra”

## **The Aramaic Old Testament, the Memra (the Word)**

**I**n the last chapter we considered the OT roots of the Word/Logos in the Hebrew Bible. In this chapter we consider the roots of the Logos in the Aramaic OT. Since most Christians know practically nothing about the Aramaic background of the early church, we will here provide a brief “intensive” introduction to this matter which is so important for a proper understanding of the gospels and John 1 in particular.

## **Aramaic, the language of Palestine and the primary language of Jesus**

The learned Jewish scholar Rabbi Samuel Sandmel (who, unlike many other rabbis, exercised a more understanding attitude towards the New Testament) wrote,

Christianity was born in Palestine, within Judaism. The language spoken by Jesus and his immediate followers was Aramaic, a language as closely related to Hebrew as one might say, Portuguese is to Spanish.

The New Testament itself attests to the knowledge that the beginnings of the Christian movement were in a locale linguistically Aramaic, for it preserves within its Greek text Aramaic words in quotation. Somewhere in the line of development of Christianity, probably while its accumulating tradition was still being carried on orally, translation of some things from Aramaic into Greek took place. (Sandmel, *A Jewish Understanding of the New Testament*, p.13)

Rabbi Sandmel compared the relationship of Hebrew and Aramaic with that of Portuguese and Spanish. The prolific (having written over 70 books) Catholic scholar Henri Daniel-Rops wrote that Aramaic was “in no way at all a corrupt form of Hebrew, a kind of degenerate dialect that the Jews brought back with them from Babylon. Aramaic was just as much a true language as Hebrew: it was the language of those active, stirring tribes which moved about the Fertile Crescent from the earliest times—those tribes from which the Israelites claimed descent.” (H. Daniel-Rops, *Daily Life in the Time of Jesus*, p.267.)

Geza Vermes, Professor Emeritus of Jewish Studies at Oxford, wrote in his recent book *The Authentic Gospel of Jesus*, Penguin 2004: “Ideally this analysis [of the gospel of Jesus] should be applied to the original language of the teaching of



Jesus, who spoke Aramaic; Aramaic was the Semitic tongue used by most of his compatriots.” (*A Note on the Sources*, p.x)

Here Prof. Vermes, one of the foremost authorities on Jewish studies, states three things:

1. The language which Jesus spoke was Aramaic, therefore
2. Jesus’ original teaching was in Aramaic, because
3. Most of the people of Palestine in his time spoke Aramaic.

However, the Gospels are now available to us only in Greek, so the task of the scholar is to try to understand the underlying Aramaic forms of expression, and even words (e.g. ‘Abba’, meaning ‘Father’), in order to attain a clearer understanding of Jesus’ teaching. For this purpose, Vermes mentions three sources which provide extremely valuable material:

The most important Bible commentaries are [1] the *Tannaitic Midrashim* (plural of Midrash, works of Scripture exegesis) on the Law of Moses...; [2] the *Midrash Rabbah*, the *Large Midrash*...; and [3] the *Targumim* (plural of Targum, translation) covering a variety of popular Aramaic versions of the Hebrew Bible classified as the Targum of Onkelos on the Torah, various recensions of the Palestinian Targum on the Torah, the Targum of Jonathan on the Prophets, etc. (page xvi, numbers in square brackets added).

But few Christian scholars are acquainted with this large body of material. For those able to read German, a standard reference work in 4 volumes by H.L. Strack and P. Billerbeck,

*Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, has long been available. For those unable to read German, there is the much smaller and older work by John Lightfoot, *A Commentary of the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica*, which was published by Oxford University Press in 1859. Few people, however, perceive the importance of all this material for understanding the NT, so references to it even in scholarly works are sparse. To this can be added the fact that some of the most important Aramaic material, notably Targum Neofiti, were discovered only 50 years ago, and the Dead Sea scrolls (containing significant Aramaic writings) just 60 years ago.

## **General Observations on Aramaic**

The learned Catholic scholar and expert on the Aramaic Targums, Martin McNamara, reminds us of the Jewish origin and character of the gospel:

Yet we can never lose sight of the fact that the preaching of the gospel had its origins within Judaism. Christ and the Apostles were Jews. The gospel tradition, too, was formed in a Jewish atmosphere within Palestine during the early years of the nascent Church. And this tradition was formed by men who for the greater part were themselves Jews. And even when Christianity moved beyond Palestine to the Greek world, it was brought there by Jews. They may preach to Greeks, but they would naturally have thought as Hebrews. (McNamara, *Targum and Testament*, p.1f)

Elsewhere McNamara speaks of “the early Aramaic-speaking Church” and “the nascent Aramaic stage of the Church” (both p.130, *Targum and Testament*); and again, “the language used by Christ and by the Aramaic-speaking nascent church” (p.164).

To underscore these points, consider the following information provided in the Encarta Reference Library on “The Aramaic Targums”:

In Judaism, when Aramaic replaced Hebrew as the language of everyday life, translations became necessary, first accompanying the oral reading of Scriptures in the synagogue and later set down in writing. The Targums were not literal translations, but rather paraphrases or interpretations of the original.

When, after the Babylonian Captivity in the 6th century bc, Aramaic replaced Hebrew as the generally spoken language, it became necessary to explain the meaning of readings from the Scriptures. These were the Targums; the word “targum” means “interpretation”.

(Microsoft Encarta Reference Library 2005)

The names of people mentioned in the gospels often used the Aramaic prefix “bar” (instead of the Hebrew “ben”) for the word “son” (as in “son of”); this clearly shows that Aramaic was the language of the common people. Consider, for example, these well-known names in the NT: Barabbas; Bar-Jesus; Bar-Jonah; Barnabas; Barsabbas; Bartholomew;

Bartimeus, etc. Also words like Maranatha (1Cor.16:22), “Our Lord, come,” a common prayer in the church.

Jesus’ hometown Nazareth was in Galilee, situated in the northern part of the land of Israel. It was called “Galilee of the Gentiles” (Mt.4:15) probably because it was that part of Israel which had the most contact with the neighboring Gentile populations, namely, the Greek-speaking cities of the Decapolis to the east and Scythopolis in the south. What language(s) then did the Galileans speak? This question is important for us because many of the twelve apostles were, like Jesus, from Galilee. Freyne’s standard work on Galilee provides the following answer:

While Greek was certainly widely used even among the lower, uneducated classes, we have allowed, there seems little doubt that *Aramaic remained the most commonly spoken language of the vast majority of the inhabitants of Galilee* throughout the whole period of this survey. There is a growing consensus that Mishnaic Hebrew too was spoken in first century C.E. Palestine, and in fact had developed from spoken Hebrew of earlier times that had never been totally replaced. Given the close affinity of Hebrew and Aramaic it is quite possible that a situation of *diglossia* [simultaneous use of two languages] existed, namely Aramaic as the ordinary language for everyday speech and Hebrew for formal occasions, especially the cult [i.e. worship]. (Sean Freyne, *Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian 323 B.C.E. to 135 C.E.*, p.144; italics and explanatory words in square brackets mine. Freyne was Professor of New Testament studies at Loyola University, New Orleans.)

Professor M. Black described it in this way:

Four languages were to be found in first-century Palestine: Greek was the speech of the educated ‘hellenized’ classes and the medium of cultural and commercial intercourse between Jew and foreigner; Latin was the language of the army of occupation and, to judge from Latin borrowings in Aramaic, appears also to some extent to have served the purposes of commerce, as it no doubt also did of Roman law; Hebrew, the sacred tongue of the Jewish Scriptures, continued to provide the lettered Jew with an important means of literary expression and was cultivated as a spoken tongue in the learned coteries of the Rabbis; *Aramaic was the language of the people of the land* and, together with Hebrew, provided the chief literary medium of the Palestinian Jew of the first century; Josephus wrote his *Jewish War* in Aramaic and later translated it into Greek. (Matthew Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition), p.15f; italics added)

## **Aramaic still evident in the Greek (and English) Gospels**

Those who read the gospels will often come across names and other words without knowing that these are Aramaic. For the reader’s convenience, the following material is extracted from the detailed study in Wikipedia:<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> For further details see the Wikipedia article, “Aramaic of Jesus,” which is located at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aramaic\\_of\\_Jesus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aramaic_of_Jesus); we quoted from the 2009 version of this article. When the Hebrew words in this article are pasted into Microsoft Word, they run left to right

— Start of Wikipedia article —

### **Talitha qoum** (Ταλιθα κουμ)

And taking the hand of the child, he said to her, “Talitha koum,” which is translated, “Little girl, I say to you, get up”. (Mark 5:41)

The Aramaic is *tlīthā qūm*. The word *tlīthā* is the feminine form of the word *tlē*, meaning “young”. *Qūm* is the Aramaic verb ‘to rise, stand, get up’.

### **Ephphatha** (Εφφαθα)

And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” which is ‘be opened’. (Mark 7:34)

Once again, the Aramaic word is given with an attempted transliteration, only this time the word to be transliterated is more complicated. In Greek, the Aramaic is written εφφαθα. This is from the Aramaic ‘ethptha 𐤆 the passive imperative of the verb ‘ptha 𐤆 ‘to open’.

### **Abba** (Αββα)

And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt. (Mark 14:36)

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(not right to left) even though the Hebrew consonants within a word remain right to left. We made no attempt to rectify this.

Abba, an Aramaic word (written Αββα in Greek, and 'abbā in Aramaic), is immediately followed by the Greek equivalent (Πατηρ) with no explicit mention of it being a translation. The phrase *Abba, Father* is repeated in Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6.

Note, the name Barabbas is a Hellenization of the Aramaic *Bar Abba* (בַּר אַבְבָּא), literally, “Son of the Father”.

### **Raca** (Ρακα)

But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. (Matthew 5:22)

Raca, or Raka, in the Aramaic of the Talmud means empty one, fool, empty head.

### **Mammon** (Μαμωνας)

No one can serve two masters: for either they will hate the one, and love the other; or else they will hold to the one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. (Matthew 6:24)

And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations. He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have

not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. (Luke 16:9-13)

### **Rabboni** (Ραββουνοι)

Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master. (John 20:16, KJV)

Also in Mark 10:51. Hebrew form *rabbi* used as title of Jesus in Matthew 26:25,49; Mark 9:5, 11:21, 14:45; John 1:49, 4:31, 6:25, 9:2, 11:8. In Aramaic, it could be (רבוני).

### **Maranatha** (μαρανα θα)

If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha. (1 Corinthians 16:22)

In Aramaic (תא מרנא) it means *Lord, come!* or *Our Lord, come!*

### **Eli Eli lema sabachthani** (Ηλει Ηλει λεμα σαβαχθανει)

Around the ninth hour, Jesus shouted in a loud voice, saying "Eli Eli lema sabachthani?" which is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46)



And at the ninth hour, Jesus shouted in a loud voice, “Eloi Eloi lema sabachthani?” which is translated, “My God, my God, for what have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34)

This phrase, shouted by Jesus from the cross, is given to us in these two versions. The Matthean version of the phrase is transliterated in Greek as ηλει ηλει λεμα σαβαχθανει. The Markan version is similar, but begins ελωι ελωι (*elōi* rather than *ēlei*).

The lines seem to be quoting the first line of Psalm 22. However, he is not quoting the canonical Hebrew version (êlî êlî lâmâ `azabtânî), but is using an Aramaic translation of it (targum).

In Aramaic, it could be (שבקתני למא אלהי אלהי).

### **Jot and tittle** (ἰῶτα ἐν ἡ μία κεραία)

For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the Law (that is, the Torah) till all is fulfilled. (Matthew 5:18)

The quotation uses them as an example of extremely minor details. “Jot and tittle” is *iota* and *keraiia* in the Greek. *Iota* is the smallest letter of the Greek alphabet (ι), but since only capitals were used at the time the Greek New Testament, written (Ι), it probably represents the Aramaic *yodh* (י) which is the smallest letter of the Aramaic alphabet.

**Korbanas** (κορβανας)

But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, ‘It is not lawful to put them into the **treasury** (Gk. text: *korbana*), since they are blood money.’ (Matthew 27:6)

In Aramaic (קרבנא, *korbana*) it refers to the treasury in the Temple in Jerusalem, derived from the Hebrew *Corban* (קרבן), found in Mark 7:11 and the Septuagint (in Greek transliteration), meaning *religious gift*.

**Sikera** (σικερα)

for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or **strong drink** (Gk. text: *sikera*); even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. (Luke 1:15)

In Aramaic (שכרא, *sikera*) it means barley beer, from the Akkadian *shikaru*.

**Hosanna** (ὡσαννά)

Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! (Mark 11:9)

According to the Bauer lexicon, see references at end, this word is derived from Aramaic (נא הושע) from Hebrew (הושיעה נא) (Psalm 118:25, נָא הוֹשִׁיעָה), meaning “help” or “save, I pray”, “an appeal that became a liturgical formula; as part of the Hallel... familiar to everyone in Israel.”

## Aramaic personal names in the New Testament

The most prominent feature in Aramaic names is “bar” (Greek transliteration βαρ, Aramaic *bar*), meaning ‘son of,’ a common patronym prefix. Its Hebrew equivalent, ‘ben,’ is conspicuous by its absence. Some examples are:

Matthew 10:3—Bartholomew (Βαρθολομαιος from bar-Tôlmay, perhaps ‘son of furrows’ or ‘ploughman’).

Matthew 16:17—Simon bar-Jona (Σιμων Βαριωνας from Šim`ôn bar-Yônâ, ‘Simon son of Jonah’).

John 1:42—Simon bar-Jochanan (‘Simon son of John’).

Matthew 27:16—Barabbas (Βαραββας from bar-Abbâ, ‘son of the father’).

Mark 10:46—Bartimaeus (Βαρτιμαιος from bar-Tim’ay, perhaps ‘son of defilement’ or ‘son of a whore’).

Acts 1:23—Barsabbas (Βαρσαββας from bar-Šabbâ, ‘son of the Sabbath’).

Acts 4:36—Joseph who is called Barnabas (Βαρναβας from bar-Navâ meaning ‘son of prophecy, the prophet,’ but given the Greek translation υιος παρακλησεως; usually translated as ‘son of consolation/encouragement’).

Acts 13:6—Bar-Jesus (Βαριησους from bar-Yêšû`, ‘son of Jesus/Joshua’).

Mark 3:17—Boanerges (Βοανηργες): And James, the son of Zebedee, and John, the brother of James, and he gave them the name Boanerges, which is Sons of Thunder.

Jesus surnames the brothers James and John to reflect their impetuosity. The Greek rendition of their name is Βοανηργες (*Boanērges*). Given the Greek translation that comes with it ('Sons of Thunder'), it seems that the first element of the name is 'bnê', 'sons of' (the plural of 'bar'), Aramaic (בני). The second part of the name is often reckoned to be 'rğaş' ('tumult') Aramaic (רנא), or 'rğaz' ('anger') Aramaic (רנז). The Peshitta reads 'bnay rğeşy'.

### **Cephas** (Κηφας)

He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John, you shall be called Cephas," which is translated 'Peter'. (John 1:42, NIV)

But I say that each of you says "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ". (1 Corinthians 1:12)

Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and stayed with him for fifteen days (Galatians 1:18, NRSV)

In these passages, 'Cephas' is given as the nickname of the apostle better known as Simon Peter. The Greek word is transliterated Κηφᾶς (*Kēphâs*).

The apostle’s given name appears to be Simon, and he is given the Aramaic nickname, *kêfâ*, meaning ‘rock’. The final sigma (*s*) is added in Greek to make the name masculine rather than feminine.

### **Thomas** (Θωμάς)

Then Thomas, who was called Didymus, said to his co-disciples, “Now let us go that we might die with him!” (John 11:16)

Thomas (Θωμᾶς) is listed among the disciples of Jesus in all four gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. However, it is only in John’s Gospel that more information is given. In three places (John 11:16, 20:24 and 21:2) he is given the name Didymus (Δίδυμος), the Greek word for a twin. In fact, “the Twin” is not just a surname, it is a translation of “Thomas”. The Greek Θωμᾶς—Thōmâs—comes from the Aramaic *tômâ*, “twin”.

### **Tabitha** (Ταβειθα)

In Joppa, there was a disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. (Acts 9:36)

The disciple’s name is given both in Aramaic (Ταβειθα) and Greek (Δορκας). The Aramaic name is a transliteration of Tvîthâ the female form of טַבַּיָּהּ (Tavyâ). Both names mean ‘gazelle’.

## Aramaic place names in the New Testament

### Gethsemane (Γεθσημανει)

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane.  
(Mt 26:36)

And they went to a place that has the name Gethsemane.  
(Mark 14:32)

The place where Jesus takes his disciples to pray before his arrest is given the Greek transliteration Γεθσημανει (Geth-sēmani). It represents the Aramaic ‘Gath-Šmânê’, meaning ‘the oil press’ or ‘oil vat’ (referring to olive oil).

### Golgotha (Γολγοθα)

And they took him up to the place Golgotha, which is translated Place of the Skull. (Mark 15:22)

And carrying his cross by himself, he went out to the so-called Place of the Skull, which is called in ‘Hebrew’ Golgotha. (John 19:17)

This is clearly Aramaic rather than Hebrew. ‘Gûlgaltâ’ is the Aramaic for ‘skull’. The name appears in all of the gospels except Luke, which calls the place simply *Kranion* ‘the Skull,’ with no Aramaic. The name ‘Calvary’ is taken from the Latin Vulgate translation, *Calvaria*.

**Gabbatha** (Γαββαθα)

When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge’s bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew, Gabbatha. (John 19:13)

The place name appears to be Aramaic. According to Josephus, *War*, V.ii.1, #51, the word Gabath means *high place*, or *elevated place*, so perhaps a raised flat area near the temple.

— End of Wikipedia article —

**The Aramaic Old Testament: the Targums**

The following explanation is from *Encyclopedia Britannica* 2003, article “Targum”:

The earliest Targums date from the time after the Babylonian Exile when *Aramaic had superseded Hebrew as the spoken language of the Jews in Palestine*. It is impossible to give more than a rough estimate as to the period in which Hebrew was displaced by Aramaic as a spoken language. It is certain, however, that *Aramaic was firmly established in Palestine by the 1st century AD*, although Hebrew still remained the learned and sacred language. Thus *the Targums were designed to meet the needs of unlearned Jews [i.e. the great majority] to whom the Hebrew of the Old Testament was unintelligible*. (italics added)

## Further observations about the Targums

McNamara, one of the foremost experts on the Targums, provides the following explanation:

*A targum is an Aramaic translation of a book or books of the Old Testament, Aramaic being the language spoken rather generally in Palestine in the time of Christ, and indeed for some centuries preceding it. In the regular synagogue service, sections of the Pentateuch and of the Prophets were read out in Hebrew and were immediately translated into Aramaic. It is for this reason that we refer to these translations as liturgical renderings.*

There are still extant two distinct Jewish targums of the Pentateuch. The first is a rather literal rendering and is known as the Targum of Onkelos. The other, an extremely paraphrastic version, is called the Palestinian Targum of the Pentateuch. This Palestinian targum is now found in its entirety in Codex Neofiti, and in part in the texts of Pseudo-Jonathan, the Fragment Targum, and in Fragments from the Cairo Geniza. Being a paraphrase rather than a translation proper, this targum contains much additional material and consequently gives us a good idea of the religious concepts current when it was composed. This latter targum is written in the language known as Palestinian Aramaic....*Targums, stand at the very heart of Jewish religion.*" (*Targum and Testament*, p.11f, italics added).

"The targumic tradition was a sacred tradition, originating in the liturgy. The Palestinian Targum, being recited every Sabbath in the synagogues, would have been well known to Christ



and his Apostles [including John], as well as to the Jewish converts to Christianity. That Christ should have made use of the religious traditions of his people when addressing his message to them is altogether natural. He came not to destroy the Law but to fulfill it, to bring it to perfection... Jesus was a Jew of the Jews. His language and mental make-up were theirs. *It is, then, not surprising that the manner in which he, and later the Apostles [including John], presented the gospel to the Jews was that already known to them.*” (McNamara, p.167, italics and square brackets added)

### **The Jewish background of the Word, the Glory, etc.**

In order to help us better understand the Jewish background of such terms as “the Word” (the Memra), “the Glory,” etc., I quote further from McNamara:

The expression of divine truths in human language will always present a problem to mortals. The Yahwist [Bible writer(s) who used the Tetragrammaton] has given us both a deep psychology and a profound theology in anthropomorphic and mythical dress. Yahweh fashions man from clay, converses with him, walks in the Garden of Eden, descends from heaven to see the tower of Babel. This manner of speaking about God must have appeared to many as not entirely becoming.

This led the targumists to remove anthropomorphisms, substituting references to the ‘Word’ (*Memra*), ‘Glory’ (*Yeqara*, *Iqar*) or ‘Presence’ (*Shekinah*; Aramaic: *Shekinta*) of the Lord when speaking of his relations with the world. In communicating his will to man we read of ‘the Holy Spirit’ or

the *Dibbera* (Word) rather than the Lord himself. For a Jew, of course, these were merely other ways of saying ‘the Lord’. They were reverential ways of speaking about the God of Israel.” (*Targum and Testament*, p.98)

In some texts of [Targum] Neofiti ‘Glory of the Lord’ is a metonym for God and one which could equally well be replaced by ‘the Word (*Memra*) of the Lord’. Thus, for example, in Genesis:

‘*The Word of the Lord* created the two large luminaries... (1:16)... and the *Glory of the Lord* set them in the firmament (1:17)... *the Word of the Lord* created the son of man [i.e. man]... (1:27)... And the *Glory of the Lord* blessed them and the *Word of the Lord* said to them: ‘be strong and multiply’ (1:28)... And on the seventh day the *Word of the Lord* completed the work which he had created... (2:2)... and the *Glory of the Lord* blessed the seventh day (2:3).’” (*Targum and Testament*, p.99)

In the Palestinian Targum the usual expression is not ‘the Glory of God’ but ‘the Glory of the Shekinah of God’, or ‘the Glory of the Shekinah of the Lord’. The insertion of ‘Shekinah’ may be a further attempt to remove any trace of anthropomorphism.... ‘Shekinah,’ i.e. presence, dwelling, calls to mind ‘Glory of the Lord,’ or his dwelling presence with Israel.” (McNamara, p.100)

All this makes it perfectly clear that “Word” (*Memra*), “Glory,” and “Shekinah” were “reverential ways of speaking about the God of Israel”. The Word was never thought of as

a personal being distinct from Yahweh, the God of Israel. The Logos in Greek philosophy was also not a personal being, as is also true in the writings of the Jewish philosopher Philo. The Word as a person distinct from Yahweh simply did not exist anywhere. This proves beyond doubt that the trinitarian interpretation of the Word in John 1 as a divine person distinct from Yahweh God is without any foundation whatsoever; it is the result of a serious misinterpretation of Scripture. This will be considered in greater detail in the following chapters.

### Trinitarianism and the Memra

With regard to the question of what John meant by “the Word,” John Lightfoot, the learned British scholar wrote:

There is no great necessity for us to make any curious inquiry, whence our evangelist should borrow this title, when in the history of creation we find it so oft repeated, וַיֵּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים *And God said*. It is observed almost by all that have of late undertaken a commentary upon this evangelist, that מִימְרָא דִּי, *the Word of the Lord*, doth very frequently occur amongst the Targumists, which may something enlighten the matter now before us. (*A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica*)

With these words Lightfoot brushes aside the idea that the Logos in John 1:1 derives from Greek philosophy. He sees the Logos as the Greek equivalent of the *Memra* (מִימְרָא), which

occurs frequently in the Targums. Lightfoot evidently understood that *Memra* refers to “The Lord himself,” as he says, but like so many trinitarians, his ambivalent concept of “Lord” (Yahweh or Jesus?) seemed to have confused him to the extent that at least at one point he seemed to write as if Christ was the trinitarian Logos and that “the second person of the holy Trinity” was meant (Vol.3, p.237)! As a scholar he knew very well that *Memra* was a metonym for “the LORD (Yahweh) himself,” yet he allowed himself, at least in this instance, to be confused into thinking that it was “the Lord (Jesus) himself”. *Memra* absolutely *never* referred to another person distinct from Yahweh, yet such is the “bewitching” power of error, as the Apostle Paul aptly described it in Galatians 3:1, that the capacity to distinguish between truth and error becomes gravely blurred.

### **The Memra (Word) rejected because it does not support trinitarian dogma!**

C.K. Barrett, however, rejects Lightfoot’s identification of the Logos with the *Memra* on the grounds that the *Memra* is not a divine hypostasis but a substitute for the divine Name. Barrett writes:

In the Targums of the Old Testament frequent use is made of the Aramaic word מִימְרָא (*memra*, word). It has sometimes been supposed that this מִימְרָא is a divine hypostasis capable of furnishing a true parallel to John’s thought of a personal Logos incarnate in Jesus. מִימְרָא [*memra*] however *was not*

*truly a hypostasis but a means of speaking about God without using his name*, and thus a means of avoiding the numerous anthropomorphisms of the Old Testament. One example will show both the true meaning of מִמְרָא [*memra*], and also the way in which it *might erroneously be taken as a hypostasis*: Gen.3:8: for, They heard the voice of the Lord God, *Targ. Onkelos* reads, They heard the voice of the *memra* of the Lord God. *Memra* is a blind alley in the study of the biblical background of John’s logos doctrine. (*The Gospel According to St. John*, p.128. In this quotation from Barrett, I have left out the Hebrew of the phrase he quotes from Gen.3:8 and the Aramaic of the Targum of Onkelos, which are in his text, but the rest of the quotation is exactly as it is in his text; italics added).

I quote this passage from Barrett both to show that he correctly understood the meaning of *Memra* and to illustrate how completely dogma determined his exegesis. Regarding the latter point, it is determined in advance by trinitarianism that John’s thought about the Logos is, specifically, “John’s thought of a personal Logos incarnate in Jesus.” Following this reasoning, it means that we do not need to find out through careful exegesis whether indeed John’s thought of the Logos is to be understood in personal terms, this has already been determined in advance by our dogma; and because the *Memra* cannot be shown to be personal, it is irrelevant for our purpose, it is “a blind alley in the study of the biblical background of John’s logos doctrine.” Why is it a “blind alley”? Because it will not lead to the trinitarian dogma which Barrett wants to get to. But is it not our responsibility to discover how

*Logos* in John 1 was meant to be understood rather than to look for a meaning which may help to get us to the meaning which *we* want to get to, namely, trinitarianism?

Barrett understands that the *Memra* was “not truly a hypostasis,” and illustrates this with an example from Targum Onkelos, by which he wants to show how the *Memra* “might erroneously be taken as a hypostasis.” Yet he shows no concern about falling into precisely the same error by assuming without further ado that the *Logos* in John must be understood as a divine hypostasis.

Having in this rather cavalier fashion thrown out the possibility of the *Memra* as providing a background to our understanding of the *Logos* in John 1, Barrett considers what options are left. He looks more favorably on Wisdom (as in Proverbs 8:22), ignoring the fact that Wisdom is *feminine* in both Hebrew and Greek while *Logos* is masculine. He also ignores the fact that the language of Proverbs 8 is *metaphorical*, as is common knowledge, which means in Barrett’s words that Wisdom, like *Memra*, “was not truly a hypostasis” or person. How exactly, then, does Wisdom provide a better support for his hypostasized *Logos* than *Memra*? To this question he provides no answer.

Apart from Wisdom, Barrett like other trinitarian scholars, pointed to Philo’s Judaized Stoic-Platonic *Logos* and the hypostatic language used of the Torah [the Law] in rabbinic Judaism (but whose language he considered “fanciful”); but the main point about these ideas is that none of them, as in the case of *Memra*, can be shown to be divine hypostases. So he proceeded to the conclusion that *John had manufactured*

*his own synthesis of these ideas in the form of a divine hypostasis, the Logos.* This is what Barrett called the “Johannine synthesis”—a synthesis of ideas drawn from Wisdom literature, “Sophia and Torah speculations,” and Philo’s interpretations—producing an “amalgam” which John applied to Christ as “the Johannine Logos” as Barrett called it (*The Gospel According to St. John*, p.129). But this is pure conjecture; or stated more accurately, even if more sternly, this alleged synthesis is Barrett’s fabrication, not John’s. We can only wonder which is the more “fanciful”: some of the Rabbinic language about the Torah or Barrett’s “Johannine synthesis”? Yet this is the foundation of the trinitarian interpretation (we cannot call this exegesis) of John 1:1ff. This is basically the same kind of interpretation (even when the term “Johannine synthesis” is not used) found in most trinitarian commentaries on John’s Gospel. After all, trinitarianism has no other alternative but to take this path of interpretation.

Barrett does not, however, make Lightfoot’s mistake of identifying the *Memra* with “the second person of the Trinity”; he rejects it on the grounds that the *Memra* is not a person but “*a means of speaking about God without using his name* (i.e. YHWH).” (*John*, p.128)

Barrett was entirely correct on this last point concerning the meaning of *Memra*, as can also be confirmed by consulting M. Jastrow’s authoritative work *Dictionary of the Talmud*, where the definition of *Memra* given is:

1) *word, command* Targ. Gen.XLI.44. Targ. Ps.XIX.4;—2) (hypostatized) the Word, i.e. *the Lord* (used in Targum to obviate anthropomorphism). Targ. Gen. III.10. Targ. Y. ib. 9” (p.775). “*The Word’ or ‘the Word of the Lord’ in the Targums is thus a respectful circumlocution for ‘Yahweh’.* (italics added only in the last sentence)

Looking at the definition of *Memra*, it is clear that there is one point on which Lightfoot is unquestionably correct: the identification of *Logos* with *Memra*. Both these words mean exactly the same thing: *word*. Barrett cannot, and does not deny, this fact; he just does not want to accept it because it cannot lead to trinitarianism. It is, therefore, for him a dead end road, or a “blind alley,” as he put it. Unable to find any road forward that could lead to the trinitarian objective he was trying to reach, he put forward the idea of a “Johannine synthesis,” a road constructed out of pure speculation!<sup>44</sup>

Here is another example from the well-known German commentary by Strack-Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash* [A Commentary on the NT using the Talmud and Midrash]. I will quote from Martin McNamara’s work *Targum and Testament*, in which he provides an English translation of the relevant section. Under the heading *Memra of Targums and Logos of John*, McNamara writes:

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<sup>44</sup> Should not this way of mishandling and misinterpreting Scripture justifiably call forth stern condemnation? After all, if this way of handling Scripture is acceptable, what kind of error and falsehood cannot find support by means of this kind of speculative “interpretation”?



At the end of a very long excursus on ‘The Memra of Yahweh’ (Jn 1:1), P. Billerbeck concludes: ‘The inference that follows from the foregoing statement with regard to the Logos of John can be in no doubt: the expression ‘Memra of Adonai’ was an empty, purely formal substitution for the Tetragrammaton and is consequently unsuitable to serve as a starting-point for the Logos of John. (*Targum and Testament*, p.101, quoting from Strack-Billerbeck, II, p.333).

Billerbeck’s statement defies logic and understanding—except, of course, for the trinitarian. Let us look at that statement again: “the expression ‘Memra of Adonai’ was a... substitution for the Tetragrammaton and is *consequently* [!] unsuitable...” (italics and exclamation mark added). Why is it “unsuitable”? Because it is not the hypostasis that the trinitarian dogma requires and therefore does not suit its purpose, so throw it out!

Interestingly, McNamara (a noted Catholic priest and scholar) does not agree with the kind of views expressed by Barrett and Billerbeck, which he considers “unfortunate”. He does not accept their rejection of *Memra* even though he confirms that it was a standard way of referring to “the LORD (Yahweh)”. On the latter point he writes: “That the *Memra* of the Lord is merely a reverent circumlocution for ‘the Lord,’ another way of expressing the same thing and in no way a hypostasis [i.e. one different from ‘the Lord’], is now generally held by students of Judaism. As H.A. Wolfson says: ‘No

scholar nowadays will entertain the view that it is either a real being or an intermediary.’” (*Targum and Testament*, p.101)<sup>45</sup>

McNamara then continues:

Present-day scholars tend to reject the targumic *Memra* as a background to, or contributing factor towards, John’s doctrine of the *Logos*. This they prefer to see prepared in the prophetic word (*dabar*) and in the Wisdom literature. This neglect of targumic evidence is unfortunate. Granted that the *Memra* of God and the Lord is but another way of saying ‘God’ or ‘the Lord,’ it by no means follows that John was not influenced by targumic usage in his choice of *Logos* as a designation for Christ. For John too, ‘the Word was God’ (Jn 1:1). (p.102f.)

The *Memra* was certainly not a divine hypostasis in the sense Barrett required, namely, a second person coequal with Yahweh. But is Yahweh (whose Name is represented by “*Memra*,” “*Logos*,” or “*Word*”) not “divine hypostasis” par excellence? Certainly a name (or, in the case of *Memra*, a substitute or circumlocution of that name) is not a person; it

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<sup>45</sup> McNamara provides two examples from Targum Neofiti of “the Word of the Lord” as being “a reverent circumlocution of ‘the Lord’ (Yahweh)”: “And *the Word of the Lord* said: ‘Let the waters swarm forth a swarm of living creatures...’ And *the Lord* created... every living creature which the waters swarmed forth (Gen 1:20f, Neofiti). And *the Lord* said: ‘Let us create man...’ And *the Word of the Lord* created the son of man [=man] ... and the *Glory of the Lord* blessed them... (Gen 1:26f, Neofiti).” (p.101)

designates a person. *Memra* is a metonym not a person, but it designates the *Person* of Yahweh. This may be stating the obvious but, where the *Memra* is concerned, it would help to be able to grasp the obvious!

## Memra

The *Memra*, as we have seen, is the Aramaic word for “word” or *logos*. Closer attention must be given to the meaning of the *Memra* in the thought world of Jesus’ time and John’s time if we are to gain a proper understanding of what the important message is in the Prologue of John. A convenient and extensive source of information is the *Jewish Encyclopedia*. In the following section, I shall quote extensively from its article on the *Memra*. The fundamental point which is made at the beginning of its study is this:

In the Targum the **Memra** figures constantly *as the manifestation of the divine power*. (italics added)

It is essential to keep this point in mind because the Gentile mind, with its tendency to polytheism, is easily misled by the hypostasizing language used when referring to the *Memra* and quickly starts assuming that it is a hypostasis independent of Yahweh. From the *Jewish Encyclopedia* we learn the following:

MEMRA: ‘The Word,’ in the sense of the creative or directive word or speech of God manifesting His power in the world of matter or mind; **a term used especially in the Targum as a**

**substitute for “the Lord”** when an anthropomorphic expression is to be avoided. [Bold lettering added]

—Biblical Data:

In Scripture ‘the word of the Lord’ commonly denotes the speech addressed to patriarch or prophet (Gen. xv. 1; Num. xii. 6, xxiii. 5; I Sam. iii. 21; Amos v. 1-8); but frequently it denotes also **the creative word**: “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made” (Ps. xxxiii. 6; comp. “For He spake, and it was done”; “He sendeth his word, and melteth them [the ice]”; “Fire and hail; snow and vapors; stormy wind fulfilling his word”; Ps. xxxiii. 9, cxlvii. 18, cxlviii. 8). In this sense it is said, “For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven” (Ps. cxix. 89). [Bold lettering added]

‘The Word,’ heard and announced by the prophet, often became, in the conception of the seer, an efficacious power apart from God, as was the angel or messenger of God: ‘The Lord sent a word into Jacob, and it hath lighted upon Israel’ (Isa. ix. 7 [A.V. 8], lv. 11); ‘He sent his word, and healed them’ (Ps. cvii. 20); and comp. ‘his word runneth very swiftly’ (Ps. cxlvii. 15).

Personification of the Word—In Apocryphal and Rabbinical Literature:

While in the Book of Jubilees, xii. 22, the word of God is sent through the angel to Abraham, in other cases it becomes more and more a personified agency: ‘By the word of God exist His works’ (Ecclus. [Sirach] xlii. 15); ‘The Holy One, blessed be

He, created the world by the “Ma’amar” [speech]’ (Mek., Beshallah, 10, with reference to Ps. xxxiii. 6).

The repeated references in Jewish literature to the involvement of the Word in creation, just as in John 1:3,10, are seen in the following in *Jewish Encyclopedia*:

Quite frequent is the expression, especially in the liturgy, ‘Thou who hast made the universe with Thy word and ordained man through Thy wisdom to rule over the creatures made by Thee’ (Wisdom ix. 1; comp. ‘Who by Thy words causeth the evenings to bring darkness, who openest the gates of the sky by Thy wisdom’; ... ‘who by His speech created the heavens, and by the breath of His mouth all their hosts’; through whose ‘words all things were created’; see Singer’s ‘Daily Prayer-Book,’ pp. 96, 290, 292). So also in IV Esdras vi. 38 (‘Lord, Thou spakest on the first day of Creation: “Let there be heaven and earth,” and Thy word hath accomplished the work’).

The Mishnah, with reference to the ten passages in Genesis (ch. i.) beginning with ‘And God said,’ speaks of the ten ‘ma’amarot’ (= ‘speeches’) by which the world was created (Abot v. 1; comp. Gen. R. iv. 2: ‘The upper heavens are held in suspense by the creative Ma’amar’).

Out of every speech [“dibbur”] which emanated from God an angel was created (Hag. 14a). ‘The Word [“dibbur”] called none but Moses’ (Lev. R. i. 4, 5). ‘The Word [“dibbur”] went forth from the right hand of God and made a circuit around the camp of Israel’ (Cant. R. i. 13).

‘Thy word, O Lord, healeth all things’ (Wisdom xvi. 12); ‘Thy word preserveth them that put their trust in Thee’ (*l.c.* xvi. 26). Especially strong is the personification of the word in Wisdom xviii. 15: ‘Thine Almighty Word leaped down from heaven out of Thy royal throne as a fierce man of war.’

Comment: The words, “Thy word, O Lord, heals all things” (Wisdom 16:12) would have helped the Jews to understand that Yahweh’s word was embodied in Jesus such that in and through him all manner of sick people were healed; healing was a prominent part of his ministry. The following words from Psalm 107 could well be applied to Jesus’ healing ministry:

<sup>17</sup> Some were sick through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquities suffered affliction; <sup>18</sup> they loathed any kind of food, and they drew near to the gates of death. <sup>19</sup> Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress; <sup>20</sup> he sent forth his *word*, and *healed* them, and delivered them from destruction. <sup>21</sup> Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to the sons of men! (RSV)

See also Matthew 8:16:

That evening they brought to him many who were possessed with demons; and he cast out the spirits with a *word*, and *healed* all who were sick. (cf. also Mt.8:8; Lk.7:7, RSV)

## **A thorough understanding of the Memra, the key to understanding the Logos in John 1**

The root of the problem of the Gentile’s failure to understand John 1:1 in particular, and NT Christology as a whole, stems from the failure to understand Jewish literature and thought as a whole.

