

Introducing the Divinity of Yeshua

J.K. McKee

For many, the Divinity of Yeshua—Yeshua the Messiah being the Eternal, uncreated Son of God, who is God, integrated into the Divine Identity—is an essential Biblical truth. Given the diversity of theological beliefs in the broad Messianic movement, this is often the issue that people will divide over.

What is Christology?

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

Stanley J. Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 25.

A low Christology widely advocates that Yeshua (Jesus) is some sort of created, exalted agent of the Father. Yeshua might be the first ever created being, who in turn was authorized to create our known universe, and may even have great power, but He is ultimately created.

A high Christology advocates not just that Yeshua pre-existed our known universe and created our known universe, but that He is co-equal with God the Father and uncreated, sharing the same glory and worthy of the same worship as the Father. Yeshua the Son is the Father’s agent, being incarnated and born as a human being, hence the Messiah can be spoken of as being both God and sent by God.

Where does the broad Messianic community stand?

1. Traditional Christian Trinitarianism: Among some of the older Messianic Jewish organizations, primarily geared toward missionary evangelism and often tied to older networks of evangelical Christian support, are those who adhere to the traditional doctrine of the Trinity, “The Christian church’s belief that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three Persons in one Godhead” (Donald S. McKim, *Westminster*

Dictionary of Theological Terms [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996], 288.).

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

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

4. An ambiguous Christology: An ambiguous Christology is detectable among Messianic people who are either unsure about the nature of the Messiah and whether or not He is genuinely God, are internally divided as a ministry or congregational leadership team about the nature of the Messiah, or may actually hold to a low Christology of Yeshua not being God, but who do not wish to be too public about it. Those who

adhere to an ambiguous Christology are likely to say that they only “speak in Biblical terms,” and affirm what various Bible passages say about the Messiah. But, those who adhere to an ambiguous Christology will not expel any real effort to explain what they think various Bible passages about the Messiah actually mean.

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

A Low Christology, a High Christology?

1. Lordship: Within the Hebrew Tanach, the God of Israel is certainly designated by the Divine Name YHWH/YHVH (יהוה), which in most English Bibles is rendered as “the LORD,” following Second Temple Jewish convention of not speaking God’s proper name aloud (m. *Yoma* 6:2). The Greek Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Tanach rendered YHWH with the title *Kurios* (κύριος), which in a classical context can mean, “of persons, *having power or authority over, lord or master of*” (LS, 458). There are references seen in the Gospels, when Yeshua of Nazareth is referred to as *Kurios*, it is something more akin to “Sir.” But, there will be other places, particularly when there is some significant Tanach quotation made involving the LORD or YHWH, where an ascription of such a status is seemingly given to Yeshua (i.e., Romans 10:13 and Joel 2:32; Philippians 2:10-11 and Isaiah 45:23). Is the statement, “Yeshua is Lord,” merely a declaration of His supremacy, or is it also intended to be an assertion of His nature as actually being the LORD God or YHWH of the Tanach?

For certain, various resources and scores of books and commentaries will conclude that

Yeshua the Messiah being *Kurios* in the Apostolic Scriptures, bears some significant connection with the Divine Name YHWH in the Tanach. This is especially holds true when various Pauline letters include “grace and peace” issued from “God our Father and the Lord Yeshua the Messiah” (Romans 1:7; also 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2; Philippians 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1; 1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2; Philemon 3). The close proximity of God being referred to as “Father,” and Yeshua the Messiah as “Lord,” would be taken as natural evidence of a balanced Godhead where Yeshua is integrated into the Divine Identity (cf. 1 Corinthians 8:5, reworking the Deuteronomy 6:4 *Shema*), and that the intention of the Apostles was to present the nature of Yeshua along Jewish monotheistic lines, and not as some separate deity. Those who hold to a high Christology would be quite keen to conclude that Yeshua being Lord or *Kurios*, is rightly and widely to be associated with how *Kurios* in the Greek Septuagint is connected to the Divine Name YHWH.

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

2. Worship and Veneration: The First Commandment explicitly prohibits the worship of any other deity than the LORD God of Israel (Exodus 20:3-5; Deuteronomy 5:6-9), meaning

that some significant questions are posed from the Apostolic Scriptures, when it is clear that Yeshua of Nazareth was venerated by people and various supernatural entities. How are examiners and readers to view such veneration of Yeshua? Is this to just be some kind of intensified honor, as could be demonstrated by the ancients toward various human kings, political leaders, and figures of importance? Or, is the veneration that Yeshua of Nazareth received, to be indeed regarded as worship?

