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Answering the “Frequently Avoided Questions” About the Divinity of Yeshua

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answering the claims of the anti-Divinity Messianics

Anyone who has surveyed the Messianic movement—whether it be Messianic Judaism, the One Law/One Torah sub-movement, or Two-House sub-movement—knows that it is very broad and diverse. There is a broad array of theologies and opinions evident in the Messianic movement, just as in Christianity or Judaism. There are those who are theologically conservative, and those who are theologically liberal. There are those who believe that God has the ultimate control over their lives, and those who believe that they can determine their own destiny and dictate to God who He is, ignoring His direction. There are those who think deeply, and there are those who think simplistically. There are those who let themselves be tossed and swayed by religious politics, and there are those who do not allow entangling alliances to have an influence over them.

Since the 1990s and 2000s, it is not surprising that an age-old theological controversy, going back to the Second and Third Centuries C.E., has arisen in the broad Messianic movement: *Who is Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ)? Is He God—or is He just a human man?*

This has now developed into a debate that is not so easily delineated along any kind of denominational, organizational, or ministry lines, *as it affects everybody*. While various Messianic associations and ministries have rightfully taken strong stands against those who would deride Yeshua the Messiah as being the Divine Savior—the fact is that individual people who may attend congregations which officially affirm Yeshua as God, may themselves only think of the Messiah as a good man who was connected to God in a special way, or some kind of exalted supernatural being, yet ultimately created. It is certainly true that there are many Christian people who attend church every week, being members of denominations which officially affirm the Divinity of Jesus, who themselves do not believe in it and only think that Jesus was a good teacher. So, individual people denying Yeshua’s Divinity is not at all an isolated incident, nor is it uncommon to the world of Christian religion, at least.

What can make things in the Messianic movement much different, though, is our relatively small size, and the fact that many sub-groups and cliques are becoming more and more reliant on promoting themselves by various modern communication media. It is very easy for an outspoken individual in the assembly, who does not believe that Yeshua is Divine, to cause

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quite a stir. In the past, this would have only taken place by a person passing out questionable literature on the side, not too different from a dealer offering free samples of illegal drugs. What happens now is usually seeing various opinions expressed via a personal blog page or YouTube channel. All too often, individuals are caught broadsided when various arguments are made or encountered, not quite knowing what to do. Too many can be persuaded, even if just for a little while, into thinking that Yeshua the Messiah might not really be God.

Sadly, too many of today's Messianic congregational leaders do not know what to do about this. And, given the fact that apostasy is indeed prophesied to be a sign of the Last Days (2 Thessalonians 2:3), people denying major tenets of our Messianic faith is something that we are all going to have to deal with in increasing numbers as the Second Coming draws nearer. Pockets of individuals here and there denying Yeshua's Divinity is sure to be followed by much larger groups, and in time it will be found in some Messianic congregations' leadership and whole ministries. Those of us who are true to what the Scriptures tell us about Yeshua the Messiah, however, **can have confidence that He is indeed the LORD God, and He is indeed Divine!** There are fair-minded, Biblically-rooted answers for the questions and criticisms being made. *You do not have to be broadsided by some of the main, yet decidedly weak arguments, that are being bantered around.*

Approaching the Debate: Why does the Messiah have to be Divine?

The question of whether or not Yeshua the Messiah is Divine, God in the flesh, has been a cause of considerable debate and dissension in various periods, since His ascension into Heaven. The Apostolic Scriptures record ancient hymns and creeds affirmed about Yeshua by the First Century Believers themselves (i.e., Philippians 2:6-11; Colossians 1:15-20; 1 Timothy 3:16), some of which may have been formulated to not only make key statements about who He is, but also subvert errant ideas that had circulated in various sectors of the *ekklesia*.

In much of theological study since the First Century and ministry of the Apostles, we encounter the views of people who strongly believed that Yeshua (Jesus) must be God, and that any diversion of believing that He is not God must be viewed as theological heresy. There are also those who have strongly believed that Yeshua was only a human man, that He had some kind of special relationship with God and was quite possibly even the Messiah empowered by God, but was never God in the flesh.

Whether Yeshua the Messiah is Divine is an old debate, and while there are discussions about what this group of Christian leaders insisted, or what that sect did—**this is an issue that ultimately tries a reader's loyalty to the claims of the Biblical text.** How Medieval Roman Catholic leaders handled those who they considered to be "heretics," for example, *should not* be what guides our thoughts about this issue. What should guide our thoughts about this issue is understanding the wide-sweeping Biblical ramifications of: "these have been written so that you may believe that Yeshua is the Messiah, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31). What matters for our deliberations is whether or not the Divinity of Yeshua **is a clear teaching of Scripture**, that the Divinity of Yeshua is something reflected in the testimony of the Apostles, and how the Divinity of Yeshua is something which affects our salvation.

As I approach the issue of whether or not Yeshua is the Divine Savior, my reasons for believing in His Divinity are firmly based within the text of Scripture. From Scripture, we see stated in numerous places that only God can save human beings from their diverse trials, and

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allow His people to enter into His blessed purpose for them. The LORD God explicitly claims that He is the only Savior (derived from the Hebrew verb *yasha*, יָשָׁא)¹ of people:

“For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; I have given Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in your place” (Isaiah 43:3).

“I, even I, am the LORD, and there is no savior besides Me” (Isaiah 43:11).

“Declare and set forth *your case*; indeed, let them consult together. Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none except Me” (Isaiah 45:21).

“I will feed your oppressors with their own flesh, and they will become drunk with their own blood as with sweet wine; and all flesh will know that I, the LORD, am your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob” (Isaiah 49:26).

“You will also suck the milk of nations and suck the breast of kings; then you will know that I, the LORD, am your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob” (Isaiah 60:16).

“Yet I *have been* the LORD your God since the land of Egypt; and you were not to know any god except Me, for there is no savior besides Me” (Hosea 13:4).

These verses from the Tanach (Old Testament) attest to the fact that the LORD (YHWH) Himself is the only Savior and Redeemer, as demonstrated by great acts of deliverance and victory for His people. The claim of Isaiah 42:51, for example, is most exclusive: “**And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me**” (NIV). The process of being saved from the eternal punishment to be meted upon sinners, directly involves actions performed by God Himself.

The key to properly dealing with whether or not Yeshua is Divine, is with how He could possibly offer any person eternal redemption as Savior, if He were only a human man.

The Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament) surely affirm that Yeshua the Messiah is the Savior (Grk. *sōtēr*, σωτήρ). The angels proclaimed at Yeshua’s birth, “for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Messiah the Lord” (Luke 2:11). The Apostle Paul wrote, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Yeshua the Messiah” (Philippians 3:20), and he spoke about “the redemption which is in Messiah Yeshua” (Romans 3:24). He further says, “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace” (Ephesians 1:7; cf. Colossians 1:14), which is undeniably the activity of salvation. Four times in the Epistle of 2 Peter, Yeshua is called “our Lord and Savior” (1:11; 2:20; 3:2, 18). And indeed, there are many other places in the Apostolic Scriptures where Yeshua the Messiah is unambiguously referred to as the Savior, including: John 4:42; Acts 5:31; 13:23; Ephesians 5:23; 2 Timothy 1:10; Titus 1:4; 2:13; 3:6; 1 John 4:14.

For some outsiders encountering the testimony of Scripture, there seems to be an issue. If the LORD God says that He is the only Savior and Redeemer of His people, then how can Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) also be referred to as the One who saves and redeems sinners? Is not this something that can only be done by God alone? The Biblical truth of the

¹ “be saved, be delivered (Niphal); save, deliver, give victory, help; be safe; take vengeance, preserve (Hiphil)” (John E. Hartley, “יָשָׁא,” in R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols [Chicago: Moody Press, 1980], 1:414).

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matter is that a human person being saved, forgiven of his or her sins, and being spiritually regenerated, **is directly connected to whether or not Yeshua the Messiah is Divine.**

We need to each consider the picture of the Ancient Israelites' Exodus from Egypt. Any one of us in the Messianic community, who has studied the Passover, should be fully aware of how the Passover lamb is a type and shadow of Messiah Yeshua (1 Corinthians 5:7), and that the Passover represents our exodus as Believers from slavery to sin to new life in Him.² The Passover is a picture of an individual's salvation. The Exodus account tells us that after the Lord had swallowed up the Egyptian armies that the Israelites began singing a song: "The LORD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise Him; My father's God, and I will extol Him" (Exodus 15:2). The Hebrew text says that *Yah v'yehi-li l'yeshuah* (יְהוָה יִהְיֶה-לִּי לְיִשׁוּעָה), or "the LORD has become our *yeshuah*."