Another fact of great importance emerged after the Babylonian exile: Israel for the first time truly and wholeheartedly embraced monotheism, specifically the worship of Yahweh. From the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC onwards one could say that Israel had become fiercely monotheistic, in sharp contrast to their spiritual waywardness prior to the Exile. But now they had such a sense of awe and reverence for God that they would not speak His Name or refer to His Person directly, but only by way of circumlocution such as *HaShem* (the Name), or more frequently *Adonai*, which is the plural form (i.e. of majesty) of “Lord” (*Adoni*), etc. But *Memra* (Word) is the one of particular importance for us because it corresponds exactly to the *Logos* of John 1.

The *Jewish Encyclopedia* provides a large section illustrating the use of Memra in the Targum; we would be wise to go through it patiently if we wish to grasp the fact that the Memra and the *Logos* are precisely the same in both word and concept, though in different languages.

The following material is given as one continuous section in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* but I have broken it down into its individual components to make it somewhat easier to read and to comment on (within square brackets) where needed:

*The Jewish Encyclopedia:*

## —In the Targum:

Instead of the Scriptural ‘You have not believed in the Lord [Yahweh],’ Targ. Deut. i. 32 has ‘You have not believed in the word of the Lord’; [i.e. “the word of the Lord” instead of “the Lord”]

Instead of ‘I shall require it [vengeance] from him,’ Targ. Deut. xviii. 19 has ‘My word shall require it.’ [“My word” instead of “I”]

The **Memra**,” instead of “the Lord [Yahweh],” is “the consuming fire” (Targ. Deut. ix. 3; comp. Targ. Isa. xxx. 27).

The **Memra** “plagued the people” (Targ. Yer. to Ex. xxxii. 35). “The **Memra** smote him” (II Sam. vi. 7; comp. Targ. I Kings xviii. 24; Hos. xiii. 14; *et al.*). [In both these instances “the Memra” stands for “Yahweh” in the Hebrew text]

Not “God,” but “the **Memra**,” is met with in Targ. Ex. xix. 17 (Targ. Yer. “the Shekinah”; comp. Targ. Ex. xxv. 22: “I will order My **Memra** to be there”).

“I will cover thee with My **Memra**,” instead of “My hand” (Targ. Ex. xxxiii. 22).

Instead of “My soul,” “My **Memra** shall reject you” (Targ. Lev. xxvi. 30; comp. Isa. i. 14, xlii. 1; Jer. vi. 8; Ezek. xxiii. 18). [It is significant that “My Memra” in the Targum stands for “My soul” in the Hebrew text.]

“The voice of the **Memra**,” instead of “God,” is heard (Gen. iii. 8; Deut. iv. 33, 36; v. 21; Isa. vi. 8; *et al.*).



Where Moses says, “I stood between the Lord and you” (Deut. v. 5), the Targum has, “between the **Memra** of the Lord and you”; and the “sign between Me and you” becomes a “sign between My **Memra** and you” (Ex. xxxi. 13, 17; comp. Lev. xxvi. 46; Gen. ix. 12; xvii. 2, 7, 10; Ezek. xx. 12).

Instead of God, the **Memra** comes to Abimelek (Gen. xx. 3), and to Balaam (Num. xxiii. 4).

His **Memra** aids and accompanies Israel, performing wonders for them (Targ. Num. xxiii. 21; Deut. i. 30, xxxiii. 3; Targ. Isa. lxiii. 14; Jer. xxxi. 1; Hos. ix. 10 (comp. xi. 3, “the messenger-angel”). [“His Memra” refers to Yahweh, as e.g. in Deut. 1:30f. etc]

The **Memra** goes before Cyrus (Isa. xlv. 12). [The reference here should be Isa. 45:1,2; the Hebrew text refers to Yahweh]

The Lord swears by His **Memra** (Gen. xxi. 23, xxii. 16, xxiv. 3; Ex. xxxii. 13; Num. xiv. 30; Isa. xlv. 23; Ezek. xx. 5; *et al.*). It is His **Memra** that repents (Targ. Gen. vi. 6, viii. 21; I Sam. xv. 11,35). [Gen. 22:16f: “By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son—blessing I will bless you...” Comp. Targ. Ps. Jon.: “By My Word have I sworn, saith the Lord, forasmuch as thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thy only begotten, that in blessing I will bless thee...”]

Not His “hand,” but His “**Memra** has laid the foundation of the earth” (Targ. Isa. xlvi. 13); [Cf. again John 1:3,10]

For His **Memra’s** or Name’s sake does He act (*l.c.* xlvi. 11; II Kings xix. 34). [Targ. Isa. 48:11 “for my own sake,” so also 2Ki. 19:34]

Through the **Memra** God turns to His people (Targ. Lev. xxvi. 90; II Kings xiii. 23), becomes the shield of Abraham (Gen. xv. 1), and is with Moses (Ex. iii. 12; iv. 12,15) and with Israel (Targ. Yer. to Num. x. 35, 36; Isa. lxiii. 14).

It is the **Memra**, not God Himself, against whom man offends (Ex. xvi. 8; Num. xiv. 5; I Kings viii. 50; II Kings xix. 28; Isa. i. 2, 16; xlv. 3, 20; Hos. v. 7, vi. 7; Targ. Yer. to Lev. v. 21, vi. 2; Deut. v. 11); [The statement “It is the **Memra**, not God Himself, against whom man offends” is somewhat misleading, for in offending against the Memra one offends against God, for the word “Memra” merely stands in for the words “the LORD”. This is clearly seen already in the first example which is supplied in the text: “the LORD has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him—what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the LORD.” The Targum has: “against the Memra” (Ex.16:8)]

Through His **Memra** Israel shall be justified (Targ. Isa. xlv. 25); (Isa.45:25: “In the LORD all the descendants of Israel shall be justified, and shall glory,” NKJB)

With the **Memra** Israel stands in communion (Targ. Josh. xxii. 24, 27);

In the **Memra** man puts his trust (Targ. Gen. xv. 6; Targ. Yer. to Ex. xiv. 31; Jer. xxxix. 18, xlix. 11). [Gen.15:6: “he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness” Targ. Gen. 15:6: “he believed in the Lord, and had faith in the Word (Memra) of the Lord, and He reckoned it to him for righteousness”. “Believe in the Lord” and “faith in the Memra of the Lord” are synonymous parallels.]

— End of quotation from Jewish Encyclopedia —

This is how Genesis 1:27 reads in the Jerusalem Targum: “And the Word of the Lord created man in His likeness, in the likeness of the presence of the Lord He created him, the male and his yoke-fellow He created them.” The Targums, being in the language of the Jews of Palestine, were the versions of the Bible which they would have been familiar with. So whether the Lord created all things through His Word, or did so directly, either way would have been unproblematic for them.

## Conclusion

In these many references cited in *Jewish Encyclopedia* (a few of the references appear to be incorrect, probably due to typing errors), we have seen that where the Targum has the “Memra,” in the Hebrew text we see “the LORD (YHWH)”. It is useful to check the Biblical references quoted in each instance above to ascertain this for oneself. This should make it perfectly clear that in the most instances by far, the word “Memra” is used as a reference to or a metonym for the Name “Yahweh”. In a few instances Yahweh’s Memra stands for “His soul,” or “His hand”.

It must be borne in mind, however, that the references given in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* represent a very small proportion of the large number of occurrences of Memra in the Targums where Yahweh (YHWH) appears in the Hebrew text. Charts at the end of this book provide a convenient and comprehensive overview of all the occurrences of Memra in the Pentateuch. (These are found in Appendix 12.)

## The question of “personification”

Though occasionally the *Memra* as a special manifestation of Yahweh or His power appears to be personified, it most certainly was not intended to imply that it is a person apart from Him. Instead, it directs attention to a particular aspect of Yahweh’s Person and work.

On this matter of personification, *Jewish Encyclopedia* provides a whole section to illustrate this type of use of “Memra” in the Targum. But before we consider it, first we need to be clear what the word “personification” means. It basically means speaking of something *as though* it were an actual person; thus in Proverbs, Wisdom is often described as if it is a living person. Here is a definition of personification from Britannica (2003):

Figure of speech in which human characteristics are attributed to an abstract quality, animal, or inanimate object. An example is ‘The Moon doth with delight / Look round her when the heavens are bare’ (William Wordsworth, ‘Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood,’ 1807). Another is ‘Death lays his icy hand on kings’ (James Shirley, ‘The Glories of Our Blood and State,’ 1659).

Personification is something found frequently in poetic language; it is a characteristic of the vivid language of poetry. Here are some examples from the Scriptures:

**Psalm 147:15:** He (Yahweh) sends out his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly. (Notice that this verse speaks about the Word of God.)

**Psalm 85:** <sup>10</sup> Steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other. <sup>11</sup> Faithfulness springs up from the ground, and righteousness looks down from the sky. <sup>12</sup> Yes, the LORD will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. <sup>13</sup> Righteousness will go before him and make his footsteps a way.

**Psalm 107:42:** The upright see it and are glad, and all wickedness shuts its mouth.

**Job 5:16:** So the poor have hope, and injustice shuts her mouth.

**Job 11:14:** If you repudiate the sin which you have doubtless committed and do not allow wickedness to live on in your tents . . . <sup>17</sup> Then begins an existence more radiant than noon, and the very darkness will be bright as morning. (NJB)

## Regarding the personification of the Word

Under the general heading “Personification of the Word,” the *Jewish Encyclopedia* has the following:

Mediatorship.

Like the Shekinah (comp. Targ. Num. xxiii. 21), the **Memra** is accordingly **the manifestation of God.**” [Bold added].

How exactly is this statement to be understood? How does a manifestation function in a mediatorial way? This manifestation of God must stand in some way between God and men, both revealing and concealing at the same time. It would thus be something like the glory of the Shekinah which reveals Yahweh's glory yet also conceals His Person.

But though we could speak in this carefully defined sense of the Memra functioning in a kind of mediatorial way, it is misleading (to polytheistic Gentiles) to speak of its role in terms of a "mediator" or "mediatorship" without giving the impression that one is speaking about an actual person. The Jew knows that there is no such person as the "Memra," but not the Gentile.

The same is true of such a statement as, "The Memra is the agent of God," for though "agent" does not necessarily refer to a human being such as an "estate agent" or a "travel agent" and could also refer to a chemical "cleansing agent" such as a detergent, this ambiguity in "agent" leaves the Gentile mind free to select the meaning of his choice, namely, the reference to a person. It is, therefore, important to bear in mind (if we would avoid misleading ourselves and others) that Jewish literature never thinks of the Memra as an actual person distinct from God but as "the manifestation of God," as stated at the beginning of this section.

The *Memra* is "mediatorial" in the sense of being a "mediatorial word," that is, a word that serves to refer to Yahweh without directly mentioning his Name. It is thus a word that "stands between" Yahweh and the speaker or hearer, and in this sense "mediates" between them. This was done

out of reverence for Yahweh by avoiding direct reference to Him. Such mediatorial words and terms are probably found in most languages as a means of avoiding the pronunciation of the name of the person, out of reverence or respect for that person. Examples of this in English are “Your Majesty” (or “His majesty”), “Your Excellency,” “Your Honor”, etc. Similar forms of address are also common in classical Chinese. For example, out of courtesy even to people of not particularly high status, people could be addressed by the term “*zu xia*” which, translated literally, would mean “below your feet” or “to your feet” or “at your feet,” thus respectfully addressing the feet of the person as a “mediatorial” or indirect way of saying “you”.

If, however, the Word is not thought of as an entity or a being distinct from God, then it can be said correctly that the Word was an “agent” in creation in that it was by, or through, His Word that God created all things “in the beginning”. This fact is stated in John 1:3: “Through (*dia*) him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.” All things owe their origin to God: all things are from (*ek*) God (1Co.11:12); and He accomplishes His eternal purposes through (*dia*) His Word, His Wisdom, and His power.

## The Targums were apparently less concerned about “anthropomorphism” than with direct references to God

It is often asserted that the use of such terms as *Memra* and *Shekinah* was to avoid anthropomorphism, but this is not necessarily supported by the evidence. For example the “anthropomorphic” reference to God’s “hand” in Dt.32:41 is still translated as “hand” in the Targums, both in this verse and elsewhere. Yet references to His “face” are consistently changed to His “*Shekinah*”. So it seems clear that *the concern was not primarily with anthropomorphisms but with direct references to God, which were considered irreverent.*

The following are a few examples of *Memra* as a form of indirect reference to Yahweh in the Targums as given in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*:

“The *Memra* brings Israel nigh unto God and sits on His throne receiving the prayers of Israel’ (Targ. Yer. to Deut. iv. 7).” [This kind of “mediatorial” language could give the impression that the *Memra* is an actual person, but when one looks at the second part of the verse—the *Memra* “sits on His throne receiving the prayers of Israel”—one realizes that to the monotheistic Jew only God can sit on God’s throne, and to Him alone Israel prayed. So the first part of the verse means: God’s Word brings Israel near to God. Moreover, only Yahweh is mentioned in Deut.4:7.]

“It [the *Memra*] shielded Noah from the flood (Targ. Yer. to Gen. vii. 16) and brought about the dispersion of the seventy nations (*l.c.* xi. 8)”;



“It is the guardian of Jacob (Gen. xxviii. 20-21, xxxv. 3) and of Israel (Targ. Yer. to Ex. xii. 23, 29); it works all the wonders in Egypt (*l.c.* xiii. 8, xiv. 25); hardens the heart of Pharaoh (*l.c.* xiii. 15); goes before Israel in the wilderness (Targ. Yer. to Ex. xx. 1); blesses Israel (Targ. Yer. to Num. xxiii. 8); battles for the people (Targ. Josh. iii. 7, x. 14, xxiii. 3).”

“As in ruling over the destiny of man the **Memra** is *the agent of God* (Targ. Yer. to Num. xxvii. 16), so also is it *in the creation of the earth* (Isa. xlv. 12) and in the execution of justice (Targ. Yer. to Num. xxxiii. 4).” [Notice here the words which I have put in bold italics because of its special relevance for John 1:3,10.]

“So, in the future, shall the **Memra** be the comforter (Targ. Isa. lxvi. 13) [cf. the use of this word “comforter” in John 14-16]: ‘My Shekinah I shall put among you, My **Memra** shall be unto you for a redeeming deity, and you shall be unto My Name a holy people’ (Targ. Yer. to Lev. xxii. 12).”

“‘My **Memra** shall be unto you like a good plowman who takes off the yoke from the shoulder of the oxen’; ‘the **Memra** will roar to gather the exiled’ (Targ. Hos. xi. 5, 10).”

“The **Memra** is ‘the witness’ (Targ. Yer. xxix. 23); it will be to Israel like a father (*l.c.* xxxi. 9) and ‘will rejoice over them to do them good’ (*l.c.* xxxii. 41).”

“‘In the **Memra** the redemption will be found’ (Targ. Zech. xii. 5). ‘The holy Word’ was the subject of the hymns of Job (Test. of Job, xii. 3, ed. Kohler).”

When these texts from the Targums are compared with the Hebrew texts it will be readily evident that *Memra* functions as “mediatorial” word in each instance to avoid a direct reference to Yahweh. For example, in Isa.66:13 Yahweh speaks of Himself as the comforter; the Targum avoids the reference to Yahweh and replaces His Name by “Memra”. Again, in Hosea 11:10 it is Yahweh Himself who “will roar like a lion,” but also here His Name is replaced in the Targum by “the Memra”.

The final portion of the article on the Memra in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* considers the relationship of *Memra* with its Greek equivalent *Logos*:

#### The Logos.

It is difficult to say how far the rabbinical concept of the Memra, which is used now as a parallel to the divine Wisdom and again as a parallel to the Shekinah, had come under the influence of the Greek term “Logos,” which denotes both word and reason, and, perhaps owing to Egyptian mythological notions, assumed in the philosophical system of Heraclitos, of Plato, and of the Stoa the metaphysical meaning of world-constructive and world-permeating intelligence.

We will take note in particular of two points in the above excerpt:

- 1) The Memra, Wisdom, and the Shekinah were seen as parallel concepts.

2) The philosophical systems of Greek thought, under Egyptian influence, conceived of the Logos in terms of a “world-constructive and world-permeating intelligence” but not in personal terms as God. Therefore, the deification of the Logos as a personal God was the work of Gentile Christians, perhaps beginning already in the middle of the 2nd century AD.

The article continues:

The **Memra** as a cosmic power furnished Philo the cornerstone upon which he built his peculiar semi-Jewish philosophy. Philo’s ‘divine thought,’ ‘the image’ and ‘first-born son’ of God, ‘the archpriest,’ ‘intercessor,’ and ‘paraclete’ of humanity, the ‘arch type of man’, paved the way for the Christian conceptions of the Incarnation (‘the Word become flesh’) and the Trinity.

From this it becomes clear that *Philo’s Logos was itself built upon the idea of the Memra as its “corner-stone,”* even though he borrowed Greek elements so that his philosophy is described here as “semi-Jewish” (Philo himself was a Jew). It is, therefore, rather pointless to speak of John having borrowed the Logos idea from Philo seeing that Philo himself based his ideas on the Memra, and John needed only draw directly on the idea of the Memra well-known to the Jews from the Targums without any recourse to Philo.

The article on the Memra continues:

In the ancient Church liturgy, adopted from the Synagogue, it is especially interesting to notice how often the term ‘Logos,’ in the sense of ‘the Word by which God made the world, or made His Law or Himself known to man,’ was changed into ‘Christ’ (see ‘Apostolic Constitutions,’ vii. 25-26, 34-38, *et al.*).

From this excerpt the following points are worth noting:

1) The ancient church adopted and adapted its liturgy from that of the Synagogue; this fact reflects a time when the church had been predominantly Jewish, that is, during the time of the apostolic church of the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

2) From the early church’s adaptation of the Jewish liturgy, the Logos understood as being “the Word by which God made the world, or made His Law or Himself known to man,” was applied to Christ as the one in whom the Word became incarnate. But the *Jewish Encyclopedia* indicates that by the time of the Apostolic Constitutions, about AD 380, the Logos “was changed into ‘Christ’”, which is to say that Christ and the Logos had become equated.

With “the parting of the ways” between Jews and Gentiles some time before the middle of the 2nd Century, and the Gentile deification of the Word as a person equal to Yahweh God resulting in the emergence of trinitarianism, the Jewish response was to cease referring to the Memra:

“Possibly on account of the Christian dogma [i.e. the Trinity], rabbinic theology, outside of the Targum literature, made little use of the term ‘Memra.’” (*Jewish Encyclopedia*, art. ‘Memra’)

### **Memra as rooted in Psalm 33:6**

We should also take note of the following statement in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (article “God”) which points to Psalm 33:6 as the root of the use of Memra in the Targums:

The Old Testament idiom, according to which ‘by the word of Yhwh were the heavens made’ (Ps. xxxiii. [xxxii.] 6)—which passage is at the root of the Targumic use of Memra

Note also the following important statement in that same article:

The Memra (“Word”; “Logos”) and the Shekinah, the divine effulgent indwelling of God ... *are not hypostases*” [that is, they are not persons in the sense in which Christ is said to be a person in the Trinity (italics mine)]

The following observations are also relevant for understanding the way Memra is used in the Targums; these are quoted from the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, article ‘Anthropomorphism’:

“They [the older Targums] always speak of the Memra (“word” of God) if in the Hebrew text God is represented as speaking.”

“Ginsburger is accordingly right when he deduces the following rule for the employment of **memra** in the older Targumim [Targums]: ‘Whenever a relation is predicated of God, through which *His spiritual presence in an earthly being must be assumed*, the paraphrase with **memra** is employed.’”  
(italics added)

It is clear from these statements that wherever in the Hebrew text there are references to God relating to human beings in some way (e.g. speaking to him, etc), the Targums would replace the word “God” with “Memra.”

## **A few examples of the Memra or the Word in the Targums which are particularly relevant to the Word or Logos in John 1**

### **The Wisdom and the Word of the Lord Created the Universe**

<sup>1</sup> By Wisdom the LORD created and perfected heaven and earth.

<sup>2</sup> And the earth was waste and void,  
a desert without the sons of men or any cultivation at all.  
And darkness was spread on the face of the deep,  
And the Spirit of mercy from before the LORD blew  
on the face of the waters.

<sup>3</sup> And the Word [Memra] of the LORD said:  
—“Let there be light!”

And there was light in his Word [cf. Ps 119:105]

<sup>4</sup> And it was revealed before the LORD that the light was good; and the Word of the LORD divided the light from the darkness.

—Targum, Fragment on Genesis 1:1-4

### **The Word as Light**

The first night was when the LORD was revealed above the earth to create it:

the earth was void and empty

and darkness was spread over the face of the deep.

And the Word (Memra) of the LORD was the light and it shone;

and he called it the first night.

—Targum Neofiti on Exodus 12:42

### **The Word created the Son of Man (=man) in His own Divine Image**

<sup>26</sup> And the Word of the LORD said:

—“Let us create the son of man [*bar nash*] in an image like us

and let them have dominion over (all creatures)...

<sup>27</sup> And the Word (Memra) of the LORD created Adam in his own image, in the image from before the LORD he created them:

he created them the male and his mate.”

—Targum, Fragment on Genesis 1:26-27

The following passage finds fulfillment in crucial elements in the gospels:

When the Word [Memra] of the LORD (Yahweh) will be revealed to release his people  
 he will say to all the peoples:  
 —“Now see that I (am) he [*ani hu*] who is and was  
 and I (am) he who is destined to be.  
 There is no other god beside me!  
 With my Word I make dead and I make live!  
 I humbled the people of the house of Israel  
 and I will heal them in the end [*suq*] of days.  
 And there is none to rescue from the hands of Gog and his  
 army [Ezek 38],  
 when they come to order the ranks for battle against them.”  
 —Targum Neofiti on Deut 32:39

The main elements in this last passage are found in the gospels:

- (1) The Memra of Yahweh embodied in Jesus was “revealed to release His (Yahweh’s) people,” that is, to save them; the purpose of his coming is thereby declared.
- (2) “Now see that I (am) he [*ani hu*] who is and was”: There is an echo of some of the occurrences of “I am” in John.
- (3) “There is no other god beside me!” A declaration of monotheism such as that found in Mark 12:29, and John 5:44 and 17:3.



(4) “With my Word I make dead and I make live!” The Memra in Jesus not only healed the sick but raised the dead on a number of occasions; these words may also imply Jesus’ own death and resurrection.

(5) The words “I humbled the people of the house of Israel” would seem to be a reference to their rejection of Jesus as Messiah and what happened to Israel not long afterwards, especially the destruction of the Temple; but this does not result in Yahweh’s rejection of them because,

(6) “I will heal them in the end [*suq*] of days”; this lovingkindness of Yahweh is absolutely vital because,

(7) “there is none to rescue from the hands of Gog and his army,” which is precisely what Jesus referred to regarding “the end of days,” the end time and the horrors that the tribulation of those days will bring (Matt.24; Mark 13; Luke 21:5ff).

From this exposition of the Targum on Deuteronomy 32.39, by correlating it with the gospels, it is evident that there is much of spiritual value in the Targums.

## **The Shekinah and its relevance for understanding John 1:14**

Very closely related to the Memra is the term “Shekinah” which, functionally, is its equivalent because both words are used to designate God; but whereas Memra is used in the Targum, Shekinah also appears in the Talmud and Midrash.

Since the word “Shekinah” (lit. “the dwelling”) comes from a Hebrew word meaning “to dwell,” this has significance for understanding John 1:14: “The Word became flesh and made *his dwelling* among us” (NIV). The following quotations are from the article “Shekinah” in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*:

‘Shekinah—In the Targumim.

‘The majestic presence or manifestation of God which has descended to “dwell” among men. Like Memra (= “word”; “logos”) and “Yekara” (*i.e.*, “Kabod” = “glory”), the term was used by the Rabbis in place of “God” where the anthropomorphic expressions of the Bible were no longer regarded as proper [sic].’

‘The term “Shekinah,” which is Hebrew, whereas “Memra” and “Yekara” are Aramaic, took the place of the latter two in Talmud and Midrash, and thus absorbed the meaning which they have in the Targum, where they almost exclusively occur. Nevertheless the word “Shekinah” occurs most frequently in the Aramaic versions, since they were intended for the people and were actually read to them.’

‘In the great majority of cases “Shekinah” designates “God”; but the frequent use of the word has caused other ideas to be associated with it [e.g. His light or power?]

“Shekinah” is spelt “Shekhina” in *Encyclopedia Britannica 2003*. For convenience of reference, that article is here attached:

**Shekhina** also spelled Shekhinah, Shechina, or Schechina (Hebrew: “Dwelling” or “Presence”), in Jewish theology, the presence of God in the world. The designation was first used in the Aramaic form, shekinta, in the interpretive Aramaic translations of the Old Testament known as Targums, and it was frequently used in the Talmud, Midrash, and other postbiblical Jewish writings. In the Targums it is used as a substitute for “God” in passages where the anthropomorphism of the original Hebrew seemed likely to mislead. Thus, belief in the transcendence of God was safeguarded. In many passages Shekhina is a reverential substitute for the divine name.

In rabbinic literature the Shekhina is associated with several other religious and theological terms. It is said that the Shekhina descended on the tabernacle and on Solomon’s Temple, though it is also said that it was one of the five things lacking in the Second Temple. The glory of God that filled the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34) was thought of as a bright radiance, and the Shekhina is sometimes similarly conceived.

There is also an affinity between the Shekhina and the Holy Spirit, though the two are not identical. Both signify some forms of divine immanence, both are associated with prophecy, both may be lost because of sin, and both are connected with the study of the Torah. Certain medieval theologians viewed the Shekhina as a created entity distinct from God (the divine “light,” or “glory”).

In *Wikipedia* it is spelt “Shekhinah”; an extensive discussion can be found there. The article explains the origin and meaning of the corresponding Greek word: “The Greek word σκηνή [*skēnē*]*—dwelling—*is thought to be derived from שכִּינָה [noun *shekinah*] and שָׁכַן [verb *shakan*].”

As for the Tabernacle and later the Temple as Yahweh’s dwelling place, *Wikipedia* says: “The Shekhinah is referred to as manifest in the Tabernacle and the Temple in Jerusalem throughout Rabbinic literature.” Hence John 2:19, where Jesus’ own body is spoken of as Yahweh’s temple; he is the one in whom Yahweh dwells bodily, Col.2:9. Cf. Jer.17:12.

The verb *skēnoō* (σκηνόω, ‘live, settle, take up residence,’ BDAG) is the word used for the Word dwelling among us in John 1:14. The noun *skēnē* (σκηνή, ‘tent, dwelling,’ ‘Yahweh’s tabernacle,’ BDAG) occurs 20 times in the NT of which 10 times are in Hebrews. Most of these instances refer to “the tent of meeting” or “tabernacle” where God’s presence “dwelt” (cf. Jn.1:14).

Whether or not these Greek words were actually derived from the Hebrew (there is indeed a striking similarity between the Greek and Hebrew words that may be more than coincidental), more relevant for our purpose is the fact that the two words are identical in meaning. That “dwelt” (*skēnoō*, the verb of *skēnē*, σκηνή) in John 1.14 refers to the Shekinah appears to be confirmed by the words which immediately follow it: “we have beheld his glory”; the glory of the Shekinah manifested the glory of God’s presence.

This same truth about the Shekinah is reflected again in Hebrews 1.3, “He is the radiance of the glory of God,” and

again in the phrases “the Lord of glory” or “our glorious Lord”: 1Corinthians 2:8, “None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified *the Lord of glory*,” and James 2.1, “My brothers, show no partiality as you adhere to the faith in *our glorious Lord* Jesus Christ.”

In this connection, there is also the glory described in the gospel accounts of Christ’s transfiguration: “And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.” (Matthew 17:2); “he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them” (Mark 9:2,3).

## **The Shekinah as the manifestation of Yahweh’s presence and glory, as seen in the Targums:**

“And He [Yahweh] cast out Adam, and made *the glory of His Shekina* to  *dwell* at the front of the east of the garden of Eden, above the two Kerubaia [cherubim].” (Pseudo-Jonathan and Jerusalem Targums on Genesis 3:24.)

“And she [Hagar] gave thanks before the Lord whose *Word* spake to her, and thus said, Thou art He who livest and art eternal; who seest, but art not seen! for she said, For, behold, here is revealed the glory of *the Shekina of the Lord* after a vision.” (PsJon. Gen.16:13)

“And immediately *the Glory of the Shekina of the Lord* was revealed to him, and Israel [Jacob] worshipped upon the pillow of the bed.” (Ps.Jon. Gen. 47.31)

“(Of BENJAMIN) I will liken him to a ravening wolf. In his limits will the sanctuary be builded, and in his inheritance *the glory of the Shekina of the Lord* will dwell.” (Jerusalem Targum Genesis 49:17 [27]; so also Targum Onkelos, “shekinah” Gen.49:18.)

All the above examples are taken from the Targums on Genesis, but *Shekinah* also occurs frequently elsewhere in the Pentateuch; for example, *Shekinah* occurs 22 times in Deuteronomy in Targum Onkelos. In all cases the term indicates Yahweh’s unique immanent presence; a comparison with the Hebrew text makes this clear.

## **God’s manifest Presence is constantly linked with “Glory” in the Old Testament**

The following paragraphs from *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (TWOT, article כְּבוֹד, “glory”) are instructive:

Over against the transience of human and earthly glory stands the unchanging beauty of *the manifest God* (Psa 145:5). In this sense the noun *kabôd* [glory] takes on its most unusual and distinctive meaning. Forty-five times this form of the root relates to *a visible manifestation of God* and whenever ‘the glory of God’ is mentioned this usage must be taken account of. Its force is so compelling that it remolds the meaning of

*doxa* from an opinion of men in the Greek classics to *something absolutely objective* in the LXX and NT.

The bulk of occurrences where God’s glory is a visible manifestation have to do with the tabernacle (Exo 16:10; Exo 40:34; etc.) and with the temple in Ezekiel’s vision of the exile and restoration (Ezek 9:3, etc.). These manifestations are directly related to *God’s self-disclosure and his intent to dwell among men*. As such they are commonly associated with his holiness. *God wishes to dwell with men*, to have his reality and his splendor known to them.

The several references which speak of God’s glory filling the earth and/or becoming evident are instructive. On the one hand they quite legitimately refer to that reputation for greatness which God alone deserves, not only because of his natural position as king, but because of his unsurpassed activity as deliverer and saviour. However, as the preceding discussion indicates, something more is intended here. It is not merely God’s reputation which fills the earth, but it is *the very reality of his presence*. And his desire is that all persons may gladly recognize and own this. His first step toward the achievement of these goals was to fill the tabernacle with his presence and then the temple.

*But nowhere is the reality and the splendor of his presence and his character seen as in his son (Isa 4:2). Here the near blinding quality of his glory is fully portrayed, ‘We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only son of the Father, full of grace and truth’ (Jn 1:14; cf. Jn 17:1-5). (TWOT, italics added)*

From this it can be seen that both the idea and the reality of Yahweh's dwelling among men is deeply woven into the fabric of the Old Testament. It then came to its final fulfillment when "the Word/Memra became flesh and made His dwelling among us" (Jn.1:14, NIV).

As we have seen, both "Shekinah" and "Memra" are important words in the Aramaic Targums. It is interesting that even though "Shekinah" is Hebrew (from the root שָׁכַן (*shākan*) dwell, tabernacle; see also Jastrow, *Diction. of the Talmud*), not Aramaic, the Targums incorporate this word into their Aramaic translation. This draws attention to the fact that in the Hebrew Bible the truth expressed by the word "Shekinah" is a vitally important aspect of Yahweh's relationship with His people: Yahweh does not just visit His people from time to time, but He chooses to live with them (e.g. Exodus 25:8, "And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.")

*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* has this interesting observation about the tabernacle:

Something of the cruciality of the tabernacle can be gauged by observing how many chapters the Bible devotes to the original event. Here it is thirteen chapters, Exo 25-31, 35-40, in contrast to, say, creation and the fall which merit a total of three skeletal chapters in Gen. If the tabernacle is the place where God and man meet for worship, the latter to worship the former, it is imperative that this institution be spelled out intricately. (TWOOT, מִשְׁכָּן (*mishkān*) tabernacle)



The Hebrew word for “tabernacle” (*mishkān*) is related to “Shekinah” by the fact that both words are from the root *shākan*. Yet the idea of “Shekinah” goes further than speaking of the glory of God abiding in a particular place; it refers to Yahweh’s special presence.

## The Memra

“Memra” (“Word”) on the other hand is an Aramaic word, and a link to Hebrew cannot be established. It is often used in a way that is different from “the word of the Lord” in the Hebrew Bible. It is in fact used in a way so similar to Shekinah that it is replaced by Shekinah in the Talmud. The following shows how it is used in Targum Ps-Jonathan (or “the Targum of Jonathan ben Uzziel; in the translation by J. W. Etheridge, the remaining fragments of the Jerusalem Targum are incorporated). These verses are selected because they are instructive for our understanding of the Logos (Word) in the Johannine Prologue:

**Genesis1:27:** “And the Lord created man in His Likeness: [JERUSALEM: And the Word (Memra) of the Lord created man in His likeness, in the likeness of the presence of the Lord He created him, the male and his yoke-fellow He created them.]”

Notice how instead of “the Lord created man” the Jerusalem Targum has “the Word (Memra) of the Lord created man”. This corresponds to the role, in creation, of the Logos in John

1.3. “The presence of the Lord” in the preceding quotation seems to be a reference to the Shekinah.

**Genesis 2:8:** “And a garden from the Eden of the just was planted by the Word [Memra] of the Lord God before the creation of the world, and He made there to dwell the man when He had created him.”

Here the Word or Memra of God is none other than God Himself as we can see by comparing it with the Biblical text: “And the LORD (Yahweh) God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed.” It is exactly as in John 1:1, “the Word was God”.

**Gen.3:8-9:** “And they heard the voice of the word [memra] of the Lord God walking in the garden in the repose of the day; and Adam and his wife hid themselves from before the Lord God among the trees of the garden. And the Lord God called to Adam, and said to him, Is not all the world which I have made manifest before Me; the darkness as the light? and how hast thou thought in thine heart to hide from before Me?”

What is interesting about this passage is that “they heard the voice of *the word* (memra) of the Lord God walking in the garden,” yet in the following sentence it is “the Lord God” himself who “called to Adam” and spoke to him. Again the identification of “the Word of the Lord” with “the Lord God” is clear within the Targum itself, and this is all the more so when we compare it with the Biblical text: “And they heard the sound of the LORD (Yahweh) God walking in the garden”. And instead of the words, “The Lord God called to Adam” in

Ps-Jonathan, the Jerusalem Targum reads: “The Word of the Lord God called to Adam”. The Hebrew has, “Yahweh God called to Adam (or ‘the man’)”.

**Gen.3:22:** The Jerusalem Targum has, “**And the Word [Memra] of the Lord God said, Behold, Adam whom I have created...**” Again it is the Word or Memra that is said to have created Adam.

**Gen.4:26:** Where the Biblical text has “the Name of Yahweh,” the Targum reads, “the name of the Word of the Lord”.

**Gen.6:3:** Bible: “And Yahweh said”; Jerusalem Targum: “**And the Word [Memra] of the Lord said**”.

These first six occurrences of “the Word of the Lord” in the Targums provide us with a clear perception that this term is used as an indirect form of referring to Yahweh, yet implying the idea that His interaction with man are mediated through His Word.

It should now be perfectly clear that the Jews in NT times were very familiar with idea of “the Word of God”. B.D. Alexander (in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* article ‘Logos’) wrote the following perceptive observations:

It would be inconceivable that the apostle [John] lighted upon this word [Logos] by chance or that he selected it without any previous knowledge of its history and value. It may be assumed that when he speaks of the “Word” in relation to God and the world, he employs a mode of speech which was

already familiar to those for whom he wrote and of whose general import he himself was well aware.

The truth that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ was borne in upon John. The problem which confronted him was how he could make that truth real to his contemporaries. This he sought to do by using the language of the highest religious thought of his day.” (ISBE, ‘Logos’)

Why, then, would we suppose that the Logos in John was derived from Greek philosophy? I now realize how foolish it was to have assumed that the monotheistic Jew, John, who (on the basis of what we learn about him in the gospels) grew up in Aramaic-speaking Galilee, would have derived the Logos idea from Greek philosophy (including Philo’s version), which almost certainly neither he nor the people for whom he wrote would have had any knowledge of. How many people today (even well educated people) know anything about philosophy, Greek or otherwise, even if they were educated in the arts rather than the sciences?

### **Is the term “pre-incarnation Jesus” Scripturally correct?**

Is it Scripturally correct to speak of “Jesus’ preexistence” in the way that trinitarians do? Can this phrase be justified in view of John 1:14? For this phrase assumes, of course, that Jesus existed *as Jesus or Christ*, and not just as Logos, *before* the incarnation of the Logos. But according to John 1:14, Jesus came into being at the incarnation; he did not exist as Jesus

or Christ before that; it was the eternal Logos who “became flesh” in Christ. It was the Logos that was preexistent.

### **The meaning of John 1:14, is the message “veiled”?**

In view of the foregoing evidence it should now be clear that the Logos in John 1 is the *Memra* so familiar to the Jews; John was certainly not referring to some philosophical concept foreign to his readers. It is true that the *Memra* was “a means of speaking about God without using his name” (Barrett). By observing the way *Memra* is used in the Targums we can see that it referred specifically to His self-revelation as expressed by His creative Word, and to His immanent Presence in relation to mankind as expressed by word and deed. If so, then something truly astonishing is stated in John 1, namely, that Yahweh Himself came into the world, embodied in the person of Jesus the Messiah. A mind-boggling event is revealed in John 1. Could it be that it is for this reason that it appears to us (if not to the Jews of John’s time) that the event is stated in somewhat veiled language?

Yet the language in Col.1:19 does not appear to be veiled at all, for it states explicitly: “For in him (Christ) all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell”. In case we did not get the message, it is repeated shortly afterwards in Col.2:9: “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.” The very same words and ideas are used here as in John 1:14, “dwell” or “live,” and John 1:16, “fullness”. By now it should be clear that when John and Paul speak of “God” in these verses,

consistent with Biblical monotheism, they do not refer to some other deity besides Yahweh God. That God “dwelt among us” (Jn.1:14) through His Word/Memra is explained in Colossians in terms of “*all* the fullness” or “the *whole* fullness” of God dwelling in “bodily form” in Christ. Is that not precisely what Jesus himself was also saying when he said that neither his words nor his actions were his own, but those of his *indwelling* Father, Yahweh (John 14:10)?

But is it correct to suppose that the message of John 1 is veiled? Or is it veiled only to those who are perishing, as the apostle Paul says (2Cor.4:3)? The fact is that John evidently tried to make the point as clear as possible by *twice* quoting the opening words of Genesis, “In the beginning” (Ἐν ἀρχῇ, *en archē*, John 1:1,2):

Genesis 1:1: “In the beginning God created...”

ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς  
בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים

John 1:1: “In the beginning was the Logos...”

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος  
בְּרֵאשִׁית הָיָה הַדְּבָר

What is being equated is evidently “in the beginning *God*” and “in the beginning *the Logos*”; this is even clearer in the Greek: ὁ θεὸς (the God) and ὁ λόγος (the Logos), both with the definite article.