There are linguistic factors which play into evaluating the veneration demonstrated toward Yeshua of Nazareth. There is some disagreement about what the specific Hebrew verb translated “worship” in the First Commandment, among other key places, actually is, among lexicons, with *TWOT* favoring the verb *chavah* (חָוָה; Edwin Yamauchi, in *TWOT*, 1:267-269), but it more often favored to be the verb *shachah* (שָׁחָה; Merrill F. Unger and William White, *Nelson’s Expository Dictionary of the Old Testament* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1980], pp 295-296). Lexically speaking, whether it is *chavah* or *shachah*, the underlying Hebrew can be translated as either “worship” or “bow down,” depending on whether or not the God of Israel or some pagan deity is being venerated, or if just honor is being expressed toward another human being. The Greek equivalent via the Septuagint, which is also employed in the Apostolic Scriptures, is *proskuneō* (προσκυνέω), which in relative totality can mean “worship; fall down and worship, kneel, bow low, fall at another’s feet” (*CGEDNT*, 154). The verb *proskuneō* can lexically be translated as either “worship” or “bow down,” certainly asking some important questions concerning how it is employed when veneration or honor is expressed toward Yeshua of Nazareth (i.e., Matthew 2:2, 11; 14:33; 28:9).

Those who hold to a high Christology would, for sure, view the majority of uses of *proskuneō* in regard to veneration or honor of Yeshua of Nazareth being regarded as “worship,” and not just some sort of “bowing down.” This especially concerns Tanach intertextuality, where worship of YHWH is ascribed to Yeshua (Hebrews 1:6 and Psalm 97:7). If Yeshua is not genuinely God, then to worship Yeshua is to violate the First Commandment and commit blatant idolatry. Those who hold to a low Christology of Yeshua of Nazareth being some important human lord or master, and perhaps

even a supernatural agent but ultimately a created being, would not often consider “worship” to be ascribed to Yeshua. Where the verb *proskuneō* appears in the Apostolic Scriptures in association with honor of Yeshua, it is widely concluded to only involve people “bowing down” to the Messiah.

3. The titles “Son of Man” and “Son of God”:

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

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

Those who hold to both a high and low Christology will have to concede that whatever is intended by Yeshua of Nazareth being referred to as the “Son of God,” it is representative of a relationship that only Yeshua as the Son has to the Father (i.e., Matthew 11:25-27; Luke 10:21-22; John 3:16; 5:19-24; 14:13; 17:1). It is then, of course, up to readers to decide, based on the context of how “Son of God” is employed (i.e. Matthew 26:63-64), as to whether or not the title

“Son of God” implies some sort of Divine state of being or not. Too frequently overlooked, in association with the title “Son of God,” is how this terminology is employed with Yeshua of Nazareth embodying the hopes, aspirations, and destiny of Israel (i.e., Exodus 4:22-23; Jeremiah 31:1; Hosea 11:1; Malachi 2:10) and its king (2 Samuel 7:14; Psalm 2:7; 89:26-27).

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

Those who hold to a high Christology of Yeshua the Messiah being genuinely God have to balance statements of the Son being sent by the Father, with statements that no mere, created agent—be that agent the figure Wisdom, or some other high ranking angel or messenger—could say. Yeshua was accused of the crime of self-deification (i.e., John 5:18; 10:33) by various Jewish religious leaders. Rather than capitulate to charges of a mortal claiming some inappropriate divine status, Yeshua predicated His identity on His pre-existence (i.e., Luke 10:18; John 8:56-58), and in having an identity that no mere mortal could intrinsically have (Mark 12:35-37; Matthew 22:43-46; Luke 20:41-44). Yeshua’s being sent by the Father as His agent, and His unique and different relationship with the Father (John 20:17), was to draw people in, for them to sincerely investigate who He was, where He was from, and His true nature. While it can indeed be

shown that there are areas of overlap between Yeshua the Messiah and supernatural agents such as the figure Wisdom, or various angels or messengers—it is in those areas of divergence, where Yeshua is shown to be uncreated. Wisdom was “created before all things (Sirach 1:4), but in contradiction to this, Yeshua “is before all things, and in Him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:17).

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

The major differences between those who hold to a high Christology and a low Christology, as they concern Yeshua’s humanity, will mostly be seen in how the latter will tend to over-emphasize Yeshua’s human experience, particularly in over-quoting a passage such as 1 Timothy 2:5: “For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Messiah Yeshua.” The former will try to balance Yeshua’s humanity as an example for His followers to emulate, but Yeshua being uniquely One in whom “all the fullness of the Deity dwells embodied” (Colossians 2:9, PME).

Key Texts of Principal Importance

John 1:1-18

Philippians 2:5-11

Colossians 1:15-20