This is not the only place where we see God as the *yeshuah* of His people. Psalm 118:14, 21 exclaims, "The LORD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation [*l'yeshuah*, לְיִשׁוּעָה]...I shall give thanks to You, for You have answered me, and You have become my salvation [*l'yeshuah*]." Isaiah 12:2 says, "Behold, God is my salvation [*yeshuati*, יִשׁוּעָתִי], I will trust and not be afraid; for the Lord GOD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation [*l'yeshuah*]." Perhaps most intriguing is Psalm 98:3: "He has remembered His lovingkindness and His faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God." This verse tells us that the world has seen *yeshuat Eloheinu* (יִשׁוּעַת אֱלֹהֵינוּ), in that the salvation of God is to have global ramifications. Such salvation extends far beyond physical deliverance from worldly trials and situations.

These verses from the Tanach affirm how God alone is the only Source of salvation, redemption, and deliverance from not only peril—but that He is the only steadfast One in whom people can trust and rely. God was the salvation for the Ancient Israelites, as the Supreme One removed them from their slavery in Egypt, being their salvation or *yeshuah*. If we are born again Believers, God has had to surely be *yeshuah* or salvation for us, leading us on an exodus out of the bondage we once had to sin and the forces of darkness, and into new life and restored communion with Him.

Is God our Savior? The conviction that Yeshua the Messiah must be Divine, God in the flesh, is deeply rooted in where the Source of one's salvation is found. The Source of our salvation is God Himself. God Himself is the only One who can save and redeem human beings from sin and the realm of death. The Psalmist expressed how, "No man can by any means redeem *his* brother or give to God a ransom for him—but God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol, for He will receive me. Selah" (Psalm 49:7, 15). If Yeshua were only a human man or mortal, or even a created supernatural being, then could He legitimately have the power to deliver people from the clutches of death and eternal punishment (cf. Revelation 1:18)?

It is entirely appropriate for one to conclude that there is **no possible way** for Yeshua to be the Savior, providing eternal redemption for those who look to Him, unless He is truly God. Only if Yeshua is Divine, can He then be our Savior. The Hebrew Tanach is adamant about the LORD God being the only Savior, and if Yeshua is not the LORD God—a part of the Divine Identity—then who or what is He? How can Yeshua genuinely be the Source of eternal salvation if He is not God? Some have said that Yeshua only acts as "the Savior," meaning that He is God's agent in the world, but that He is ultimately not God. Yet, when we look at

² Consult the author's article "The Message of Exodus," appearing in the *Messianic Spring Holiday Helper*.

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something as important as the intertextual quote of Isaiah 45:23 in Philippians 2:10,³ it definitely forces us to acknowledge that Yeshua the Son is indeed the LORD (YHWH):

“Declare and set forth *your case*; indeed, let them consult together. Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none except Me. Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. I have sworn by Myself, the word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness and will not turn back, that to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear *allegiance*” (Isaiah 45:21-23).

“God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Yeshua EVERY KNEE WILL BOW [Isaiah 45:23], of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Yeshua the Messiah is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9-11).

The implications, of Isaiah 45:21-23 and Philippians 2:9-11 viewed together, are completely unavoidable. The One God of Israel, who has directly insisted that He is the only Savior to which all must turn for deliverance—who specifically says “there is no other” (Isaiah 45:22)—has actually *shared* this status with Yeshua. This should not be surprising, as Yeshua is stated to be One “existing in the form of God” (Philippians 2:6, ASV). Not only is Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) the One to whom all of Creation and all created beings (human *and* supernatural) must give an account, confessing His supremacy and worshipping Him—but the Father and Son definitely co-exist as a part of a plural Godhead, with the Son having the same Divine Identity as His Father.

The statement of Isaiah 45:21-23 about God being the exclusive Savior to whom the whole Earth must turn and swear allegiance, and Yeshua being the One to whom every knee will likewise bow and every tongue confess—makes it definite “that Yeshua the Messiah is *ADONAI*” (CJB), and not a mere human master. A word like Isaiah 45:21-23 applied to any mere human agent empowered by God, or some supernatural yet created agent, would immediately invoke an accusation of blasphemy, yet the *Carmen Christi* hymn of Philippians 2:5-11 is widely believed by conservative expositors to be a very early form of liturgy used by the Body of Messiah, representing a high Christology of Yeshua being Divine, which the Apostle Paul incorporated into his letter.⁵

Whether or not Yeshua the Messiah is God, **is indeed a salvation issue**. None of us as limited human beings may fully understand all of the complexities of Yeshua’s Divinity, His pre-existence of Creation, and His co-existence with the Father—but we **must acknowledge** a Divine Redeemer in order to be forgiven of our sins and be saved from eternal punishment. We need to make sure that if we indeed must profess that Yeshua is Lord, it is those who have received the eternal redemption He offers—and not the condemned who will have to acknowledge Him at the Great White Throne judgment, before their final sentencing.

Answering these “Frequently Avoided Questions”

There are many claims that those who deny the Divinity of Yeshua, and thus deny the Biblical reality that we must have a Divine Savior, make, in saying that Yeshua is not God.

³ Erwin Nestle and Kurt Aland, eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece, Nestle-Aland 27th Edition* (New York: American Bible Society, 1993), 518; Kurt Aland, et. al., *The Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/United Bible Societies, 1998), 675.

⁴ Heb. *v'ein od* (וְאֵין אֹד).

⁵ For a further examination, consult the author’s commentary *Philippians for the Practical Messianic*.

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Many of the arguments that anti-Divinity proponents make tend to be sensationalistic, and they can definitely prey on various individuals' unfamiliarity and/or ignorance of the Bible. Those who are undiscerning, and especially those who have perhaps not had the spiritual encounter with the Creator through the Divine Messiah that they think they have had, are quite susceptible to these arguments.

It has become commonplace, when trying to challenge Yeshua as the Divine Messiah, to see various lists and compilations floating around, called something like the "Frequently Avoided Questions." Perhaps it is because these questions are so easily answered, that various Messianic Bible teachers who fully affirm Yeshua's Divinity, have not really taken the time to answer them. This analysis that I have provided you is intended to address ten of these specific so-called "Frequently Avoided Questions," which are often used to claim that the Messiah is not Divine. You will find that these questions can be answered, that they are usually based on a selective reading of Scripture passages only at the surface level, and that when deeper readings of the text are conducted they fully affirm Yeshua's Divinity. Yet, it is these questions that can get even relatively mature and Biblically-rooted Believers, caught totally off guard.

False Claim #1

God cannot die. If Yeshua the Messiah is God, then how could He die on the cross?

On the surface, this first reason against believing that Yeshua the Messiah is God may seem to have some validity. If we suppose that God is an eternal and an immortal being, and that Yeshua the Messiah is God, then how could Yeshua be God if He died a human's death on the cross? If Yeshua the Messiah actually died, could this mean that He was just a normal human being like the rest of us?

The Apostle John attests in John 1:14, "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." His Gospel opens with the critical statement, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). The Word we know to be the Messiah Yeshua. John plainly testified **"the Word was God."** Yeshua the Messiah "dwelt among us" or "made his dwelling among us" (NIV), the "us" obviously being humanity at large. John 1:14 says *sarx egeneto* (σὰρξ ἐγένετο), meaning that the Word "became flesh." The Hebrew word for "flesh" used in the Tanach is *basar* (בָּשָׂר), which relates to "flesh for kindred, blood-relations," "all living beings," and "mankind" (BDB).⁶ Its Greek equivalent is *sarx* (σὰρξ), "the substance of the body" (Vine).⁷

The Creator God manifesting himself as a human being is not something new. In Genesis 18:1-2, the Lord appears to Abraham in the form of a man:

"Now the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, while he was sitting at the tent door in the heat of the day. When he lifted up his eyes and looked, behold, three men [*sheloshah anashim*, אַנְשֵׁי ה' אֲנָשִׁים] were standing opposite him; and when he saw *them*, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth."

God being present in human flesh, in the midst of mortals, is nothing new as far as the narrative of Scripture is concerned. However, when Yeshua came to the Earth, He did empty Himself of the exalted glory that He had in Heaven. The Messiah "emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant...being made in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:6-7). Yeshua *en*

⁶ Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 142.

⁷ W.E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1980), 242.

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morphē Theou huparchōn (ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων), clearly “existing⁸ in the form of God” (Philippians 2:6, TLV), exclusively, prior to His Incarnation. When Yeshua came to Earth, He was “born in human likeness” (Philippians 2:7, NRSV), *homoīōmati anthrōpōn* (ὁμοιωματι ἀνθρώπων).

Yeshua came to Earth not only as a human being, but specifically *morphēn doulou* (μορφὴν δούλου), “the form of a servant” (Philippians 2:7, RSV/ESV) or a “slave” (NRSV), so that He might be sacrificed for all our sins (Philippians 2:8). Yeshua was subject to many of the same things that all human beings are subject to (Hebrews 2:17-18). However, the testimony of the Gospels is clear that Yeshua maintained His authority as God, as the demons would immediately recognize who He was, and He commanded authority over illnesses, diseases, and the weather.