Now this surely raises the question: Why did John replace “God” with “Logos,” when by “Logos” he meant God, which

he explicitly states: “the Logos was God” (θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος). And who is this “God” that is being referred to? In a world where there were “Gods many, and Lords many” (1Cor.8:5f), the answer to this question was not as self-evident as it may be to most of us. The Hebrew word *elohim* (אֱלֹהִים) “God” could refer not only to “the one true God” of whom Jesus spoke (John 17:3) but also to the gods of Egypt, Canaan, Assyria, etc.; it could even refer to angels (e.g. Ps.8:5, cf. Heb. 2:7) and to men (“I said, you are gods,” Ps.82:6; Jn.10:34). The Greeks and Romans also had their many gods.

It was, therefore, essential to state with absolute clarity who exactly was the one who came into the world in Christ. If it were simply stated that it was the one who created heaven and earth, which is implied by the parallelism with Genesis 1 and stated explicitly in John 1:3, it might still leave open the possibility that a hypostatic agent who was said to have been involved in the creation, such as Wisdom (an idea which Barrett and others looked upon favorably), could be meant as that which became incarnate in Christ. Wisdom was not usually used as a metonym for Yahweh, so it would not have served John’s purpose if his message was that Yahweh had come in Christ to dwell with His people. Even so, if the Logos is interpreted in terms of OT Wisdom (and that of intertestamental literature), then it must be remembered that Wisdom in the Scriptures is an attribute of Yahweh and, as such, could serve as a metonym of Yahweh. This means that interpreting Logos in terms of Wisdom or Memra would come to exactly the same result.

But if John 1:1 intended to say that it was Yahweh Himself who came into the world, how exactly could that be stated other than the way in which it is stated in that verse? John could not use the Tetragrammaton (YHWH) because that would be offensive to the Jews and unintelligible to the Greeks or to Gentiles generally. Could anything else be done other than to use “the Word,” namely, the unspoken Tetragrammaton? His readers knew very well that “the Word” was the metonym for the Name “Yahweh”. Moreover, in the Targums “the Word” usually appears as “the Word of the Lord (Yahweh),” so “the Word” is an abbreviation of the longer phrase. Even so, the Word or *Memra*, like Wisdom in Proverbs, could be spoken of in a personalized way, as in the examples we saw earlier, such as: “the Word of the Lord *said*...” and “the Word of the Lord *created*...” But it must always be borne in mind that the “personality” of the Word or *Memra* derives from the personality of the Lord (Yahweh) whose Word it is.

How are we to understand the statement that “the Logos became flesh” (Jn.1:14)? It certainly does not mean that the Logos ceased to be the Logos and changed into “flesh” (the “flesh” was a way of referring to human existence or, specifically, to a human being, e.g. Isa.40:5, “all flesh, i.e. all human beings, shall see it [the glory of Yahweh] together”). How then is it to be understood? What it means is surely that the Word became embodied in a human being. This does not mean Word = human being, i.e. Jesus, but that the Word is embodied in Jesus. The Word of God became “incarnate” “in Christ,” in “the man Christ Jesus” (1Tim.2:5).



“The Word became flesh”; “flesh” translates the Greek word *sarx* (σάρξ), for which the definitions in BDAG *Greek-English Lexicon* specially relevant to this verse are: “the physical body as functioning entity, *body, physical body*” and “one who is or becomes a physical being, *living being with flesh*,” specifically, “of humans: *person, human being*”. So the meaning of John 1:14 is clear: the Word entered into the world in a human being, a person with a physical body of flesh, namely, the Messiah Jesus.

BDAG also states, “In Paul’s thought esp., all parts of the body constitute a totality known as σάρξ [*sarx*] or *flesh*, which is dominated by sin”. Jesus also declared that “everyone who sins is a slave to sin” (Jn.8:34; cf. Rom.6:16; 7:14). Since Jesus did not sin, his flesh was not dominated by sin. But sin could also operate in his flesh and be a cause of temptation. Sexual desires are a part of life in the flesh; BDAG states: “The σάρξ [*sarx, flesh*] is the source of the sexual urge, without any suggestion of sinfulness connected with it”.

Insofar as Jesus had a true body of flesh like ours, he would have experienced the same temptations that all human beings experience. And it is explicitly declared he “has been tempted in every respect as we are, yet without sin” (Heb.4:15). His having been without sin was something he accomplished *in the face of* temptations. If he had not had to face temptations then he was not truly human; and if he was God he could not even have been tempted (James 1:13), let alone sin. Trinitarianism has tacitly sacrificed the humanity of Christ in order to establish his deity. And by sacrificing the humanity of Christ in reality, though paying lip service to it, it has

therewith effectively sacrificed the salvation which God accomplished for mankind “through the one *man* Jesus Christ” (Rom.5:17).

The “became” in “became flesh” (Jn.1:14) is *ginomai* (γίνομαι), which here serves to “indicate entry into a new condition” (BDAG, *Greek-English Lexicon*). The Word entered into a new state of being in Christ, that of human life.

### **The uniqueness of Yahweh’s indwelling Christ**

*Nowhere prior to the NT did Yahweh (or His Spirit) indwell any person.* We must grasp this fact clearly if we are to understand the remarkable significance of what took place in Christ. The Spirit “rested on” people (Num.11:25, the 70 elders; Isa.11:2, a messianic prophecy), or “came upon” persons (e.g. Gideon, Judg.6:34; Samson, Judg.15:14); and in Micah 3:8 the prophet says, “I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD, and with justice and might,” stating that this power was given him to fulfill his specific mission “to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin.”

That Yahweh actually *indwells a person* as His dwelling place, His temple, is not found in the OT. The closest it comes to this is the promise in Leviticus 26:11,12 in which Yahweh says that if Israel obeys Him, “I will put my dwelling place {Or *my tabernacle*} among you, and I will not abhor you. I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people” (NIV). That the “dwelling place” mentioned in this promise is not the tabernacle in the wilderness which existed

at that time is clear from Ezekiel 37:27 where the promised “tabernacle” is in the *future*: “My dwelling place [same word in Hebrew as in Lev.26:11] shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” (NRSV)

These promises are fulfilled in Christ who, as Yahweh’s temple (John 2:19ff), is His dwelling place; and after Pentecost the church as Christ’s body has also become God’s temple. That is why Paul quotes those verses mentioned in the previous paragraph as having been fulfilled also in the church. They are referred to in 2Cor. 6:16, “we are the temple of the living God; as God said, ‘I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people’.” But this translation (ESV; and others) has missed something important about this verse: the word translated as “among” is *en*, which has the basic meaning “in” (though it can sometimes also mean “among”). Thus RSV, NRSV, NKJV, etc, have, correctly, “I will live *in* them”. After all, since Paul states that we are God’s *temple*, God does not dwell “among” His temple, but in it.

But even “I will live in them” is unable to reflect strongly enough what Paul has written in 2Corinthians 6:16: *enoikēsō en autois* (ἐνοικήσω ἐν αὐτοῖς). This quotation is evidently Paul’s own inspired rendering of the message in Lev.26:11 and Ezekiel 37:27. The spiritual point that he wants to emphasize here is that something new has happened: God “indwells in” His people. This is emphasized by using *en* (ἐν, in) twice, as can be seen in the three Greek words quoted above, including the “en” in *enoikēsō*. The word *oikeō* (οικέω) by itself already means to “live, or dwell,” but the stronger

form *enoikeō* (ἐνοικέω) is used instead. *Enoikeō* is the word used in Rom.8:11 and 2Tim.1:14, where not only this same word “indwell” is used but also the same emphatic structure “*indwell in*”. The message in both these verses is that God by His Spirit now actually lives within His people. No good translation would render these verses as “the Holy Spirit who dwells *among* us”.

Of course, the translation “indwells in us” may not sound like good conventional English, but then it probably did not sound like good conventional Greek either, but that very fact could serve to draw attention to the point that was being made. Paul is evidently strongly concerned to make the point that God *indwells in* us, as He did in Christ.

Paul was filled with wonder by the fact that Yahweh had done something in Christ that He had never done before, namely, to indwell a person—the person of Christ—“and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (Col.1:20). In this way, Yahweh in His mercy accomplished His eternal plan “to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14). All this was so amazing that the Apostle burst forth into praise and adoration, “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways” (Romans 11:33).

## God’s Spirit indwells “the body of Christ”

The term “the body of Christ” refers to both Christ’s physical body (Rom.7:4) as also to the church (1Cor.12:27; Eph.4:12), in particular to the physical body of its members (1Cor.6:19,20). Does this mean that there is some vital similarity in the way that God indwelt Christ bodily (Col.2:9) and how He indwells the body of believers so that it constitutes His temple (1Cor:3:16; 6:19)? We remember that Jesus also spoke of his own body as God’s temple (Jn.2:19-21).

## Further observations on the significance of “dwelt” in John 1:14

“The Word (Logos, Memra) became flesh and *dwelt* (*skēnoō*) among us” (John 1:14). The English word “dwelt” does not bring out the idea of the “tent” or “tabernacle” inherent in the Greek word. The reference to the “tabernacle” (*skēnē*) is definitely intentional. If not, then the ordinary or general word for “dwell” or “live” (*oikeō*) could have been used instead of *skēnoō*, which is the verb form of *skēnē*, a tent or tabernacle. The significant point about the reference to the “tent” or “tabernacle” is that this was the place where *Yahweh* “dwelt”. It is this vitally important point which is lost in the translation, but which is unfortunately practically impossible to bring out in any translation. Yet the use of this word would not have been lost on a Jewish reader or one familiar with the OT.

The word “tabernacle” is familiar to us from the OT where it referred to the tent in which God’s presence dwelt. For convenience we can refer to *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*:

The account (of the tabernacle) is given in Ex 25 through 27; 30 through 31; 35 through 40, with additional details in Nu 3:25 ff; 4:4 ff; 7:1 ff. The central idea of the structure is given in the words, ‘Make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them’ (Ex 25:8) [“make a Sanctuary to My Name, that My Shekinah may dwell among them,” Targ. Ps-Jon.]. *It was the dwelling-place of the holy Yahweh in the midst of His people; also the place of His meeting with them* (Ex 25:22). (Italics added)

The last sentence finds a fuller explanation in the following passage:

**Exodus 33:** <sup>7</sup> Now Moses used to take the tent (*skēnē*, σκηνή) and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the LORD (Yahweh) would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp [cf. Heb.13]. <sup>8</sup> Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people would rise up, and each would stand at his tent door, and watch Moses until he had gone into the tent. <sup>9</sup> When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the LORD (Yahweh) would speak with Moses. <sup>10</sup> And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship, each at his tent

door.<sup>11</sup> Thus the LORD (Yahweh) used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.

**Numbers 35:34:** “You shall not defile the land in which you live, in the midst of which I  *dwell*, for I the LORD (Yahweh)  *dwell* in the midst of the people of Israel.”

Another instance of Yahweh “dwelling” among His people is seen in Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the newly built temple, “But I have built you an exalted house, a place for you to  *dwell* in forever” (2 Chronicles 6:2; cf. Acts 7:44-47). The temple was modeled on the tabernacle or tent.

From all this, the message of John 1:14 should be clear: The Word (Memra, metonym for Yahweh) came in a human body in the person of Christ and “tabernacled” or “tented” among us. It is significant that in 2Corinthians, Paul twice speaks of the human body as a “tent”: “For we know that if the tent ( *skēnos*), which is our earthly home, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” (5:1; also v.4). This “tent” is also the temple of God (1Cor.3:16; 6:19). The powerful and astonishing message of John 1:14 is that it was into such a “tent” as this that Yahweh came to “tabernacle among us”.

## Conclusion

In view of all that we have discussed, the truth as stated in terms of the monotheism of the Bible can be declared powerfully, simply, and yet profoundly in this way: Yahweh in all His “fullness” ( *plērōma*, Jn.1:16; Col.1:19; 2:9), which

in Scripture was expressed through His Word from creation to revelation, chose in His divine mercy and wisdom to come into the world by indwelling the man Christ Jesus, and in him to “be with us” (Immanuel) and in this way to accomplish our eternal salvation.

This stands in sharp and clear contrast to trinitarian dogma which declares that a hitherto unheard of person called “God the Son” (and one who had no prior connection to the Word or Wisdom) was incarnate in Jesus, who thereby became “God-man,” “true God, true man”. The relationship of “God” and man in Jesus is described as a “hypostatic union,” a union of a personal kind, and is “explained” by the impressive Latin term “*communicatio idiomatum*,” meaning that his “human and divine attributes and experiences, etc. might properly be interchanged” (Kelly, *Doctrines*, p.143, etc). Actually, this kind of “explanation” produces more questions than answers for the thinking person. But it is often useful for stifling further questions and for talking vaguely about “mysteries”. The truth is that the real “mystery” is, Who is “God the Son”?, seeing that he is nowhere to be found in the Scriptures. It is now evident that he was brought into existence by the misinterpretation of “the Word” in John 1:1, which we shall examine in even greater depth and detail in the next chapter.

Suffice it to say here that the difference between the Biblical teaching and trinitarianism is as clear as day and night.



## Chapter 9



# A Closer Look at John 1:1

### The vital need for “the renewing of the mind”

**H**aving considered in some detail the roots of “the Word” in the Hebrew and Aramaic Bibles, we are now in a better position to consider “the Word” in John 1. In this chapter we shall study John 1:1 in three sections corresponding to the three phrases in this verse: (I) “In the beginning was the Word,” (II) “and the Word was with God,” (III) “and the Word was God”. In each section the standard trinitarian interpretations will be given as presented by some of their best scholars in the past. These interpretations will be examined and considered in the light of the OT Word and the Memra of the Aramaic Bible. But what it is necessary to understand, first and foremost, is that this is not merely a question of interpretation; if we think merely along this level we will have missed the spiritual roots of the whole matter. It is a matter which has to do with the fundamental difference between *two totally different ways of thinking* represented by trinitarian polytheism (three persons who are all equally God) on the one hand, and Biblical monotheism on the other. (The term

“*Biblical* monotheism” is used to stress the fact that we are not concerned about whether there are, or have been, other religions who profess faith in only one God.)

It is most essential for us to bear in mind that the fundamental difference in the way of thinking—the mindset—between polytheism and monotheism makes them totally incompatible and irreconcilable. Regardless of trinitarian attempts to formulate a distorted “monotheism” to suit their dogma—and they do this because even the most determined or “dyed in the wool” trinitarian is uncomfortably aware of the fact that the Bible is undeniably monotheistic—Biblical monotheism and trinitarianism have absolutely nothing in common. This means that unless our minds are renewed (Rom.12:2) we shall not find it easy to make the transition from trinitarian polytheism to *Biblical* monotheism, because this is not a simple matter of learning to change our way of thinking at the rational or intellectual level, but a change of outlook at the *spiritual* level, for it ultimately concerns our relationship with Yahweh God.

These two fundamentally different ways of thinking and of understanding the word of God can be conveniently illustrated by taking John 20:28 as a well-known example. Only someone with a polytheistic mentality can suppose that Thomas’ words “My Lord and my God” could be addressed to the man Christ (Messiah) Jesus. To a Jewish monotheist, as Thomas certainly was, this is utterly unthinkable. The only possible way in which Thomas could have uttered those words as directed to Jesus is if he recognized that it was none other than Yahweh who was personally embodied within the

flesh or body of the man Jesus standing before him. In view of John 1:14, this is quite certainly the case. The decision, on the *spiritual* level, that each person individually must eventually make in regard to John 1:1,14 is: From which perspective, trinitarian polytheism or Biblical monotheism, am I going to understand these verses? Each person will then have to live with the consequences of that decision before “the Lord and His Christ” (Rev.11:15), or “God and His Christ” (Rev. 12:10; cf. Acts 3:18).

### **(I) In the beginning was the Word (Logos)**

We have already considered the Memra/Logos/Word in some detail. We now need to apply it to John 1:1, while also examining the trinitarian interpretations as we proceed. But before we do this, there is an important aspect of Memra which we have not yet touched on. The Memra is a metonym for Yahweh, as we have seen, but the metonym is not a simple substitute for “Yahweh” such that we could simply read “Yahweh” in place of Memra/ Logos. Each metonym (such as Wisdom or Shekinah) denotes a specific characteristic of Yahweh special to that metonym. Failing to see this will result in missing an essential element in the intended message.

What is the special characteristic of *Memra*? Even a fairly cursory look at the way Word or Memra is used in the Hebrew and Aramaic Bibles shows that it represents Yahweh’s dynamic activity as expressive of His creative wisdom and power. Both wisdom and power are realities within Yahweh,

but they remain “latent” in Him until they come into action in Yahweh’s “works,” whether in the form of creation or revelation, or in whatever activity He undertakes. Wisdom is that attribute in Yahweh which can be described in terms of his eternal plans or counsels, His understanding of all things, His insight into the hearts and thoughts of man; it is that quality which governs and characterizes His “omniscience”. By comparison, the Word or Memra is not an attribute of Yahweh but is the dynamic and powerful expression of Yahweh’s Wisdom when He chooses to express it in action. Power is another “latent” attribute of Yahweh which, in theological terms, is described as His “omnipotence”. This, too, comes into action through the Memra. The Memra can therefore be metaphorically described as the expressive “agent” of Yahweh’s wisdom and power.

Life and love can also be considered as essential attributes of Yahweh since these are inalienable and fundamental aspects of His Person and character. These, too, find vigorous and vital expression through His Memra/Word. So it is evident that Memra is the concrete way of describing Yahweh in action, His self-expressive action. Hebrews 4:12 sums this up neatly by means of the vivid metaphorical description, “The word of God is *living* and *active*”; mentioning also that the word is penetrating in its depth and thoroughness, “it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow”. God’s work is never shallow or superficial; we have already noted, for example, how He pays attention even to exquisite details in His creative work of forming man.

Equipped with a clearer understanding of Memra, we are better able to understand the words, “In the beginning was the Word/Memra,” for in Genesis 1 we see Yahweh’s dynamic creative Word in action bringing the universe and man into being. What also emerges from the fact that “in the beginning” is twice quoted in John 1 (vv.1,2) is that it is clearly intended to make a statement to the effect that through the Word/Memra Yahweh is bringing a new creation into being, which means a whole new way of life for mankind in Christ.

But the trinitarian church, having lost its connection to its Jewish roots and their Hebrew and Aramaic concepts, was trying to find an explanation for the Johannine Logos in the world of Greek ideas in which polytheism was endemic and practically inescapable.

## **The Logos derived from Greek philosophy?**

For the benefit of those who have been immersed in trinitarian teaching, we shall examine this and other questions more closely than we have done so far.

As for Greek philosophy, while the idea of *logos* was known, it is important to understand that *logos* was not thought of as an hypostasis or person. This fact is stated concisely by Prof. Witherington III,

It is interesting that in the Greek-speaking world there was among the Stoics some speculation about a *logos* as well, but they understood it to refer to a sort of divine rational principle or moral structure to all of the universe, *not to a personal*

*being*. One can argue that the evangelist has chosen terminology familiar to both Jews and Greeks, but he does not use it in a Stoic way. (Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage*, p.285, footnote 136, italics mine.)

Accordingly, Witherington states, “It is quite unnecessary to posit a Stoic background for the material in John 1” (p.285). This means that there exists no direct link to Greek thought where the idea of the *logos* is concerned. The article on ‘Logos’ in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (ISBE) confirms Witherington’s observations.

## **Was the Logos idea borrowed or adapted from Philo?**

Concerning Philo’s ideas about the Logos, ISBE (art. ‘Logos’) concludes: “After all has been said, his [Philo’s] *Logos* really resolves itself into a group of Divine ideas, and is conceived, *not as a distinct person*, but as the thought of God which is expressed in the rational order of the visible universe.” (italics added)

In any case, there is little, if any, basis for assuming that John knew Greek philosophy, or that he was acquainted with the writings of the Jewish writer Philo of Alexandria in Egypt, who used Greek philosophical ideas to interpret the *Logos*. We simply have no reason to assume that John was a scholar who might have been acquainted with prevailing philosophies. As ISBE (article ‘Logos’) puts it, “It is hardly probable that John was directly acquainted with the writings of Philo.” The

article goes on, moreover, to state: “Far from the apostle being a disciple of the Alexandrian [Philo] or a borrower of his ideas, it would be more correct to say that there is clearly a conscious rejection of the Philonic conception, and that the *logos* (λογος) of John is a deliberate protest against what he must have regarded as the inadequate and misleading philosophy of Greece.” The article then goes on to delineate the fundamental differences between the Johannine Logos and Philo’s notions of it.

But because there are simply no references to “the Word” as an actual person in the OT, trinitarians are obliged to look elsewhere for the idea of a Word or Logos that is both a person distinct from God and yet also co-equal with Him. Such an idea could not be found within monotheistic Judaism, not even in the Hellenistic-Jewish religious philosophy of the Alexandrian Jew Philo who, though he used the Greek idea of the Logos to introduce Jewish ideas to the Greek speaking world, was not prepared to surrender his monotheism—much to the disappointment of trinitarians. Yet, astonishingly, some are still prepared to assert that John did what his fellow-Jew Philo refused to do! These trinitarian scholars have decided that John had ceased to be a monotheist and had become a trinitarian, even though John acknowledges that his own Lord and Master Jesus Christ was a monotheist who spoke of the Father as “the only true God” (John 17:3).

The trinitarian interpretation of Logos in John 1:1 is left without support because of the fact that the Logos was *not* conceived of as being a person either in Greek philosophy or in Philo. Moreover, even assuming that the Logos was

essentially a Greek philosophical idea, it would be extremely strange that John would have resorted to a philosophical term to describe Jesus. Moreover, how many of his readers would have been conversant with Greek philosophy and/or with Philo? How many people today, including educated people, know anything about philosophy? But what is decisive is the fact that *the Logos in Greek philosophy was never conceived of as a person*, so it is useless for trinitarianism.

The point is simply this: Even assuming that John had somehow become acquainted with Philo's religious philosophy, and even *if* Philo's Logos was a personal being, would that provide any basis for supposing that John derived his Logos from Philo? Surely not. Then how do the discussions in trinitarian writings about Philo have any substantial relevance for our understanding of the Johannine Logos? Such discussions are often a measure of the desperation of trinitarians to clutch at any straw that might lend some credibility to their interpretation, even if it is no more than to suggest that *perhaps* John's Logos was an adaptation of Philo's. This is hardly a solid basis for constructing a dogma which the church has decreed to be foundational for the Christian faith!

### **Was John's Logos of Gnostic origin?**

Such a question might make early church historians frown because they know that Gnosticism was regarded as a mortal threat by the early church. We consider the question for the sake of the completeness of our inquiry into the origins of the



Johannine Logos, and to show that *even in early Gnosticism the Logos was not regarded as a personal divine being.*

Some scholars have raised the question whether John may have derived the idea of Logos from what B.D. Alexander called “incipient Gnosticism” (ISBE art. ‘Logos’). Early Gnosticism is thought to have been current already at the time of the writing of John’s gospel (cf. the anti-docetic pronouncements in 1Jn.4:2; 2Jn.1:7). Docetism maintained that the body of Jesus was not really flesh and blood, but only appeared to be so (Gk: *doketai*, to seem or appear to be). That was why Jesus, according to them, could not actually have been crucified—it only appeared as though he was (this idea is still used today in Islamic teaching about Jesus’ crucifixion). Alexander did not think that John’s use of the Logos was influenced by early Gnosticism, and most scholars would agree with him.

In any case, this suggestion would be of no use to trinitarianism because also in Gnosticism the Logos was *not* a personal being. Kurt Rudolf wrote:

The manner in which the redeeming function of the Logos is seen to operate *without assuming any personal figure* is shown by the Hermetic texts already mentioned (where however the ‘understanding’ [Gk: *nous*] has the same function), but also very impressively by the Nag Hammadi document ‘The Original Teaching’ [Gnostic texts]. In these, the *non-personal* Logos functions “like a medicament” for “the truly sick” soul. (K. Rudolf, *Gnosis*, p.144; italics mine)

Gnosticism was a mixture or synthesis of Eastern (mainly Iranian) and Western (Greek) philosophical and religious ideas. Salvation in Gnosticism was by means of a special “knowledge” (Greek: *gnosis*) which Gnosticism claimed to impart.

This system of teaching became popular and influential during the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD in the form of “Christian Gnosticism” as taught by able teachers such as Basilides, Valentinus, Theodotus, and Bardesanes. At one time it became so widespread that some church leaders, notably Irenaeus, saw it as a serious threat. Though “Christian Gnosticism” did not teach that Christ was equal to God, it did teach that he was a preexistent being (Rudolf, *Gnosis*, p.154, etc). Though the leaders of the Nicene church rejected the Christian Gnostics on some main issues (e.g. Docetism, mentioned above), they did at least agree with them on this last point. But it is quite certain that no trinitarian scholar would care to acknowledge that the trinitarian interpretation of the Logos owes anything to Gnosticism.

### **Is Jesus “The Word of God” in the New Testament?**

Christians frequently speak of Jesus as “the Word of God,” having all along been taught that Jesus is the Logos, the Word. It came to me as something of a shock to discover that the title “the Word of God” is not applied to Jesus in any of the gospels (not even in John 1) nor in any of the epistles, because as a trinitarian I had always assumed it to be a title of his. The

only place where it appears as a name or title in the NT is in Rev.19:13, where it refers to the rider on a white horse (cf. Rev.6:2), who trinitarians want to assume to be Jesus, even though he is not mentioned in the immediate context; but if the earlier riders were symbols of famine, plagues, and death, it is most likely that here too “the Word of God” refers to the message of the gospel, which is what the term usually means in the NT.<sup>46</sup>

The term “the word of God” occurs 43 times in the Bible, 39 of which are in the NT, none of which is applied to Christ as a title. Even in Revelation where the term occurs 5 times, 4 of these definitely have the meaning “the message of the gospel” as in the rest of the NT. There is, therefore, no NT basis for assuming that Rev.19:13 is a lone exception and refers to Christ. The only way we could make it refer to Christ in this verse would be to interpret the term “Word of God” as the message of the gospel embodied in Christ. But that would admittedly be interpretation, not exegesis. This interpretation is questioned by Dr. R.H. Charles in his authoritative two-volume commentary on Revelation in the International Critical Commentary series.

What all this means is that trinitarianism has no viable explanation for the Logos/Word in John 1:1; it has no meaningful exegesis which is consistent with the context and is therefore conspicuous by its absence. The use of Psalm 33:6 is exegetically acceptable, but it does not provide any support whatsoever for interpreting the Word as “God the Son”. We

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<sup>46</sup> On Rev.19:13 see the fuller discussion in Appendix 6.

shall now study the meaning of the Word within the NT itself.

## The parallel wording in 1John 1:1f

In the commentaries I have not noticed in their discussion of the meaning of the Logos in John 1:1 that proper account is taken of 1John 1:1,2 which, on closer inspection, provides both a parallel to, and a commentary on, John 1:1. Let us look at it more carefully:

**1John 1:1** That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word (*logos*) of life—<sup>2</sup> the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us.

The parallel with John 1:1 is obvious from the reference to “the beginning,” while the Logos, significantly, is explained as being the “*logos of life*”. Thus the Logos is linked to or identified with life (“living and active,” Heb.4:12), for in the next verse it is simply called “the life,” which is then further described as “the eternal life,” i.e. God’s life.

Moreover, when we compare 1John 1:1,2, where the word of life “was with the Father,” with John 1:1, “the Word was with God” (“was with,” ἦν πρὸς, are exactly the same words in both verses), it emerges clearly that the “God” being referred to is “the Father”. How then can it be assumed that though “God” in John 1:1 refers to the Father in the statement “and

the Word was with God (the Father),” yet in the very next statement, “the Word was God,” “God” is no longer the Father but “God the Son”—a title which simply does not exist in Scripture? To acknowledge that “God” means the Father, as 1John 1:2 makes perfectly clear, and then to insist that the very next reference to “God” in the same verse no longer refers to the Father, is undoubtedly to do violence to Scripture. Yet this is, sadly, the unscrupulous way in which trinitarianism treats Scripture.

The same phrase “the word of life” (ὁ λόγος τῆς ζωῆς), exactly as in 1John 1:1, appears also in Philippians 2:16 where *there is no suggestion that the reference is to a person*. As is the case with “the *logos* of God” in the NT in general, it means “the message of life”; and here again we see that “God” and “life” are in parallel in these two phrases: “the word of *God*”= “the word of *life*”.

But if it is indeed the case that the correct understanding of John 1:1 is that the Logos has to do with the Father (Yahweh), then what else can John 1:14 mean other than that it was Yahweh Himself in the form of the Word (Logos) who came into the world in Christ? Thus the astonishing (yet possible, in view of Yahweh’s appearances in the OT, esp. Genesis) conclusion emerges that it was the Father who came into the world in the man Christ Jesus to accomplish the salvation of mankind. The error of trinitarianism is that it replaced the Father with an unknown (in Scripture) “God the Son”. By this means they sidelined Yahweh from the center of mankind’s salvation, relegating Him to a relatively peripheral role, while Christ as “God the Son” (who they claim is His equal

in every respect) takes center stage. If this is not heresy where Scripture is concerned, then what is?

It now becomes clearer why trinitarian commentators would have a problem with 1John 1:1 in regard to the question of the identity of the Logos; for if we rephrase John 1:1 to read “In the beginning was the Life (or eternal life),” it is hardly conceivable that Life could be thought of as something or someone distinct from God as an independent person. Life, after all, is something integral to the very Being of God—just as Word is the expression of His innermost being and character. “Life” is constantly connected with God in the Scriptures. “Life of God” is a term used in Ephesians 4:18. Psalm 36:9 sums up beautifully the Biblical teaching that God is life and the source of all life, “For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light.”

We have seen that in 1John1:1 the Logos is “the *logos* of life” which, in the next verse, is simply spoken of as “the life” and then explained more fully as “the eternal life”. It thus becomes clear that the Logos is the expression and the conveyor of eternal life. But what now also becomes evident is that, because this “life” in the NT is closely associated with many other important spiritual realities such as light, truth, grace (both within John 1 and also in the rest of the NT), the phrase “the word of life” can just as correctly be read as “the word of truth” (Ps.119:43; Col.1:5, “the word of the truth, the gospel,” i.e. “the word of truth” = the message of the gospel; Eph.1:13, “the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation”= the word, or message, of salvation), “the word of grace” (Acts 14:3; 20:32 “the word of *His* grace”).

From this we can see that life, truth, gospel, salvation, and grace all come to expression through the Word/Logos; this is important for our understanding of the *Logos* in John 1:1. For it is precisely God's saving grace that is manifested to mankind in Christ: "his (God's) own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which (i.e. "His purpose and grace") now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus" (2Tim.1:9,10).<sup>47</sup>

2Timothy 1:10 says that God's purpose/grace has now been "manifested". This is exactly the same word which appears twice in 1John 1:2 where it is stated that life has been "manifested," and that this eternal life "was with the Father"—notice again the *exact* correspondence in the Greek of the phrase "was with (*pros*)" that we see here, to the same words in John 1:1. Thus, the manifesting of eternal life in 1John 1:2 corresponds precisely with the manifesting of God's purpose/grace in 2Timothy 1:9,10.

Within the Prologue of John 1, the association of life with light is seen in v.4, "In him was life, and *the life* was *the light* of men." In verse 14, "the Logos became flesh" in Christ, that is, life and light were made tangible and visible (1Jn.1:1) in the person of Christ, in whom Yahweh's glory is revealed ("made manifest," 1Jn.1:2) and seen as being "full of grace

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<sup>47</sup> God's "purpose and grace" are both feminine in Greek; the word "which" occurs twice in this verse and translates words in the Greek which are in the feminine *singular*, thus corresponding to the feminine of "purpose and grace"; the singular points either to purpose or to grace, or to both *understood as one single concept*.

and truth” (Jn.1:14). Grace and truth are characteristics of the Logos. But it must be carefully noticed that Christ is not himself “grace and truth,” but that “grace and truth came *through* Jesus Christ” (v.17) in the same way as “the Law was given *through* Moses” in the same verse. Moses was not the Law, but it came through him. However, Moses was not the embodiment of the Law, but the one who delivered it to Israel; in contrast to this, the Memra/Logos was embodied in Christ.

## (II) “The Word was with God”

### The Trinitarian interpretation of the “with” (*pros*) in John 1:1

What evidence is there that the Logos can be considered a divine person distinct from God? Well, the trinitarian argument hangs on the one little word *pros* (“with”) or rather how it is translated and interpreted by them. It is absolutely essential for trinitarian dogma that *pros must* be translated as “with” in the specific sense of “to be with”. Trinitarianism insists that “with God” *must* mean that the Word is thereby shown to be a person distinct from Him so as to be “with” Him. But does “with Him” necessarily mean that another distinct person is implied? Then what about Wisdom being with (*para*) God in Proverbs 8:30, where *para* is equivalent to *pros* when speaking in personalized terms? That *pros* with



accusative (as in John 1:1) is equivalent to *para* is not something uncommon in the NT, as the following reference confirms:

*pros* with accusative: taking the place of *παρά* [*para*] after εἰμι [*eimi*] etc.: e.g. Mt 13:56 πρὸς ὑμᾶς εἰσιν [*pros humas eisin*], 26:18, 55 v1, Mk.6:3; **Jn 1:1**, etc. (*A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, J.H. Moulton, Vol. III, N. Turner, p.274; bolding added).

This means that we cannot make more of the “with (*pros*) God” in John 1:1 than Wisdom being “with (*para*) God” in Proverbs 8:30. What coherent response can (and should) trinitarianism make to this solid exegetical fact other than to acknowledge its error? Their whole dogma hangs essentially on a *pros*! Though there is far more evidence of trinitarianism’s error than the erroneous interpretation of *pros*, in this section we shall concentrate chiefly on this word so crucial to their dogma.

If the personal, individualized interpretation of *pros* cannot be sustained, then neither can the trinitarian argument based on John 1:1 be kept intact. But if someone is determined to disregard all the facts, what can be done but to leave him to his errors? I certainly would not want to build my faith on sinking sand. The tragedy was, however, that we did not realize that we were building on interpretative sand; the ground appeared to us to be solid enough at the time, and there were no lack of “expositions” reinforcing this serious misconception.

A fairly typical example of a trinitarian “exposition” of “with” (*pros*) can be found in *Expositor’s Commentary*. On *pros* in Jn.1:1 it says, “The preposition ‘with’ in the phrase ‘the Word was with God’ indicates both equality and distinction of identity along with association. The phrase can be rendered ‘face to face with.’” Here it is baldly stated that *pros* “indicates... equality” without a shred of evidence given to support such a weighty statement. Trinitarianism is simply read into the text without any regard for factual accuracy. Disregard for truth results in falsehood being spread from generation to generation and from place to place.

Trinitarian dogma overrides concern for what the text is actually saying. Even a glance at any of the major Greek-English lexicons will show that none of them suggests that *pros* “indicates equality” or even the idea of “face to face”. Moreover, “face to face” does not indicate equality either. Can a servant not stand before his master face to face, or a soldier before his commanding officer? Can it be that adherence to trinitarianism can result in the loss of both common sense and basic logic?

Furthermore, the phrase *pros ton theon* (πρὸς τὸν θεόν) is not unique to John 1:1 in the NT. Had this commentator in *Expositor’s Commentary* made the necessary effort to check the use of this phrase, he would have found that it occurs no less than 20 times in the NT (John 1:1,2; 13:3; Acts 4:24; 12:5; 24:16; Rom. 5:1; 10:1; 15:17,30; 2Cor.3:4; 13:7; Phil.4:6; 1Thess.1:8f; Heb. 2:17; 5:1; 1John 3:21; Rev.12:5; 13:6) and not one instance of these “indicates equality” or the idea of being “face to face”. Most of these references speak of praying

to (*pros*) God, while Rom.5:1 speaks of “peace with (*pros*) God”. What can be said regarding all these references is that they speak of an act or action (prayer) or a new state of life (peace) relating to God.

### **Pros—Are dictionaries always objective?**

Let us take the following example. BDAG takes *pros* (πρὸς) in John 1:1 as meaning to “be (in company) with” someone. But it must be borne in mind that “with” is not the only possible translation of *pros*. It is not even its primary meaning, as a look into any Greek dictionary (including BDAG) or grammar will show. If we refer to BDAG, it is interesting to note that the definition of *pros* is given under three sections, the last being the longest one. And only in a subsection at the end of this long section, in the *last* of many subsections, is the definition “be with” given—and specifically applied to John 1:1. This shows that “with” is definitely not the primary meaning of *pros*. So the inquiring mind cannot help but ask: Why should only the definition “with” apply to *pros* in John 1:1—to the exclusion of all other possible meanings of the word? It seems hard to escape the conclusion that the choice of this particular definition is likely to be doctrinally motivated. It must be kept in mind that the editors of most, and perhaps all, dictionaries and lexicons of the NT are (like myself) from trinitarian backgrounds.

*Pros* in John 1:1 can, in fact, be understood in one of its other meanings (as we shall see, for the sake of the completeness of our study of this verse), but there is exegetically no problem accepting the definition of *pros* as “be with,” because the monotheistic exposition of John 1:1 (in contrast to trinitarianism) is not absolutely bound to one particular definition of *pros*.

But accepting the meaning “be with” actually proves nothing for trinitarianism. Wisdom in Proverbs is the most important example of this. It is well known that a close parallel to Jn.1:1 is found in Prov.8:30, “I was beside (LXX, *para*) him, like a master workman, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always.” *Para* is closer to the idea of “be with” than is *pros*. We saw that the definition of *pros* as “be with” is found only in the last subsection of a series of sections in BDAG. In contrast to this, a *major* definition of *para* in BDAG is given as: “**marker of nearness in space, at/by (the side of), beside, near, with,** according to the standpoint from which the relationship is viewed.”

Wisdom in Proverbs is described in terms of a personal being, though the language is meant metaphorically. C.K. Barrett recognized the importance of Proverbs 8:30 for the understanding of John 1:1. He sees that Wisdom and Torah are identified in rabbinic teaching, and thought that “such notions are the root of John’s statement” (*The Gospel According to John*, p.129f).

Since Meyer affirms the “strict monotheism of the N.T.” (*Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Gospel of John*, p.68)

what does he mean by the Logos “as a divine being”? He maintains that by the Logos (ὁ λόγος) is meant

“the self-revelation of the divine essence, before all time immanent in God, but for the act of creation proceeding hypostatically from Him—which divine self-revelation appeared bodily in the man Jesus, and accomplished the work of the redemption of the world” (*Critical and Exegetical Commentary of the NT, John*, p.66f).

How can “the self-revelation of the divine essence” be “a divine being” distinct from Yahweh? It is often difficult to make much sense of trinitarian speech.

By translating *kai ho logos en pros ton theon* (καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν) as “and the Word was with God,” only one of the relevant meanings of *pros* has been selected, obviously because this accords best with trinitarianism which, of course, is the doctrinal position of the translators. But John was certainly no trinitarian, so how can we be sure that this correctly represents what he intended to say? What would the words mean if we took that aspect of *pros* which BDAG describes as “with reference/regard to”? It would read, “And the Word had reference to God (i.e. Yahweh)”; this would mean “‘the Word’ referred to ‘God’ (Yahweh),” thus providing an explanation of who “the Word” is, who is here being referred to, namely, “Yahweh”.

Meyer recognized this meaning as a valid possibility but, as might be expected from a trinitarian, rejected it because he rightly perceived that this would mean that the Logos/Word is “a periphrasis for God,” as he put it. Commenting on the

phrase “And the Word was God” (*kai theos ēn ho logos*) Meyer writes,

This θεός [*theos*] can only be the *predicate*, not the subject, which would contradict the preceding ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν [*ēn pros ton theon*, was with God], because the conception of *the λόγος* [*logos/word*] *would be only a periphrasis for God* (the quotation is given exactly as it stands in Meyer; the words in square brackets and italics in the last phrase are mine).

If *theos* is a predicate in relation to the Logos in this phrase,<sup>48</sup> Meyer sees that the Word would be a periphrasis for God. For example, if instead of “the Word was God” it reads, “the Good was God,” then “the Good” is (indirectly) another name for God. He sees this as contradicting the previous phrase which he assumes means “the Word was with God” *in the trinitarian sense*. But it would contradict that phrase *only if* it is first given a trinitarian interpretation. Understood in the light of monotheism there would be no contradiction at all.

Thus, if *pros* in the phrase “the Word was *pros* God” is taken as meaning “with reference or regard to” (i.e. “the Word referred to God”) then it functions in an explanatory way, with the result that “the Word” (the *Memra*) is indeed “a periphrasis for God” (as Meyer rightly observed), and the next phrase “the Word was God” would serve to confirm and emphasize this to be the case. Even so, let it again be affirmed

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<sup>48</sup> Barrett also wrote, “θεὸς [*theos*], being without the article, is predicative and describes the nature of the Word”.

that the monotheistic understanding of John 1:1 is not dependent on this particular definition of *pros*. Defining *pros* as “with” gives monotheism no problems at all because this would be to understand the Word in the same hypostatized way as Wisdom in Proverbs, particularly Proverbs 8:30. Unlike trinitarianism, monotheism is not at the mercy of one particular definition of this preposition.

As for Meyer’s argument, he thought he had resolved the supposed “contradiction” by interpreting the two phrases as, “He was *with* God, and possessed of a *divine nature*” (italics his), which is the standard trinitarian interpretation. But notice carefully that “God” in John’s text is thereby reduced to meaning “a divine nature,” a nature or “substance” in which three persons are said to participate according to trinitarianism. So the price paid for interpreting “with” in such a way as to extract an argument for a distinct divine person who is thus said to be “with God” as “God the Son” is the *depersonalizing* of the very concept of God itself, which is now spoken of in terms of a “nature”.

### **Another trinitarian argument based on *pros***

Another typical trinitarian explanation of “the Word was with God” is that given in *The Expositor’s Greek Testament* by Marcus Dods: “πρὸς [*pros*] implies not merely existence alongside of but personal intercourse. It means more than μετὰ [*meta*] or παρά [*para*], and is regularly employed in expressing the presence of one person with another. Thus in classical

Greek, τὴν πρὸς Σωκράτην συνουσίαν [*tēn pros Sōkratēn sunousian*], and in the N.T. Mk.6:3, Mt.13:56, Mk.9:19, Gal.1:18, 2 John 12. This preposition implies intercourse and therefore separate personality.”

This is, sadly, the kind of “exposition” (note the title, “*Expositor’s* Greek Testament”) on which trinitarianism is built: the whole argument here is again built on the word *pros*. Let us examine the evidence presented. Dods quotes a phrase from classical Greek, but he evidently fails to see that it is actually the word συνουσία [*sunousia*], not πρὸς [*pros*], which accounts for “expressing the presence of one person with another” in this phrase. This is clear from a look at Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*: “συνουσία [*sunousia*], ἡ, (συνών, συνοῦσα, part. of σύνειμι) *a being with, social intercourse, society, conversation, communion*”. The abridged Liddell and Scott *Greek-English Lexicon* has, “*being with or together; a living together, social intercourse*” etc. Interestingly, Liddell and Scott (unabridged ed.) also quote an example from Sophocles about Socrates (which appears to be the same one quoted by Dods) which they translate as “their *intercourse with him*”. What all this means is that Dods claimed for *pros* the meaning which is actually already in *sunousia*! Another sadly erroneous argument.

Dods claimed that *pros* “means more than μετά [*meta*] or παρὰ [*para*]” yet does not provide a single piece of evidence to support this exaggerated claim. Then he goes on to make the further claim that *pros* “is regularly employed in expressing the presence of one person with another,” apparently suggesting that the idea of “persons” is implied in *pros*. Regularly?



Yet he manages to give only five examples from the NT, of which two are Synoptic parallels: Mk.6:3 par. Mt.13:56:

**Mark 6:3**, “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with (*pros*) us?” And they took offense at him.” (ESV)

A look at this verse should immediately make it clear that the reference to *persons* is in the *text*, *not* in the preposition *pros*. Jesus’ sisters were present in the town of Nazareth where this event took place, and in this sense they were present among the people who were speaking in this verse. But nothing whatever can be demonstrated from this verse regarding the alleged “personal intercourse” said to be implied in the preposition *pros*. So it would be fallacious to assume from this verse that the speaker(s) had any personal acquaintance with Jesus’ sisters. All that can be reasonably deduced is that they knew that the sisters lived in their neighborhood.

The situation is the same in all the remaining three NT examples given by Dods: The persons are, in each case, in the text itself, not in the preposition. The last example, 2 John 12, demonstrates this point graphically: “Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead I hope to come to you and talk face to (*pros*) face, so that our joy may be complete.” (ESV) “Face to face” is *not* implied in *pros*, but are the actual words of this particular verse. As in all the previous examples, the *context* itself has to do with persons, here made the more specific by “face to (*pros*)

face” (not face *with* face), which in the Greek is literally “mouth to mouth”.

Quite apart from these examples, the fact, put in more general terms, is that prepositions cannot in and of themselves imply personal relations, because they can just as readily be used of impersonal matters.

Trinitarians would have benefited from taking note of the basic definition of a preposition: “Words that combine with a noun or pronoun to form a phrase are termed prepositions” (Microsoft Encarta Reference Library 2005). Given the nature and function of prepositions, it should be clear that *the noun or pronoun with which the preposition is combined is not necessarily one that refers to a person, but can just as readily refer to a thing or an event*. Herein lies the fundamental error of the trinitarian argument from John 1:1,2 based on the preposition *pros*.

For the sake of completeness, consider the fact that *pros* appears 700 times in the NT (of which nearly 300 times are in Luke-Acts, and 102 times in John’s gospel), yet Dods manages to find only 5 examples to support his case, none of which actually supports it, as we have seen. To base the case for the existence of a second person in the Divinity on this sort of argument is truly pathetic in the extreme. Worse than that, how is the average person (even including those sufficiently equipped in basic Greek to use such a work as *The Expositor’s Greek New Testament*) able to discern the errors of this kind of “exposition”?

*Pros* is, as we have noted, a very common preposition not only in the Greek NT, but also in the Greek OT (LXX,

including apocrypha) where it occurs 4381 times. Given these facts, what exactly is the excuse for making the fallacious claims for *pros* which Dods and others make in support of trinitarian dogma? We claim the Scriptures to be the word of God, yet we dare to treat it in this kind of contemptible manner for the sake of a creed. Does this not remind us of what Jesus said, “Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that” (Mk.7:13, NIV)?

Even the phrase *pros ton theon* (as in Jn.1:1,2) occurs fairly frequently in the Greek Bible: about 70 times in the LXX and 20 times in the NT, and is usually translated as “to God”. By far the most frequent use of this term has to do with prayer or supplication *to God*, that is, it has mainly to do with a person or persons addressing God; sometimes, though rarely, it refers to a particular *relationship* with God (e.g. Rom.5:1, “peace with God”). As previously noted, the personal element is found in the phrase and its context, not in the preposition itself.

### **“Theos” as divine nature?**

Where in the NT does “God” ever mean “divine nature” or “substance”? The Greek-English lexicons do not provide any instance in the NT where *theos* (θεός), God, means “divine nature”. “Divine nature” represents a different concept in Greek, such as expressed by *theiotēs* (θειότης), defined by Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, as “*divine nature*,

*divinity*,” or Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the NT*, “*divinity*, as essence”. The attempt by trinitarians to dissolve God’s Being and Person into *theiotēs* can properly be considered as dishonest handling of the word of God. Whether trinitarians like it or not, it is intellectually and morally fraudulent to read *theiotēs* (θειότης) into the text where *theos* (θεός) stands. Just how bad can misinterpretation and eisegesis get?

There are those who argue that the word “God” in the last phrase of Jn. 1:1 (“the Word was God”) is anarthrous (without the article “the”) and may therefore be understood not as the person but as the nature of God. This, too, is without basis in the NT. BDAG (θεός, section 3) substantiates the fact that *in the NT God is referred to both with or without the definite article*; it reads: “3. *God in Israelite/Christian monotheistic perspective, God* the predom. use, sometimes with, sometimes without the article”. Of the many examples given, John 1:18a (“no one has ever seen God”) is an example *within the Johannine Prologue itself* of “God” *without* the definite article, and no scholar is likely to suggest that it is to be understood here as “divine nature”, so why should it be understood in this way in John 1:1?

### **Pros as a Semitism**

What has rarely, if ever, been noticed in Bible commentaries is the Semitic (Hebrew), and possibly Aramaic, origin of *pros* in John 1. Dr. Nigel Turner wrote: “πρὸς [*pros*] with

accusative meaning *with*, Jn 1:1; 1Jn 1:2, is a Semitism and it may be due to the Aramaic *lewath*.” (N. Turner, in *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, by J.H. Moulton, Vol.4, p.71 and reaffirmed on pp.13 and 93; this is in a section on “Aramaisms” in a chapter (ch.5) on “The Style of John”.)

The importance of this observation about *pros* as a Semitism (and Turner mentions many others in John) is that it points strongly in the direction that, not only the *Logos*, but possibly the whole hymn in the Johannine Prologue is also to be understood as having a Semitic or Aramaic origin.

Turner also described the phrase “full of grace and truth” in John 1:14 as a Hebraism (Moulton, *Grammar*, Vol.4, p.68). “Glory” in the same verse is another Hebraism: “*Glory* ([John] 1:14 and 16 times [in John]) is one of those terms which radically changed meaning through Hebrew influence; originally *doxa* was *good repute*, but it became also *visible splendour* because in the LXX it rendered *kabhodh* (*honour, glory*) and such words as *hodh* (*splendour*)” (Moulton, *Grammar*, Vol.4, p.69). This also serves to confirm the identification of the Word/Memra with the Shekinah glory in John 1:14.

These observations together go to show that the origins of the meanings of the key words in the Johannine Prologue (i.e. Jn.1:1-18) are not to be sought in some Hellenistic (Greek) source but in the Hebrew and Aramaic sources which were close to hand for John.

We have earlier noted that *pros* can have a referential meaning or it can also mean “with” in the sense of being “together with”. The latter is the only one acceptable in the

trinitarian interpretation. In view of Dr. Turner's observation that *pros* in John 1:1 is likely to be a Semitism, and also in view of the generally accepted affirmations of scholars that the Johannine Prologue is or contains a hymn, we can, for these two reasons, accept the understanding of *pros* as meaning "with," especially because in a hymn or poem the Word is most likely to be hypostasized, that is, described in terms of being a person, just like Wisdom in Proverbs.

If, however, the view of the Johannine Prologue as being a hymn or poem is rejected, that does not at all affect the monotheistic understanding of John 1:1, because then *pros* can be understood in its referential sense. What this means is that there is a "built-in" safeguard in this verse such that it does not depend on one particular view of the Prologue to establish its meaning.

### **Further detailed examination of *pros* in view of the trinitarian dependence upon it**

The *pros* in John 1:1 is the key to the trinitarian argument for the Logos as a "divine hypostasis" as Barrett calls it. In a context where people are the subject, *pros* can indeed mean "with"; but it must first be established that John 1:1 is about *different* persons, rather than assuming that in advance. Whether or not John 1:1 speaks of different persons (that is, of the Logos and God as different persons) as the subject is precisely what has first to be determined rather than presumed. Where

different persons are not the subject, the meaning of *pros* (here with the accusative) has to be determined by its context.

The phrase “with God” (*pros ton theon*), like the phrase “in the beginning,” occurs twice in the first two verses of John’s Gospel. How is it to be understood? As noted earlier, there are 20 occurrences (or 18 excluding Jn.1:1,2) of this phrase in the NT:

1. In many instances it speaks of praying “to God” (e.g. Ac.4:24; 12:5; Rom.10:1; 15:30; 2Cor.13:7; Phil.4:6);
2. Of good conscience towards God, Acts 24:16;
3. Peace with God, Romans 5:1;
4. Confidence toward God through Christ, 2Cor.3:4; 1John 3:21;
5. Faith in God, 1Th.1:8;
6. Things pertaining to God, Heb.2:17; 5:1.

The general *context* of these 18 statements in which the phrase *pros ton theon* occurs, consistently has to do with *man’s personal relationship with God*. But an examination of each of their sentence structures shows that the word *pros* itself does *not* have to do directly with persons as such, but rather with aspects of their spiritual and emotional life, specifically, with their prayers (1, above), good conscience (2), peace (3), confidence (4), and faith (5) with reference to God. This again confirms the fact that the idea of “person” cannot be extracted from the preposition *pros* but is found in the context in which *pros* stands.

Furthermore, in *none* of the 18 instances does the phrase *pros ton theon* have the meaning to “be with God”. When Paul, for example, speaks of his desire to depart and “be *with* Christ” (Phil.1:23), he uses *sun* (σὺν Χριστῷ εἶναι), not *pros*. These words of Paul are particularly relevant to Jn.1:1,2 because in both instances the verb “to be” is used; in Phil.1:23 it is in the present tense (*einai*, εἶναι) and in Jn.1:1 in the imperfect tense (*ēn*, ἦν).

What all this means is that if *pros ton theon* is to be understood as being “with God” in John 1:1, then it is not used in its usual sense, and there seems to be only one explanation for this, namely, that “the Word” in this verse is not used in its usual sense in the NT as being a “message (the Gospel)” or simply something spoken, but in a unique sense which is that “the Word” is here used in the same hypostatized or *personified* way like Wisdom in Proverbs and in Jesus’ sayings (Mt.11:19; Lk.7:35; 11:49). There does not appear to be any other way to explain the use of both *Word* and *pros* in John 1:1 that is consistent with the use of these words in the New Testament as a whole. That the Word in John 1:1,2 is poetically portrayed (like Wisdom) as a person who was “with God” “in the beginning” is Scripturally unproblematic. The problem only arises when trinitarianism insists on interpreting the poetical description in a literal way. It would be equally disastrous if Proverbs were interpreted in this way.

We read in Matthew 1:23: “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” {Isaiah 7:14}—which means, “God with us” (NIV); here “with” is not *pros* but *meta*.



## The referential aspect of *pros*

For the sake of completeness and thoroughness in examining this central argument on which trinitarianism is based and, so to speak “leave no stone unturned,” I will also mention that there are other occurrences of *pros* with the accusative where the meaning is clearly referential, for example,

**Romans 10:21:** “But concerning (*pros*) Israel he says, ‘All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people.’” (quoting Isaiah 65:2)

**Hebrews 1:7-8 (x2):** “In speaking of (*pros*) the angels he says ... But about (*pros*) the Son he says, ....”

**Matthew 27:14:** “But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge (*pros oude*), so that the governor was greatly amazed.”

**Luke 14:6:** “And they could not reply to these things (*pros tauta*).”

For the referential use of *pros* with the accusative, see also *A Concise Exegetical Grammar of NT Greek*, by J. Harold Greenlee, Eerdmans, p.43, where under the meaning “Pertaining to,” Greenlee cites Heb.1:7, “In speaking of (*pros*) the angels he says, ‘He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire’” (NIV) and Heb.5:1, “Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God (*pros ton theon*—exactly as in John 1:1!), to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.” The *exact* correspondence of the phrase *pros ton theon* in Hebrews 5:1

with John 1:1 can be considered to settle once and for all the meaning of the phrase in favor of its being *referential*. Even so, it might not be reasonable to shut out the possibility that *pros* in John 1:1 *could* have the meaning “with” in the sense in which it is applied to Wisdom in Proverbs 8:30 although, admittedly, this possibility is considerably weakened in view of Hebrews 5:1.<sup>49</sup>

Understood in the referential sense, the phrase “the Word was *pros* God” would mean “the Word had reference to God”, i.e. the Word was a way of referring to, or speaking about, God. This is in fact the case with the *Memra* (the Word), as we have seen, so it would confirm to the reader of John that by “the Word” the “*Memra*” is meant. This would make it clear that the phrase, “In the beginning was the Word,” is not a reference to some other divine being called “Word” (of whose existence there is no evidence), but referred to the one true God in terms of His creative and self-revelatory Word and, as such, served as a metonym for Yahweh God.

Even so, I have already indicated that the monotheistic understanding of John 1:1 is not exclusively dependent on one specific meaning of *pros*. Monotheism is equally

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<sup>49</sup> In the 18 occurrences (mentioned above) of the phrase *pros ton theon* (excluding for the moment Jn.1.1,2 ), it is the *referential* meaning of *pros* with the accusative which appears. This referential aspect of *pros* is, of course, well documented in all the standard Greek-English lexicons. Thayer’s *Greek Lexicon*, for example, describes this aspect as that “of relation or reference to any person or thing”; BADG *Greek-English Lexicon*: “to indicate a connection by marking a point of reference, *with reference/regard to*” (italics theirs).

comfortable with *pros* as meaning “with,” thereby understanding Word (Logos, Memra) as being “with God” just as Wisdom was with Him in the beginning (Prov.8:30). And just as Wisdom could serve as a metonym for God (cf. Lk.11:49), the Word as a metonym for Yahweh God can also be described in personalized language.

The situation is completely different for trinitarianism. It depends on one particular interpretation of *pros*. Now we can clearly understand why translation involves interpretation, and often depends entirely upon it to make a particular case. When *pros* is translated as “with” (with the intention of implying reference to an second person), it has already been *interpreted* in a specific sense, because one of several possible meanings has been selected and the other meanings rejected. This also means that no translation gives the meaning of the original without having interpreted it. A word or phrase can have a variety of possible meanings and nuances; which of these is chosen by the translator is to a great extent determined by the doctrinal preferences of that translator. As might be expected, he chooses the meanings which accord with his dogmatic inclinations; he would hardly choose those which run counter to those inclinations even if they would be equally correct as a translation. We can better appreciate why Muslims have always maintained that only the Arabic Qur’an is authoritative, and translations are not.

## The Logos in Psalm 119:89 and the idea of “with God”

**Psalm 119:89:** “Forever, O LORD (Yahweh), your word is firmly fixed in the heavens.” (NIV translates this verse as: “Your word, O LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens.”)

There are some important points of contact of this verse with John 1:1:

1. In this verse, “word” is *logos* in the LXX (Greek OT).
2. This “word” must certainly have been “in the beginning” seeing that it is “forever” or “eternal”.
3. Since it “stands firm in the heavens” from eternity, the word (*logos*) was certainly “with God” in the beginning.

In Psalm 119:89, the word which is translated “stands firm” (NIV) is *diamenō* (LXX), which in Psalm 102:26 (LXX Ps.101:27; quoted in Heb.1:11) is the word for “continue” or “remain: “They will perish, but you (Yahweh) will remain; they will all wear out like a garment.” If, then, Yahweh’s word “remains” or “continues” eternally in the heavens, then it is eternally *with* God.

Interestingly, *diamenō* can actually mean being or staying *with* someone, as in Galatians 2:5, where it is used together with *pros* (the word used in Jn.1:1). Gal.2:5 reads, “We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with (*diameinē pros*) you.” (*Diameinē* is 3rd pers. sing. of *diamenō*.) What this verse shows is that

neither *diamenō* nor *pros*, even when used in combination, prove that only persons are in question, because what remains *with* them here is not a particular person but “the truth of the gospel” which elsewhere is also spoken of as “the word of God” (e.g. Acts 13:5; 17:13), “the word of truth” (2Tim. 2:15). *This demolishes the trinitarian argument that the pros in John 1:1 necessarily implies two persons.*

### **“The Word (Memra) was God”**

Now we must get to grips with these important words. We shall first evaluate the standard trinitarian arguments. Since our purpose is to get to the truth and not to cross swords with any particular individual or scholar, I generally quote from authoritative trinitarian writers who are no longer with us, well known scholars of an earlier generation whose writings are fully representative of trinitarian thinking, and who put their case better than most others could do, even today.

Marcus Dods (formerly professor of theology, New College, Edinburgh) wrote:

The Word is distinguishable from God and yet θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος [*theos ēn ho logos*], the Word was God, of Divine nature; not ‘a God,’ which to a Jewish ear would have been abominable, nor yet identical with all that can be called God, for then the article would have been inserted (cf. 1John 3:4). The Christian doctrine of the Trinity was perhaps before anything else an effort to express how Jesus Christ was God (θεὸς) and yet in another sense was not God (ὁ θεὸς), that is

to say, was not the whole Godhead. (M. Dods, *The Expositor's Greek Testament, TEGT*).

What this boils down to is: Jesus is not the whole “Godhead” but a part of it; on the trinitarian view, God is composed of three parts—the three parts together form the “the whole Godhead”. On the trinitarian view, there is no person called “God” but only a “Godhead” made up of three persons. “God” is a “substance”—the substance of the Godhead. Did Dods really suppose that this kind of doctrine was any less “abominable” “to a Jewish ear”?!

Dods, like H.A.W. Meyer before him, interprets the meaning of “the Word was God” as meaning that the Word was “of divine nature”. According to 2Peter 1:4 we, too, have been granted to “participate in the divine nature”; on Dods’s argument this would mean that we too participate in the Godhead; this is indeed abominable to a Jewish ear, and the ear of any Biblical monotheist. But notice what Dods has to do to the Biblical text to achieve his trinitarian goal: the words “the Word was God” is in effect paraphrased as “the Word was of Divine nature,” i.e. “God” (*theos*) is reduced to mean “of Divine nature”; this definition of *theos* cannot be found in Greek-English lexicons, but that is evidently not of any concern to trinitarians.

Moreover, does it not occur to anyone to ask: If “the Word was God” is supposed to mean “the Word was of divine nature,” why did John not simply write that in the text since the Greek language is perfectly capable of making that statement? Why does the text not say “divine nature” (as in 2Peter

1:4) instead of “God” if that was the intended meaning, for the author of the text undoubtedly knew (as “scholars” deserving of that name also ought to know) that “God” in Greek does *not* mean merely “divine nature”?

H.A.W. Meyer was an outstanding German scholar whose 20 volume commentary on the Greek New Testament was first published more than a century ago and is still available in fairly recent reprints, indicating that his work has not been made obsolete by more recent writings. How then does he interpret the words “the Word was God”? We have already seen earlier that Meyer wrote, “This θεός [*theos*, God] can only be the *predicate*, not the subject (as Roehricht takes it), which would contradict the preceding ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν [was with God], because the concept of the λόγος [*logos*, word] would be only a periphrasis for God” (*The Gospel of John*, p.67, italics his, translations in square brackets mine). Now let us unpack this interesting statement:

(1) Meyer says that the word “God” can only be the *predicate*, not because it cannot legitimately be taken as subject (which was how the scholar Roehricht took it, as Meyer points out), but because it would contradict the preceding “was with God”. Actually it does not contradict “was with God” at all but *only contradicts Meyer’s trinitarian interpretation of those words* as meaning that the Logos was another person besides God.

(2) But now look at his sentence again, “This θεός [*theos*, God] can only be the *predicate*... because the concept of the λόγος [*logos*, word] would be only a periphrasis for God”. The

alternatives for him are *either* to take “God” as the predicate *or* the Logos can “only” be “a periphrasis for God”. Great Greek scholar as Meyer was, he did not appear to have much grasp of the Judaic foundations of the New Testament, as is the case with many Western Bible scholars whose training is often based on an education in the Greek classics. He does not appear to show any awareness of the important concept of *the Memra*, the Judaic equivalent of *the Logos*, or of the fact that *the Memra* is precisely “a periphrasis for God”.

C.K. Barrett, on the other hand, appears to have been conversant with Judaic literature. How does he interpret “the Word was God”? He writes, “θεὸς (God) being without the article, is predicative and describes the nature of the Word” (*The Gospel According to St. John*, SPCK, 1962). Unfortunately, this statement is not true to the facts so, not surprisingly, Barrett does not present any Scriptural evidence to support it. Notice that Meyer made no such statement. The fact is that *theos* is used in the NT *with or without the article* as a look at the word *theos* in BDAG’s *Greek-English Lexicon* will quickly show (see below). Moreover, *theos* is used *without the article* even within the Prologue of John: “No one has seen ever God (*theos*)” (John 1:18). That a scholar of Barrett’s stature should overlook something like this and make the kind of statement he made is a sad commentary of how trinitarianism blurs mental clarity.

The rest of Barrett’s comment on “the Word was God” reads, “The absence of the article indicates that the Word is God, but is not the only being of whom this is true; if ὁ θεὸς



[*ho theos*, the God] had been written it would have been implied that no divine being existed outside the second person of the Trinity.” Still drawing on his assertion about the predicative character of *theos* without the article [*ho*], he now goes on to his next statement that the presence of the article would have “implied that no divine being existed outside the second person of the Trinity”. Now we see how his argument depends heavily upon “the absence of the article”; so what happens to his argument when we see the Scriptural fact that the presence or absence of the article does not affect the meaning of the word “God” in the way that Barrett claims? His argument collapses.

As for Barrett’s reference to “the second person of the Trinity,” it can be seen from a consideration of this matter in the previous section that this notion was extracted by means of the trinitarian interpretation of “the Word was God”. The notion of a “second person of the Trinity,” stated simply, exists nowhere in the Bible.

For the sake of clarity let the following facts be reaffirmed: (1) it cannot be demonstrated from the NT that the anarthrous (without the article) *theos* is predicative, *nor even that theos can properly be used predicatively*. (2) The NT refers to God (*theos*) in the Greek text either with or without the definite article without any evident difference. BDAG *Greek-English Lexicon of the NT*, provides many examples of this; see under *theos* section 3, where it states that *theos* is used “sometimes with, sometimes without the article”; it then provides a list where it occurs without the article: “without the art. Mt

6:24; Lk 2:14; 20:38; Jo 1:18a; Ro 8:8, 33b; 2 Cor 1:21; 5:19; Gal 2:19; 4:8f; 2 Th 1:8; Tit 1:16; 3:8; Hb 3:4”.

Let us now consider more closely the statements, “the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (*ho logos ēn pros ton theon kai theos ēn ho logos*, ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος). For those unacquainted with Greek it helps to get an idea of these important words by means of a literal word for word translation of the Greek text which reads: “the *logos* was with **the God and God** was the *logos*.” Notice how in the Greek sentence structure, “God” in the first phrase and “God” in the next phrase are joined by an “and”. This is something which is obliterated in the translations. It should also be remembered that in the original Greek texts there were no commas or full stops, etc, all of which were added much later. Looking at the syntax of the Greek, i.e. its wording, the fact that the two occurrences of “God” are linked together by the “and” would point to the author’s idea that the word “God” refers to one and the same Person, the one God, rather than to two different “divine beings”.

Are the translations correct which change the order of the Greek and make it read “the Word was God” instead of “God was the Word”? Grammatically speaking, this can be done, it is not incorrect; but the syntactical structure of the sentence is obviously changed by this translation. Moreover, “was” functions somewhat like an equal (=) sign, such that both sides of the equation have essentially the same meaning: “God = the Word” or “the Word = God,” provided that we understand that “=” does not speak of a strict equation but an equation of meaning, such that “the Word” means “God”.

This equation of meaning is what Meyer meant when he mentioned that it is possible to understand “the Word” as “a periphrasis for God”.

### John 1:1 and 4:24, a parallel

An instructive parallel with John 1:1 is seen in John 4:24, all the more so since both occur in the same Gospel:

John 4:24:

πνεῦμα ὁ θεός

*pneuma ho theos*

literally: Spirit (is) God

John 1:1c:

θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος

*theos ēn ho logos*

literally: God was the Word

The order of the words in the Greek of John 4:24 is: “Spirit (*pneuma*) God (*ho theos*)”. Since God is the subject and “Spirit” is predicate, it is correctly translated as “God is Spirit,” but unfortunately, the English reader misses the significance of the predicate being placed *before* the subject in the Greek text. This syntax is not to be taken for granted because the words in the Greek text do not necessarily have to be in this order; it is put in this order for a reason. For example, the structure of the Greek sentence here is not parallel to “God is love” in 1John 4:8,16 which is *ho theos agapē estin* (ὁ θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν) which is in the same word sequence as in the

English translation. The same is true of “God is light” in 1John 1:5, *ho theos phōs estin* (ὁ θεὸς φῶς ἐστίν), which also has the same word order as the English. But as we have seen, the order of the words “God is Spirit” is inverted in the Greek. Why?

An extended answer is given in an old, very large (over 1000 pages), but useful work by Dr. E.W. Bullinger entitled *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*:

“John iv.24.—‘A Spirit is God.’ The true emphasis is to be placed on the word ‘**Spirit**,’ through its being placed (in the Greek) at the beginning of the sentence. In the ordinary order, it would be placed after the subject. The two words are transposed to call our attention to this great fact; as being the basis of the Great Rubric which emphasizes the absolute necessity of our worship being truly spiritual.” (p.695, bold lettering his)

This helps us to understand the significance of the same kind of word structure in John 1:1c where the word “God” is in the same position as “Spirit” in John 4:24, namely, *at the beginning of the sentence* in the Greek. This means that “the true emphasis” is placed on the word “God”; the words are “transposed to call our attention to this great fact” (Bullinger). What great fact is our attention called to in John 1:1 but that it is *God*, and none other, that is the Word (= Logos = Memra)? Only a polytheistic mentality could suggest that when John places strong emphasis on “God” he could be

referring to some other God (or person) than Yahweh, the God of Israel; or that he was referring to a “divine nature”.<sup>50</sup>

## **The essence of the trinitarian argument: “The Word was God” = Jesus is God**

This, in essence, is the basis of trinitarianism. First, they make the fundamental error of interpreting “the Word was God” as meaning “Jesus is God”, which produces the erroneous equations: Word = Jesus and Jesus = God (“divine nature”). Concerning the first of these, the indisputable fact of the matter is that the identification of Word = Jesus or Jesus = Word is never made in John. Also, Jesus is never once called the “Word of God” either in John’s Gospel or the Johannine epistles. ‘Logos’ occurs 40 times in 36 verses in John’s Gospel; apart from the 2 occurrences in the Prologue (vv.1,14), it carries the usual meaning of ‘something spoken (or written).’ It is *never* applied to the person of Jesus. This means that there is not a shred of evidence to support the identification of Word/Logos with Jesus. The Word is *not* Jesus; it is incarnate in Jesus (Jn.1:14).

Regarding the second trinitarian equation mentioned above (Jesus=God): The word “God” (*theos*) occurs 83 times in John’s Gospel. An examination of the way it is used in this gospel shows that, when it refers to God (not to “gods,” Jn.10:34,35), it consistently and without any exception refers to God, the Father, namely, Yahweh. Yet the trinitarian

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<sup>50</sup> See, further, Appendix 7.

argument ignores this fact and insists, contrary to the plain evidence, that the word “God” in the phrase “the Word was God” is an exception. Their argument maintains that the Word was not Yahweh God but another person who shared Yahweh’s nature. To the Jews, to Jesus, and in the Bible as a whole, there is simply no other God besides Yahweh, “the only true God”. Yet the trinitarians arbitrarily reduce “God” to “divine nature” and then make Jesus, who they have equally arbitrarily equated with the Word, participate in this “nature” as a “second person in the Godhead”. By this two-step process of misinterpretation, trinitarianism attains its dogma of the Trinity. The arbitrariness, unreasonableness, and falsity of this kind of argumentation should now be evident.

### **One more look at John 1:1**

We began by indicating that what is at stake is not merely a question of interpretation but the very foundation of our faith, for what is being determined is whether our faith is monotheistic or polytheistic in its essential character. We are familiar with the fact that the trinitarian dogma is the belief of three equal persons who together constitute the one “Godhead” called “the Trinity”. There is, therefore, no “one God” in trinitarianism, only one “divine nature” (the “Godhead”) shared by three divine persons all of whom are God: “God the Father,” “God the Son,” and “God the Spirit,” which is to say nothing more or less than that there are

actually three co-equal “Gods” in trinitarianism. This is also to say that the word “God” in trinitarian language means “the Trinity”. The very word “Trinity” (Latin *trinitas*, from *trinus*, *trini*, “three”) is the acknowledgement that this is a faith in a divine triad of three divine persons.

What is important for our present purpose of understanding John 1:1 is that the trinitarian reading of this verse is fundamentally different from that of Biblical monotheism. This is inevitable because in trinitarianism, “God” (or rather “Godhead”) = “the Trinity”. The result of this trinitarian interpretation is that the words “the Word was with God, and the Word was God” mean “the Word was with the Trinity, and the Word was the Trinity”. What sense can be made of this is a matter for the trinitarian to unravel. That the Word (“God the Son,” according to trinitarianism) was with the Trinity is presumably self-evident, since “God the Son” is a part of the Trinity. That “the Word was the Trinity” is either a mere repetition of the previous statement (the Trinity being understood as predicative of the Son), or “the Son” is the real essence of the Trinity, whatever this means. This latter alternative is surely unacceptable to trinitarianism as it would reduce the Trinity to being a kind of shadow of “the Son” instead of there being three co-equal persons in it. So only the first alternative remains, which reduces the trinitarian interpretation of the text to a tautology, i.e. a redundant repetition. This is the sort of interpretative dilemma that trinitarianism is confronted with when trying to interpret the Scriptures on its terms.

But who really is “God” in John 1:1? The Scriptures know of only one God, the one true God whose Name is Yahweh, and there is none besides Him (1Sam.2:2; Isa.45:6,21; etc). As far as the Bible is concerned, to ask the question is already to answer it, for the Bible recognizes no alternative to the One whom Jesus called “the only God” (Jn.5:44). So when John 1:1 is understood in the proper Biblical terms, it would be taken as, “In the beginning was the Word/Memra, and the Word was with Yahweh, and the Word was Yahweh”; it makes perfect sense.

Since “God” stands grammatically in a predicative position in relation to “Word” in the words “the Word was God,” the identity of the Word is clearly thereby revealed as being a manifestation (like Wisdom or Spirit) of Yahweh God. For, what is predicated of the Logos is not stated in terms of an adjective (much less a “divine nature” or “substance”), but a Person, namely, Yahweh.

What this means is that even if someone chooses to dispute the interpretation of the Word as being the Memra, or that the Gentile church no longer knew of the Word’s origin in the Memra, that does not change the outcome of the monotheistic understanding of John 1:1 because:

(1) As was shown in the previous paragraph, in the phrase “the Word was God (Yahweh),” “God” explains what the “the Word” was, that is, “the Word” is to be understood as referring to “God”; this is to say that “the Word” is a metonym for “God,” namely, Yahweh. This is precisely what the Memra as metonym signifies.



(2) The trinitarian interpretation of “God” as “divine nature” is a travesty of Scripture, and no Biblical evidence for it can be produced.

(3) Even if we do not draw upon the Memra as the basis for the Word, trinitarianism has no other basis to draw upon except the Word in the OT, primarily Psalm 33:6, which we have studied in an earlier section. In a poetic context like the Prologue of John, the Word of Psalm 33:6 would, like Memra, serve as a metonym for “Yahweh”; so the result is exactly the same whether we use “the Word” in OT texts or the Memra of the OT Targums.

The point of all this is that here, too, there is a built-in safeguard against misinterpretation. Is this not something we would expect from the Scriptures as the word of God, namely, that God had long ago foreseen man’s attempts at misinterpreting His word and had installed safeguards against it? For those who are concerned for the truth, these safeguards will serve to expose error.

## **A summary of the foregoing observations on John 1:1**

(1) The Logos is identified with or as Yahweh, who in the NT is consistently spoken of as “God” and, for believers generally, as “God our Father” (*not* “God the Father” of trinitarianism).

(2) The word “God” *never* means “divine nature (or, essence, substance)” in Scripture. The term “divine nature” occurs

only in 2Peter 1:4, “He (God) has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the *divine nature*”. The word “divine” translates *theios* (θεῖος, an adjective), and the word “nature” is *fusis* (φύσις); as in English, two words are needed to speak of the “divine nature”. Trinitarianism plays much too close to the fire of blasphemy when it dares to reduce “God” to “divine nature”.

(3) In the NT, God is referred to either *with or without the definite article*, as BDAG states. It is completely false to claim that when used without the definite article, *theos* (God) can be made to mean “divine nature”. The extent to which trinitarianism is prepared to go in support of their dogma by misinterpreting Scripture is hardly less than shocking.

(4) The term “the Word of God” does not appear in John 1, nor is it specifically applied to Jesus anywhere in John’s Gospel or in any of the Johannine writings. In fact, nowhere in the NT (including Revelation 19:13) is “the Word (Logos)” identified with the name “Jesus” or “Christ”. Hence it is evident that the application of the title “Word of God” to Jesus is the result of trinitarian misinterpretation.

(5) From the foregoing points, it becomes clear that the question of *Jesus’* preexistence, as distinct from that of the Word, cannot find any exegetical support in John 1 because Jesus is *not* the Word; but the Word “became flesh” (incarnate) in him. Trinitarians also forget that if Jesus pre-existed as a person, he would not really be a true human being

like Adam or, for that matter, like any of us; that would negate God's plan for mankind's salvation. Notice, too, that the argument for Jesus' preexistence cannot be supported by those verses in which he speaks of having been *sent from God*. John 1:6 (significantly, embedded in the Prologue itself) says, "There was a man *sent from God*, his name was John". No one is likely to use this verse to argue for John's preexistence!

## **Monotheists and polytheists are bound to read John 1 totally differently**

Only when Christians from polytheistic backgrounds dominated the church from about the middle of the second century did the trinitarian idea begin to emerge, and later to flourish, in the non-Jewish church. Polytheists would tend to read John 1 very differently from the way the monotheist John meant it.

John 1:1 actually has a triple "built-in" safeguard against polytheism (which trinitarianism tried to bypass, resulting in interpretative confusion and serious error):

(1) The explicit identification of Yahweh and His Word which could hardly have been made more obvious, "In the beginning was the *Logos*," stands in direct and explicit parallel with "In the beginning God" in Genesis 1:1, thereby clearly identifying the *Logos* with God. This explicit juxtaposing of "in the beginning" with the phrase in Genesis should have been sufficient in itself to establish what the Word was meant to refer to in John 1:1.