The argument that “God cannot die” is often delivered without any consideration of what happened at the crucifixion and subsequent death of Messiah Yeshua. The Word, who was God, became flesh. The Messiah lived on Planet Earth as a human man. Human flesh is subject to a human death. Yeshua the Messiah was executed upon a Roman cross, bearing the sins of the world. **But this does not necessarily mean that Yeshua “died,” and then for a time passed into total non-existence.**

Hebrews 5:7 notes how, “In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety.” This is obviously speaking about the Son’s obedience to the Father, and should necessarily cause us to think about the prayers offered in the Garden of Gethsemane before His arrest (Matthew 26:36-45; Mark 13:32-42). This concerns a time period labeled *tais hēmerais tēs sarkos* (ταῖς ἡμέραις τῆς σαρκὸς) or “the days of His flesh,” a time when Yeshua was subject to mortality.

When Yeshua died at Golgotha (Calvary), **it was the Lord’s flesh that died.** The mortal frame that the Word had taken on had expired. But Yeshua the Messiah did not then pass into total non-existence.

The Apostle Peter describes, “For Messiah also died for sins once for all, *the just for the unjust*, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits *now* in prison” (1 Peter 3:18-19). Peter says that Yeshua died for human sins, that He was put to death by the flesh or sinful human hands (*sarki*, σαρκί),⁹ and that “going in to the spirits in prison, He then proclaimed” (LITV). Yeshua surely did not “preach the gospel”¹⁰ to those spirits who were in prison from the time of Noah and the Flood (1 Peter 3:20). Yet, Yeshua would have had to actually have *gone somewhere* in order for this to have occurred, even if it were going via the Spirit to issue a proclamation to such spirits in prison, of His sacrifice and victory via final atonement for sin offered.

We know from the account of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16:19-31 that *Sheol* or *Hades*, the realm of the dead, was once divided into a compartment for the righteous and a compartment for the wicked.¹¹ When Yeshua died, His spirit or consciousness went to the

⁸ *Huparchōn* (ὑπάρχων) is a present active participle, which while rendered with the English past tense “was” in some versions, really means “existing.”

⁹ This assumes that the dative (case indicating indirect object) *sarki* is instrumental.

¹⁰ The verb appearing in 1 Peter 3:19 is *kērussō* (κηρύσσω) or “to proclaim”; if some form of gospel declaration were intended then the verb *euangelizomai* (εὐαγγελίζομαι), “to bring good news,” i.e., to evangelize, would have been much clearer.

¹¹ Josephus *Discourse to the Greeks Concerning Hades* 1, 4.

Also consult the FAQ, “Luke 16:19-31.”

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Paradise side for the righteous, as He had plainly stated the following to the thief who was executed on the cross beside Him:

“And he was saying, ‘Yeshua, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!’ And He said to him, ‘Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise’” (Luke 23:42-43).

Some who deny the Biblical reality of a temporary, disembodied afterlife say that the comma in English can be moved in this passage to read, “Truly I say to you today, you will be with Me in Paradise,” but that is not what the source text reads at all. The Greek *sēmeron* (σήμερον) means “today, this very day” (BDAG).¹² Yeshua certainly did tell the repentant thief that both of them, *that day*, would be in Paradise—not that it would be an event to come sometime in the distant future. (The vast majority of usages of *sēmeron* in the Biblical text deal with events that occurred on the same day as “today.”)¹³ In order for them to be in Paradise, Yeshua would have had to continue to exist, even if it were in another dimension.

The claim that “God cannot die” used against Yeshua’s Divinity is invalid when we understand that it was not Yeshua the person who died—but rather that it was the flesh, the physical mortal body of Yeshua, which died. When Yeshua was executed on the tree, He told the thief beside Him that they would both be in Paradise that very day. When Yeshua was in Paradise, the righteous side of *Sheol* or *Hades*, He made a proclamation to those spirits who were in the side of the unrighteous in prison in Hell. Yeshua as a spirit being, continued to exist after His flesh expired, and the testimony we see in the Apostolic Scriptures about Yeshua is that God did indeed take on human form. Later, we know that Yeshua was resurrected—“you will not abandon me to Sh’ol” (Acts 2:27, CJB),¹⁴ being brought up from the abyss (Romans 10:7)—and it is in His resurrected body that the Son now sits at the right hand of the Father in Heaven.¹⁵

False Claim #2

God cannot be tempted. Yeshua the Messiah was tempted by Satan in the wilderness. How can Yeshua be God if He was tempted?

The claim that God cannot be tempted to sin is based on James 1:13: “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.” The logic that is used against Yeshua being God is that since He was tempted by Satan in the wilderness that He cannot be God. On the surface for some people, it would seem that since Yeshua was tempted that this must mean Yeshua cannot be God. Yet when a responsible Bible reader factors in only a few more Scripture passages, we see that the argument against Yeshua’s Divinity of “God cannot be tempted,” was produced by a very simplistic mind.

We definitely encounter in the Gospels, “Then Yeshua was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil” (Matthew 4:1; cf. Mark 1:13; Luke 4:2). We see that Yeshua was tempted three times, and each time the Messiah responded with quotations from

¹² Frederick William Danker, ed., et. al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, third edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 921.

¹³ “In Mt. 27:19 Pilate’s wife has had a bad dream today; this is an omen for a decisive day, but the immediate sense is the ordinary one. The usual sense is also present in the petition of Mt. 6:11: believers ask today for their daily bread from God. Similarly in 16:3 the reference is to today’s weather, in 21:28 the father asks his son to work today” (E. Fuchs, “*sēmeron*,” in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abridged [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985], 1025).

¹⁴ Cf. Psalm 16:8-11.

¹⁵ It cannot go unnoticed that many of the people who deny Yeshua’s Divinity also do not believe in an intermediate afterlife before the resurrection. The author has responded to many of the claims against a conscious, post-mortem afterlife in his publication *To Be Absent from the Body*.

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Tanach Scripture to Satan. A major temptation delivered by Satan to Yeshua appears when he said, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, ‘HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU’; and ‘ON *their* HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE’ [Psalm 91:11-12]” (Matthew 4:6; cf. Luke 4:9-11). To this temptation, Yeshua responded with, “On the other hand, it is written, ‘YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST’ [Deuteronomy 6:16]” (Matthew 4:7; cf. Luke 4:12).

In responding to the Adversary’s lure to Yeshua to cast Himself down, the Messiah quoted from the Torah in Deuteronomy 6:16: “You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested *Him* at Massah” (cf. Exodus 17:7). The Hebrew verb of interest here is *nasah* (נָסָה), appearing in the Piel stem (intensive action, active voice), and not only means “to **put someone to the test,**” but can relate to how “men **‘tempt’** God” (*HALOT*).¹⁶ The KJV/NKJV does render Deuteronomy 6:16 with, “You shall not **tempt** the LORD your God.” The Greek Septuagint translates the Hebrew verb *nasah* with *ekpeirazō* (ἐκπειράζω), which certainly appears in the quotation of Deuteronomy 6:16 in Matthew 4:7 and Luke 4:12, and which the RSV has rendered with, “You shall not **tempt** [*ekpeirazō*] the Lord your God.” Both *nasah* and *ekpeirazō*, while variably rendered as either “test” or “tempt” in English Bibles, can both relate to human beings *tempting God*.

Psalm 78:41, 56 informs us how, “Again and again they tempted [*nasah*] God, and pained the Holy One of Israel...Yet they tempted [*nasah*] and rebelled against the Most High God and did not keep His testimonies.” The testimony of the Tanach is certainly clear that people have tempted God. “Although people were forbidden from putting God to the test, they often did so” (*AMG*).¹⁷ The very character of God, though, as an Eternal and Omniscient Being, prohibits Him from at all being influenced by any mortal testing or tempting of Him. People, even up until today, have challenged God with many absurd or even obscene statements along the lines of: “If God exists, then I demand that He...,” insisting upon an immediate and often ridiculous action of Him.

If we follow the logic that God cannot be tempted, and because Yeshua was tempted by Satan in the wilderness that He cannot be God—then how is this to be consistently applied to the Tanach? The Hebrew Scriptures are clear that the Ancient Israelites *tempted God* in the wilderness. Because God was tempted by them, does that then make Him *anything less than God*? Is our Eternal Creator something less than a Supreme Being, because He has been tempted and tried throughout human history—especially by those who challenge His existence? **Of course not.**

The proper understanding about God being “tempted” is not the Father or the Son being placed in the position of being tempted, but rather that God cannot succumb to temptation. Because God is perfect, He always has the power to overcome temptation and will never fall prey to sin. As J.A. Motyer so correctly puts it, “There is nothing within his whole nature to which that or any other temptation could appeal, or which would respond to that or any other base suggestion.”¹⁸ Yeshua was tempted in the wilderness by Satan, but He overcame temptation, as it was not Yeshua’s nature to give in. In telling Satan “You shall not tempt the Lord your God” (RSV), He was in essence declaring Himself to be God, as the action of temptation was prohibited to be directly issued toward God! Yeshua could just as well have

¹⁶ Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 1:702.

¹⁷ Warren Baker and Eugene Carpenter, eds., *Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 2003), 736.

¹⁸ J.A. Motyer, *The Message of James* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1985), 51.

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rebuked Satan with a retort of not to stand against His Father's work or plan—but instead issued a word that he was prohibited from tempting God, definitively placing Himself as the Messiah on the Divine side of things.

What makes Yeshua God—different from us as human beings—is that Yeshua does not have the sin nature we inherited from Adam (cf. Romans 5:12). Being God in the flesh, Yeshua definitely had the power to overcome sin. He could not have been tempted to fall prey to any testing, and thus sin, as Satan tried to tempt Him in the wilderness.

False Claim #3

The New Testament Scriptures always present a difference between the Messiah and God, proving that they are not one and the same. Because of the separation of the Messiah and God, how can He be God?

It is correct that within the Apostolic Scriptures or New Testament, we see a co-existence of the Father and the Son presented to us. Because there is a separation between the Father and the Son, does this all of a sudden mean that the Son is something less than God? It should be legitimately asked: How can Yeshua be the Son of God, if He does not have the distinct and specific nature of being “God” (cf. Philippians 2:6)? What do we do with statements appearing in the Apostolic Scriptures, where there is an intention for both the Father and the Son to be represented as “God”?

The Gospel of John opens with the classic statement, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and **the Word was God**. He was in the beginning with God” (John 1:1-2). John teaches that the Word, the Messiah Yeshua who took on human flesh (John 1:14), was God. Some have claimed that since the Greek clause *Theos ēn ho Logos* (θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος), “the Word was God,” lacks the definite article *ho* (ὁ) with *Theos*, that it is something only akin to the Word or Yeshua being something supernatural, but not God. The New World Translation, produced by the Jehovah's Witnesses, notably rendered John 1:1 with “the Word was a god.” Yet, were the definite article *ho* to appear, i.e., “the Word was *the* God,” it would mean that the Word was all that exclusively composed God, such as “the Word was *the* Godhead.”¹⁹ If John 1:1 communicated “the Word was *the* God,” then the preceding claim “the Word was with God,” *ho Logos ēn pros ton Theon* (ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν), would be unsustainable. As Leon Morris directs us, “John is leaving open the possibility that there may be more to ‘God’ than the ‘Word.’”²⁰ The Word, Yeshua the Messiah, is indeed God. The Word is not, however, exclusively or entirely all that composes the Godhead.

The fact that the Godhead is plural, meaning that both the Father and Son are Divine, is evident to Bible readers all the way back in the Book of Genesis. The Lord said in Genesis 1:26, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” Some say that the “Us” referred to is not God, meaning that *Elohim* (אֱלֹהִים) is not to be regarded as plural, but rather the “Us” is God speaking to His celestial court. But Genesis 1:27 says that “in the image of God He created him.” The “Us” referred to has to be *Elohim* or God, as human beings were created *b'tzelem Elohim* (בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים), not in the image of the angels or any of the other powers in Heaven. Ecclesiastes 12:1 notably admonishes, “Remember also thy Creators [Heb. *bor'ekha*, בּוֹרְאֵיךְ]²¹ in days of thy youth” (YLT).

¹⁹ Cf. F.F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 31; D.A. Carson, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 117.

²⁰ Leon Morris, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 78.

²¹ The Hebrew *bor'ekha* (בּוֹרְאֵיךְ) is a plural Qal participle.

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This verse attests to the plurality of God, as “All things came into being through Him [the Word], and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being” (John 1:3). It was not only God the Father, but also Yeshua the Son (Colossians 1:16-17; Hebrews 1:2-3), who is credited as being directly responsible for creating the universe (cf. Proverbs 30:4).

In the Apostolic Writings, when God is most often referred to, the reference made is to God the Father, but this should not be taken as implying that Yeshua is not God. In the Pauline letters, we see the greeting frequently issued, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Yeshua the Messiah” (Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2; Philippians 1:2; Colossians 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1; Philemon 3). Notice how “God” (*Theos*, θεός) is most always a title used in reference to the Father.²² Notice also how with Yeshua the Messiah being called “Lord,” that the title *Kurios* (κύριος) was used in the Greek Septuagint to render the Divine Name YHWH (יהוה),²³ and that with God the Father and Yeshua the Lord used in such close proximity, their association within the Godhead is unmistakably being referred to. Consider how Paul adapts the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4 in 1 Corinthians 8:6, with the Father and the Son identified together: “for us there is *but* one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we *exist* for Him; and one Lord, Yeshua the Messiah, by whom are all things, and we *exist* through Him.” Yeshua as Son (Lord) is integrated into the same Divine Identity as His Father (God).

Because “God” in the Apostolic Scriptures is most frequently identified with the Father, does not all of a sudden mean that Yeshua is not God. There are some places where Yeshua the Messiah is directly referred to with the title *Theos*. In Titus 2:13, Paul writes that Believers are to be “looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Messiah Yeshua,” identifying Yeshua as *tou megalou Theou* (τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ) or “our great God.” Paul speaks of the Jewish ancestry of Yeshua in Romans 9:5, specifying, “from whom is the Messiah according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever.” The Epistle of 2 Peter is composed for “those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Yeshua the Messiah” (2 Peter 1:1). And surely not to be overlooked is how the disciple Thomas, upon seeing the resurrected Messiah, cried out to Him and exclaimed: “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). This was no mere statement of astonishment on Thomas’ part, as he recognized Yeshua as being God, per Yeshua’s own word of how “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am [egō eimi, ἐγώ εἰμι]” (John 8:28a).

In John 10:30, Yeshua told those assembled at the portico of Solomon, celebrating *Chanukah*, that “I and the Father are one.” In oral Hebrew dialogue, He would have said something like *ani v’avi echad anachnu* (אֲנִי וְאָבִי אֶחָד אַנְחֵנוּ), Delitzsch) or *v’ani v’ha’av echad* (וְאֲנִי וְהָאָב אֶחָד, UBSHNT); the written Greek source text has *egō kai ho Patēr hen esmen* (ἐγὼ καὶ ὁ πατήρ ἓν ἐσμεν). In using the word *echad* (אֶחָד) for “one,”²⁴ there is a correlation made with the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4, “the LORD is one” or “The LORD is our God, the LORD alone” (NJPS). By Yeshua having said that He and the Father were one, He did not just claim that He and the Father were of one accord. Surely, many of the Jewish religious leaders of the day thought that they and God were of one heart and mind, in agreement and in one accord, in terms of how people were to live and conduct themselves. The reaction seen to Yeshua’s claim that “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30) is, “The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him” (John 10:31).

²² Cf. D. Guthrie and R.P. Martin, “God: God as Father (2.2),” in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 357.

²³ Cf. L.W. Hurtado, “Lord: Appellation Formulas (3.3); Contexts (3.4),” in *Ibid.*, pp 566-568.

²⁴ If Yeshua were speaking Aramaic, then the closely related *chad* (ܚܕ), as appearing the Peshitta New Testament, would have been used.

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The *Shema* is the declaration that only the LORD is the One True God. Did these Jews present pick up stones because Yeshua claimed that He was just in one accord with the Father? No. They picked up stones because in claiming that He was *echad* or one with the Father, they saw that Yeshua was claiming to be Divine, and they considered that to be blasphemous—even with Yeshua as the Son having noted that His Father is greater (John 10:29), at least requiring some kind of pause to consider His nature, which they did not allow. Bruce Milne is right to note, “A claim such as this reflects no merely human consciousness. It is nothing other than a ‘word made flesh’ consciousness.”²⁵ Earlier in John 5:18b, one of the reasons why the Jewish religious leaders are said to have wanted to kill Yeshua is because He “was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.”²⁶ They recognized that Yeshua as the Son, presented Himself to them as having a very special relationship with His Father, and Yeshua was claiming to be of the same Divine substance as the Father. Yet as Philippians 2:6 explains, Yeshua “did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited” (NRSV) or “something to be used to his own advantage” (TNIV).²⁷ Yeshua the Messiah legitimately had equality with God, yet such equality could not be used by Him in order to avoid His humiliation and sacrifice for sinful humanity (Philippians 2:7-8).

There is a co-existence between the Father and the Son in the Apostolic Scriptures, but the Godhead has been plural ever since the beginning. References to “God” in the Apostolic Scriptures (particularly in the Pauline Epistles) are most often referring to God the Father. At the same time, Yeshua the Messiah is specifically referred to as “God” in various places as well. Most critical to recognize is that Yeshua is referred to as “Lord,” and that “if you confess with your mouth Yeshua as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9). This is **not** just some recognition of Yeshua as “Master” or “Leader,” for as C.E.B. Cranfield concludes, “The usage of κύριος [*Kurios*] more than six thousand times in the LXX to represent the Tetragrammaton [YHWH] must surely be regarded of decisive importance here.”²⁸ This indeed indicates that acknowledging Yeshua the Messiah as God Incarnate, the LORD or YHWH, is required for salvation.