(2) Already “in the beginning” the Logos was *pros* God; the Logos had specific reference to God *at the time of creation*; or put in another way, the Logos was (like Wisdom) with God at the creation. The same God who brought the physical creation into being by His word “in the beginning” was now about to bring a whole new spiritual creation into being by means of that same creative *Logos*. And as He manifests Himself through the physical creation (Rom.1:20), so He will yet more fully reveal Himself through His new creation. His *Logos* is the instrument or “agent” of His self-revelation in both cases.

(3) “The Logos was God”; it is hard to understand how John could have been any more specific than that!

Finally, we have observed something truly remarkable in John 1:1, namely, the fact that there are three built-in safeguards in every part of the three phrases of this verse. This serves to demonstrate that Yahweh foresaw (as we would expect) that once the gospel reached out into the polytheistic world, the attempt would be made to interpret the Scriptures in polytheistic terms. The built-in safeguards would make this impossible without have to twist and distort the meaning of the inspired words, which is precisely what trinitarians have done, to their own eternal peril. But the Lord God Yahweh will not be defeated in His eternal purposes; He will bring those who love Him into His light and truth.

## The befuddling of the mind by trinitarianism

It is remarkable (as we now know from experience) how trinitarianism can teach people (even intelligent and learned ones) to accept two totally contradictory and mutually exclusive items as both true! We engaged in double-talk because we had learned to “double-think,” without even being aware of it, while being led to suppose that some divine “mystery” was involved.

We thought that what was divine had to be, in the nature of the case, mysterious and therefore not amenable to rational understanding or explanation, and was therefore to be simply accepted by “faith”. But this notion of alleged “divine mystery” opened the door to the acceptance of irrational and even nonsensical ideas. Thus polytheism, which is totally incompatible with Biblical monotheism, has been fashioned into something called “trinitarian monotheism”—and we did not even perceive the self-contrary character of the term.

But we as trinitarians did try to make some sense of it, especially when speaking to unbelievers, by means of such illustrations as water, ice, and steam as being three forms or modes of the one substance. The problem with this illustration is that it actually serves as an illustration of what the trinitarians condemned as the heresy of “modalism” (that the one God appeared in three different forms or modes: Father, Son, and Spirit), also called Sabellianism or Monarchianism. Sabellius (early 3rd cent.) attempted to avoid the polytheism into which the church was falling by proposing that the one

God manifested Himself in three forms; but he was rewarded for his efforts by being branded a heretic by the trinitarians.

Other popular illustrations don't fare much better because though they narrowly avoid modalism they also assume three manifestations as persons within the one substance, thereby reducing God to a "substance". Thus, for example, the illustrations of the three petals of the clover leaf (attributed to St. Patrick of Ireland), or three tree-trunks growing out of the one stem, or Augustine's three aspects of the human mind are well-known. All these, of course, necessarily ignore the fact that Yahweh was always known as a Person, and never as a "substance" or "essence". For this reason, describing God in terms of "essence" can, Biblically speaking, be quite properly considered as blasphemous.

The notion of God as "substance" derives from Gentile polytheism ("gods many," 1Cor.8:5) in which many gods share the "substance" of divinity; otherwise they could not be considered "gods," just as we would not be considered human beings unless we shared the "substance" of being human. Such a notion of God is foreign to monotheism and, indeed, absolutely incompatible with it. Confronted with such polytheism, it needs to be constantly reaffirmed that in the Biblical revelation there is absolutely no other God besides Yahweh (Isa. 45:21,22, etc), "the only true God" (Jn.17:3).

## John 1:1 and 1:14

As we have seen, “the Word” is used in John 1:1 and 1:14 in a way totally unique as compared to the way it is used elsewhere in the NT. There is a parallel in 1John 1:1,2, but the parallel is partial, and “the Word” is not used in precisely the same way as in John 1:1, although it is possible that “the Word of Life” could also be used as a kind of metonym for “God”.

In view of the evidence, it is beyond any doubt that in John 1:1 “the Word” is a metonym or circumlocution for “Yahweh,” and the only other verse in which “the Word” occurs in this unique sense is in the first part of John 1:14: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” (NIV) Here the message in John 1:1 reaches its purpose, namely, the “enfleshment” of the Word in the person of Jesus Christ who, for that reason is unique (*monogenēs*, variously translated as “only begotten” or simply as “unique,” cf. BDAG), and through whom Yahweh’s glory is manifested for the salvation of mankind.

What now begins to emerge with crystal clarity is that the author of the poem in the Johannine Prologue used “the Word/ Memra” as the metonym for “Yahweh” so well-known in his time; he had in fact no other way available to him to make specific reference to *Yahweh*. He also wanted to make absolutely sure that his readers will have no doubt whatever that his reference was to Yahweh, the only God, hence the first statement in John 1:1 about the Word/ Memra is

followed up by two statements, “the Word was *pros* God, and the Word was God,” excluding any ambiguity.

For though Memra was certainly a metonym for Yahweh, yet exactly like “Word” or “Logos,” it could be simply understood as “word” in the ordinary sense, rather like the “word of God” in Psalm 33:6, where “word” is not a metonym for “Yahweh”. The explicatory safeguards for the poem’s intended meaning was all the more necessary once it was translated into Greek (Logos) which made the connection to Memra less obvious. Only after explicitly ensuring the unmistakable link of Memra/Word to the one true God by means of those two statements was the poem’s author ready to go on to the central purpose of John 1:1 expressed in the earth-shaking revelatory statement in John 1:14 that “the Memra/ Word became flesh and dwelt among us”. Rarely in the history of human language has anything so astonishingly profound been stated within the compass of so few words.

## **Yahweh dwells among His people**

What does it mean to say that Yahweh’s presence and glory indwelt Jesus? Or that Yahweh God’s “fullness” dwelt in him bodily? The word “fullness” (*plērōma*) is the noun derived from the verb “to fill” (*plēroō*). The words “dwell” and “fill” are precisely the words associated in the OT with the coming of Yahweh to dwell among His people in the structure or building prepared for Him, either as tent (tabernacle) or temple. Yahweh’s presence and glory became visible as a great shining cloud when it filled the tabernacle or the Temple; this



is something mentioned many times in the OT. The Targums and the Talmud described this as the “Shekinah,” a term which was synonymous with the *Memra* (*Word*) as speaking of Yahweh and His glorious presence. The following are some of the references to “filling”:

#### Exodus 40

<sup>34</sup> Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD (Yahweh) *filled* the tabernacle. <sup>35</sup> And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD (Yahweh) *filled* the tabernacle.

#### 1Kings 8

<sup>10</sup> And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, a cloud *filled* the house of the LORD (Yahweh), <sup>11</sup> so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD (Yahweh) *filled* the house of the LORD (Yahweh). (So also 2Chron.5:13,14).

#### 2 Chronicles 7

<sup>1</sup> As soon as Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD *filled* the temple. <sup>2</sup> And the priests could not enter the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD *filled* the LORD’s house. <sup>3</sup> When all the people of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory of the LORD on the temple, they bowed down with their faces to the ground on the pavement and worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD, saying, “For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.”

## Isaiah 6

<sup>3</sup> And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is *full* of his glory!” <sup>4</sup> And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was *filled* with smoke.

## Ezekiel 10

<sup>3</sup> Now the cherubim were standing on the south side of the house, when the man went in, and a cloud *filled* the inner court. <sup>4</sup> And the glory of the LORD went up from the cherub to the threshold of the house, and the house was *filled* with the cloud, and the court was *filled* with the brightness of the glory of the LORD.

An echo of the foregoing verses, in the form of wind and fire at the coming of Yahweh’s Spirit, is seen in Acts 2, where what is filled is not just the house but the church, the body of Christ, which is God’s temple to be filled with God’s fullness (*plērōma*), as in Ephesians 3:19, “that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

## Acts 2

<sup>2</sup> And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it *filled* the entire house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. <sup>4</sup> And they were all *filled* with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> For the word “filled” in the OT texts, it is the Hebrew rather than

J. Rutherford, in ISBE, provides an elaborate and imaginative theological description of what he considers to be the meaning of the “fullness” of God: “The fullness of the Godhead is the totality of the Divine powers and attributes, all the wealth of the being and of the nature of God—eternal, infinite, unchangeable in existence, in knowledge, in wisdom, in power, in holiness, in goodness, in truth, in love. This is the fullness of the nature of God—life, light, love; and this has its permanent, its settled abode in Christ.”

The word “abode” in the last sentence fits in precisely with the Greek word for “dwell” in John 1:14. The amazing revelation made in this verse is that Yahweh’s presence and glory came to dwell among men in the person of Jesus Christ:

**John 1:14a:** “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us”

**Colossians 2:9:** “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.”

When we compare John 1:14 with Colossians 2:9, the parallels are striking:

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the Greek that matters. The Hebrew word was translated in the LXX by both *plēroō* and *pimplēmi*, but the latter was used more frequently. By contrast, *pimplēmi* is much less frequent in the NT than *plēroō*, and in fact does not occur after Acts. So the evidence appears to indicate that *pimplēmi* was being replaced in general use by its synonym *plēroō*. Unlike *plēroō*, *pimplēmi* does not have a noun form, so *plērōma* would serve both verbs.

(1) The Word/Memra is reflected in the phrase “the whole fullness of the deity”;

(2) “Became flesh” has its parallel in “bodily”;

(3) “Dwelt” or “dwells” are in both verses; the idea of the human body as a “tent” in which man dwells at the present time is seen in 2Cor.5:4. The idea of Yahweh dwelling among human beings is a crowning idea in the book of Revelation: “I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell (the same word in Greek as in Jn.1:14) with (*meta*) them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with (*meta*) them as their God” (Rev.21:3). The “with” (*meta*) in “with them” is the same word as in Matthew 1:23, “Immanuel” {Isaiah 7:14}—which means, “God with (*meta*) us” (NIV), the One who dwells with us.

“Deity” in Colossians 2:9 is *theotēs*, a rare word that occurs only in this verse in the NT. This word is not to be confused with the synonymous *theiotēs* in Romans 1:20. Thayer’s *Lexicon* suggests the following difference between the two words, “θεότης [*theotēs*] deity differs from θειότης [*theiotēs*] divinity, as essence differs from quality or attribute” (Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon*).

The significance of this for our understanding of both Colossians 2:9 and John 1:14 is that the coming of the Word/Memra in the person of Christ was not just an external manifestation of Yahweh’s glorious presence, but that the whole essence of His Person came to dwell in Christ bodily.

This is emphasized not only by the word “deity,” but also by the words “the whole fullness”. This is something amazing and wonderful. What is stated in Colossians 2:9 is also affirmed in Colossians 1:19 in an abbreviated form: “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him.”

When it says that the whole fullness of God came to dwell in Christ bodily, the Scripture is certainly not indicating that God had ceased to be omnipresent and that now He was wholly contained in Christ. Such a notion would be, Biblically speaking, unthinkable. Yahweh’s omnipresence is one of His inalienable attributes, just like His omnipotence and omniscience. But what is here clearly being affirmed is that the very essence of His being came to indwell Christ.

“In the beginning,” in Genesis, Yahweh walked in the Garden of Eden and communicated on evidently intimate terms with Adam and Eve; this intimate communication reached its apex in the OT in His “face to face” relationship with Moses (Deut. 34:10). But with Israel’s persistent decline into idolatry and polytheism, the distance between Yahweh and His people increased accordingly, until the national cataclysm of the Exile ended its existence as a nation. Even when the people were permitted to return to their deserted and impoverished land some seventy years later, when they began to return initially as a small trickle of rather disoriented people under Ezra and Nehemiah, only a few prophets of Yahweh spoke to them at that time, and the people’s response appears to have been generally poor.

Not long afterwards, the prophetic voice ceased altogether, and would not be heard again for four centuries. It appeared as though Yahweh had broken off communications with Israel but for the fact that the last of the OT prophets, Malachi, before God's "spiritual radio transmissions were switched off" so to speak, proclaimed a final declaration from Yahweh, which said, "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD (Yahweh) of hosts" (Mal.3:1).

Here Yahweh declared that He would in due time resume communication with His people. His messenger (who Jesus identified as John the Baptist, cf. Mt.11:14 with Mal.4:5 etc, and who is mentioned in John 1:6) would "prepare the way *before me*," and what else can this mean but that Yahweh Himself was coming? This is made even more plain, if possible, by the statement that the Lord "will suddenly (i.e. unexpectedly) come to *His temple*," to dwell among His people as in John 1:14. "The messenger of the covenant" (apparently not the same person as the first mentioned messenger) would then be a reference to Christ through whom Yahweh would establish a new covenant. The Good News, indeed, the wonderful news, was that Yahweh would break through all the barriers hitherto standing between God and man: He would "rend the heavens and come down" (Isa.64:1) as those who sought Him, and delighted in Him, had pleaded for.

## Chapter 10



# Yahweh “came down” and “dwelt among us” in Christ

<sup>1</sup> “Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence—<sup>2</sup> as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil—to make your name known to your adversaries, and that the nations might tremble at your presence! <sup>3</sup> When you did awesome things that we did not look for, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.” (Isaiah 64:1-3)

**N**otice that “your presence” appears in every one of these three verses. The longing expressed here is that just as Yahweh had come down in an earth-shaking manifestation of His glory in full view of all the people of Israel at Mount Sinai, so may He manifest Himself once again in such a way that the nations may know His presence. This longing and plea would find an amazing fulfillment in Christ.

## **The Word/Memra descended from above and “became flesh”**

The Word is the subject of the Johannine Prologue (1:1-18), after which it is not referred to again in the Gospel account; yet it cannot be denied that the idea of the Word/Memra permeates the subject of the entire Gospel. The Prologue and the Gospel are not independent of each other. It is in the rest of the Gospel that the Word (Logos) of the Prologue is seen in “flesh and blood” in the person of Jesus. Some of Jesus’ sayings in John can hardly be explained except as the Logos speaking through him, and it is evident that Jesus knowingly spoke as the one in whom the Word “became flesh,” as the poetic language of the Prologue expresses it. This expression certainly does not mean that the Word changed into “flesh,” but that in Christ the Word entered into a body of flesh and blood, into human life, and “dwelt among us”. Jesus, for his part, was fully aware that his body was the temple of God (John 2:21), and that the Father, Yahweh, has come into the world in the Word which indwelt him.

It is not possible for us to properly understand the language and imagery of John’s Gospel unless we grasp the fundamental OT message about Yahweh’s coming down to earth—as is seen so often in Genesis, or at Mount Sinai, or in one form or another: such as His “word” in Isaiah 55:11, or as the special “angel of Yahweh,” or in the Targums as the Memra (Word) and the Shekinah. The last two are given expression in the poetic context of John 1:1 (Word/Memra) and John 1:14 (dwell/Shekinah) respectively.



It will help us to understand the powerful message of John's Gospel better if we compare the OT message of Yahweh's coming down to earth with the Word/Memra's coming into the world in the person of Jesus Christ. Here is a summary of some of the OT references:

### **The idea of Yahweh's coming down**

The idea of Yahweh's coming down to earth is something that is seen throughout Scripture; even the words "came down" or "come down" are specifically used:

**Genesis 11:5:** "Yahweh came down" – to inspect the tower of Babel

**Exodus 19:20:** (cf. v11): "Yahweh came down" – on Mt. Sinai

**Numbers 11:25:** "Yahweh came down" – and spoke to Moses

**Numbers 12:5:** "Yahweh came down" – and spoke to Aaron and Miriam

**Psalms 144:5:** "Bow your heaven, O Yahweh, and come down!"

**Isaiah 31:4:** "Yahweh of hosts will come down to fight on Mt. Zion"

**Micah 1:3:** "Yahweh is coming out of His place, and will come down"

These are some of the many references (see other instances below) which make it evident that Yahweh's coming down to earth is no newfangled idea; it was something He did already from the beginning. The prophet Isaiah proclaimed that Yahweh would come in such a manner that "the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and *all flesh shall see it together*, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken" (Isa.40:5). These words show that this was to be an event of *universal* proportions. The God who came down to save a people enslaved in Egypt in ancient times, will He not come again in "the last days" to save mankind from sin? Is not this the message of the Bible?

**Isaiah 64:1** "Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down". The word "rend" means to tear something open or apart like a cloth or a garment, and is therefore a forceful expression. Interestingly, a corresponding expression is found in Mark 1:10, "As Jesus was coming up out of the water, *he saw heaven being torn open* and the Spirit descending on him like a dove". The Greek word translated as "torn open" is the same word used in Matthew 27:51 of the curtain in the temple being torn in two and of the rocks of nearby tombs being split apart (cf. v.52) at the moment of Christ's death on the cross. Thus the coming down of the Spirit of Yahweh upon Jesus at the commencement of his ministry is revealed as being another vital step in the fulfillment of Yahweh's response to the plea to "rend the heavens and come down" and bring salvation to Israel and to mankind.

**Psalm 18:9** “He bowed the heavens also, and came down” (also 2Sam.22:10). Here the vivid poetic picture is that of making the high and inaccessible heights of the heavens bow down so low that it touches the earth, such that Yahweh could step down upon the earth. A similar picture is painted in **Psalm 144:5**, “Bow your heavens, O LORD, and come down! Touch the mountains so that they smoke!” The same Hebrew word translated as “bow down” in these verses appears also in **Job 9:8**, but most translation choose to translate the word here as “stretch out”: “who alone stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the sea,” but this translation makes it difficult to see any connection between stretching out the heavens and His coming down to tread upon the waves. There would be no such difficulty if He “bowed down the heavens and trampled the waves of the sea”. The picture of His treading upon the waves, and thereby subduing them, is another of the many descriptions in the OT of Yahweh’s concern about the turmoil in the world and His coming down to deal with it. This fact was memorably portrayed by the calming of the storm on the Lake of Galilee (Mt.8:24-27; cf. Ps.107:29,30).

**T**he saving of the Israelites out of Egypt under Moses’ leadership, and the events of the Exodus as a whole are, typologically, the model of salvation in John’s Gospel. Just as Yahweh was personally involved throughout the process of the Exodus, so also He was personally involved throughout the whole process of mankind’s salvation through Christ in

this Gospel. This is why references to the Exodus events occupy an important place in John's Gospel. For example, Yahweh's provision of manna in the wilderness is the theme for the whole of John chapter 6, a very long chapter in which Jesus evidently speaks as the incarnate Word, the life-giving Word which, like the manna, is to be internalized or (metaphorically speaking) "eaten".

Jesus described the saving character of his ministry by referring to the instruction Yahweh had given to Moses to lift up a bronze serpent in the desert so that all who looked at it by faith would be saved from the deadly venom of the serpents that had bitten them (Jn.3:14,15; Num.21:7-9).

The Feast of the Passover is mentioned more frequently in John than in any other gospel. The importance of this feast lay in the fact that the Jews who obeyed Yahweh's instructions to put the blood of a lamb on the lintel of their doors immediately before the impending judgment against Egypt, were spared from the plague which killed all the firstborn in Egypt (Ex.12:13,21ff).

Without understanding *Yahweh's direct personal involvement in the processes of salvation*, whether that of the Exodus or that in Christ, no correct understanding of the NT revelation of salvation can be attained. This is clearly seen in the following verses in regard to the Exodus, where again they speak of His having "come down":

**Exodus 3:7,8:** Then the LORD said, “I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, and *I have come down to deliver them* out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey.”

**Exodus 19:10,11:** The LORD said to Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments and be ready for the third day. For on the third day *the LORD will come down* on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.”

Yahweh is even portrayed as personally marching at the head of the armies of Israel, leading them forward to the land of promise. The Bible (unlike the scholars) is certainly not afraid of “anthropomorphism”:

**Judges 5:3-5:** “Listen, you kings! Give ear, you princes! From me, from me comes a song for Yahweh. I shall glorify Yahweh, God of Israel. Yahweh, when you set out from Seir, when you marched from the field of Edom, the earth shook, the heavens pelted, the clouds pelted down water. The mountains melted before Yahweh of Sinai, before Yahweh, God of Israel.” (NJB)

**Psalms 68:7,8:** “O God, when you went out before your people, when you marched through the wilderness, the earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain, before God, the One of Sinai, before God, the God of Israel.”

Yahweh's having "come down to deliver" (Exodus 3:8) His people is strikingly reflected in Jesus' use of precisely this kind of expression. In Exodus 3:8 "come down" in the LXX is *katabainō*, so also in Exodus 19:11 quoted above. This is also the word used in John 6 where Jesus describes himself in terms of the manna, the bread of life, which "came down" from heaven; in this connection *katabainō*, "to come down from above, to descend," occurs 7 times in Jesus' discourse on the bread from heaven in John 6:

**6:33:** For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

**6:38:** For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.

**6:41:** So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven."

**6:42:** They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven?'"

**6:50:** This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die.

**6:51:** I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.

**6:58:** This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.

Like the “bread,” the Holy Spirit is also described as having descended (*katabainō*) from heaven (Jn.1:32,33; Mt.3:16; Mk. 1:10; Lk.3:22).

Jesus did not descend physically from heaven; he was born in Bethlehem. It was the Word/Memra of Yahweh that “descended” into the world in him. From this it becomes clear that it is the Memra that is speaking in and through Jesus, and Jesus himself is perfectly aware of this fact. This is one vital aspect of the Father’s speaking through him, “The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works” (Jn.14:10). “For he whom God has sent utters the words of God” (Jn.3:34).

The aptness of comparing the Word with “bread” (the word “bread” also means “food”) is something familiar to the reader of the OT. In Ezekiel the word of God is given to the prophet in the form of a scroll and he was instructed to eat it (Ezek.3:1-3); similarly in Jeremiah: “When your words (pl. of *logos*, LXX) came, I devoured them: your word (*logos*, LXX) was my delight and the joy of my heart; for I was called by your Name, Yahweh, God Sabaoth [LORD of Hosts]” (Jer.15:16, NJB) (cp. Revelation 10:9; also Job 23:12).

Directly related to the word “descend” in John 6 is the word “ascend”:

**John 3:13**, “No one has ascended (*anabainō*) into heaven except him who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.” In these words of Jesus, as in John 6, the word for “descend” is *katabainō*. The antonym of *katabainō* is, of course, *anabainō* “to ascend”. Both these words appear in this verse. *Anabainō*

is found also in 6:62, which is related in meaning to the foregoing verses.

**John 6:62**, “Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?” The descent of the Word/Memra embodied in “the man Christ Jesus” (1Tim.2:5), the Son of Man, will climax in the ascent following his resurrection. Again, “ascending to where he was before” can only apply to the Word, not to “the man Christ Jesus,” otherwise Jesus would not be a human being as we are. This is not to deny the ascension of Jesus as reported in Acts 1:9-11, but to point out that Jesus’ words “where he was before” refers specifically to the Word/Memra, who having dwelt in Christ “bodily” (Col.2:9), returned to heaven in Christ at his ascension.

Also semantically related are the following:

**John 8:23**, “He said to them, ‘You are from below; I am from above (*anō*). You are of this world; I am not of this world.’” What “from above” (the related word *anōthen* “from above” occurs 5 times in John, 13 times in NT, hence it is a key word in John) means in this context must be determined by what “from below” means. “From below” is explained in this verse as “of this world”; and this is explained in John 3:31 as meaning “belongs to the earth” in contrast to the one who is “from above,” who is not “earthly” but spiritual: “He who comes from above (*anōthen*) is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all.” (John 3:31) These are



not Jesus' words; they are likely to be those of John the Baptist, who is certainly speaking in the previous verse. "He who comes from above" can hardly be any other in John's Gospel than the Memra.

Regarding "above all" in Jn.3:31, this is beautifully ascribed to Yahweh in this doxology: "Yours, O LORD (Yahweh), is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head *above all*" (1Chr.29:11); and in the Levitical song of praise, "Stand up and bless the LORD your God from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted *above all* blessing and praise" (Neh. 9:5); this suggests that He is exalted beyond all praise that man can give, "blessed be your glorious name, surpassing all blessing and praise!" (NJB). The same theme is heard in Psalm 89:6,7; 95:3; 96:4; 97:9; etc. This is summed up in Psalm 113:4, "The LORD is high *above all* nations, and his glory above the heavens!"

But also important for our understanding of "above all" is the fact that Yahweh, as the one who is "above all," exalts those who are faithful to Him to a position of being "above all" relative to those around them. The OT provides a number of examples: Deuteronomy 7:14, "You shall be blessed above all peoples"; so also Deut.10:15; 26:19; 28:1; of individuals 2Sam.6:21; Dan.6:3. This is applied to Christ in the following magnificent passage in Ephesians 1:

<sup>19</sup> and what is the immeasurable greatness of his (God's) power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might <sup>20</sup> that he (God) worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, <sup>21</sup> far *above all* rule and authority and power and dominion, and *above every name* that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. <sup>22</sup> And he put all things under his feet and gave him as *head over all things* to the church.

This is neatly epitomized in the words in Acts 10:36, “he is Lord of all”.

## The significance of ‘*exerchomai*’ in John: The Word/Memra came into the world in Christ and dwelt among us

Inseparably related to the above are the following verses where the same theme is expressed through the word *exerchomai* (ἐξέρχομαι). This word is of great significance for understanding the Word/ Memra as having come into the world from God. In its use with reference to the incarnate Word/ Memra, it is unique to John's Gospel; here are some of its occurrences:

Interestingly, in John **8:42**, Jesus uses 3 different words for “come”: “I came from God (lit. I came out of God, *ek tou theou exēlthon*, aor. act. *exerchomai*) and I am here (*hēkō*). I came (*elēlutha*, the perfect of *erchomai*) not of my own accord, but he sent me.”

**13:3**, “Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come (*exerchomai*) from God and was going back to God”

**16:27,28**, “for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came (*exerchomai*) from God. I came (*exerchomai*) from the Father and have come (*erchomai*) into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father.” (cf.v.30)

**17:8**, “For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came (*exerchomai*) from you; and they have believed that you sent me.”

Would anyone wish to suggest that Jesus is saying in the foregoing verses that he descended physically from heaven? <sup>52</sup> Surely not! That would be to ignore his statement that his words are “spirit and life” (Jn.6:63); it would also deny John 1:14 since it makes the incarnation (his birth) redundant and meaningless if Jesus actually came to earth in a physical body. But if these sayings do not refer to a physical descent of Jesus into the world, is it not perfectly plain then that *he is speaking of himself in terms of the Word/Memra incarnate*? Therefore, in John, the Word constitutes the central element in the life of “the son of man,” Jesus the Christ. All through John’s Gospel, Jesus speaks and acts as the Word incarnate. Jesus was fully

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<sup>52</sup> That is, descended in the way the manna was thought to have descended—although apparently no one actually saw the manna descend: it appeared on the ground in the early morning, Ex.16.14.

conscious of the incarnate Word/Memra working powerfully in him, while he himself lived in complete unity with the Word. Not to understand this central fact is not to understand John at all.

It is precisely these statements about Jesus' having come from God which those from a trinitarian background have become accustomed to take as meaning that he is speaking as "God the Son," since these could not refer to his having physically come from God. It may still not be easy for them to grasp the fact that it was *the Word* that came into the world, that it was *the Word* that "became flesh"; *and the Word is not "God the Son" in the Scriptures*. The Word is a metonym for Yahweh; it represents His "fullness" as Paul calls it (Col.1:19; 2:9) which dwelt "bodily" in Christ. So it was Yahweh's Presence and power that was "in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (2Cor.5:19). The moment we lose our grip on these essential Biblical truths, we slip back into the error of trinitarianism and lose sight of the glorious reality revealed in the NT that, in Christ, Yahweh came down and dwelt among us, and in Christ accomplished our salvation.

### **"I came (exerchomai) from God"**

*Exerchomai* ("come forth from") could also tell us something about the *nature* of Yahweh's Word such as in Psalm 33:6: "By the word of Yahweh the heavens were made, by the breath of his mouth all their array" (NJB). Does this not tell us something important about the Word? The Word not only

came from the Father into the world, but he *came out of* the Father as His *expressed* Word (cf. Num.16:35, “fire came out from (*exerchomai*) the LORD”). *The Word came forth from the inner being of the Father as His self-expression, self-revelation*, just as His breath or Spirit proceeds from His inmost being to accomplish His eternal purposes.

All these many verses about “coming” or “coming down” reflect what was stated about the Word/Logos in the Prologue: the Word has come, or descended, into the world where “he became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn.1:14) in “the man Christ Jesus” (1Ti.2:5; etc). In all four gospels, Christ’s preferred way of referring to himself was as “the son of man” (in John cf. 1:51; 3:13,14, etc). In John’s Gospel there is specific emphasis on Jesus being “the Christ,” the Messiah; yet Jesus never applied the title to himself.

To understand all this is also to understand that trinitarian Christology, which came into its full development and expression in the Gentile church in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries (and with it the doctrine of the Trinity), cannot find any legitimate support in John. For *nowhere in John is the Word/Logos ever thought of as a person independent of God and equal with Him*, as is taught in the doctrine of the Trinity. There is nothing in the Johannine Word/ Logos that could properly be developed into such a doctrine.

## **Let us remember: Memra is a metonym of Yahweh, not of Jesus!**

John's Gospel begins in its very first verse with a three-fold reference to the Word; this in itself should have made it perfectly clear what the central theme of this gospel is about; but blinded by trinitarianism we missed even what is clear as day. The Word/ Memra was a metonym for Yahweh, *with special reference to His creative and self-revelatory work*, as every Jew of John's day knew. So it would have been absolutely clear to the first Jewish readers of the gospel that it speaks of Yahweh's saving work through Christ. The fact that Yahweh is the center of this work in Christ is confirmed statistically by the fact that "the Father" is mentioned 120 times in Jesus' teaching in John's gospel, far more than in any other gospel; so the Father is clearly the central theme. In contrast, "the son" (*ho huios*) occurs 44 times in John, but only 35 of these refer to Christ. He spoke of himself as "the son of man".

Word/Memra is *not* a metonym of Christ, yet trinitarian interpretation forcibly treats it as such. In fact, if a metonym is involved, the text already itself explains it in the words "the Word was *pros* God". As we have seen, if *pros* is taken *referentially*, it would be saying that the Word was a way of referring to Yahweh, indicating that it is here being used as a metonym for Him; in this way the reader is being explicitly informed of this fact even if he did not know it before. But trinitarianism insists on translating the *pros* as "with," with the fixed purpose of making "the Word" a person distinct and

independent from God, and then elevates this “person” to equality with God as “God the Son”.

### **The four ‘must’s of trinitarianism in John 1:1**

Let us rehearse again, even at the risk of repetition, for the sake of attaining as great a level of clarity as possible on this important matter, the several steps which trinitarianism took to achieve its objective of deifying Jesus: (1) *pros* must be taken as meaning “with” and nothing else; the average reader is not given any idea from the translations that there are other options; (2) it is possible to accept *pros* as meaning “with” without affecting the monotheistic understanding of it, because it would mean that the Word is thus being spoken about in metaphorical terms common in the OT both in regard to the “Word” (e.g. Ps.33:6) and also with regard to Wisdom, as in Proverbs; but trinitarianism *has to turn what is metaphorical into the literal*: the Word must be interpreted as meaning that it is an actual person; (3) this “person” is *elevated* to equality with God *in substance*, or as the Nicene Creed puts it, “of the same substance (*homoousion*) as the Father”; to achieve this, *theos* (God) in the third clause of John 1:1 must be reduced to mean “divine nature” or “substance,” for a second “God” is not necessarily equal to the first in “substance” and would, therefore, be an inferior “God”; (4) this “person,” the Word, must be *equated* with Jesus Christ—trinitarianism has, in effect, made the Word a metonym of Jesus instead of Yahweh (!)—even though Jesus is not mentioned by name until John

1:17! This is indeed to read a whole series of ideas into the text which do not exist in the text at all. In short, it is the product of pure fabrication!

The trinitarian dogma can only survive within the narrow limits of these four ‘must’s; and if even just one of these fails under careful Biblical scrutiny, the whole case collapses. Yet, in the light of Scripture, not even one of these ‘must’s can stand up to exegetical examination, as we have seen earlier. The whole trinitarian dogmatic structure is thus found to be built on the sand of the misinterpretation of Scripture.

## **John’s two main themes: the Word/Memra and the Shekinah**

At the time of the early church, the Jews who read John’s Gospel would quickly have recognized its two main themes: the *Memra* and the *Shekinah*. How the two are related in the gospel is stated in John 1:14: “The *Word* (Memra) became flesh and *dwelt among us* (Shekinah)”. The whole Gospel expounds these two central themes. We have given an outline of the Word or Memra of Yahweh having “come” or “come down” and was embodied or “enfleshed” in the person of Jesus Christ; in him Yahweh dwelt among us. We remember that in the OT, the “tent of meeting,” and later the Temple, was where Yahweh’s Shekinah or presence “rested” (*Shakan*, “settle down, abide, dwell” (BDB *Hebrew-English Lexicon*), the verbal root of Shekinah; its Greek equivalent *menō* appears 40 times in John’s Gospel, cp. Mat: 3 times; Mk:2; Lk:7). The



amazing message of the NT, expressed succinctly in John 1:14, is that Yahweh came to dwell among us in Christ. The body of Christ was Yahweh's Temple.

## Jesus, God's Temple: John 2:19

**John 2:19**, 'Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

<sup>20</sup> The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?"

<sup>21</sup> But he was speaking about the temple of his body.

<sup>22</sup> When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.'

This public statement to the Jews is of great importance both in what is said (namely, that his body is God's temple, v.21, cp. 1Cor.6:19) and in its consequence (it was brought against him at his trial and condemnation before the Sanhedrin, Mt.26:61; Mk. 14:58).

The temple in Jerusalem was known to the Jews as the temple of Yahweh. Therefore, for Jesus to claim that he is God's temple is to claim that Yahweh indwells him. This is consistent with his teaching in John, where it is the Father who is at work in him in all that he does and says. In saying that he is Yahweh's temple, he is not claiming that he himself is Yahweh (or the Jews would have stoned him for blasphemy long before he got to the Sanhedrin) but that Yahweh indwells

him as, for example, in John 14:10, “the Father who dwells in me”.

There is, however, a major problem in John 2:19. Jesus is quoted as saying, “I will raise it [Greek: active] up”. This is in contradiction both to the immediate context and to the whole teaching of the NT. Even in the immediate context, only three verses further on, it is stated that “he was raised [Greek: passive] from the dead” (Jn.2:22) i.e. *God* raised him. The latter corresponds to the message of the NT as a whole which consistently declares that it was God who raised him from the dead; nowhere does it say that he raised himself.

That God raised him from the dead is proclaimed throughout the NT: Ac.2:24,32; 3:15,26; 13:30; Rom.4:24; 6:4 (note the unusual: “raised through the glory of the Father”); 8:11; 1Co.15:4,12 (the “divine passive” in both, just as in Jn.2:22); Gal.1:1; Eph.1:20; Col.2:12; 1Pet.1:21.

The evidence, therefore, is overwhelming that it was God the Father who raised Jesus from the dead. How then are the words “I will raise it up” to be understood? Do John 10:17,18 provide some explanation?

**John 10:17,18:** “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up (*lambanō*, λαμβάνω) again. <sup>18</sup> No one takes (*airō*) it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority (*exousia*, “freedom of choice, right”) to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up (*lambanō*) again. This charge I have received (*lambanō*) from my Father.”

To “take it up again” seems to imply that he would raise himself from the dead. But is this the proper translation? Notice that *lambanō* occurs three times in these two verses, but the translators have chosen, for reasons best known to themselves, to translate the first two as “take it up” and the last as “receive”. What problem do they see in translating “I lay down my life that I may *receive* it again (from the Father)”? The word *lambanō* can mean either “receive” or “take,” the choice being decided by the context. Of the three occurrences in Jn.10:17,18, the last of them, in its context, can only be translated as “receive”. But what is there in the context of the first two occurrences that requires the translation “take”? It is clear that it is not the context but the translators’ preference that caused them to translate it in this way.

Moreover, *lambanō* is used 46 times (in 41 verses) in John, and in less than one quarter of these does it have the meaning “take”. In the other more than 30 instances it has the meaning “receive”. In view of this evidence, it seems clear that what Jesus says in John 10:17,18 is that he freely lays down his life and, because his life is one that is pleasing to the Father, he knows that he will *receive it again* from the Father.

But we are still left with the problem as to how Jesus’ words “I will raise it up (i.e. his body)” (Jn.2:19) can be reconciled with the unanimous message of the NT, including John 2:22, that the Father raised him up. Is an answer to be found in 14:24, “the word that you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me”? Could it be that it is *the Father* who is speaking in and through Jesus? But how can it be said that the “body” (2:21) is the Father’s body? If the body is God’s temple (2:19),

and temple = body, then God's temple is God's "body". Colossians 2:9 may also be relevant here, "For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells *bodily*"; hence Jesus' body is, in this significant sense, the Father's body.

We, specifically our bodies, are also described as being the temple of God or of the Spirit of God (1 Cor.6:19); does that not mean that we, too, constitute God's "body" in the world today, the place where He dwells and manifests Himself to the world?

While Jesus is never said to raise himself up, he has been given the authority from the Father to raise the dead on the day of resurrection (Jn.6:39,40, etc). Could "his body" refer to the church (in the way Paul described it later) being raised on that Day? This interpretation is unworkable because of the reference to the "three days" in John 2:19, which would not fit in with the resurrection of believers at the Lord's coming in the future. If this alternative cannot be established exegetically, we are left only with the previous one, namely, that it is *the Father* who (speaking through Christ) said "I will raise it up".

But if this is correct, then we must ask: Where else in Jesus' words is it actually the Father who is speaking and not Jesus himself? Thus, it could be that it is the Father who is speaking in some of the "I am" sayings (e.g. "before Abraham was, I am," Jn.8:58), not because of a supposed connection to Exodus 3 but because of the *content* of these sayings in John.

## The Shekinah

The Shekinah concept is woven into Jesus' teaching in John in other ways related to the concept of his body being the dwelling place of Yahweh. Inseparably connected, too, is the teaching of "abiding" and "oneness" with God, which are central elements in the concept. *Menō* "stay, live, dwell, lodge, abide" is, as we have seen, a key word in John's Gospel (40 times). A look at the meaning of *menō* immediately shows its affinity to the meaning of "Shekinah," which is explained in Wikipedia:

In Biblical Hebrew the word means literally *to settle, inhabit, or dwell*, and is used frequently in the Hebrew Bible. See Exodus 40:35—'Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting, for the cloud rested [*shakhan*] upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle'... In classic Jewish thought, the Shekhina refers to a dwelling or settling in a special sense, a dwelling or settling of divine presence. (art. *Shekhina*, an alternative spelling of Shekinah).

What needs to be noticed is the introduction of a new and utterly unique concept into the understanding of the Shekinah, namely, the equation of temple and body: "the temple of his body" (Jn. 2:21). The temple (and the tabernacle before it) was a structure made by human hands but the body, of course, is not (Mk.14:58, which is parallel to Jn.2:19). More important than this, the body is a living entity in contrast to the temple. As a living entity, the body can grow; this means that it is not something static but dynamic, something filled with life. It is interesting how Paul uses mixed metaphors of

a building and a body when speaking of its *growth*: “in whom (Christ) the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord” (Eph.2:21); compare this with Colossians 2:19: “the Head (Christ), from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God”; the Ephesian verse emphasizes the structure of the temple, while the Colossians verse portrays it as a body.