False Claim #4

To worship Yeshua as God is to worship another god. This is idolatry. How can you worship Yeshua as God? We are only supposed to honor or bow down to Yeshua.

The thrust of the First Commandment is quite clear in saying, “You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me” (Exodus 20:5; cf. Deuteronomy 5:9). This is a definite prohibition against idolatry, demanding that the LORD God of Israel be the only object of worship for the people, something repeated in any number of ways throughout the Torah.²⁹ In Exodus 20:5, the Lord instructs, *lo’tishtachaveh* (לֹא־תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה), “You shall not worship,” as this is something that is **to only be directed toward Him**. The

²⁵ Bruce Milne, *The Message of John* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 154.

²⁶ The first reason stated in John 5:18a is, “He...was breaking the Sabbath.” Here it is probably useful to keep in mind how the verb *luō* (λύω) can mean “to loosen, i.e. weaken, relax” (H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994], 482), and Yeshua Himself gave the Disciples the authority to bind and loose (Matthew 18:18), meaning to consider proper application or *halachah* of various matters.

²⁷ While rendered elsewhere as “grasped” (2:6, RSV/NASU/NIV/ESV), the noun *harpagmos* (ἄρπαγμός) best means “**someh. to which one can claim or assert title by gripping or grasping, someth. claimed**” (BDAG, 133), often with some degree of violence or abuse.

²⁸ C.E.B. Cranfield, *International Critical Commentary: Romans 9-16* (London: T&T Clark, 1979), 529.

²⁹ Exodus 23:24; Deuteronomy 4:9; 5:9; 6:13; 8:19; 11:16; 30:17.

specific verb that is actually employed here is *chavah* (חָוָה), which as TWOT informs us, appears “**exclusively in the Eshtaphal stem**, hishtahāwâ ‘to prostrate oneself; ‘to worship.’” Its entry goes on and explains how in language studies, “Formerly this was analyzed as a Hithpael of shāhâ [חָוָה] (q.v.). Cognate with the Ugaritic hwy ‘to bow down’ (UT 19:no. 847), used in parallel with kbd [כָּבַד] ‘to honor,’ the verb occurs 170 times, in the majority of cases of the worship of God, gods, or idols” (TWOT).³⁰

In the Greek Septuagint, Exodus 20:5 appears with, “Thou shalt not bow down to them, nor serve them; for I am the Lord thy God, a jealous God, recompensing the sins of the fathers upon the children, to the third and fourth generation to them that hate me” (LXE). The verb rendered as either “bow down” (LXE) or “do obeisance” (NETS) is *proskuneō* (προσκυνέω): “to make obeisance to the gods, fall down and worship, to worship, adore” (LS).³¹ Obviously in the case of the First Commandment, *proskuneō* has to relate to worship.

Worship of other gods, also involving some kind of bowing down or performing obeisance, or some other related devotion, is strictly prohibited in the Torah. For the Ancient Israelites, idolatry would not only merit capital punishment, but also incur reverberating curses being passed down to succeeding generations. So, if worship of Yeshua the Messiah is indeed idolatry, then many religious people—especially evangelical Christians who believe Jesus Christ to be Divine—have a significant degree of curses attached to them. Yet, if Yeshua the Messiah is genuinely Divine, being God, those who acknowledge Him as Savior are necessarily **required to worship Him**.

Various actions involving the verb *proskuneō* are witnessed in the Greek Apostolic Scriptures, in association with Yeshua the Messiah. A few of these actions do involve some kind of general honoring of Yeshua, but there are justifiable reasons to think of most of the places where *proskuneō* appears to regard actual worship of Him as Lord:

“And when he [the Gerasene demoniac] saw Jesus from afar, he ran and **worshiped** [*proskuneō*] him; and crying out with a loud voice, he said, ‘What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me’” (Mark 5:6-7, RSV).

“Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to **worship** [*proskuneō*] Him” (Matthew 2:2).

“And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, ‘Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, so that I too may come and **worship** [*proskuneō*] Him’” (Matthew 2:8).

“After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and **worshiped** [*proskuneō*] Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh” (Matthew 2:11).

“When they got into the boat, the wind stopped. And those who were in the boat **worshiped** [*proskuneō*] Him, saying, ‘You are certainly God’s Son!’” (Matthew 14:32-33).

“And behold, Yeshua met them and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and **worshiped** [*proskuneō*] Him” (Matthew 28:9).

³⁰ Edwin Yamauchi, “חָוָה,” in TWOT, 1:267.

³¹ LS, 693.

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“When they saw Him, they **worshiped** [*proskuneō*] Him; but some were doubtful” (Matthew 28:17).

“And they, after **worshipping** [*proskuneō*] Him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy” (Luke 24:52).

“And he said, ‘Lord, I believe.’ And he **worshiped** [*proskuneō*] Him” (John 9:38).

Whether the verb *proskuneō* (προσκυνέω) is rendered as either “worship” or “bow down,” in some of the notable passages appearing above from the Gospels, is undeniably something that is theologically motivated.³² Is Yeshua the Messiah worthy of an honor, which in the Torah is only to be given to God Himself? Of the examples listed above, the reaction of the demon-possessed man to Yeshua (Mark 5:6-7) and the Disciples on the Sea of Galilee when the storm was calmed (Matthew 14:32-33), probably immediately jump out at us the most. Are these just instances where various people bowed down or knelt to Yeshua as a sign of honor—or were they instances when the Divine authority that Yeshua exercised was acknowledged, and the people present knew that Yeshua was no ordinary human being?

There are a few places in the Gospels where the verb *proskuneō* appears, where worship of some kind is not really in view. Having to bow down may involve the physical condition of someone encountering Yeshua, or some kind of pleading. At least one example, that of the Roman soldiers taunting Yeshua, is a spiteful form of “worship”:

³² Messianic Bible versions commonly encountered on the market today, and in various congregations, notably render the verb *proskuneō* in varied ways in these verses listed above.

The 1998 **Complete Jewish Bible** (CJB) has something along the lines of “fell on knees” or “fell down” or “prostrated” (Mark 5:6; Matthew 14:33; 28:9, 17; John 9:38), as well as the more customary “worship” (Matthew 2:2, 8, 11; Luke 24:52).

The 1998/2009 **ISR Scriptures** has something along the lines of “bowed down” (Mark 5:6; Matthew 14:33; 28:9, 17; Luke 24:52; John 9:38) or “do/did reverence” (Matthew 2:2, 8, 11).

The 2011 **The Messianic Writings** by Daniel Gruber employs “bowed down” (Mark 5:6; Matthew 2:11; 14:33; 28:9, 17; Luke 24:52; John 9:38) or “bow down” (Matthew 2:2, 8; 28:9).

The 2011 **Tree of Life Messianic Family Bible—New Covenant** (TLV) includes the renderings “bowed down” (Mark 5:6), as well as the more customary “worship” (Matthew 2:2, 8, 11; 14:33; 28:9, 17; Luke 24:52; John 9:38).

Of the four Messianic versions listed here, the TLV follows the exact same pattern as an evangelical Christian translation like the New American Standard (NASB/NASU), and would be the strongest in affirming worship of Yeshua with *proskuneō*. While David H. Stern’s CJB might render *proskuneō* in some varied ways, Stern does affirm Yeshua’s Divinity in his *Jewish New Testament Commentary*. As far as the Institute for Scripture Research or ISR is concerned, they have stated on their website (isr-messianic.org), “The ISR will not respond to doctrinal questions,” and so there is no real way of knowing why certain things in the ISR Scriptures are rendered the way they are. Some of the writings of the late ISR founder C.J. Koster lead one in the direction of thinking that the ISR Scriptures was not originally produced from a standpoint of Yeshua really being God/Elohim.

Also to keep in mind how there is no reference to any kind of worship directed toward Yeshua in the 2011 **Delitzsch Hebrew Gospels** (DHE) by First Fruits of Zion/Vine of David. The DHE has rendered the above verses from the Gospels with “bowed down” (Mark 5:6; Matthew 2:11; 14:33; 28:9; Luke 24:52; John 9:38) and “bow down” (Matthew 2:2, 8).

Obviously, the DHE is rendered from Franz Delitzsch’s Hebrew translation of the Greek New Testament, where the verb *chavah* (חָוָה) was employed for *proskuneō* (προσκυνέω). All of the various forms of the verb *chavah* encountered in Delitzsch’s Hebrew New Testament, also seen in the Tanach, have been rendered with “bowed down” in various mainline English versions. An exception to this to be taken into serious consideration, is where 1 Chronicles 16:29 says *hishtachavu l’ADONAI b’hadrat-godesh* (הַשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לַיהוָה בְּהַדְרַת־קֹדֶשׁ), “Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness” (ESV). The Delitzsch version rendered *proskunēsantes* (προσκυνήσαντες) in Luke 24:52 as *hishtachavu-lo* (הַשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ־לוֹ), the same verb that appears in 1 Chronicles 16:29; Psalm 29:2; 96:9; 97:7 in regard to worshipping God.

The DHE lacks any explanation about why “bow/bowed down” was chosen in terms of reverent action directed toward Yeshua, and not the more customary “worship” as seen in more mainline versions. Perhaps in future editions some kind of statement can be made about this.

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“They kept beating His head with a reed, and spitting on Him, and kneeling and **bowing** [*proskuneō*; mock worship, NLT] before Him” (Mark 15:19).

“And a leper came to Him and **bowed down** [*proskuneō*] before Him, and said, ‘Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean’” (Matthew 8:2).

“While He was saying these things to them, a *synagogue* official came and **bowed down** [*proskuneō*] before Him, and said, ‘My daughter has just died; but come and lay Your hand on her, and she will live’” (Matthew 9:18).

“But she came and *began* to **bow down** [*proskuneō*] before Him, saying, ‘Lord, help me!’” (Matthew 15:25).

“Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Yeshua with her sons, **bowing down** [*proskuneō*] and making a request of Him” (Matthew 20:20).

In order to get a fuller picture of how the verb *proskuneō* is applied to Yeshua the Messiah, consider the following additional places where it appears in the Greek Apostolic Scriptures:

“And when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says, ‘AND LET ALL THE ANGELS OF GOD WORSHIP [*proskuneō*] HIM’ [Psalm 97:7]” (Hebrews 1:6).

“And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, ‘To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, *be* blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.’ And the four living creatures kept saying, ‘Amen.’ And the elders fell down and worshiped [*proskuneō*]” (Revelation 5:13-14).

In Hebrews 1:6, we see a specific quotation made from Psalm 97:7, where it is asserted, “Let all those be ashamed who serve graven images, who boast themselves of idols; worship Him [*hishtachavu-lo*, הִשְׁתַּחֲוּיִלּוּ, all you gods.” The Hebrew *kol-elohim* (כָּל-אֱלֹהִים) was rendered in the Septuagint as *hoi angeloi autou* (οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ), in reference to God’s angels, given some of the broad possible applications of the limited Hebrew term *elohim* (אֱלֹהִים).³³ The point made is that worship, which is directly intended for the LORD or YHWH (Psalm 97:5-6), **is here worship directed to Yeshua the Messiah**.³⁴ This is further intensified as Hebrews 1:8 informs us, “But of the Son *He* says, ‘YOUR THRONE, O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER, AND THE RIGHTEOUS SCEPTER IS THE SCEPTER OF HIS KINGDOM’ [Psalm 45:6],” with the Son clearly referred to as “God.” Hebrews 1:10, also speaking of the Son, also says, “And, ‘YOU, LORD, IN THE BEGINNING LAID THE FOUNDATION OF THE EARTH, AND THE HEAVENS ARE THE WORKS OF YOUR HANDS’ [Psalm 102:25],” with the Son also referred to as “Lord.” Both of these references should be recognized as affirming Yeshua as Divine.

Revelation 5:13-14 depicts John being shown the Throne of God, with the Father and the Son (the Lamb) seated together, and the elders issuing their worship. Worship of the Son does not negate worship of the Father.

While it would be linguistically valid to render the verb *proskuneō* as “bow down” or “kneel” in relation to action performed to Yeshua, whether or not it would be theologically valid can and should be legitimately challenged. In one’s deliberations over whether or not

³³ Cf. *BDB*, pp 43-44.

³⁴ Among Messianic versions, the CJB and TLV have properly rendered *proskuneō* in Hebrews 1:6 with “worship.” The ISR Scriptures 2009, while noting the quotation from Psalm (Tehellim) 97:7 in **bold text**, has “do reverence,” although to be fair has rendered Psalm 97:7 itself with “Bow.” The Messianic Writings by Gruber has “bow down” in Hebrews 1:6.

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Yeshua was actually “worshipped,” one cannot deny when reverence or spiritual devotion was issued to Yeshua as depicted by the verb *proskuneō*, Yeshua did not make any effort to stop it. Contrary to this, there are some distinct places in the Greek Apostolic Scriptures where the verb *proskuneō* appears, of a human being performing action to either another human being or an angel, and the opposite party makes a decisive point to halt the action immediately:

“When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and **worshipped** [*proskuneō*] him. But Peter raised him up, saying, ‘Stand up; I too am *just* a man’” (Acts 10:25-26).

“Then he said to me, ‘Write, “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”’ And he said to me, ‘These are true words of God.’ Then I fell at his feet to **worship** [*proskuneō*] him. But he said to me, ‘Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Yeshua; **worship** [*proskuneō*] God. For the testimony of Yeshua is the spirit of prophecy’” (Revelation 19:9-10).

“I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to **worship** [*proskuneō*] at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. But he said to me, ‘Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God’” (Revelation 22:8-9).

The Apostolic Scriptures do demonstrate that Yeshua the Messiah was genuinely worshipped. In fact, the Father actually commanded it of His angels (Hebrews 1:6; cf. Psalm 97:7)—**meaning that worship of Yeshua is surely expected of human beings** as well. Yet, when a human being is witnessed to have attempted worship of either another human being or an angel, he is stopped from this action.

One common argument that will sometimes be made by those who deny that Yeshua the Messiah was worshipped as God, is that the verb *latreuō* (λατρεύω), “in the N.T. *to render religious service or homage, to worship*” (Thayer),³⁵ is not applied to Him. There is actually a very good reason why *latreuō* seldom appears in relationship to Yeshua the Messiah; it is because *latreuō* frequently renders the Hebrew verb *avad* (אָבַד), which itself tends to be associated with acts of cultic worship such as animal sacrifice and other physical acts in the Temple or Tabernacle. Yet, it would be impossible to claim that the Greek verb *latreuō*, with its Hebrew background via *avad* in view, is never applied to people serving Yeshua. The TWOT entry on *avad* informs us,

“The...concept is used of serving Yahweh with the Levitical service (Num 3:7-8; Num 4:23, 30, 47; Num 8:11, 19 ff., *latreuō* for etc.). Interestingly enough, the LXX reserved the Greek word the official service of the priests only. The NT however, steadfastly resisted using this group of words for the NT ministry or its functions except in Rom 15:16, where it refers to Paul's labors for Jesus Christ. Instead, it reserved it for other religious contexts, especially those dealing with the OT ritual (Heb 9:21; Heb 10:11; Lk 1:23).”³⁶

While it is not common for one to encounter the Greek verb *latreuō*, “serve,” in association with devotion to Yeshua—precisely because of its close association with the Levitical priesthood and its sacrifices—it is nevertheless witnessed. The associated noun *leitourgós* (leitourγός) is used by Paul in Romans 15:16, where he says he is “a minister of Messiah Yeshua to the Gentiles.” It also has to be recognized that in some key Son of Man (cf. John 9:35-38;

³⁵ Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 372.

³⁶ Walter C. Kaiser, “אָבַד,” in TWOT, 2:639.

Revelation 1:12-18) passages in the Book of Daniel, that the Aramaic verb *pelach* (פִּלַּח), “pay reverence to, serve (deity)” (BDB),³⁷ was rendered with *latreuō* in its Septuagint version:

“I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and *men of every* language might **serve** [Ara. *pelach*; Grk. LXX *latreuō*; worshiped, NIV] 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).

As Robert M. Bowman, Jr. and J. Ed Komoszewski explain in their book *Putting Jesus in His Place*, “the reference to all peoples ‘serving’ the Son of Man is confirmed as an expression of religious devotion. The One whom you may regard as the Ruler of your entire universe for all time is by definition your God, and it would be the height of folly *not* to render religious devotion or service to him.”³⁸ So, while encountering the Greek verb *latreuō* in regard to Yeshua the Messiah is not common, the Son of Man, Yeshua the Messiah, who is granted the supreme authority by His Father, is indeed rendered worshipful “service.”

If Yeshua is not God, then to worship Him would indeed be idolatry. However, the Apostolic Scriptures are clear that Yeshua was worshipped. When Believers today worship the Son, they do worship God—but never should worship of the Son at all subtract from worship of the Father. After all, in Philippians 2:11 we see “that every tongue will confess that Yeshua the Messiah is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” When people bend their knee and confess Yeshua the Son as Lord, the Father is glorified in all of it.³⁹

False Claim #5

Yeshua the Messiah had to be born to exist. He did not exist until He was born. How can Yeshua be God if He had to be born to exist?

Those who deny Yeshua’s Divinity have to dismiss any sort of concept of pre-existence, because Yeshua pre-existing the Creation of the universe lends undeniably strong support to Him being God. So, it is not uncommon for those who deny Yeshua’s Divinity to barrage people with a statement like: “It is just common human sense that a person has to be born in order to exist.” Yet, the full implications of the Messiah’s emergence onto the scene of human history, from a Tanach prophecy such as Micah 5:2, have probably not been considered too deeply from those who deny Yeshua as God:

“But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, *too* little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, **from the days of eternity** [*m’mei olam*, מִיָּמֵי עוֹלָם].”