This also means that the Johannine concept of *menō* must, accordingly, also be understood as something *dynamic*, not static. This means that it cannot be taken as merely meaning “stay, remain” but as “dwell, live”. Moreover, it soon becomes evident that it refers to a dynamic *mutual* indwelling involving Christ and believers. This is stated clearly in the well-known metaphor of the vine: “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in (*menō en*) me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (Jn.15:5). “Bearing fruit” is the evidence of both life and growth as a result of this mutual “living in” (*menō en*) or indwelling.

The Apostle Paul says the same thing, but again by means of the picture of the body: “For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same *function*, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another” (Rom.12:4,5). The interrelatedness of the body and its members is self-evident; its dynamic character is brought out by the word “function” (*praxis*, deed,

action, practice, function), and as Paul pointed out in Colossians 2:19 (quoted above), the body “grows with a growth that is from God (Yahweh).”

Yahweh lives in this body as His temple (1Cor.3:16; 2Cor. 6:16). This mutual indwelling functions on the same basis as the mutual indwelling of Jesus and the Father, Yahweh: “Do you not believe that *I am in the Father and the Father is in me?* The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells (*menō*) in (*en*) me does his works” (Jn.14:10). This mutual indwelling is precisely what is meant by Jesus and the Father being “one,” a oneness that is not exclusive, but is meant to bring believers into participation in it:

“<sup>21</sup> that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. <sup>22</sup> The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, <sup>23</sup> I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me” (Jn.17:21-23).

As more believers are included into this oneness, it functions as a dynamic, growing structure or body, the whole being empowered by Yahweh’s indwelling Shekinah presence. Inclusion into this body by faith is what salvation, or receiving eternal life, means in John’s Gospel, where faith is not just “believing in” something but “believing into” someone (Christ) and is thus also dynamic in quality, for life is characterized by motion.

## Believing into

“Believe into” (*pisteuō eis*) is another central and foundational concept in John’s Gospel; the statistics speak for themselves: John’s Gospel, 34 times; Mat: 1; Mark: 1; Acts: 1; Rom: 3; 1Jn: 3. “Eis” does not just mean “in” but more specifically “into, toward, to” (cf. *Greek-English Lexicon*, BDAG). There are too many references to consider in detail here, but one verse that most Christians are familiar with is: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (Jn.3:16), but most Christians are not aware of the fact that “believe in” here is *pisteuō eis*, “believe into”.

What is the point of emphasizing the word “into”? The whole point is that in John, it is through “believing into” Christ that we are “in Christ” and he in us, and it is only “in him” that there is eternal life. Salvation is not a matter of standing at some distance away from Christ and “believing in” him. Believing means becoming a branch in the vine or a member of his living body. Salvation is not in the believing or faith as such, but it is found in the person who is the object of that faith; therefore, only the believing that moves a person “into” Christ results in participating in eternal life.

The same truth is put in a contrasting but complementary way such that instead of speaking of our entering into Christ, we receive Christ into our inner being by “eating” him—another way of portraying the act of believing. This is the picture that Jesus paints in John 6 (esp. vv.54,56,57,58). The result is that Jesus can speak both of being *in us* and also of us



as being *in him*; this mutual indwelling, this sharing of life, is central to John's Gospel. The "internalizing," or receiving into our innermost being, by way of the metaphorical "eating his flesh" and "drinking his blood," is something symbolized by the Lord's Supper; but the symbol is empty and meaningless without the reality of the shared life in mutual indwelling.

### Spiritual union

Mutual indwelling is the dynamic of the spiritual union and oneness between the Father (Yahweh) and Jesus: "I and the Father are one" (Jn.10:30). This living union extends outwards to embrace the disciples of Jesus, and all believers who have a faith that "internalizes" ("eats") Jesus, as is seen in the following verses.

**John 17:** <sup>11</sup> "that they may be one, even as we are one" ... <sup>21</sup> "that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. <sup>22</sup> The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, <sup>23</sup> I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me."

Yahweh is the center of this union which radiates outwards to include all believers, uniting them to Him in a vital spiritual bond through which His life, which is eternal life, is infused into our lives and steadily transforms us into new

persons. This union is, therefore, a spiritual reality of great importance to the Apostle Paul: “He who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him” (1Cor.6:17). It is important to understand, as most Christians apparently do not, that for Paul salvation is the result of reconciliation (2Cor:5:18-20; Eph.2:16; Col.1:20), and reconciliation results in union (Rom.6:5). This union will eventually have cosmic proportions: Ephesians 1:10, “as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth”; Colossians 1:20, “and through him (Christ) to reconcile to himself (Yahweh God) all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”

### **Conclusion: “God was in Christ”**

There are basically three factors that need to be kept in view if we are to grasp this matter clearly:

(1) Jesus is true man. But this fact in itself is insufficient to accomplish the salvation of mankind; nor, indeed, can it account for the person, life, and work of Jesus as presented in John’s Gospel and in the Pauline writings. The magnitude of the work of salvation could never have been accomplished by man alone, no matter how great the man. It had to be *God’s* work, but God’s work accomplished through a man. But only a perfect man could offer the perfect and acceptable sacrifice for sin. How could any man attain perfection in this world? Hebrews says that he was “perfected through suffering” and that “he learnt obedience through suffering” (Heb.2:10; 5:8).

“Learnt” indicates effort on Jesus’ part; being perfected was not something passively attained.

Yet suffering is something common to much of human experience; multitudes of people suffer in this world in one way or another, and often in the most intense ways. Paul himself suffered for the sake of the gospel far beyond what most people have ever had to endure as we can see from the outline of it which he provides (2Cor.11:23-30); yet in spite of all this suffering, he acknowledged that he had not yet attained perfection, nor did he expect to until the resurrection (Phil.3:11-13). What this clearly means is that perfection is unattainable in this life which, then, also means that Jesus’ perfection is not something that can be credited simply to suffering, necessary as it is in the process of perfection, but that it was something which he attained above all by Yahweh’s indwelling presence and empowerment. In other words, Jesus’ attainment of perfection is a miracle which Yahweh accomplished in him. Put in another way, Jesus is himself Yahweh’s miracle.

While Jesus is truly and entirely man, we do not really begin to comprehend his humanity at all until we perceive his uniqueness as the perfect man, and that his uniqueness is characterized by Yahweh’s unique indwelling presence in him. To speak of Jesus as “only human” is to fail to understand the marvel of Yahweh’s presence and work in him resulting in his being Yahweh’s miracle.

The error of the various kinds of teaching labeled in theology as “Arianism,” “Adoptionism,” and “Unitarianism” (of which there are, apparently, many varieties) lies, among other things, in the failure to perceive the nature of Yahweh’s

union with Jesus which transformed him into a human being of the kind that had never existed before—the miracle of the perfect man. This is also fundamentally different from trinitarianism which makes Jesus perfect by, in effect, deification through a kind of quasi-physical union with a Biblically unknown person they call “God the Son”.

(2) The trinitarian view is well-known, so I shall keep this outline brief. This view is that “God the Son” came into the world incarnate in Jesus in order to save mankind. He was united to Jesus in such a way that he can be called the “God-man,” a union of a kind that resulted in a being who is both “true God and true man”. The fundamental problem of this view is that there is simply no such person as “God the Son” in the Bible, no matter how high or how low one searches. It derives primarily from the misinterpretation of Scripture, especially John 1:1. And the problem with the idea of a “true God and true man” is that it ends up with a being who is neither truly man nor truly God.

But the most serious erroneous consequence of this misinterpretation is the use of the Biblically nonexistent entity named “God the Son” to displace Yahweh as the one who, both by prophetic promise and expectation, was to “come down” for the salvation of Israel and the world. Trinitarians identified “God the Son” with Jesus Christ as being one and the same person, the former being incarnate as the latter, and all this without any valid Biblical justification. They daringly replaced the “First Person” (who presumably represents Yahweh in trinitarian dogma) by means of the “Second

Person” as the one who came into the world to save mankind. So the glory goes to the “Second” person, who by his central role marginalizes the “First” person. I shudder to think what the consequences of all this will be at the Judgment.

(3) All the Biblical evidence is done justice to when we see that the glorious NT message is that Yahweh has personally come into the world in the human person of Jesus Christ. Yahweh’s special presence uniquely lived in him. This indwelling is the basis for a profound spiritual union with Jesus—a union fundamentally different from the quasi-physical union of the “second person” of the trinitarian “Godhead” with the man Jesus to constitute the trinitarian Christ; by “quasi-physical” (for lack of a better term) is meant the kind of union of flesh and spirit in the person of Jesus which, according to trinitarianism, must have taken place at the incarnation of “God the Son”. But in the Biblical teaching, the process of indwelling began at Jesus’ birth, which explains the meaning and significance of the Virgin Birth.

This is not to say that Yahweh’s being was wholly encompassed in Christ without remainder. Yahweh being omnipresent, whom “heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain” (1Ki.8:27; 2Chr. 2:6; 6:18), could not be embodied in Christ in this way. What the NT does say is that His “fullness” (*plērōma*), “the full measure of deity” (*Greek-English Lexicon*, BDAG re. Col.2:9; 1:19), or what might be described as Yahweh’s “essential being” as represented by His Word, dwelt in Jesus bodily. To speak of “measure” in relation to “deity” is to speak in highly metaphorical terms, but metaphorical of

what? “Measure” indicates a limit, whereas Yahweh is limitless. The limitation, then, is not on the part of Yahweh but on the part of the recipient of His fullness. Any other person besides Yahweh must, in the nature of the case, be limited in comparison to Him. So what this must of necessity mean is that to say that “the fullness of God dwelt in him (Jesus) bodily” (Col.2:9) is to say that the essential being (not the entire being, which would not have been possible) of Yahweh filled him completely.

It was this indwelling in Christ that made it possible for God to be in Christ reconciling the world to Himself; and it was this that made the salvation of mankind possible, because it made it possible for Christ to attain perfection in this world, which was not possible for any other human being. Jesus, consumed with (“consume,” Jn.2:17; Ps.69:9) love and obedience to Yahweh, could thus become the Lamb without blemish which took away the sins of the world, and Yahweh could raise him up from the dead also for that very reason (Ac.2:27,31; 13:35,37).<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> The relationship of perfection to holiness in Scripture can be seen, for example, by comparing “be perfect” (Mt.5.48; Dt.18.13) with “be holy” (1Pt.1:16; Lev.20:26). So Jesus as the perfect man is also “the holy one of God” (Jn.6:69; Mk.1:24; Lk.4:34).

## **“The Word”—a final observation**

Because of the importance of the meaning of the “Word” for trinitarianism, a considerable part of this study has been concentrated on this point. We have noted the fact that *none* of the sources, whether Greek, Jewish-Greek (Philo), or the OT (whether Hebrew or Aramaic) provides any basis for the trinitarian notion of the Word as an independent, much less co-equal, being in relation to Yahweh whom they call “God the Son”. Support for this notion is simply nonexistent in any of the sources; it was produced by the misinterpretation of John and some other NT writings. Thus trinitarianism is without *any* support from *any* of the sources mentioned above.

In contrast to this, we arrived at a completely different conclusion in this study, namely, that “the Word” in Scripture is a metonym of Yahweh God, who came into the world in the form of His self-revelatory and creative Word by which He indwelt Jesus Christ in a way He had never done before in relation to any human being. Significantly, when the Word is understood in this Scriptural way, even the Greek (Stoic) idea of the Word (Logos) as the rational principle by which the universe operates could find an echo within the Biblical concept of the Word which sustains all things (Heb. 1:3); many of Philo’s interpretations of the Logos could also serve to illustrate points of interest and even of importance for the understanding of Jesus’ ministry. The OT references to the Word, though relatively few, are nonetheless important, while the large number of occurrences of the Memra in the

Aramaic Targums provide further elucidation for the Johannine Word. Thus *all* the sources provide useful and, indeed, valuable support for the understanding of the Word in the light of Biblical monotheism; this wide scope available to the meaning of the Biblical “Word” may well have been an important reason for its use in John’s Gospel.

### **A summary**

If we could sum up the wonderful Biblical revelation of Yahweh, we might adumbrate or sketch it as follows:

The Bible account opens with a glimpse of Yahweh fellowship (what else should one call it?) with the man and the woman in the garden He had Himself prepared (“planted,” Gen.2:8) for them after He had created them. Even after Adam and Eve had sinned, there were those (like Enoch) who “walked” with Yahweh. Yahweh even talked with Cain and protected him from being killed; and what would this indicate but His patience and mercy towards sinners? But sin kept on multiplying on earth and showed no sign of abating, going from bad to worse to the point that only one righteous man (Noah) was left. Yahweh in His holiness could tolerate this no longer; hence the great Flood.

After this catastrophic event, Yahweh again sought a righteous man and found one in Abraham with whom He communed intimately, to the remarkable extent that Abraham felt bold enough to bargain with Him in his intercession for Sodom! This incident also showed that Yahweh



had no desire to destroy the city if only a few relatively righteous people could be found in its populace, but again there was only one: Lot.

The close communion that Yahweh had with Moses is also well known. But the disobedience and rebelliousness of the Israelites, both in the wilderness and subsequently, evidently wearied Yahweh. As usual, people of the quality of Abraham and Moses were very scarce. So what we begin to see in the Biblical account is that the God who was immanent to the extent of being described by scholars as “anthropomorphic,” appears to withdraw Himself after the time of Moses, there being very few He could communicate with during the remainder of Israel’s history apart from a few prophets who, as Jesus pointed out, were persecuted and killed (Lk.11:47-51, etc).

So the God who was at first “immanent” appeared to have become remote or “transcendent,” “hiding” (Isa.45:15) from man in heaven. But He only *appeared* to be remote; remoteness was not in His character, it was caused by man’s obstinate persistence in sin. Thus, the talk about God’s “transcendence,” insofar as His alleged innate remoteness from man is meant, is a mistaken concept as far as the Bible is concerned. Yahweh is transcendent in the sense that He is, in His greatness, far above everything and everyone, but not in the sense that He is inaccessible. Yahweh’s *immanence* and *transcendence*, therefore, are terms which indicate *man’s perception* of His nearness or remoteness according to his own relationship with Him.

In Noah's day Yahweh promised not again to destroy the world by flood. Why would He bind Himself with this pledge when there was no need for Him to do so? We now realize that in His love for mankind He had long ago planned for man's salvation. How He purposed to carry out this plan was already hinted at in the Garden, when He Himself slaughtered an animal so as to use its skin to cover the nakedness of Adam and Eve. The Hebrew word for "atone" comes from the word to "cover". Yahweh Himself will provide for the atonement of man's sin. What amazing good news (gospel) that is! The psalmist rejoiced in this: "When iniquities prevail against me, you (Yahweh) atone for our transgressions." (Psalm 65:3). Why does He do this? Because "I have loved you with an everlasting love" (Jer.31:3).

What becomes truly mind-boggling appears in the good news of the NT: Yahweh Himself came into the world, His whole fullness dwelling bodily in the man Jesus the Messiah, the one He had prepared and anointed for this purpose: Yahweh came in Christ to reconcile the world to Himself. This does not mean that Jesus is Yahweh, but that Yahweh dwelt in him in such a way that Jesus could speak of his body as Yahweh's temple (John 2:21). Jesus was, therefore, united with the Father (Yahweh) in such a way that he could speak of the Father being in him, and he in the Father (cp. our being in Christ and Christ in us through our union with him). In this union, Jesus was indeed one with Yahweh, but not in some metaphysical union of essences (if there is any such thing) but in the deepest form of union possible: spiritual union.

The purpose of this union was so that Yahweh could accomplish man's salvation in Christ. Precisely for this purpose, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (2Cor.5:19). The way this was accomplished is spelt out very clearly in Colossians 2:

<sup>13</sup> And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, <sup>14</sup> having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross. <sup>15</sup> He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them *in him* (*en autō, ἐν αὐτῷ*).

In view of the context and the syntax of the passage, "in him" (see boldface) is certainly the correct translation (as in NASB, RSV, ESV, NIV margin, etc). A few translations have "in it," i.e. the cross, but this is incorrect because it was not by the cross itself that the "principalities and powers" were disarmed, much less were they made "a public example" by it—all this was possible only through the death of Christ *and* his resurrection by the power of the Father (1Cor.6:14; etc); for only through the resurrection was Christ "declared to be the Son of God with power" (Romans 1:4).

From the important passage in Colossians (2:13-15, quoted above) we can see what Yahweh did *in Christ* to save us:

1. He made us alive together with Christ,
2. Forgave us all our sins,
3. By the cross He freed us from the legal demands which still stood against us,
4. He disarmed (through the cross and the resurrection of Christ) the hostile spiritual powers who had oppressed us,
5. *In Christ*, He triumphed over all the enemies of righteousness.

Jesus was a man specially prepared by Yahweh for His unique and amazing manifestation in the world in order to save it; this is the significance of the Virgin Birth.<sup>54</sup> The Biblical meaning of “the Word” sums up Yahweh’s self-manifestation: the manifestation of His presence, His truth, His power, His life, and His love—indeed, it is the expression of all His attributes. His “fullness” came to dwell in “a temple not made with (human) hands” (Mk. 14:58; cf. Ac.7:48; Heb.9:11); this temple was the body of Jesus (John 2:21).

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<sup>54</sup> For a fuller discussion, see Appendix 10.

## Finally

**W**e can conclude this study by asking the crucial question once more: Did Yahweh come into the world in the person of Jesus Christ or not? If not, then the message and the specific prophecies of the Old Testament remain unfulfilled, while an enormous question mark hangs over the gospels and the New Testament as a whole: Is Jesus Christ just an ordinary man—a prophet, even the Messiah, but just an ordinary man nonetheless? Or was Jesus a man in whom God chose to live and to work in a way He had never done before—a man with whom God lived in union in such a way that He experienced human life and what it is to be a human being, that is to say, that in Christ God experienced what it is to “become flesh”.

This study leads us to the conclusion that Yahweh Himself came into the world in the man Jesus Christ in whom He “tabernacled” or dwelt as He formerly did in the Temple at Jerusalem, but now in a “temple not made with (human) hands”—the living body of the Messiah Jesus. The error of trinitarianism was to invent a second divine being whom they called “God the Son” and claim that this being came into the world to save us. In this way Yahweh, who is honored as “God our Savior” in the NT, was sidelined or marginalized while the deified Jesus was made to take center stage. With the deification of Jesus, Biblical monotheism was displaced and violated by means of a doctrine proclaiming the divinely co-equal persons of the Trinity in place of the “one true God”

(John 17:3) to whom Jesus prayed, and who, in Jesus' teaching, is to be loved above all else (Mark 12:29f, and pars.).

The gospel proclaims that, in Christ, Yahweh God has done an amazing new thing for the sake of mankind's salvation. This new thing was something He had planned and promised long ago, and finally "at the end of the ages" (Heb.9:26; 1Cor.10:11) brought it to fulfillment in Christ.

## Yahweh does a New Thing

**Isaiah 43:19** Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

**Isaiah 42:9** Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them.

**Isaiah 48:6** You have heard; now see all this; and will you not declare it? From this time forward I make you hear new things, hidden things that you have not known. <sup>7</sup> They are created now, not long ago; before today you have never heard of them, so that you could not say, "I already knew them." (NRSV)

**2 Corinthians 5:17** So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! (NRSV) <sup>18</sup> All this is from God (Yahweh), who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: (NIV) <sup>19</sup> that is, that **God (Yahweh) was in Christ** reconciling the world to Himself. (NKJV)

These verses concisely yet comprehensively sum up not only the Pauline but also the New Testament message of the gospel. Likewise, the four words “God was in Christ” encapsulates the truth which we have studied in this book, provided that we have now grasped the fact that “God” always refers to Yahweh in the Bible. It was precisely the failure to hold on to this truth that resulted in the slide into trinitarianism. The slide into error was a gradual process beginning around the middle of the 2nd century AD when the church became increasingly dominated by Gentiles and was losing contact with its Jewish roots. Under the leadership of the Greek-speaking, Greek-educated “Fathers” or leaders of the Gentile church who had grown up in the polytheistic environment of the Hellenistic world, there was little sense of commitment to monotheism of the kind found among the Jews and in the early Jewish church. So within a little more than 100 years from the time of Jesus’ earthly ministry, the Western Gentile church had begun the process of deifying Jesus, climaxing at Nicaea (AD 325) and then at Constantinople (AD 381) with the proclamation of a thinly veiled polytheism later called “trinitarianism”.

The whole process was no doubt facilitated by the fact that the Greek translation of the Old Testament used by the Greek speaking church did not transliterate the Name of God, Yahweh, but followed the post-exilic Jewish practice of replacing it with the word “Lord” (*kyrios*) which translated the Hebrew word *Adonai* (Lord). The essential difference was that the Jewish reader always understood that *Adonai* was a substitute for “Yahweh”; the word “Yahweh” was always

clearly visible in the Hebrew text even though the reader read it out as *Adonai*. But “Yahweh” is nowhere to be seen in the Greek Old Testament translations used in the Gentile churches, and thus the 6828 references to Yahweh were in effect obliterated. Moreover, Jesus was also given the title “Lord,” exactly the same word used of Yahweh in the Old Testament, so now the title “Lord” was used indifferently of God and of Christ. The deification of Christ was thus practically accomplished by the failure to distinguish Yahweh from Christ, and the leaders of the church took no steps to maintain this important distinction. Modern English translations make the distinction by means of the capitalized “LORD” when referring to Yahweh and the lower case “Lord” when referring to Jesus, but the difference remains indistinguishable in speech, and Christian books do not in general use “LORD” when writing about God.

The net result of all this is that Yahweh has effectively been eliminated from the church. He has for all practical purposes been replaced by Jesus. It may be that He retains a small niche in trinitarian doctrine as “the Father” who in trinitarian faith and worship has a relatively peripheral role as compared to Jesus, who is given center stage. Moreover, even the title “Father” is sometimes used with reference to Jesus, so that “the Father” is robbed even of this small niche. Add to this the remarkable ignorance even of church leaders in their apparent inability to distinguish between Jesus and Yahweh in both thought and speech, and the elimination of Yahweh from the church is complete. It is, for example, quite common for preachers and writers to point to the “I am” sayings of



Jesus in John's Gospel as evidence for Jesus' deity, completely failing to grasp the fact that "I am" had specifically to do with Yahweh and not with the idea of God in some general sense. They even appear to fail to understand that such use of the "I am" would only "prove" that Jesus is Yahweh, and this is not something that even trinitarianism accepts. That an untaught Christian might stumble into this sort of error might perhaps be excusable, but that church leaders and teachers should blunder in this way is surely inexcusable.

Yahweh has been eliminated from almost all versions of the Bible used in Christian churches. The only major translation that does have the word "Yahweh," the New Jerusalem Bible, is rarely used in any non-Catholic church. But much worse than this, the church has for the most part so fully abandoned Biblical monotheism—regardless of the fact that Jesus himself upheld absolutely the truth that Yahweh is "the only true God" (John 17:3; 5:44)—that they would brazenly dare to call someone a "heretic" who takes his stand on this undeniable truth; they thereby show themselves to be the real heretics as far as Scripture is concerned.

It is urgent that in these "last days" (2Tim.3:1), Yahweh is given His proper place in the church—His church—if it is still His church. There are still many in the churches who are open to the truth in God's Word; these are the ones who are "the called according to His purpose" (Rom.8:28). These are the ones who will respond to the call, "Who is on Yahweh's side? Come to me" (Ex.32:26). This, as we well remember, was Moses' call to the Israelites when they were about to collapse into idolatry and apostasy. This call must once more

resound with the utmost urgency: Who is for Yahweh? Who is on Yahweh's side? Let them come to Him. Those who rally to this call will discover that it comes from none other than Jesus, in and through whom Yahweh speaks, "Come to me all you who are tired and burdened—I will give you rest" (Mt. 11:28), for Yahweh in Christ calls to all mankind, "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other" (Isa.45:22).

— End —

# APPENDIXES



## Appendix 1

### The Great Importance of Psalm 2, and its Messianic Promise, for Understanding the Title of Christ “the Son of God”

The association of “Son of God” with the Davidic, Messianic “King of Israel” is, of course, well-known from the Scriptures, as we have seen, and is rooted in particular with an important Messianic psalm:

Psalm 2:

<sup>2</sup> The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his anointed [Heb: *Mashiach*, Eng: “Messiah”; Gk: *ho Christos*, Eng: “Christ”], saying,

<sup>6</sup> “As for me (i.e. the Lord, v.4), I have set my King on Zion [hence “King of Israel”], my holy hill.” <sup>7</sup> I will tell of the decree: The LORD (Yahweh) said to me, “You are **my Son**; today I have **begotten** you.

<sup>8</sup> Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.

<sup>12</sup> Kiss **the Son**, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

Here we see the three terms so important in the NT: “Christ” (God’s anointed one, v.2); the Davidic “King,” the King appointed by God (“my King,” v.6); and God’s “Son” (“my Son,” vv.7,12) or “Son of God” as the more generally used term in the NT, all linked together to refer to the same person. In v.12, “the Son” brings safety or salvation for all who take refuge in him. Thus this psalm speaks of God’s Messiah, God’s King, and God’s Son all with reference to the same person. Why this psalm is so important should now be apparent.

The proclamations from heaven at Jesus’ baptism, at the commencement of his public ministry, and then also at his transfiguration, are precisely in fulfillment of Psalm 2:7:

**Matthew 3:17:** and behold, a voice out of the heavens, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” (NASB)

**Matthew 17:5:** and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!” (NKJV)

Note that it is precisely in Matthew (the most Jewish of the gospels and accordingly the one which is most concerned that God’s word in the OT be shown to have been fulfilled in Christ) that God’s well-known declaration in Psalm 2 was

literally fulfilled in Christ at these two pivotal points in his ministry.

It is of interest to note that in one important Greek manuscript (D) the words spoken at Jesus' baptism in Luke 3:22 were, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you". The textual scholar B.D. Ehrman, in his recent work *Misquoting Jesus* (2005), maintains that this is the original reading which was changed by antiadoptionist (the later trinitarians) scribes in order to remove the verse from its use by the adoptionists who maintained that Jesus became the Son of God at his baptism. Prof. Ehrman points out that the antiadoptionists need not have worried about this argument because Jesus was already mentioned as being the Son of God by reason of his virgin birth in Luke 1:35.

Luke 3:22 is discussed at length in *Misquoting Jesus* pp.158-161, where Ehrman gives the reasons for his conviction that "today I have begotten you" was the original reading. One important fact which Ehrman points out as evidence of its authenticity is the fact that many of the early church fathers (including Justin, Origen, and Augustine) quote this verse as reading "today I have begotten you" (see the textual apparatus in *The Greek New Testament*, United Bible Societies). "It is quoted in the second and third centuries (which is before most of our manuscripts were produced) everywhere from Rome, to Alexandria, to North Africa, to Palestine, to Gaul, to Spain" (*Misquoting Jesus*, p.159).

Now when we look again at Nathanael's confession in John and Peter's confession in Matthew, we can clearly see their OT foundation:

**John 1:49:** Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”

**Matthew 16:16:** Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

In both these confessions Jesus is spoken of as “the Son of God” as in Psalm 2. Nathanael also confesses Jesus as the promised “King” while Peter confesses him as the “Messiah/Christ”. In Psalm 2, “Son” occurs twice, which suggests that of the three titles, “Son” is the predominant one, a fact which also comes out by comparing the two confessions (of Nathanael and Peter) and seeing that it appears in both.

Not only are these terms in this psalm important for the NT, but the twice repeated “Son” is of especial importance. Psalm 2:7 is quoted in several places in the NT. Even where it is not quoted, God’s declaration in Psalm 2 underlies the use of the term “Son” or “Son of God” in the NT and defines its meaning. One cannot, therefore, decide to use the title “Son of God” as though it had no basis in the OT and then give it such meaning as our own dogma decides for it, and even go so far as to take the liberty to invert it into “God the Son”—something totally foreign to both the OT and the NT.

Psalm 2:7 is quoted in the early apostolic preaching in Acts 13; here the apostle Paul declares:

We bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children *by raising Jesus*, as also it is written in the second Psalm, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you’ (Acts 13:32,33).



Interestingly, the apostle sees the words in Psalm 2:7 as fulfilled by God's raising of Jesus from the dead. That is, he sees a connection between "begotten" and "resurrection". He makes this connection again in Romans 1:4, "*declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.*" Psalm 2:7 is also quoted in Hebrews 5:5 and 1:5:

**Hebrews 5:5** "So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you.'"

**Matthew 16:16** "Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.'"

**Hebrews 1:5a** "For to which of the angels did God ever say, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you?'"

**Hebrews 1:5b** "Or again, 'I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son' [2Sam.7:14; 1Chr.17:13]?"

The first part of this verse (Heb.1:5a) quotes Psalm 2:7, as we have just seen. The quotation in the second part of the verse (Heb. 1:5b), is historically closely related to Psalm 2:7 and, like that verse, its importance for our understanding of the title "son of God" in the NT is that it shows that this title is rooted in the OT, and is semantically different from the way the title is used in the Western (Gentile) church in its trinitarian teaching as officially established some 2½ centuries later at the Council of Nicaea (AD 325).

Hebrews 1:5b is a quotation of God's promise to David concerning his son Solomon, who would become king of Israel after him and who would build the first temple in Jerusalem. This promise of a Father-son relationship with Solomon is unique in the OT. The promise is repeated no less than 4 times in the OT historical books, once in 2Samuel and three times in 1Chronicles:

**2 Samuel 7:13:** He (Solomon) shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. <sup>14</sup> I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.

**1 Chronicles 17:12:** He shall build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever. <sup>13</sup> I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from him (Saul) who was before you.

**1 Chronicles 22:10:** He shall build a house for my name. He shall be my son, and I will be his father, and I will establish his royal throne in Israel forever.

**1 Chronicles 28:6:** He said to me, "It is Solomon your son who shall build my house and my courts, for I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his father."

## What connection is there between the two quotations in Hebrews 1:5?

It can be affirmed with considerable certainty that Psalm 2 was a coronation psalm sung at Solomon's enthronement as king of Israel after David's death. This conclusion can be drawn on the basis of the fact that it was only concerning Solomon that God made the promise quoted in Heb.1:5 above and there applied to Christ, who was "greater than Solomon" (Mt.12:42; Lk.11:31) and therefore stood in a closer Father-son relationship than Solomon ever could.

## The "only begotten son"

**John 3:16**, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son [*monogenēs*] {Or *his only begotten Son*}, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (NIV)

How is the word (*monogenēs*) in John to be understood? The word is translated variously as "only Son" (RSV), "only begotten Son" (KJV), or "one and only Son" (NIV). What then is its significance in John 3:16? There are at least two verses that can help us:

(1) The same word appears in Heb.11:17, "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son (*monogenēs*)" (cf. also Hebrew and LXX). Abraham eventually did

not have to offer Isaac, but God did actually give His Son out of His love for the world and in order to save it.

The Jews gave the name “Aqedah” (“binding”) to Abraham’s offering of Isaac—a truly significant spiritual event. Insofar as that event was a kind of foreshadowing of God’s giving His Son for the salvation of the world, the parallel between Christ and Isaac should not be overlooked, otherwise an important element in its spiritual significance is missed. The account of the Aqedah in Genesis informs us that Isaac, when he heard from Abraham that his being offered up was the will of Yahweh, willingly offered himself without compulsion from Abraham. He submitted voluntarily and totally to God’s will. This foreshadows Christ’s subordination and total obedience to the Father.

Abraham’s own complete submission to Yahweh, and his absolute trust in Him, should also not be overlooked. Trust (or faith) and submission are inherently linked, and Paul points to Abraham’s trusting faith, as seen by the fact that he trusted God to raise Isaac from the dead if that was necessary to fulfill His promise to him (cf. Rom.4:17). This means that not only Isaac, but also his father Abraham, in their unquestioning submission and obedience to God, were both types of the life quality of Jesus.

It should not be forgotten that Christ’s exaltation to the right hand of the Father was God’s response to Christ’s obedience—something that trinitarianism obscures by suggesting that the exaltation was Christ’s by right as the Son, rather than something that the Father conferred upon him. In this way fundamental Scriptural truths are obscured.

(2) The uniqueness of Christ as “only” Son lies also in this: that his sonship is of a kind that was not given even to the most exalted of angelic beings: Hebrews 1:5a, “For to which of the angels did God ever say, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you?’”

Even Moses, that great servant of God, was never called a “son of God,” even though he had a uniquely intimate relationship with Him:

<sup>5</sup> Now Moses was faithful in all God’s house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, <sup>6</sup> but *Christ* is faithful over God’s house as a *son*. (Hebrews 3:5-6)

Solomon was certainly not of Moses’ spiritual stature, so why should God publicly name him His “son”? The reason is not found in Solomon himself but in that he was a “type” (a foreshadowing) of Christ, “the one who is to come” (Mt. 11:3), the Messiah, the Savior of the world. Solomon built the first temple, but Christ is the builder of the temple of God not made with hands; Christ is the true king of the “Israel of God” (Gal.6:16) and God “will establish his throne forever” (1Chr.17:12).

## Appendix 2

# On John 8:58

Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” (John 8:58)

In this verse it is evident that “I am” is in an emphatic position. Could “I am (emphatically) before Abraham” be an equivalent reading? There are two verses which correspond to it:

John 1:15

John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”

Ἰωάννης μαρτυρεῖ περὶ αὐτοῦ καὶ κέκραγεν λέγων, Οὗτος ἦν ὃν εἶπον, Ὁ ὀπίσω μου ἐρχόμενος ἔμπροσθέν μου γέγονεν, ὅτι πρῶτός μου ἦν.

These words of John (the Baptizer) are repeated verbatim in 1:30. The explanation as to why he (the Messiah Jesus) “ranks before me” is “because he was before (πρῶτος, *prōtos*) me”. *Prōtos* here can certainly have reference to time, just as “before” (*prin*) does in Jn.8:58. John (like Abraham) was born *before* Jesus, so how could Jesus have been before him in time?

This would seem to point to John's perception of Jesus as the embodiment of the *Logos/Memra*, the Word of God. We can be certain that John, as a monotheistic Jew, would never have thought or spoken of Jesus as God.

In any case, what John 1:15,30 certainly means is that the Baptizer acknowledges that Jesus is greater than he. Likewise, what is stated in John 8:58 means, at the least, that Jesus is greater even than Abraham, the father of nations and the "friend of God". That this understanding is correct is confirmed by the fact that Jn.8:58 is in answer to the question posed in Jn.8:53, "Are you greater than our father Abraham?"

It has often been pointed out that there is little similarity of substance between John and the Synoptic gospels, and many scholars doubt or reject the historical validity of John for that very reason, namely, that these gospels cannot readily be reconciled and both cannot be right. But if the basic meaning of John 8:58 is that, great though Abraham was, Jesus the Messiah is greater, then this can be readily reconciled with a good number of passages in the Synoptics where Jesus' greatness is stressed: greater than the temple, Mt.12:6; greater than Jonah, Mt.12:41; Lk.11:32; greater than Solomon, Mt.12:42; Lk.11:31.

## Appendix 3

# Did Paul Reject the Law and its Righteousness?

<sup>6</sup> But the righteousness that comes from faith says, “Do not say in your heart, *‘Who will ascend into heaven?’*” (that is, to bring Christ down) <sup>7</sup> or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). <sup>8</sup> But what does it say? “The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); <sup>9</sup> because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:6-9, NRSV)

Does not our discussion of Romans 10:6-9 (in chapter 7 of the present book) contradict what Paul said in the previous verse? Romans 10:5:

“Moses describes in this way the righteousness **that is by the law**: ‘The man who does these things will live by them.’ {Lev.18:5}” (NIV)



What does it mean to say, “The man who does these things will live by them” (Rom.10:5)? If “doing these things” means “living by these things,” then the whole statement would be a mere tautology, a repetitious statement (“live by them” already appears in the statement), for if he is not living by them then he is not doing them. But that is hardly what Moses was saying. What does not come out clearly in the English is that the word “will” is not here expressive of intention, as it often is, but here “will live” (ζήσεται) is in the *future* tense. Among English translations, only the New Jerusalem Bible’s (NJB) translation of this verse brings this out more clearly, “Moses writes of the saving justice that comes by the Law and says that whoever complies with it will find life in it.”

The translation “will find life in it” also comes closer to the meaning of the Hebrew (בָּהֶם, *bahem*): will live “in it” or “by it”. The NJB’s translation gives the sense that one will find life through it or because of it. That is, the Law is a means through which one finds life. This accords with the use of the Hebrew *beth* (בְּ) as can be seen in the definitions given in HALOT, “9. (*beth*) indicates the cause (personal or inanimate) of an effect” and see also item 6: “(*beth*) introduces the means or the instrument”.

Another problem for the reader of the English versions (including NJB) is that the next verse (Rom.10:6 quoted above) begins with “but,” which is adversative in meaning, indicating something contrary to what has just been stated. This is indicative of the theological predilection of the translators because the Greek particle *de* (δέ) is not necessarily

adversative in meaning. This is clearly seen in the definitions given, for example, in BDAG:

1. a marker connecting a series of closely related data or lines of narrative, *and, as for*. Freq. used in lists of similar things, with a slight call of attention to the singularity of each item
2. a marker linking narrative segments, *now, then, and, so, that is*
3. a marker with an additive relation, with possible suggestion of contrast, *at the same time* Παῦλος δοῦλος θεοῦ, ἀπόστολος δὲ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ *Paul, God's slave, and at the same time apostle of Jesus Christ* Tit 1:1.
4. marker of contrast, *but, on the other hand,*
5. marker of heightened emphasis, in combination w. καί *but also* (a)... *so also, similarly, likewise, too*

For the reader's convenience, I have listed all five of the definitions given in BDAG. Only one item (#4) of the five definitions indicates contrast, but those who depend on the English translations would not know this, and would consequently suppose that Romans 10:6 states something contrary to 10:5 though that is not the case.

Then there is another objection to seeing Paul's identification of the Law with Christ, and it is based on the way Romans 10:4 is generally understood: "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes." The words "the end" generally indicate the conclusion or termination of

something, and if that is the case in regard to the Law, what sense is there to speak of any identification of Christ with the Law?

Again, the only translation to put the matter differently is NJB: “But the Law has found its fulfillment in Christ so that all who have faith will be justified.”

What accounts for this difference in the translations? The answer is that the word translated as “end” or as “fulfillment” could have either of these meanings; so the choice was, in most cases, determined by the theological inclinations of the translators.

The word translated as “end” is *telos* (τέλος). This is one of the definitions given in BDAG: “3. the goal toward which a movement is being directed, *end, goal, outcome.*” Under this heading, BDAG makes this observation: “Perh. this is the place for Ro 10:4, in the sense that Christ is *the goal and the termination* of the law at the same time”. (Italics mine)

It seems that NJB’s “fulfillment” is precisely such an attempt to combine the two ideas of *telos* as goal and as end, thus indicating that in Christ the Law has finally (“end”) reached its goal, attaining its “fulfillment” in him. This expressed the idea that the Law, the “Word” (Dt.30:14 and Rom.10:8), has become embodied or incarnate in Christ, so that to obey Christ is to obey the Law, thereby fulfilling it.