Did Yeshua the Messiah pre-exist His birth?

The Gospel of John opens with a prologue very similar to the opening verses of the Book of Genesis. Just as Genesis 1:1 says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” John 1:1-3 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.” Further in John 1:14 we see that “the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only

³⁷ Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 1108.

³⁸ Robert M. Bowman, Jr. and J. Ed Komoszewski, *Putting Jesus in His Place: The Case for the Deity of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 69.

³⁹ For a worthwhile study examining the various worship and devotion issues surrounding Yeshua the Messiah, consult Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

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begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.” The Word or *Logos* (λόγος)⁴⁰ is obviously a reference to Yeshua the Messiah. The affirmation of John 1:1-3 is that He was present at the Creation with God, **He was God**, and that all things were created by Him. John 1:1-3 certainly testifies that Yeshua pre-existed the creation of the universe as God, that He later took on human flesh, and that the Father and the Son co-exist as part of the Godhead.

In what is commonly called the *Carmen Christi* hymn of Philippians 2:5-11, its first statement about who Yeshua is, is that “He existed in the form of God” (Philippians 2:5). The clause *en morphē Theou huparchōn* (ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων), is better rendered with “existing in the form of God” (HCSB/TLV), as *huparchōn* is a present active participle. Further on the statement is made that Yeshua “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness” (Philippians 2:7, NRSV). Just as Yeshua was existing in the form of God, further on Yeshua *morphēn doulou labōn, en homoiōmati anthrōpōn genomenos* (μορφὴν δούλου λαβὼν, ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος). No reader would argue that *morphēn doulou* or the form of a slave/servant is anything but an authentic human-state for Yeshua to have. So, why would Yeshua existing in *morphē Theou* or the form of God be anything other than an authentic God-state? The hymn concludes with a direct appeal made to Isaiah 45:21-23 (Philippians 2:9-11), a Tanach passage where salvation is exclusively found in the LORD God, and all of Creation must recognize His supremacy with no other. This is a status that Yeshua the Messiah, **as Lord**, has as well.

In the hymn of Colossians 1:15-20, the testimony given about Yeshua also affirms His pre-existence of the universe. “[F]or in him all things were created⁴¹, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things [exists before everything, TLV]⁴², and in him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:16-17, RSV). We may need to each be reminded of how God, and not only the Father but also the Son, being involved in the creation of the universe, is something clearly implied by Proverbs 30:4: “Who has ascended into heaven and descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has wrapped the waters in His garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name or His son’s name? Surely you know!”

Some readers are caught a little off guard when they see the statement made that Yeshua is “the firstborn of all creation” (Colossians 1:15), and could be led into thinking that Yeshua had to be physically born to exist. Yet, anyone familiar with the Tanach should immediately note how the title “firstborn” (Heb. *bekor*, בְּכוֹר) is one of high, preeminent status. It is applied to people regardless of where or when they were “born,” sometimes even if they were actually not the first born in their family line. Firstborn describes Reuben the son of Jacob (Genesis 49:3-4), the people of Israel as God’s “son” (Exodus 4:22), King David (Psalm 89:27), and the Northern Kingdom of Israel/Ephraim (Jeremiah 31:9). The title “firstborn,” possessing royal distinction, is appropriate for the King of Kings and His ultimate authority (Revelation 1:17-18). As it was said of King David, “I will make him the first-born, the highest of the kings of the earth⁴³” (Psalm 89:27, RSV).

The designation of Yeshua as *prōtotokos pasēs ktiseōs* (πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως) does not relate to a status of possession—as though the Earth were to own Him as only being human—but instead relates to a status of preeminence. In the estimation of Daniel B. Wallace, the clause

⁴⁰ Appearing with the *omicron* (o), the Greek term *λόγος* is properly pronounced with a short *ō* as *lōgōs*.

⁴¹ Grk. *hoti en autō ektisthē ta panta* (ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα).

⁴² Grk. *estin pro pantōn* (ἔστιν πρὸ πάντων).

⁴³ Heb. *af-ani bekor et'neihu el'yon l'malkei-eretz* (אֲפִי אֲנִי בְּכוֹר אֶתְנֵיהֶוּ עַל־יוֹן לְמַלְכֵי-אֶרֶץ).

Answering the “Frequently Avoided Questions” About the Divinity of Yeshua

prōtotokos pasēs ktiseōs is a genitive (case indicating possession) of subordination, which would regard Yeshua’s status as “the firstborn **over** all **creation**,”⁴⁴ the NIV/TNIV rendering. The title “firstborn” is one of great status and rulership, and if a reader can understand that **firstborn=anointed king** in Colossians 1:15, it becomes obvious that Yeshua is not a created being, and it is perfectly legitimate to treat *prōtotokos pasēs ktiseōs* as a genitive of subordination. Colossians 1:16-17, then, not only affirms Yeshua as the One who created the universe, but also that the universe was created for Him and it is sustained by Him. As Douglas J. Moo is right to conclude, “What holds the universe together is not an idea or a virtue, but a person: the resurrected Christ. Without him electrons would not continue to circle nuclei, gravity would cease to work, the planets would not stay in their orbits.”⁴⁵ Concurrent with this, Yeshua’s pre-existence of the universe and His presence in creating the universe—as well as His steady maintenance of it—is also affirmed in Hebrews 1:2-3:

“[I]n these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”

Surely also not to be overlooked, in terms of Yeshua’s supremacy over all things—and indeed His pre-existence of the universe—is how Yeshua has the status of being “the first and the last.” These affirmations appearing in the Book of Revelation, have an undeniable association with statements that the LORD God makes of Himself in the Book of Isaiah, and how there is no other than He. Yeshua cannot be regarded as “the first and the last” unless He too pre-existed the universe *and* is God as well:

The First and the Last	
Book of Isaiah	Book of Revelation
<p>“Who has performed and accomplished <i>it</i>, calling forth the generations from the beginning? ‘I, the LORD, am the first, and with the last. I am He’” (Isaiah 41:4).</p> <p>“Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: ‘I am the first and I am the last, And there is no God besides Me’” (Isaiah 44:6).</p> <p>“Listen to Me, O Jacob, even Israel whom I called; I am He, I am the first, I am also the last. Surely My hand founded the earth, And My right hand spread out the heavens; When I call to them, they stand together” (Isaiah 48:12-13).</p>	<p>“‘I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty’” (Revelation 1:8).</p> <p>“...And He placed His right hand on me, saying, ‘Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades’” (Revelation 1:17-18).</p> <p>“Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward <i>is</i> with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Revelation 22:12-13).</p>

⁴⁴ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 104.

Other examples of a genitive of subordination provided by Wallace (*Ibid.*, pp 103-104), include: Matthew 9:34; Mark 15:32; 2 Corinthians 4:4; 1 Timothy 1:17; Ephesians 2:2.

⁴⁵ Douglas J. Moo, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), pp 125-126.

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Yeshua the Messiah *did not* have to be born to exist, because there is ample testimony in the Apostolic Scriptures that He not only pre-existed the Creation of the universe—but **that He indeed created the universe!**

Yeshua the Messiah *did* have to be born to obtain human flesh, and as a result be sacrificed so that final atonement for human sin could be provided. Philippians 2:7-8 explains that Yeshua “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross” (NRSV). In Galatians 4:4-5 we see, “when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.” Yeshua the Messiah was incarnated as a human being, born through a human woman and born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law or subject to the Torah’s condemnation and curse. As Romans 8:3 says, “For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh.” Yeshua the Messiah entered into the world as a human being, to redeem fallen humanity from sin.

False Claim #6

The demons never confessed Yeshua to be God. How can Yeshua be God if the demons never confessed Him as such?

Does Yeshua’s Divinity always have to be represented by people or supernatural entities specifically confessing Him to be “God”? Or, can *the actions* demonstrated toward Yeshua by people or supernatural entities—particularly in terms of worship and/or devotion—demonstrate Him to be God?

In Mark 5:1, Yeshua and His Disciples go to the territory of the Gerasenes, which was on the far eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. This was an area heavily populated by pagans, where the people did not worship the God of Israel or follow the Torah. Mark 5:2-5 tells us, “When He got out of the boat, immediately a man from the tombs with an unclean spirit met Him, and he had his dwelling among the tombs. And no one was able to bind him anymore, even with a chain; because he had often been bound with shackles and chains, and the chains had been torn apart by him and the shackles broken in pieces, and no one was strong enough to subdue him. Constantly, night and day, he was screaming among the tombs and in the mountains, and gashing himself with stones.” This man was so demon possessed, that he could not be restrained and chains could not even hold him down.

Immediately upon arriving on land, getting off the boat, this demon possessed man encounters Yeshua. We are told “Seeing Yeshua from a distance, he ran up and bowed down [*proskuneō*] before Him” (Mark 5:5-6). This man, being demon possessed, immediately recognized that there was something very unique about Yeshua. This is why the RSV more properly renders Mark 5:6 with, “And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and **worshiped** [*proskuneō*] him.” The narrative continues, “What business do we have with each other, Yeshua, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God, do not torment me!” (Mark 5:7).