## Appendix 4

# Some Observations about the Targums

If the oral and written Targums had originated some time *after* NT times then, obviously, their relevance for the understanding of John's Prologue and the NT as a whole would be questionable. The following are selected quotations from *Targum and Testament* by M. McNamara, in the chapter *Origin and Transmission of the Palestinian Targum*, which provide a clear understanding on this matter:

“In any case, it is generally granted that by the first century BC Aramaic translations of the Torah, and probably of other books of the Bible as well, were being made among the Jews.

“Our main concern here is with the Targum to the Pentateuch. This was certainly the first targum to be formed. How it came into being, whether all at once or gradually over a long period, is difficult to determine. It is only natural to see its origin in the synagogue service, as a rendering of those sections of the Torah read in public.” (p.80)

“Josephus can boast: ‘For our people, if anyone do but ask any of them about our laws, he will more readily tell them all than

he will tell them his own name, and this in consequence of our having learned them immediately as soon as we became sensible of anything, and of our having them as it were engraven on our souls (*Contra Apionem* II, 17 [18] sec 178).’

“This knowledge of the Law of Moses the majority of the Israelites would have got from the synagogue rendering of the targums. It was already Ezra’s mandate and intention to bring them this knowledge of the Law of Moses, and the principle must have led the religious leaders of Judaism long before the Christian era to provide an Aramaic rendering of the entire Law.” (p.81)

“The indications, then, are that the synagogue targumic tradition originated at an early date in pre-Christian times.” (p.82)

“In conclusion we can say that there is a good likelihood that the present texts of the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch transmit substantially the paraphrase of the Pentateuch formed in pre-Christian times and known to Palestinian Judaism of the early Christian period. Used in accord with strict scientific principles, this paraphrase is of immense importance in reconstructing the beliefs of those to whom Christ and his apostles preached.” (p.85)

## Appendix 5

# A Few Notes on the Exegesis of John 12:41

<sup>40</sup> “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.” <sup>41</sup> Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him. (John 12:40-41)

What follows can be described as an extended exegetical exercise. The purpose is, on the one hand, to bring out in detail the meaning and significance of this important verse and, on the other, to give an example (for the benefit of those not familiar with it) of how exegesis is done. Too often we are told the conclusion of a study without being told exactly how that conclusion was arrived at (if indeed any proper procedure was actually followed to arrive at the stated conclusion).

John 12:41: “Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him.” While this is essentially how virtually all translations, rightly following the Greek, have translated it, the NIV takes the liberty to render it, “Isaiah... saw Jesus’ glory...” It is possible that the “his” in this verse does refer to

Jesus; and most trinitarians will immediately conclude that this means that the vision of the Lord in Isaiah 6 was actually a vision of Jesus, and we are therefore justified in equating Jesus with the Lord, i.e. Yahweh, and thereby assume that it is a proof-text for trinitarian doctrine.

But scholars, even trinitarian ones (like C.K. Barrett, H.A.W. Meyer, and others), are more cautious, knowing full well that such an equation cannot be justified from the Scriptures as a whole. Why? Because, whether they like it or not, they are mindful of the fact that the Scriptures are monotheistic and they are, therefore, fully aware that any attempt to suggest that the Lord who was seen by Isaiah was in fact Jesus would be a violation of any proper attempt to interpret what Isaiah himself meant, not to mention that it would fly in the face of the monotheism of both the Old and New Testaments, including John's Gospel itself (cf. e.g. Jn.17:3, "this is eternal life, that they know you *the only true God*, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." Also Jn.5:44)

But there is another reason why a simple equation of the Lord and Jesus, based on Isaiah's vision of the Lord, cannot be sustained. That is because it is a well-known fact that God is invisible to the human eye; that is why "no one has ever seen God" (John 1:18), and anyone who had a direct unmediated spiritual vision of the Lord would not live to talk about it. For example, the Lord said to Moses in Exodus 33:20, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." In the NT this is likewise stated unequivocally, "God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light,

*whom no one has seen or can see.* To him be honor and might for ever. Amen.” (1Tim.6:15,16) (Does all this contradict Isaiah 6:1ff? No, precisely because John 12:41 explains that Isaiah “saw His glory,” not His person.)

This being the case, what then did John mean by saying that Isaiah saw his (Jesus’?) glory? “The Word” (Logos) is God’s self-revelation. The Logos reveals God’s glory; therefore we see “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2Co.4:6)—we know God’s glory through Christ. This is precisely because “He is the radiance of the glory of God” (Heb.1:3). “Radiance” (*apaugasma*) itself speaks of a radiating brightness, so one could say that Jesus is the glory (a shining out) of the glory of God. Thus, what Isaiah saw was not a direct or unmediated vision of God (which, as we have noted above, Scripture declares to be impossible), but “the radiance of the glory of God”—which is Christ as the embodiment of the Word/Memra (cf. Jn.1:14, “we have seen his (the Word’s) glory”).

With this exegesis the scholars concur. For example, M. Dods, (*The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, John 12:41), “the Theophanies of the OT were mediated by the pre-existent Logos [Word].” Similarly, Barrett: “The theophany as described in Isa.6 could well be termed the ‘glory of God’” (*St John*, p.360). Barrett, like the others quoted above, assumes that John meant that “Isaiah saw the glory of *Christ* and spoke of him” (italics his).

There are, however, problems with these notions of the scholars mentioned above which, strangely, they don’t seem to be aware of—or perhaps don’t wish to be aware of: One of



these is that they simply assume that Jesus=Logos or Logos=Jesus. But what is the Scriptural justification for this assumption? In John there is no such simple equation but rather, according to John 1:14, in Jesus “the Logos *became flesh*” (ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο). Therefore, it is not “the Logos = Jesus,” but “the Logos was incarnate in Jesus”; this is a fundamental difference.

It is true that the Logos and Jesus were united *through the incarnation*, but it was by way of the incarnation that they became one and *not before* that, according to John 1:14. Once we have grasped this plain fact, we should see that the interpretative statement made, for example, in the NIV that Isaiah “saw Jesus’ glory” is incorrect. The most that can be said is that he saw the glory of the Logos—but that is something which John himself does *not* state in 12:41. The Logos had not yet become “enfleshed” in Jesus, how then could Isaiah have seen the glory of *Jesus* (except in a proleptic or prophetic way)? Is not such a statement as that which Barrett made (see two paragraphs earlier) anachronistic?

### **An unjustified assumption regarding John 12:41**

The reader who is careful in regard to the accurate exegesis of God’s word (and there are, alas, probably not many such readers) will have noticed that I took a step a few paragraphs ago which I made no serious attempt to justify. What was that step? It was this: I simply accepted the trinitarian position that the “his” in the words “saw his glory” (John 12:41) referred

to *Jesus' pre-incarnation glory* (this phrase will be discussed below). This *seems* plausible in the context, but does its plausibility really require no further proof? Should it not be asked: If John wanted to refer to Jesus by "his," why did he not say so specifically, for it does not take much longer in Greek to say or to write "Christ's glory" as to say or write "his glory" (the Greek word for "his" is *autos*)?

Can a matter of such importance be left to the undefined "his"? The whole trinitarian argument is based on the *assumption* that this "his" refers to Jesus. I went along with this assumption and was thereby able to see how far the more responsible scholars could take it. As we have seen, they took it as far as Jesus' being the Logos of God.

But for the sake of faithfulness to the word of God, I feel obliged to examine the validity of the assumption. If we are responsible before the Lord, should we not ask: Is this really what John meant? If so, why did he not say so, rather than leave it to his readers to assume that the reference was to the Logos, or to Jesus? Moreover, everyone who has read Isaiah 6 would know that the "his" in the context of Isaiah refers to the "Lord" (Adon) who is further specified in v.5 as Yahweh. Can we so lightly assume, as trinitarians do, that John the monotheist (and the Jewish believers, who constituted most of the first readers of John) would equally lightly refer to Jesus in John 12:41 by an indeterminate "his"?

Should we not also ask: What exactly is the connection of the "his" in v.41 to the totally different statement in v.40, in which there is no mention whatever of "glory" (not even in the preceding verses)? Can we (and should we) decide on the

“his” without even having considered whether there is any internal logic which connects these two verses (i.e. v.40 and v.41)? As for the connection between these two verses, can we find any other connection, whether in Isaiah or in John, other than this: Even though Isaiah was granted a supernal vision of God’s glory, and even though he was thereby an eyewitness of that glory, the hearts of people of Israel were so hardened against the truth that they would not listen to Isaiah.

Was this not precisely the same point made repeatedly in John in regard to the attitude of the people of Israel to Jesus? Jesus as the Word incarnate is repeatedly spoken of as the one who has seen the Father, who knows the Father, and he reveals to us what he has seen; but just as they rejected Isaiah, so now they reject Jesus in exactly the same way. (Note the frequency of “see” in John.) If so, then the “his” in v.41 would have its normal meaning, namely, that it refers to Yahweh just as Isaiah had declared in Isaiah 6:1, and since this was known to all John’s (especially Jewish) readers, he did not need to specify that it referred to Yahweh. Had he intended it to refer to Jesus, is it not obvious that he would have had to specify that to be the case and could not simply assume that his readers would make that assumption?

Thus, is not the whole point of vv.40 and 41 (and context) that though Isaiah saw Yahweh’s glory the people rejected his message, so too Jesus as the one who saw the glory of God the Father in ways far beyond what Isaiah could have seen, was nonetheless rejected by the Jews in the same way (and indeed in a worse way because it ended on the cross) as they rejected Isaiah?

## Appendix 6

On “the Word of God”  
in Revelation 19:13

**Revelation 19:11-16** <sup>11</sup> Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. <sup>12</sup> His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. <sup>13</sup> He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. <sup>14</sup> And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. <sup>15</sup> From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. <sup>16</sup> On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

Though trinitarians generally want to assume that Rev.19:13 refers to Christ, a better exegetical case can be made for it as referring to Yahweh Himself as “the Lord of Hosts (armies),” as seen by His armies in v.14. Moreover, the full title “King

of kings and Lord of lords” (v.16) occurs elsewhere in the NT only in 1Timothy 6:15 where it refers to “our only Sovereign,” God the Father. The context of 19:13 echoes other OT prophecies which have reference to Yahweh.

It is true that in Revelation 17:14, the title in the reversed form “lord of lords, and king of kings” is applied to the Lamb who was exalted by God. But the term “the word of God” appears 5 times in Revelation apart from 19:13 (in 17:17 as “the words of God”) and, as in the rest of the NT, it means the message of God as given in the Gospel.

It is argued that “the Word of God” in 19:13 refers to Jesus because of his being “clothed in a robe dipped in blood,” it being assumed that the blood is his own blood. But he who “treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty” (v.15) is more likely to have his garments dipped in the blood of God’s vanquished enemies.

R.H. Charles, in his massive two-volume *Critical and Exegetical Commentary of the Revelation of St. John*, also rejects the notion that the blood on the rider’s robe in Revelation 19:13 is his own blood, and writes:

A comparison with Isaiah 63:1-3—which passage is in the mind of our author—confirms this conclusion: ‘Who is this that cometh from Edom, with red garments from Bozrah? ... 2. Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat? 3. I have trodden the winepress alone ... yea, I trod them in my anger ... and their lifeblood is sprinkled upon my garments.’

There is no doubt whatever that, in this context, the subject of this passage is Yahweh. The result of Yahweh's treading of the "winepress" of judgment is seen in Revelation 19:17-18:

<sup>17</sup> Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, "Come, gather for the great supper of God, <sup>18</sup> to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great."

This event is seen in the prophecy of Ezekiel 39:17f:

<sup>17</sup> And as for you, son of man, thus says the Lord GOD, 'Speak to every sort of bird and to every beast of the field: "Assemble yourselves and come; Gather together from all sides to My sacrificial meal which I am sacrificing for you, A great sacrificial meal on the mountains of Israel, That you may eat flesh and drink blood. <sup>18</sup> You shall eat the flesh of the mighty..."'

And the purpose of all this is set forth in the following verses in Ezekiel 39:

<sup>21</sup> I will set My glory among the nations; all the nations shall see My judgment which I have executed, and My hand which I have laid on them. <sup>22</sup> So the house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD (Yahweh) their God from that day forward.

The glory of Yahweh is proclaimed to all nations through His righteous judgments against all evildoers.

Even so, Revelation 19:13 *could* refer to Jesus, the Lamb, as Yahweh's chosen Messianic agent of His actions in the world. But it should be remembered that the trinitarian argument based on the words "the Word was God" cuts both ways: it *could* mean that "the Word" was actually God or Yahweh Himself, that is, "Logos" could be a title of God as *self-revealing* (which is what "word" does), as *immanent*. This self-revealing aspect of God was always an essential aspect of God (as the whole of His Word, the Bible, reveals); it was always "with Him" and, for us, it is undoubtedly the most important aspect of God, for without it we could never know Him. This also means that there is no reason why "the Word of God" as a metonym for Yahweh could not also be used here as a title of Yahweh, that is, as the One who is always revealing Himself whether in His saving mercies in Christ or in Judgment as in 19:11ff. The picture of Yahweh here would then be that of Yahweh as a "man of war" familiar from the OT (Ex.15:3; Isa. 42:13).

Thus, without being dogmatic or insistent, it can be shown that, on the basis of exegesis, it is very likely that 19:13 refers to Yahweh rather than to Jesus, and that its application to Jesus is based primarily on the trinitarian interpretation of John 1:1. But did we not say that 19:13 *could* also refer to Jesus? Yes, because 19:15, "he will rule them with a rod of iron" seems clearly to reflect the Messianic verses Isaiah 11:4 and Psalm 2:9. If so, how is the verse to be understood after all? It would evidently be best to understand it in the same way as the "incarnation" of Yahweh "in Christ" (2Cor.5:19, etc.) is understood in terms, for example, of 1Timothy 3:16,

“He (God, mentioned twice in the previous verse) was manifested in the flesh”. That is to say: Just as Yahweh came into the world to save it, so also He will come at the end of this age to deal with all who in the hardness of their hearts reject His saving mercies and defy His sovereignty as our Creator and Lord.



## Appendix 7

# The Instructive Parallel of “the Word was God” with 2Cor.3:17

**2 Corinthians 3:17**, Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

The parallel can be seen when the following two sentences are placed side by side:

θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος (*theos ēn ho logos*)

“God was the Word”

(Jn.1:1c)

ὁ κύριος τὸ πνεῦμα ἐστίν (*ho kyrios to pneuma estin*)

“the Lord is the Spirit”

(2Cor.3:17)

A comparison of these two verses shows that:

(a) “God” and “the Lord” are in same position in the two sentences.

(b) “The Word” and “the Spirit” are integrally related in Scripture.

(c) In John 1:1, the past tense “was” occurs because the verse speaks about “the beginning”; 2Corinthians speaks about the present, hence the “is”.

The very next phrase in 2Corinthians 3:17, which speaks of “the Spirit of the Lord,” makes it clear that “the Spirit” is “the Spirit of the Lord,” who in the Scriptures is not another divine being distinct from the Lord. Here I shall simply quote the Catholic scholar Martin McNamara’s discussion of these words:

“*The Lord is the Spirit.*’ Having noted that ‘when a man turns to the Lord the veil is removed,’ Paul goes on to state: ‘Now the Lord is the Spirit [*ho de kyrios to pneuma estin*] and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom’. In the tent of meeting, to which the repentant Israelite withdrew, God was enthroned. From between the cherubim he spoke with Moses and Israel. God so speaking with Israel is often referred to as *Dibbera*, ‘the Word’. We have seen how he could equally well be referred to as ‘the holy spirit’.

“For the paraphrase of Pseudo-Jonathan (Num.7:89), in the tent of meeting, the spirit conversed with Moses and the individual Israelite. And the Lord, i.e. Adonai, the God of Israel was the spirit.

“In view of this it seems better to take ‘the Lord’ (*kyrios*) of 2Corinthians 3:16f as ‘the God of Israel,’ and not as Jesus Christ ... As L. Cerfaux has put it: ‘The whole context [of 2Cor.3:17] is that of a midrash and Paul means that *kyrios* in

Ex.34:34, upon which he is commenting, should be understood as the Spirit, “the Spirit of the Lord,” who has revealed himself in the Christian community’.

“We should also compare John 4:24: ‘God is Spirit’ (*pneuma ho theos*), bearing in mind the manifold ways in which Paul’s teaching parallels that of the Fourth Gospel... It may seem strange that Paul should use such Jewish traditions in a letter directed to mainly Gentile Christians. The explanation probably lies in the fact that the Apostle of the Gentiles never succeeded in being anything in his mental make-up but a Hebrew of the Hebrews.” (McNamara, *Targum and Testament*, p.111ff.)

So just as 2Corinthians 3:17 identifies the “the Lord” as one and the same person who functions as the life-giving Spirit in the church, so the parallel sentence structure with the words “God was the Word” (or “the Word was God”) in John 1:1 indicates that God functioned as the Word in His self-revelation already “in the beginning” of His creation. It is just as the Apostle describes it in Romans 1:20, “For since the creation of the world, God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, *being understood from what has been made*, so that men are without excuse.” God speaks to all men through His creation but more fully and perfectly in Christ.

## Appendix 8

# On Phil.2:6,7: More Evidence from the Hebrew Bible

**Philippians 2:6-7** <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

Much as trinitarianism would wish, for obvious reasons, to ignore or even to deny the identification of “the form of God” with “the image of God,” the evidence overwhelmingly endorses it. If we continue examining the use of the word “form” (*morphē*) to see how it is used in the OT, we find two instances of particular relevance in the Greek Old Testament (LXX) which we can compare with the Hebrew text:

(1) Job 4:16, “It stood still, but I could not discern its appearance; A form (*morphē*) was before my eyes; There was silence, then I heard a voice”. The Hebrew of the word “form” here is *tmunah* for which BDB gives the following definition, “*likeness, representation, form, semblance,*” and provides the following information: *tmunah* is used with the Hebrew word *pesel* (*‘idol, image, as likeness of man or animal’*), which is its

equivalent in 'Ex 20:4 = Dt 5:8, cf. 4:16; 4:23; 4:25'; all these verses have to do with the making of "carved images" or idols. This again shows the link between "form," "image," and "likeness".

(2) Isaiah 44:13, "The carpenter measures with a line and makes an outline with a marker; he roughs it out with chisels and marks it with compasses. He shapes it in the form (*morphē*) of man, of man in all his glory, that it may dwell in a shrine." (NIV) Here "form" translates the Hebrew word *tabnit* meaning 'figure, image' (BDB).

## Appendix 9

# On Psalm 107:19,20

**Psalm 107:19-20** <sup>19</sup> Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. <sup>20</sup> He sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from their destruction.

In verse 20, the Hebrew, translated literally, has “delivered them from the pit,” and the LXX has “rescued them from corruption (*diaphthora*, i.e. of death and the grave).” The word “corruption” (*diaphthora*) also occurs in Psalm 30:9, “What profit is there in my death (lit. “blood”, referring to a violent death, cf. Col.1:20; Lk.22:20, etc), if I go down to the pit (LXX *diaphthora*, ‘corruption’)? Will the dust praise you? Will it tell of your faithfulness?” Here “death” and “corruption” are used synonymously.

“Corruption” appears in another important verse: “For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption” (Psalm 16:10). The importance of this verse lies in the fact that it is twice quoted with reference to Jesus’ resurrection: Peter, preaching to the multitudes on the day of Pentecost, quotes this verse and then goes on to say, “He (the Psalmist) foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the

Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades (the Greek for *Sheol*), nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses” (Acts 2:31,32). Paul quotes this same verse and for the same reason (Acts 13.35ff).

It is striking that in the very next verse, Psalm 16:11, there is reference to God’s “right hand,” which is precisely where Jesus was granted to sit after God had raised him from the dead: “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at *your right hand* are pleasures forevermore.”

Yahweh’s “right hand” is referred to twice in Peter’s message in Acts 2 immediately following the verses quoted above about Christ’s resurrection: “Being therefore exalted at *the right hand of God*, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing” (Acts 2:33; also v.34).

## Appendix 10

## Some Thoughts on the Virgin Birth of Jesus

The accounts of the Virgin Birth appear in Matthew and Luke. What is its spiritual significance? This is not explicitly expounded in the gospels or in the NT letters; but there is enough information for us to draw some preliminary (non-dogmatic) conclusions: The exclusion of Joseph from the birth process means, of course, that contrary to the normal process of human birth, no human sperm was involved. To argue that the human sperm was replaced by the preexistent Word would mean that the result of such a union would be neither truly human (since no true human being can result from such a union) nor fully God (since he is at least partially man).

It seems that the proper Scriptural understanding is that the “overshadowing” of Mary by the Spirit was like the “hovering” of the Spirit over the waters prior to creation in Genesis 1:2. The parallel serves to indicate that God was bringing into being *a new creation* through Mary’s womb. This means that the new creation would have required the creation of a sperm within Mary’s womb. No human being is



born without sperm; but since, in this case, it was not derived from any male descendent of Adam, then consequently a new Adam (a new man, cf. Eph.2:15) came into being in Christ. This was for the purpose of bringing a new creation into existence (2Cor.5:17).

The new Adam was not, however, to be totally disconnected from the old Adam because as “the seed of the woman (Eve)” (Gen.3:15), he had to undo, through his obedience, the consequences of sin and death brought into the world through Adam’s disobedience (Rom.5:17-19). Moreover, in order to fulfill the promise of God by being the coming Messianic king descended from the Davidic line of kings, Jesus had to be of David’s “seed” (σπέρμα *sperma*, whence “sperm”; Jn.7:42; Rom.1:3; 2Tim.2:8), which indeed he was via his mother Mary.

The whole matter of Jesus’ birth as the point in time when the Word “became flesh” is beautifully and appropriately stated in Hebrews 10:5: “Consequently, when he came into the world, he said, ‘... a body have you prepared for me’”. His body was specially “prepared” for him; it was, so to speak, “made-to-order” or “custom-made” for him. He could thus be connected to the old creation yet, at the same time, be the beginning of a new creation. In this can be seen the wonder of divine wisdom.

The context of Hebrew 10:5 speaks of Christ being the sacrifice for sin, “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world,” as described in John 1:29. It is by this means that “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2Cor.5:17).

The virgin birth was not something that originated in the NT; it was a sign first given in the OT: “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel [which means ‘God with us’]” (Isaiah 7:14). There is also a remarkable prophecy in Jeremiah 31:22: “How long will you waver, O faithless daughter? For the LORD (Yahweh) has created a new thing on the earth: a woman encircles (or encompasses, surrounds) a man.”

**The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge provides this interesting commentary:**

“A female (‘one who is only a woman, not a wife, namely a virgin,’) shall encompass a man,” or a male child: which together with the addition of a new creation, may well be understood to denote the miraculous conception. Hence the Jews have applied it determinately to the Messiah. In Berashith Rabba it is said, that as God punished Israel in a virgin, so would he also heal; and in Midrash Tillim, on Ps 2, R. Huna, in the name of R. Idi, speaking of the sufferings of the Messiah, says, that when his hour is come, God shall say, “I must create him with a new creation; and so he saith, This day I have begotten thee.”

## Appendix 11

# Christological Conflict Among Trinitarians

The mutually irreconcilable christological views of the Antiochenes and the Alexandrians resulted in bitter conflict among the trinitarians in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. Eventually the Alexandrians, having gained the position of becoming the politically dominant party, ousted the Antiochenes. One part of the church drove out the other by labeling them heretics. The matter was not resolved through careful exegesis of the Scriptures or through good will, but went from conflict to schism.

Yet both sides (Alexandrians and Antiochenes) based their views on the same basic assumption: that Jesus was both God and man in one person because he possessed both divine and human “natures”. They simply assumed that we can talk about God and man in terms of “natures”. If we start from the wrong presuppositions, how can we reach the right conclusions?

The debate was basically about whether Christ had a human spirit. The Antiochene party said *yes*, because without it Christ would not be truly human; the Alexandrian party

said *no*, because otherwise Christ would really be two persons: God the Son joined to a human being; this would call into question the unity of his person. The Alexandrians preferred the view that, in the person of Christ, God the Son replaced the spirit of the man. This established the deity of Christ, but at the cost of sacrificing his humanity, because this would unavoidably mean that Christ was God with a human body—but, again, man is more than just his body.

Clearly neither position was satisfactory. But with the triumph of the Alexandrian view, man's salvation was placed in serious doubt because Jesus was not truly the counterpart of Adam; he was constituted differently from Adam and from us. And even if it be acknowledged that man's spirit also derived from God, that is quite different from saying that in Christ's case God the Son has taken the place of man's God-given spirit. And if Jesus is not really human in the same sense that we are human, then how can he legitimately be the representative man who died for all men?

But the problem for the Antiochene School, in the view of its adversaries, was that it could not satisfactorily explain how "the two natures" could constitute one functional person. The Alexandrian school established a functional unity, in their view, of Christology by "denaturing" his human nature, so that his human nature had a body but excluded the human spirit which would threaten that unity. If Christ's human "nature" had included both human spirit and body, then the Alexandrian christological position would have been no different from that of the Antiochenes.

What all this indicates is that the trinitarian doctrine of the two natures created problems that could not be resolved in the light of the Scriptures because of its being *essentially unscriptural in its foundational ideas*. For those wishing to study the trinitarian problem in greater detail, studies such as that by J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, are helpful.



## Appendix 12

# The Memra in the Targums

The following is an abridgment of a study by Agnes S.T. Lim and Lee Sen Siow that examines how “Memra” (Aramaic for “Word,” cf. John 1:1) in the Aramaic Targums is used as a metonym for Yahweh in the Hebrew Scriptures. By placing two English translations conveniently side by side—one being a translation of the Aramaic Targums, the other of the Hebrew Scriptures—the study enables the reader to quickly see how often “Memra” is used as a metonym for God (Yahweh). The value of the study, for which I express my deep gratitude to the authors, lies in the important fact, unknown to most Christians, that Aramaic was the main language of Jesus, of the people in the land of Israel of his day, and of the early Jewish church.

Whereas the original study covered the whole of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible), the present abridgment covers only Genesis and Exodus. The research methodology in the original study was, however, applied uniformly to all five books and led to near identical results for each; hence the results obtained from Genesis and Exodus by this procedure are representative of those obtained from the

Pentateuch as a whole. The original study is exhaustive in that every occurrence of “Memra” in the Aramaic Pentateuch was examined and taken into account.

The results are shown in the interlinear tables below. The text in the second column is taken from an English translation of the well-known *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*. The text in the third column is taken from the New Jerusalem Bible.

In these two columns, the words in boldface connect “Memra” in the second column to its Hebrew parallel in the third column. This allows us to see, for example, that in the majority of occurrences, “Memra” refers to “Yahweh” or to a pronoun referring to Yahweh.

The following symbols are used in the first column:

- Indicates that “memra” is used as a metonym of Yahweh
- ◆ Indicates that “memra” points to something other than Yahweh
- \* Indicates an explanatory note

**An Example:** In the tables below, Exodus 4:15 is marked with three symbols, ●◆◆, which means that Exodus 4:15 in the Aramaic Targums has three occurrences of the word “Memra”. The first of these occurrences is denoted by the symbol ●, which means that it is used as a metonym for Yahweh. By contrast, the second and the third occurrences of “Memra” in this verse, indicated by a different symbol ◆, refer



to someone or something other than Yahweh (in this case, Moses and Aaron, respectively).

**Conclusion of Study:** A quick look through the tables shows that the symbol • outnumbers the symbol ♦ by a vast margin, indicating that “Memra” is indeed used in the Aramaic Pentateuch predominantly as a metonym for Yahweh.

**For Further Study:** The original study by Agnes Lim and Lee Sen Siow which covers the whole Pentateuch can be downloaded from:

[www.christiandc.org](http://www.christiandc.org) or  
[www.christiandiscipleschurch](http://www.christiandiscipleschurch)

(A statistical survey of the study is also available for downloading.) The original study includes a column that displays the Aramaic text of the Targums, but it is not included in the present abridgment due to space limitations and because few people today read Aramaic. To give the reader a sample of what has been omitted here (but retained in the original study), here is the Aramaic text for the first entry of the table (with מימר “Memra” underlined):

<p>Gen 2:8 <u>במימרא</u> דיי אלקים  גינניתא מעדן לצדיקיא קדם בריית עלם  ואשרי תמן ית אדם כד ברייה</p>
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## “Memra” in the Book of Genesis from Targum Pseudo-Jonathan

REFERENCE AND NOTES	TARGUM PSEUDO-JONATHAN (ENGLISH TRANSLATION)	NEW JERUSALEM BIBLE
Genesis 2:8 •	And a garden from the Eden of the just was planted by the <b>Word of the Lord</b> God before the creation of the world, and He made there to dwell the man when He had created him.	<b>Yahweh</b> God planted a garden in Eden, which is in the east, and there he put the man he had fashioned.
Genesis 3:8 •	And they heard the voice of the <b>word of the Lord</b> God walking in the garden in the repose of the day; and Adam and his wife hid themselves from before the Lord God among the trees of the garden.	The man and his wife heard the sound of <b>Yahweh</b> God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from Yahweh God among the trees of the garden.
Genesis 3:10 •	And he said, The voice of <b>Thy Word</b> heard I in the garden, and I was afraid, because I am naked; and the commandment which Thou didst teach me, I have transgressed; therefore I hid myself from shame.	“I heard the sound of <b>you</b> in the garden,” he replied. “I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.”
Genesis 3:24 •	And He drove out the man from thence where He had made to dwell the glory of His Shekina at the first between the two Kerubaia. Before He had created the world, He created the law; He prepared the garden of Eden for the righteous, that they might eat and delight themselves with the fruit of the tree; because they would have practised in their lives the doctrine of the law in this world, and have maintained the commandments: (but) he prepared Gehinnam for the wicked, which is like the sharp, consuming sword of two edges; in the midst of it He hath prepared flakes of fire and	He banished the man, and in front of the garden of Eden he posted the great winged creatures and the fiery flashing sword, to guard the way to the tree of life.

REFERENCE AND NOTES	TARGUM PSEUDO-JONATHAN (ENGLISH TRANSLATION)	NEW JERUSALEM BIBLE
	burning coals for the judgment of the wicked who rebelled in their life against the doctrine of the law. To serve the law is better than (to eat of) the fruit of the tree of life, (the law) which the <b>Word of the Lord</b> prepared, that man in keeping it might continue, and walk in the paths of the way of life in the world to come.	
Genesis 4:23 ◆	And Lemek said to his wives Ada and Zillah, Hear my voice, wives of Lemek, hearken to <b>my words</b> : for I have not killed a man, that I should be slain for him; neither have I destroyed a young man, on whose account my children should perish.	Lamech said to his wives: Adah and Zillah, hear my voice, wives of Lamech, listen to <b>what I say</b> : I killed a man for wounding me, a boy for striking me.
Genesis 4:26 ●	And to Sheth also was born a son, and he called his name Enosh. That was the generation in whose days they began to err, and to make themselves idols, and surnamed their idols by the name of the <b>Word of the Lord</b> .	A son was also born to Seth, and he named him Enosh. This man was the first to invoke the name <b>Yahweh</b> .
Genesis 5:2 ●	Male and female He created them, and blessed them <b>in the name of His Word</b> ; and He called their name Man in the day they were created.	Male and female he created them. <b>He</b> blessed them and gave them the name Man, when they were created.
Genesis 5:24 ●	And Hanok served in the truth before the Lord; and, behold, he was not with the sojourners of the earth; for he was withdrawn, and he ascended to the firmament by the <b>Word before the Lord</b> , and his name was called Metatron the Great Saphra.	Enoch walked with God, then was no more, because <b>God</b> took him.
Genesis 6:3 ●	And <b>the Lord</b> said by <b>His Word</b> , All the generations of the wicked which are to arise shall not be purged after the order of the judgments of the generation of the deluge, which shall be destroyed and exterminated from the midst of the world. Have I not imparted My Holy	<b>Yahweh</b> said, "My spirit cannot be indefinitely responsible for human beings, who are only flesh; let the time allowed each be a hundred and twenty years."

REFERENCE AND NOTES	TARGUM PSEUDO-JONATHAN (ENGLISH TRANSLATION)	NEW JERUSALEM BIBLE
	Spirit to them, (or, placed My Holy Spirit in them,) that they may work good works? And, behold, their works are wicked. Behold, I will give them a prolongment of a hundred and twenty years, that they may work repentance, and not perish.	
Genesis 6:6 ●●	And it repented <b>the Lord in His Word</b> that He had made man upon the earth; and <b>He</b> passed judgment upon them <b>by His Word</b> .	<b>Yahweh</b> regretted having made human beings on earth and was grieved at heart.
Genesis 6:7 ●* “by My Word” in the English PJT is not in the Aramaic PJT	And the Lord said, I will abolish by My Word * man, whom I have created upon the face of the earth, from man to cattle, to the reptile, and to the fowl of the heavens; because <b>I</b> have repented <b>in My Word</b> that I have made them.	And Yahweh said, “I shall rid the surface of the earth of the human beings whom I created—human and animal, the creeping things and the birds of heaven—for <b>I</b> regret having made them.”
Genesis 7:16 ●	And they coming entered, male and female, of all flesh unto him, as the Lord had instructed him; and the <b>Word of the Lord</b> covered over the door of the ark upon the face thereof.	and those that went aboard were a male and female of all that was alive, as God had commanded him. Then <b>Yahweh</b> shut him in.
Genesis 8:1 ●	And <b>the Lord in His Word</b> remembered Noah, and all the animals and the cattle which were with him in the ark; and the Lord caused the wind of mercies to pass over the earth, and the waters were dried.	But <b>God</b> had Noah in mind, and all the wild animals and all the cattle that were with him in the ark. God sent a wind across the earth and the waters began to subside.
Genesis 8:21 ●	And the Lord accepted his oblation with favour: and <b>the Lord said in His Word</b> , I will not add again to curse the earth on account of the sin of the children of men; for the imagination of the heart of man is evil from his youth; neither will I add to destroy whatever liveth as I have done.	<b>Yahweh</b> smelt the pleasing smell and said to himself, “Never again will I curse the earth because of human beings, because their heart contrives evil from their infancy. Never again will I strike down

REFERENCE AND NOTES	TARGUM PSEUDO-JONATHAN (ENGLISH TRANSLATION)	NEW JERUSALEM BIBLE
		every living thing as I have done.
Genesis 9:12 ●	And the Lord said, This is the sign of the covenant which I establish between <b>My Word</b> and between you and every living soul that is with you, unto the generations of the world.	“And this”, God said, “is the sign of the covenant which I now make between <b>myself</b> and you and every living creature with you for all ages to come:
Genesis 9:13 ●	I have set My Bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of the covenant between <b>My Word</b> and the earth.	I now set my bow in the clouds and it will be the sign of the covenant between <b>me</b> and the earth.
Genesis 9:15 ●	And I will remember My covenant which is between <b>My Word</b> and between you and every living soul of all flesh, that there shall not be the waters of a flood to destroy all flesh.	I shall recall the covenant between <b>myself</b> and you and every living creature, in a word all living things, and never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all living things.
Genesis 9:16 ●	And the bow shall be in the cloud, and I will look upon it, to remember the everlasting covenant between the <b>Word of the Lord</b> and every living soul of all flesh that is upon the earth.	When the bow is in the clouds I shall see it and call to mind the eternal covenant between <b>God</b> and every living creature on earth, that is, all living things.”
Genesis 9:17 ● ◆	And the Lord said to Noah, This is the sign of the covenant that I have covenanted between <b>My Word</b> and between the <b>word for all flesh</b> that is upon the earth.	“That”, God told Noah, “is the sign of the covenant I have established between <b>myself</b> and <b>all living things</b> on earth.”
Genesis 11:8 ●	And the <b>Word of the Lord</b> was revealed against the city, and with Him seventy angels, having reference to seventy nations, each having its own language, and thence the writing of its own hand: and He dispersed them from thence upon the face of all the earth into seventy languages. And one knew not what his neighbour would say: but one slew the	Yahweh scattered them thence all over the world, and they stopped building the city.

REFERENCE AND NOTES	TARGUM PSEUDO-JONATHAN (ENGLISH TRANSLATION)	NEW JERUSALEM BIBLE
	other; and they ceased from building the city.	
Genesis 12:17 ●	And the <b>Word of the Lord</b> sent great plagues against Pharaoh and the men of his house, on account of Sara, Abram's wife.	But <b>Yahweh</b> inflicted severe plagues on Pharaoh and his household because of Abram's wife Sarai.
Genesis 15:1 ●	Thereupon was the word of the Lord with Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not; for if these men should gather together in legions and come against thee, <b>My Word</b> will be thy shield: and also if these fall before thee in this world, the reward of thy good works shall be kept, and be prepared before Me in the world to come, great exceedingly.	Some time later, the word of Yahweh came to Abram in a vision: Do not be afraid, Abram! I am your shield and shall give you a very great reward.
Genesis 15:6 ●	And he believed in the Lord, and had faith in the <b>Word of the Lord</b> , and He reckoned it to him for righteousness, because he parleyed not before him with words.	Abram put his faith in <b>Yahweh</b> and this was reckoned to him as uprightness.
Genesis 16:1 ●	But Sara, the wife of Abram, had not borne to him. But he had a handmaid, a Mizreitha, and her name was Hagar, a daughter of Pharaoh, whom he gave to him as a handmaid at the time that he received her, being struck by the <b>word from before the Lord</b> .	Abram's wife Sarai had borne him no child, but she had an Egyptian slave-girl called Hagar.
Genesis 16:13 ●	And she gave thanks before the <b>Lord whose Word</b> spake to her, and thus said, Thou art He who livest and art eternal; who seest, but art not seen! · for she said, For, behold, here is revealed the glory of the Shekina of the Lord after a vision.	Hagar gave a name to <b>Yahweh</b> who had spoken to her, "You are El Roi," by which she meant, "Did I not go on seeing here, after him who sees me?"
Genesis 17:2 ●	And I will set My covenant between <b>My Word</b> and thee, and will multiply thee very greatly.	and I shall grant a covenant between <b>myself</b> and you, and make you very numerous."
Genesis 17:7 ●	And I have established My covenant between <b>My Word</b> and thee, and thy	And I shall maintain my covenant between <b>myself</b>

REFERENCE AND NOTES	TARGUM PSEUDO-JONATHAN (ENGLISH TRANSLATION)	NEW JERUSALEM BIBLE
	sons after thee in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God to thee and to thy sons after thee.	and you, and your descendants after you, generation after generation, as a covenant in perpetuity, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.
Genesis 17:10 ●	This is My covenant, that you shall observe between <b>My Word</b> and you, and your sons after you:—Every male of you being circumcised, though he have not a father to circumcise him.	This is my covenant which you must keep between <b>myself</b> and you, and your descendants after you: every one of your males must be circumcised.
Genesis 17:11 ●	And you shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, as a sign of the covenant between <b>My Word</b> and you.	You must circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and that will be the sign of the covenant between <b>myself</b> and you.
Genesis 18:5 ●	And I will bring food of bread, that you may strengthen your hearts, and give thanks in the Name of the <b>Word of the Lord</b> , and afterwards pass on. For therefore at the time of repast are you come, and have turned aside to your servant to take food. And they said, Thou hast spoken well; do according to thy word.	Let me fetch a little bread and you can refresh yourselves before going further, now that you have come in your servant's direction." They replied, "Do as you say."
Genesis 18:17 ●	And <b>the Lord</b> said, <b>with His Word</b> , I cannot hide from Abraham that which I am about to do; and it is right that before I do it, I should make it known to him.	Now <b>Yahweh</b> had wondered, 'shall I conceal from Abraham what I am going to do,
Genesis 19:24 ●●	And the <b>Word of the Lord</b> had caused showers of favour to descend upon Sedom and Amorah, to the intent that they might work repentance, but they did it not: so that they said, Wickedness is not manifest before the Lord. Behold, then, there are now sent down upon them sulphur and fire from before the <b>Word of the Lord</b> from Heaven.	Then <b>Yahweh</b> rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire of his own sending.

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Genesis 20:3 •	And a <b>word</b> came <b>from before the Lord</b> unto Abimelek, in a dream of the night, and said to him, Behold, thou diest, because of the woman whom thou hast carried away, and she a man's wife.	But <b>God</b> visited Abimelech in a dream one night. "You are to die," he told him, "because of the woman you have taken, for she is a married woman."
Genesis 20:6 •	And the <b>Word of the Lord</b> said to him in a dream, Before Me also it is manifest that in the truthfulness of thy heart thou didst this, and so restrained I thee from sinning before Me; therefore I would not permit thee to come near her.	"Yes, I know," <b>God</b> replied in the dream, "that you did this with a clear conscience and I myself prevented you from sinning against me. That was why I did not let you touch her."
Genesis 20:18 •	For the <b>Word of the Lord</b> shutting had shut in displeasure the wombs of all the women of Abimelek's house on account of Sarah the wife of Abraham.	for <b>Yahweh</b> had made all the women of Abimelech's household barren on account of Sarah, Abraham's wife.
Genesis 21:20 •	And the <b>Word of the Lord</b> was the helper of the youth, and he grew and dwelt in the wilderness, and became a skilful master of the bow.	<b>God</b> was with the boy. He grew up and made his home in the desert, and he became an archer.
Genesis 21:22 •	And it was at that time that Abimelek and Phikol, chief of his host, spake to Abraham, saying, The <b>Word of the Lord</b> is in thine aid in all whatsoever thou doest.	About then, Abimelech and Phicol, the commander of his army, said to Abraham, 'since <b>God</b> is with you in everything you do,
Genesis 21:23 •	And now, swear to me here, by the <b>Word of the Lord</b> , that thou wilt not be false with me, nor with my son, nor with the son of my son: according to the kindness which I have done with thee, thou shalt do with me, and with the land in which thou dwellest.	swear to me by <b>God</b> , here and now, that you will not act treacherously towards me or my kith and kin, but behave with the same faithful love to me and the land of which you are a guest as I have behaved to you."



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Genesis 21:33 ●	And he planted a garden, (lit., “a paradise,”) at the Well of the Seven Lambs, and prepared in the midst of it food and drink for them who passed by and who returned; and he preached to them there, Confess ye, and believe in the Name of the <b>Word of the Lord</b> , the everlasting God.	And Abraham planted a tamarisk at Beersheba and there he invoked the name of <b>Yahweh</b> .
Genesis 22:1 ●	And it was after these things that Izhak and Ishmael contended; and Ishmael said, It is right that I should inherit what is the father’s because I am his firstborn son. And Izhak said, It is right that I should inherit what is the father’s, because I am the son of Sarah his wife, and thou art the son of Hagar the handmaid of my mother. Ishmael answered and said, I am more righteous than thou, because I was circumcised at thirteen years; and if it had been my will to hinder, they should not have delivered me to be circumcised; but thou wast circumcised a child eight days; if thou hadst had knowledge, perhaps they should not have delivered thee to be circumcised. Izhak responded and said, Behold now, to-day I am thirty and six years old; and if the Holy One, blessed be He, were to require all my members, I would not delay. These words were heard before the Lord of the world, and the <b>Word of the Lord</b> at once tried Abraham, and said to him, Abraham! And he said, Behold me.	It happened some time later that <b>God</b> put Abraham to the test. “Abraham, Abraham!” he called. “Here I am,” he replied.
Genesis 22:16 ●	and said, By <b>My Word</b> have I sworn, saith the Lord, forasmuch as thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thy only begotten,	“I swear by <b>my own self</b> , Yahweh declares, that because you have done this, because you have not refused me your own beloved son,

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Genesis 22:18 •	And all the peoples of the earth shall be blessed through the righteousness of thy son, because thou hast obeyed <b>My word</b> .	All nations on earth will bless themselves by your descendants, because you have obeyed <b>my command</b> .”
Genesis 24:1 •	And Abraham was old with days, and the <b>Word of the Lord</b> had blessed Abraham with every kind of blessing.	By now Abraham was an old man, well on in years, and <b>Yahweh</b> had blessed Abraham in every way.
Genesis 24:3 •	And swear to me <b>in the name of the Word of the Lord</b> God, whose habitation is in heaven on high, the God whose dominion is over the earth, that thou wilt not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Kenaanites among whom I dwell;	I am going to make you swear by <b>Yahweh</b> , God of heaven and God of earth, that you will not choose a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I live
Genesis 26:3 •	sojourn in the land, and <b>My Word</b> shall be for thy help, and I will bless thee; for to the end to thy sons will I give all these lands, and I will establish the covenant which I have covenanted with Abraham thy father.	Remain for the present in that country; <b>I</b> shall be with you and bless you, for I shall give all these countries to you and your descendants in fulfilment of the oath I swore to your father Abraham.
Genesis 26:5 ••	on account that Abraham obeyed <b>My word</b> , and kept the keeping of <b>My word</b> , My statutes, My covenants, and My laws.	in return for Abraham’s obedience; for he kept <b>my charge</b> , my commandments, my statutes and my laws.”
Genesis 26:24 •	And the Lord appeared to him that night, and said, I am the God of Abraham thy father: fear not; for <b>My Word</b> is for thy help, and I will bless thee, and multiply thy sons for the righteousness’ sake of Abraham My servant.	Yahweh appeared to him the same night and said: I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for <b>I</b> am with you. I shall bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham’s sake.
Genesis 26:28 •	And they answered, Seeing, we have seen, that the <b>Word of the Lord</b> is for thy help, and for thy righteousness’ sake	“It became clear to us that <b>Yahweh</b> was with you,” they replied, “and so we

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	all good hath been to us; but when thou wentest forth from our land the wells dried up, and our trees made no fruit; then we said, We will cause him to return to us. And now let there be an oath established between us, and kindness between us and thee, and we will enter into a covenant with thee,	thought, "It is time to have a treaty sworn between us, between us and you." So let us make a covenant with you:
Genesis 27:28 ●	Therefore the <b>Word of the Lord</b> give thee of the good dews which descend from the heavens, and of the good fountains that spring up, and make the herbage of the earth to grow from beneath, and plenty of provision and wine.	May <b>God</b> give you dew from heaven, and the richness of the earth, abundance of grain and wine!
Genesis 27:31 ●	And the <b>Word of the Lord</b> had impeded him from taking clean venison; but he had found a certain dog, and killed him, and made food of him, and brought to his father, and said to his father, Arise, my father, and eat of my venison, that thy soul may bless me.	He too made an appetising dish and brought it to his father, "Father, please eat some of your son's game and then give me your special blessing."
Genesis 28:7 ◆◆	and that Jakob obeyed the <b>word of his father</b> , and the <b>word of his mother</b> , and was gone to Padan Aram:	and that, in obedience to <b>his father</b> and <b>mother</b> , Jacob had gone to Paddan-Aram,
Genesis 28:15 ●	And, behold, <b>My Word</b> is for thy help, and will keep thee in every place where thou shalt go, and will bring thee (again) to this land; for I will not leave thee until the time when I have performed all that I have told thee.	Be sure, <b>I</b> am with you; I shall keep you safe wherever you go, and bring you back to this country, for I shall never desert you until I have done what I have promised you."
Genesis 28:20 ●	And Jakob vowed a vow, saying, If the <b>Word of the Lord</b> will be my Helper, and will keep me from shedding innocent blood, and from strange worship, and from impure converse, in this way that I am going; and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to wear,	Jacob then made this vow, "If <b>God</b> remains with me and keeps me safe on this journey I am making, if he gives me food to eat and clothes to wear,

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Genesis 29:12 •	And Jakob told unto Rahel, that he was come to be with her father to take one of his daughters. And Rahel answered him Thou canst not dwell with him, for he is a man of cunning. And Jakob said to her, I am more cunning and wiser than he; nor can he do me evil, because the <b>Word of the Lord</b> is my Helper. And when she knew that he was the son of Rivekah, she ran and made it known to her father.	He told Rachel he was her father's kinsman and Rebekah's son, and she ran to tell her father.
Genesis 29:31 •	And it was revealed before the Lord that Leah was not loved in the sight of Jakob; and <b>He said in His Word</b> that sons should be given her, and that Rahel should be barren.	When Yahweh saw that Leah was unloved, <b>he</b> opened her womb, while Rachel remained barren.
Genesis 30:22 •	And the remembrance of Rahel came before the Lord, and the voice of her prayer was heard before Him; and <b>He said in his Word</b> that He would give her sons.	Then God remembered Rachel; he heard her and opened her womb.
Genesis 31:3 •	And the Lord said to Jakob, Return to the land of thy fathers, and to thy native place; and <b>My Word</b> shall be for thy help.	Yahweh said to Jacob, "Go back to the land of your ancestors, where you were born, and I shall be with you."
Genesis 31:5 • * "Memra" in the Aramaic PJT is not translated in the English PJT	And he said to them, I consider the looks of your father, and, behold, they are not peaceful with me as yesterday and as before it; but the <b>God</b> of my father hath been [ <b>the word</b> ] to my aid.	and he said to them, "I can see that your father's manner towards me is not as it was in the past, but the God of my father has been with me.
Genesis 31:24 •	And there came <b>an angel with a word from before the Lord</b> ; and he drew the sword against Laban the deceitful in a dream of the night, and said to him, Beware lest thou speak with Jakob from good to evil.	But <b>God</b> appeared to Laban the Aramaean in a dream that night and said to him, "On no account say anything whatever to Jacob."

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Genesis 31:50 ●	If thou shalt afflict my daughters, doing them injury, and if thou take upon my daughters, there is no man to judge us, the <b>Word of the Lord seeing</b> is the witness between me and thee.	If you ill-treat my daughters or marry other women besides my daughters, even though no one be with us, remember: <b>God</b> is witness between us.”
Genesis 35:3 ●	And we will arise and go up to Bethel, and I will make there an altar unto Eloha, who heard my prayer in the day when I was afflicted, and <b>whose Word</b> was my helper in the way that I went.	We must move on and go to Bethel. There I shall make an altar for the God who heard me when I was in distress, and gave me <b>his</b> help on the journey I made.”
Genesis 35:9 ●	And the Lord revealed Himself to Jakob again on his return from Padan of Aram, and <b>the Lord</b> blessed him <b>by the name of His Word</b> , after the death of his mother.	God again appeared to Jacob on his return from Paddan-Aram, and blessed him.
Genesis 39:2 ●	And the <b>Word of the Lord</b> was Joseph’s Helper, and he became a prosperous man in the house of his Mizraite master.	<b>Yahweh</b> was with Joseph, and everything he undertook was successful. He lodged in the house of his Egyptian master,
Genesis 39:3 ●	And his master saw that the <b>Word of the Lord</b> was his Helper, and that the Lord prospered in his hand all that he did;	and when his master saw how <b>Yahweh</b> was with him and how Yahweh made everything he undertook successful,
Genesis 39:21 ●	And the <b>Word of the Lord</b> was Joseph’s Helper, and extended mercy to him, and gave him favour in the eyes of the captain of the prison.	But <b>Yahweh</b> was with Joseph. He showed him faithful love and made him popular with the chief gaoler.
Genesis 39:23 ●	It was not needful for the captain of the prison to watch Joseph, after the custom of all prisoners, because he saw that there was no fault in his hands; for the <b>Word of the Lord</b> was his Helper, and	The chief gaoler did not bother about anything put in his charge, since <b>Yahweh</b> was with him, and Yahweh made

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	that which he did the Lord made it to prosper.	everything he undertook successful.
Genesis 41:1 ●	It was at the end of two years, that the remembrance of Joseph came before the <b>Word of the Lord</b> . And Pharaoh dreamed, and, behold, he stood by the river,	Two years later it happened that Pharaoh had a dream: there he was, standing by the Nile,
Genesis 41:40 ◆* “Memra” in the Aramaic PJT is not translated in the English PJT	Thou shalt be superintendent over my house, and by the <b>decree [of the word] of thy mouth</b> shall all my people be armed only in the throne of the kingdom will I be greater than thou.	You shall be my chancellor, and all my people shall respect <b>your orders</b> ; only this throne shall set me above you.”
Genesis 41:44 ◆	And Pharaoh said to Joseph, I am Pharaoh the king, and thou art viceregent, and without <b>thy word</b> a man shall not lift up his hand to gird on arms, or his foot to mount a horse in all the land of Mizraim.	Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Although I am Pharaoh, no one is to move hand or foot without <b>your permission</b> throughout Egypt.”
Genesis 43:7 ◆	And they said, The man demanding demanded (to know) about us, and about our family, saying Is your father yet living? Have you a brother? And we informed him according to the <b>word</b> of these things. Could we know that he would say, Bring your brother down?	They replied, “He kept questioning us about ourselves and our family, asking, “Is your father still alive?” and, “Have you another brother?” That is why we told him. How could we know he was going to say, “Bring your brother down here?””
Genesis 45:21 ◆	And Joseph gave them waggons according to the <b>word of Pharaoh</b> , and he furnished them with provision for the way.	Israel’s sons did as they were told. Joseph gave them waggons as <b>Pharaoh had ordered</b> , and he gave them provisions for the journey.
Genesis 46:4 ●●	<b>I am He who in My Word</b> will go down with thee into Mizraim; I will regard the	I shall go down to Egypt with you and <b>I myself</b>

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	affliction of thy children, and <b>My Word</b> shall bring thee up from thence, and cause thy children to come up; but Joseph shall lay his hand upon thine eyes.	shall bring you back again, and Joseph's hand will close your eyes."
Genesis 48:9 ●	And Joseph answered his father, They are my sons which the <b>Word of the Lord</b> gave me according to this writing, according to which I took Asenath the daughter of Dinah thy daughter to be my wife. And he said, Bring them now near to me, and I will bless them.	"They are my sons, whom <b>God</b> has given me here," Joseph told his father. "Then bring them to me", he said, 'so that I may bless them."
Genesis 48:21 ●	And Israel said to Joseph, Behold, my end cometh to die. But the <b>Word of the Lord</b> shall be your Helper, and restore you to the land of your fathers;	Then Israel said to Joseph, "Now I am about to die. But <b>God</b> will be with you and take you back to the land of your ancestors.
Genesis 49:25 ●	From the <b>Word of the Lord</b> shall be thy help; and He who is called the All-Sufficient shall bless thee with the blessings which descend with the dew of heaven from above, and with the good blessing of the fountains of the deep which ascend and clothe the herbage from beneath. The breasts are blessed at which thou wast suckled, and the womb in which thou didst lie,	the <b>God of your father</b> who assists you, El Shaddai who blesses you: blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep lying below, blessings of the breasts and womb,
Genesis 50:20 ●	You indeed imagined against me evil thoughts, that when I did not recline with you to eat it was because I retained enmity against you. But the <b>Word of the Lord</b> thought on me for good; for my father hath caused me to sit at the head, and on account of his honour I received; but now not for the sake of my (own) righteousness or merit was it given me to work out for you deliverance this day for the preservation of much people of the house of Jakob,	The evil you planned to do me has by <b>God's</b> design been turned to good, to bring about the present result: the survival of a numerous people.

## “Memra” in the Book of Exodus from Targum Pseudo-Jonathan

REFERENCE AND NOTES	TARGUM PSEUDO-JONATHAN (ENGLISH TRANSLATION)	NEW JERUSALEM BIBLE
Exodus 1:21 •	And forasmuch as the midwives feared before the Lord, they obtained for themselves a good name unto the ages; and the <b>Word of the Lord</b> up-built for them a royal house, even the house of the high priesthood.	and since the midwives feared God, <b>he</b> gave them families of their own.
Exodus 2:5 •	And the <b>Word of the Lord</b> sent forth a burning sore and inflammation of the flesh upon the land of Mizraim; and the daughter of Pharaoh came down to refresh herself at the river. And her handmaids, walking upon the bank of the river, saw the ark among the reeds, and put forth the arm and took it, and were immediately healed of the burning and inflammation.	Now Pharaoh's daughter went down to bathe in the river, while her maids walked along the riverside. Among the reeds she noticed the basket, and she sent her maid to fetch it.
Exodus 2:23 •	And it was after many of those days that the king of Mizraim was struck (with disease), and he commanded to kill the firstborn of the sons of Israel, that he might bathe himself in their blood. And the sons of Israel groaned with the labour that was hard upon them; and they cried, and their cry ascended to the high heavens of the Lord. And He spake in <b>His Word</b> to deliver them from the travail.	During this long period the king of Egypt died. The Israelites, groaning in their slavery, cried out for help and from the depths of their slavery their cry came up to God.
Exodus 3:8 •	And I have revealed Myself to thee this day, that by <b>My Word</b> they may be delivered from the hand of the Mizraee, to bring them up out of the unclean land, unto a good land, and large in its	And <b>I</b> have come down to rescue them from the clutches of the Egyptians and bring them up out of that country, to a country



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	boundaries, a land yielding milk and honey, unto the place where dwell the Kenaanaee, and the Hittae, and the Amoraee, and the Pherizae, and the Hivae, and the Jebusae.	rich and broad, to a country flowing with milk and honey, to the home of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites.
Exodus 3:12 ●	But He said, Therefore <b>My Word</b> shall be for thy help; and this shall be the sign to thee that I have sent thee: when thou hast, brought the people forth from Mizraim, ye shall worship before the Lord, because ye shall have received the Law upon this mountain.	“I shall be with you,” God said, “and this is the sign by which you will know that I was the one who sent you. After you have led the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.”
Exodus 3:17 ●	and I have said <b>in My Word</b> , I will bring you up out from the oppression of the Mizraee into the land of the Kenaanaee, and Hittae, and Amoraee, and Pherizae, and Hivae, and Jebusae, to the land that yieldeth milk and honey.	and has said: I shall bring you out of the misery of Egypt to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, to a country flowing with milk and honey.”
Exodus 3:19 ●	But it is manifest before Me that the king of Mizraim will not let you go, (no,) not from fear of Him who is Mighty, until that <b>by My Word</b> he shall have been punished with evil plagues.	I am well aware that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless he is compelled by a mighty hand;
Exodus 4:12 ●	And now go, and <b>I by My Word</b> will be with the speaking of thy mouth, and will teach thee what thou shalt say.	Now go, I shall help you speak and instruct you what to say.”
Exodus 4:15 ●◆◆	And thou shalt speak with him, and put the matter in his mouth, and <b>My Word</b> shall be with the <b>word of thy mouth</b> , and with the <b>word of his mouth</b> , and I will instruct you what you are to do.	You will speak to him and tell him what message to give. I shall help <b>you speak</b> , and <b>him</b> too, and instruct you what to do.
Exodus 5:2 ●	And Pharoh said, The name of the Lord is not made known to me, that I should receive <b>His word</b> to release Israel. I have	“Who is Yahweh,” Pharaoh replied, “for me to obey <b>what he says</b> and

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	not found written in the Book of the Angels the name of the Lord. Of Him I am not afraid, neither will I release Israel.	let Israel go? I know nothing of Yahweh, and I will not let Israel go.
Exodus 6:8 ●	And I will bring you into the land which I covenanted <b>by My Word</b> to give unto Abraham, to Izhak, and to Jakob; and I will give it to you for an inheritance. I Am the Lord.	Then I shall lead you into the country which I swore I would give to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and shall give it to you as your heritage, I, Yahweh.” “
Exodus 7:25 ●	And seven days were completed after the Lord had smitten the river, and the <b>Word of the Lord</b> had afterward healed the river.	After Yahweh struck the River, seven days went by.
Exodus 10:10 ●	And he said to them, So may the <b>Word of the Lord</b> be a help to you: (but) how can I release (both) you and your children? The evil offence is in the look of your faces: (you think to go onward) in the way that you would walk, till the time that you shall have come to the house of the place of your habitation.	Pharaoh said, ‘so I must let you go with your wives and children! May <b>Yahweh</b> preserve you! Plainly, you are up to no good!
Exodus 10:29 ●	Mosheh said, Thou hast spoken fairly. While I was dwelling in Midian, it was told me in a <b>word from before the Lord</b> , that the men who had sought to kill me had fallen from their means, and were reckoned with the dead. At the end there will be no mercy upon thee; but I will pray, and the plague shall be restrained from thee. And now I will see thy face no more.	Moses then said, “You yourself have said it. I shall never see your face again.”
Exodus 12:23 ●	For the Glory of the Lord will be manifested in striking the Mizraee, and He will see the blood upon the lintel and upon the two posts, and the <b>Word of the Lord</b> will spread His protection over the door, and the destroying angel will not be permitted to enter your houses to smite.	Then, when Yahweh goes through Egypt to strike it, and sees the blood on the lintel and on both door-posts, <b>he</b> will pass over the door and not allow the Destroyer to enter your homes and strike.

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Exodus 12:27 ●	you shall say, It is the sacrifice of mercy before the Lord, who had mercy in <b>His Word</b> upon the houses of the sons of Israel in Mizraim, when He destroyed the Mizraee, and spared our houses. And when the house of Israel heard this word from the mouth of Mosheh, they bowed and worshipped.	you will tell them, “It is the Passover sacrifice in honour of Yahweh who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt, and struck Egypt but spared our houses.” “ And the people bowed in worship.
Exodus 12:29 ●	And it was in the dividing, of the night of the fifteenth, that the <b>Word of the Lord</b> slew all the firstborn in the land of Mizraim, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, who would have sat upon the throne of his kingdom, unto the firstborn sons of the kings who were captives in the dungeon as hostages under Pharaoh’s hand; and who, for having rejoiced at the servitude of Israel, were punished as (the Mizraee): and all the firstborn of the cattle that did the work of the Mizraee died also.	And at midnight <b>Yahweh</b> struck down all the first-born in Egypt from the first-born of Pharaoh, heir to his throne, to the first-born of the prisoner in the dungeon, and the first-born of all the livestock.
Exodus 13:5 ●	And it shall be, when the Lord your God shall have brought you into the land of the Kenaanaee, and Hittae, and Amoraee, and Hivae, and Jebusae, which <b>He</b> swore <b>by His Word</b> unto Abraham to give thee, a land producing milk and honey, that thou shalt keep this service in this month.	and when Yahweh has brought you into the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, flowing with milk and honey, which <b>he</b> swore to your ancestors that he would give you, then you must observe this rite in the same month.
Exodus 13:8 ●	And thou shalt instruct thy son on that day, saying, This precept is on account of what the <b>Word of the Lord</b> did for me in miracles and wonders, in bringing me forth from Mizraim.	And on that day you will explain to your son, “This is because of what <b>Yahweh</b> did for me when I came out of Egypt.”
Exodus 13:15	And when the <b>Word of the Lord</b> had hardened the heart of Pharaoh (that he	When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let

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•	would) not deliver us, he killed all the firstborn in the land of Mizraim, from the firstborn of man to the firstborn of cattle; therefore do I sacrifice before the Lord every male that openeth the womb, and every firstborn of my sons I redeem with silver.	us go, Yahweh killed all the first-born in Egypt, of man and beast alike. This is why I sacrifice every male first issuing from the womb to Yahweh and redeem every first-born of my sons.”
Exodus 13:17 ••	AND it was when Pharaoh had released the people, that the Lord did not conduct, them by the way of the land of the Philistines though that was the near one; for the Lord said, Lest the people be affrighted in seeing their brethren who were killed in war, two hundred thousand men of strength of the tribe of Ephraim, who took shields, and lances, and weapons of war, and went down to Gath to carry off the flocks of the Philistines; and because they transgressed against the statute of the <b>Word of the Lord</b> , and went forth from Mizraim three years before the (appointed) end of their servitude, they were delivered into the hand of the Philistines, who slew them. These are the dry bones which the <b>Word of the Lord</b> restored to life by the ministry (hand) of Yechezkel the prophet, in the vale of Dura; but which, if they (now) saw them, they would be afraid, and return into Mizraim.	When Pharaoh had let the people go, God did not let them take the road to the Philistines’ territory, although that was the shortest, “in case”, God thought, “the prospect of fighting makes the people change their minds and turn back to Egypt.”
Exodus 14:25 •	and He brake (or, made rough) the wheels of Pharaoh’s carriages, so that they drove them with hardship, and that they went on and left them behind. And the Mizrae said one to another, Let us flee from the people of the house of Israel; for this is the <b>Word of the Lord</b> who fought for them in Mizraim.	He so clogged their chariot wheels that they drove on only with difficulty, which made the Egyptians say, “Let us flee from Israel, for <b>Yahweh</b> is fighting on their side against the Egyptians!”

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Exodus 14:31 ●	And Israel saw the power of the mighty hand by which the Lord had wrought the miracles in Mizraim; and the people feared before the Lord, and believed in the <b>Name of the Word of the Lord</b> , and in the prophecies of Mosheh His servant.	When Israel saw the mighty deed that Yahweh had performed against the Egyptians, the people revered Yahweh and put their faith in <b>Yahweh</b> and in Moses, his servant.
Exodus 15:1 ●	Behold: then sang, Mosheh and the sons of Israel this song of praise before the Lord and saying they said: Thanksgiving and praise we bring before the Lord Most High, who is glorified above the glorious, and exalted above the exalted; who punisheth <b>by His Word</b> whomsoever glorifieth himself before Him. Therefore when Pharaoh the wicked bare himself proudly before the Lord, and, being uplifted in his heart, followed after the people of the sons of Israel, their horses and their chariots He threw and buried in the sea of Suph.	It was then that Moses and the Israelites sang this song in Yahweh's honour: I shall sing to Yahweh, for he has covered himself in glory, horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.
Exodus 15:2 ●	The Lord is Mighty, and greatly to be feared over all the world. <b>He spake in His Word</b> , and became to me a God of salvation. From their mothers' breasts even the children have given signs with their fingers to their fathers, and said This is our God, who nourished us with honey from the rock, and with oil from the stone of clay, at the time when our mothers went forth upon the face of the field to give us birth, and leave us there; and He sent an angel who washed us and enwrapped us; and now will we praise Him: He is the God of our fathers, and we will exalt Him.	Yah is my strength and my song, to him I owe my deliverance. He is my God and I shall praise him, my father's God and I shall extol him.
Exodus 15:8 ●	For by the <b>Word from before Thee</b> the waters became heaps; they stood, as if bound like skins that confine flowing	<b>A blast from your nostrils</b> and the waters piled high; the waves stood firm as a dyke; the

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	water, and the depths were congealed in the flood of the great sea.	bed of the sea became firm ground.
Exodus 15:25 ●	And he prayed before the Lord, and the Lord showed him the bitter tree of Ardiphne; and he wrote upon it the great and glorious Name, and cast it into the midst of the waters, and the waters were rendered sweet. And there did the <b>Word of the Lord</b> appoint to him the ordinance of the Sabbath, and the statute of honouring father and mother, the judgments concerning wounds and bruises, and the punishments wherewith offenders are punished; and there he tried (them) with the tenth trial,	Moses appealed to Yahweh for help, and Yahweh showed him a piece of wood. When Moses threw it into the water, the water became sweet. There <b>he</b> laid down a statute and law for them and there he put them to the test. Then he said,
Exodus 16:3 ●	And the sons of Israel said to them, Would that we had died by the <b>Word of the Lord</b> in the land of Mizraim, when we sat by the cisterns of meat, and ate bread and had enough! Why hast thou brought us out into this wilderness to kill all this congregation with hunger?	and said to them, “Why did we not die at <b>Yahweh’s hand</b> in Egypt, where we used to sit round the flesh pots and could eat to our heart’s content! As it is, you have led us into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death!”
Exodus 16:8 ●	And Mosheh said, By this you shall know, when the Lord prepareth you at evening flesh to eat, and in the morning bread to satisfy, that your complainings wherewith you complain against Him are heard before the Lord. And we, what are we accounted? Your complaints are not against us, but against the <b>Word of the Lord</b> .	Moses then said, “This evening Yahweh will give you meat to eat, and tomorrow morning bread to your heart’s content, for Yahweh has heard your complaints about him. What do we count for? Your complaints are not against us, but against <b>Yahweh.</b> ”
Exodus 17:1 ●	And all the congregation of the sons of Israel journeyed from the desert of Sin by their journeyings according to the <b>word of the Lord</b> , and they encamped in	The whole community of Israelites left the desert of Sin, travelling by stages as <b>Yahweh ordered</b> . They

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	Rephidim, a place where their hands were idle in the commandments of the law, and the fountains were dry, and there was no water for the people to drink.	pitched camp at Rephidim where there was no water for the people to drink.
Exodus 17:13 ●	And Jehoshua shattered Amalek, and cut off the heads, of the strong men of his people, by the mouth of the <b>Word of the Lord</b> , with the slaughter of the sword.	and Joshua defeated Amalek, putting their people to the sword.
Exodus 17:15 ●	And Mosheh builded an altar, and called the name of it, <b>The Word of the Lord</b> is my banner; for the sign which He hath wrought (in this) place was on my behalf.	Moses then built an altar and named it <b>Yahweh-Nissi</b>
Exodus 17:16 ●●	And he said, Because the <b>Word of the Lord</b> hath sworn by the throne of His glory, that <b>He by His Word</b> will fight against those of the house of Amalek, and destroy them unto three generations; from the generation of this world, from the generation of the Meshiha, and from the generation of the world to come.	meaning, “Lay hold of Yahweh’s banner! <b>Yahweh</b> will be at war with Amalek generation after generation.”
Exodus 18:19 ●	Now hearken to me and I will advise thee; and may the <b>Word of the Lord</b> be thy helper! When thou art with the people who seek instruction from before the Lord, thou shouldst take their affair before the Lord,	Now listen to the advice I am going to give you, and <b>God</b> be with you! Your task is to represent the people to God, to lay their cases before God,
Exodus 19:5 ●	And now, if you will truly hearken to <b>My Word</b> and keep My covenant, you shall be more beloved before Me than all the peoples on the face of the earth.	So now, if you are really prepared to obey <b>me</b> and keep my covenant, you, out of all peoples, shall be my personal possession, for the whole world is mine.
Exodus 20:7 ●	My people of the house of Israel, Let no one of you swear by the name of the <b>Word of the Lord</b> your God in vain; for in the day of the great judgment the	“You shall not misuse the name of <b>Yahweh</b> your God, for Yahweh will not

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	Lord will not hold guiltless any one who sweareth by His name in vain.	leave unpunished anyone who misuses his name.
Exodus 21:22 ◆* “Memra” in the Aramaic PJT is translated as “sentence” in the English PJT	If men when striving strike a woman with child, and cause her to miscarry, but not to lose her life, the fine on account of the infant which the husband of the woman shall lay upon him, he shall pay according to the <b>sentence</b> of the judges.	“If people, when brawling, hurt a pregnant woman and she suffers a miscarriage but no further harm is done, the person responsible will pay compensation as fixed by the woman’s master, paying as much as the judges <b>decide</b> .
Exodus 23:21 ◆◆	Be circumspect before Him, and obey <b>His word</b> , and be not rebellious against His words; for He will not forgive your sins, because <b>His word</b> is in My Name.	Revere him and obey <b>what he says</b> . Do not defy him: he will not forgive any wrong-doing on your part, for my name is in <b>him</b> .
Exodus 23:22 ◆	For if thou wilt indeed hearken to <b>His word</b> , and do all that I speak by Him, I will be the enemy of thy enemy, and will trouble them who trouble thee.	If, however, you obey <b>what he says</b> and do whatever I order, I shall be an enemy to your enemies and a foe to your foes.
Exodus 25:22 ●	And I will appoint <b>My Word</b> with thee there, and will speak with thee from above the mercy-seat, between the two kerubaia that are over the ark of the testament, concerning all that I may command thee for the sons of Israel.	There <b>I</b> shall come to meet you; from above the mercy-seat, from between the two winged creatures which are on the ark of the Testimony, I shall give you all my orders for the Israelites.
Exodus 26:28 ●	And the middle bar in the midst of the boards passing from end to end shall be from the tree which Abraham planted in Beara of Sheba: for when Israel had crossed the sea, the angels cut down the tree and cast it into the sea, and it floated on the face of the waters. And an angel proclaimed, and said, This is the tree	The middle bar must join the frames from one end to the other, halfway up.



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	<p>which Abraham planted in Beara of Sheba, and prayed there in the name of the <b>Word of the Lord</b>. And the sons of Israel shall take and make thereof the middle bar, seventy cubits in length, and with it shall wondrous things be done: for when they have reared up the tabernacle, it shall go round it like a serpent among the boards of the tabernacle and when they take it down, it shall become straight as a rod.</p>	
<p>Exodus 29:42</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●</li> </ul>	<p>a perpetual holocaust for your generations at the door of the tabernacle of ordinance before the Lord; where I will appoint <b>My Word</b> to (meet) thee there, to speak with thee there.</p>	<p>a perpetual burnt offering for all your generations to come, at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting before Yahweh, where <b>I</b> shall meet you and speak to you.</p>
<p>Exodus 29:43</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●</li> </ul>	<p>And there I will appoint <b>My Word</b> (to meet) with the sons of Israel, and I will be sanctified in their rulers for My glory.</p>	<p>“There <b>I</b> shall meet the Israelites in the place consecrated by my glory.</p>
<p>Exodus 30:6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●</li> </ul>	<p>And thou shalt place it before the veil which is over the ark of the testimony, before the mercy seat that is upon the testimony, where I will appoint <b>My Word</b> to be with thee.</p>	<p>“You will put it in front of the curtain by the ark of Testimony, in front of the mercy-seat which is on the Testimony, where <b>I</b> shall meet you.</p>
<p>Exodus 30:36</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●</li> </ul>	<p>And beat, and make it small, and of it some shalt thou put before the testimony in the tabernacle of ordinance, where I will appoint <b>My Word</b> to be with thee. Most sacred shall it be to you.</p>	<p>You will grind some of this up very fine and put it in front of the Testimony in the Tent of Meeting, where <b>I</b> shall meet you. You will regard it as especially holy.</p>
<p>Exodus 31:13</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●</li> </ul>	<p>Also, speak thou with the sons of Israel, saying, Ye shall keep the day of My Sabbaths indeed; for it is a sign between <b>My Word</b> and you, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctify you.</p>	<p>‘speak to the Israelites and say, “You will keep my Sabbaths properly, for this is a sign between <b>myself</b> and you for all your generations to come, so that</p>

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		you will know that it is I, Yahweh, who sanctify you.
Exodus 31:17 ●	between <b>My Word</b> and the sons of Israel it is a sign for ever. For in six days the Lord created and perfected the heavens and the earth; and in the seventh day He rested and refreshed.	Between <b>myself</b> and the Israelites, this is a sign for ever, for in six days Yahweh made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day he rested and drew breath.”
Exodus 32:13 ●	Remember Abraham, and Izhak, and Israel, Thy servants, to whom Thou didst swear in <b>Thy Word</b> and didst say to them, I will multiply your children as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have told you will I give to your sons, and they shall inherit for ever.	Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to whom you swore by <b>your very self</b> and made this promise: “I shall make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven, and this whole country of which I have spoken, I shall give to your descendants, and it will be their heritage for ever.”
Exodus 32:35 ●	And the <b>Word of the Lord</b> plagued the people, because they had bowed themselves to the calf that Aharon had made.	And <b>Yahweh</b> punished the people for having made the calf, the one Aaron had made.
Exodus 33:9 ●	And it came to pass when Mosheh had gone into the tabernacle, the column of the glorious Cloud descended and stood at the door of the tabernacle; and the <b>Word of the Lord</b> spake with Mosheh.	And whenever Moses went into the Tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and station itself at the entrance to the Tent, while <b>Yahweh</b> spoke with Moses.
Exodus 33:12 ●	And Mosheh said before the Lord, Lo, what hast Thou said to me, Take this people up? but Thou hast not made me to know whom Thou wilt send with me. <b>By Thy Word Thou</b> hast said, I have	Moses said to Yahweh, “Look, you say to me, “Make the people move on,” but you have not told me whom you are going to send with me, although

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	ordained thee with a goodly name, and thou hast found favour before Me.	<b>you</b> have said, “I know you by name and you enjoy my favour.”
Exodus 33:19 ●	but He said, Behold, I will make all the measure of My goodness pass before thee, and I will give utterance in the good name of the <b>Word of the Lord</b> before thee; and I will have compassion upon whom I see it right to have compassion, and will be merciful to whom I see it right to have mercy.	Yahweh said, “I shall make all my goodness pass before you, and before you I shall pronounce the name <b>Yahweh</b> ; and I am gracious to those to whom I am gracious and I take pity on those on whom I take pity.
Exodus 33:22 ●	And it shall be that when the glory of My Shekinah passeth before thee, I will put thee in a cavern of the rock, and will overshadow thee with <b>My Word</b> until the time that I have passed by.	and when my glory passes by, I shall put you in a cleft of the rock and shield you with <b>my hand</b> until I have gone past.
Exodus 34:5 ●	And the Lord revealed Himself in the cloud of the glory of His Shekinah, and Mosheh stood with Him there; and Mosheh called on the Name of the <b>Word of the Lord</b> .	And Yahweh descended in a cloud and stood with him there and pronounced the name <b>Yahweh</b> .
Exodus 34:27 ◆* “Memra” in the Aramaic PJT is translated as “expression” in the English PJT	And the Lord said to Mosheh, Write thou these words; for upon the <b>expression of these words</b> have I stricken My covenant with thee and with the people of Israel.	Yahweh then said to Moses, “Put these words in writing, for they are the <b>terms</b> of the covenant which I have made with you and with Israel.”
Exodus 36:33 ●	And he made the middle bar to mortise in the midst of the boards from end to end, of the tree which our father Abraham planted in Beara of Sheba, praying there in the Name of the <b>Word of the Lord</b> , the everlasting, God.	He made the middle bar, to join the frames from one end to the other, halfway up.

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Exodus 38:21 ◆	These are the sums, weights, and numbers of the Tabernacle of the Testimony, which were counted by the <b>word of the mouth</b> of Mosheh. But the service of the Levites was by the hand of Ithamar bar Aharon the priest.	These are the accounts for the Dwelling—the Dwelling of the Testimony—drawn up by <b>order</b> of Moses, the work of Levites, produced by Ithamar son of Aaron, the priest.

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