William L. Lane describes how “the demon is fully aware of Jesus’ divine origin and dignity. ‘Son of the Most High God’ is not a messianic designation but a divine one.”⁴⁶ To this, James R. Edwards further explains, “The Greek verb for ‘fell on his knees,’ [NIV] *proskynein*,

⁴⁶ William L. Lane, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 183.

denotes prostrating oneself before a person to whom reverence or worship is due...When demonic meets divine, it is a no-contest event.”⁴⁷

The demons, which possessed the Gerasene man, had no choice but to bow down and worship Yeshua as the Son of God. Not only this, but when inquired by the Lord as to who the demons’ identity was, the response is “My name is Legion; for we are many” (Mark 5:9). By having implored the Messiah not to torment them (Mark 5:7), the demons surely recognized that He had the authority to issue final judgment against them.

The authority to issue final judgment against the wicked, be they either unrepentant human beings or the forces of darkness, is **something that only God Himself possesses**. Yeshua told the Apostle John in Revelation 1:17-18, “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.” Yeshua is the One who has the supreme authority over the realm of death, and thusly who is to be judged and banished from the Kingdom for eternity. This is concurrent with how Yeshua is “the Alpha and the Omega” (Revelation 22:13), which is a title that is only given to the Lord God Himself (Revelation 1:8). Yeshua, because He is God, is the One who will issue the final judgment (Revelation 20:11-15).

False Claim #7

The Scriptures tell us that God is a spirit and that He cannot be seen. How can Yeshua be God if He could be seen by human people?

Yeshua the Messiah says in John 4:24 that “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” It could make sense on the surface, for some people to think that if God is indeed a spirit, that He cannot be seen by anyone. It is certainly true that God warns, “So watch yourselves, that you do not forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a graven image in the form of anything *against* which the LORD your God has commanded you” (Deuteronomy 4:22). The Ancient Israelites had left Egypt, and were entering into Canaan, both of them being lands where the people worshipped graven images as their gods. Israel was not to form graven images and worship them as “God.” God was not to be contained to a gold or silver object, or a lump of carved rock. He is omniscient and omnipresent. Being a spirit, God is everywhere, and does not need to be restrained to one form or another.

In spite of God being a Spirit, the Apostle John attested, “No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained *Him*” (John 1:18). If people saw the physical Yeshua, then the logic against His Divinity is that He cannot be God because God cannot be seen. But, never being able to see God *at all, ever*, could seriously contradict the plain reality that Moses saw the back of God and thus saw God, even if only in part: “Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen” (Exodus 33:23). Moses is also attested to be the one “whom the LORD knew face to face” (Deuteronomy 34:10), *panim el-panim* (פָּנִים אֶל־פָּנִים). Abraham saw God in the form of a man (Genesis 18:2-3). God has shown Himself to people before, even with Him taking on human form. It would be best for us to understand no one ever seeing God, who is spirit, as a general statement for most people—at least up until the Incarnation of the Messiah.

John describes something very special in relation to Yeshua coming to the Earth. After saying that “No one has seen God,” obviously meaning the Father, he then describes that people have surely seen “the only begotten God” (John 1:18). Here, Yeshua is specifically called,

⁴⁷ James R. Edwards, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 156.

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monogenēs Theos (μονογενῆς θεός).⁴⁸ The term *monogenēs* (μονογενής) “**pert. to being the only one of its kind or class, unique (in kind)**” (BDAG), which would surely relate to how Yeshua is “uniquely divine as God’s son and transcending all others alleged to be gods” (BDAG).⁴⁹

Why is Yeshua called “**the only begotten God**”? Yeshua is called “the only begotten God” because the Messiah is God in the flesh, as “the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Yeshua the Son specifically came to Earth, so that we could all understand the Father. Yeshua was God in a human body, interacting with standard mortals.

In the hymn of Colossians 1:15-20, which was likely composed to subvert some errant First Century ideas about the Messiah only being a kind of supernatural intermediary force⁵⁰—but not Divine—Yeshua is called “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15), *eikōn tou Theou tou aoratou* (εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου). Yeshua as the image of God is a concept seen elsewhere in the Apostolic Scriptures, specifically as He reflects the Father’s glory (2 Corinthians 4:4; Hebrews 1:3). Yet in Colossians 1:15, Yeshua is described specifically as being “the image of the **invisible** God,” meaning that He represents something that cannot be seen or is invisible, as the adjective *aoratos* (ἀόρατος) means “*unseen, not to be seen, invisible*” (LS).⁵¹ Paul details how such invisibility is a quality that only God Himself possesses:

“Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible [*aoratos*], the only God, *be* honor and glory forever and ever. Amen” (1 Timothy 1:17).

Given the preceding verses in 1 Timothy 1:14-16 which describe Yeshua the Messiah, it is proper to conclude that the designation of both *aoratos* and “the only God” applies to the Son, and not just the Father:

“[T]he grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are *found* in Messiah Yeshua. It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Messiah Yeshua came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost *of all*. Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Yeshua the Messiah might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.”

The “invisible attributes” are considered by Paul to be “His eternal power and divine nature” (Romans 1:20). If Yeshua is the “image of the invisible God”—and not just “the image of God”—what specific things would such invisibility relate to? Having taken on human flesh, what would the Messiah be able to reflect of His Father to the world of mortals? Ezekiel 1:26 gives us some important clues: “Now above the expanse that was over their heads there was something resembling a throne, like lapis lazuli in appearance; and on that which resembled a throne, high up, *was* a figure with the appearance of a man.”

It can certainly be suggested that several of the Tanach’s most significant theophanies involved pre-incarnate manifestations of Messiah Yeshua, as such an “image of the invisible God.” The author of Hebrews speaks of how Moses “persevered because he saw him who is

⁴⁸ It is obvious that in some other Greek textual traditions, “The only begotten Son” (NKJV) or *ho monogenēs huios* (ὁ μονογενῆς υἱός), appears. Yet as Bruce, *John*, 45 observes,

“[W]hy would anyone think of adding *theos* to form the unique phrase *monogenēs theos* if the Evangelist had not written it so? If *monogenēs theos* is the original reading, then the Evangelist is repeating what he said of the Logos in the third clause of verse 1: since the Logos was God, the Only-begotten is God in that sense, for the Logos and the Only-begotten are identical.”

The alteration of *theos* to *huios* by some copyists can be explained on the basis of wanting to conform to later appearance in John of “the only begotten Son” (i.e., John 3:16, 18). It is obviously the more difficult of the two readings to theologically contemplate, and a standard rule in textual criticism of the New Testament is that the harder reading is more likely the original one.

⁴⁹ BDAG, 658.

⁵⁰ This is examined more fully in the author’s commentary *Colossians and Philemon for the Practical Messianic*.

⁵¹ LS, 86.

invisible” (Hebrews 11:27, NIV), a reference to the burning bush, which is notably preceded by a statement about his service for the Messiah (Hebrews 11:26).⁵² Yeshua being the “image of the invisible God,” should be taken as proof of His pre-existence.

With Yeshua having taken on human flesh in order for people to be reconciled to their Creator (Colossians 1:19-20), Paul can assert, “For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form” (Colossians 2:9). More to the point, *en autō katoikei pan to plērōma tēs Theotētos sōmatikōs* (ἐν αὐτῷ κατοικεῖ πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος σωματικῶς) includes the definite article: “For in Him all the fullness of **the Deity** dwells embodied” (my translation). Yeshua is *the Deity* manifested in a body—and *the Deity* is everything that makes God out to be God!⁵³

God is a spirit and because God is a spirit we are prohibited in the Scriptures from making any representation of Him. But this does not negate the reality that God has manifested Himself in human form, as certainly attested by those same Scriptures.

False Claim #8

Psalm 110:1 is a proof text that Yeshua the Messiah is not God, and has been purposefully misrepresented by those trying to make the Messiah God. How can Yeshua be God when *adon* is a Hebrew title given only to human masters?

Psalm 110:1 is one of the most frequently quoted verses in the Tanach that is directly cited or referenced in the Apostolic Scriptures in relation to Yeshua the Messiah (Matthew 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42-43; Acts 2:34-35; Hebrews 1:13). Yeshua quoted Psalm 110:1 in reference to the scribes’ claim that He was only the son of David, and asked them why they called Him the son of David, when David called Him “Lord”:

“And Yeshua *began* to say, as He taught in the temple, ‘How is it that the scribes say that the Messiah is the son of David? David himself said in the Holy Spirit, “THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, ‘SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I PUT YOUR ENEMIES BENEATH YOUR FEET.’” David himself calls Him “Lord”; so in what sense is He his son?’ And the large crowd enjoyed listening to Him” (Matthew 22:41-46; cf. Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44).

The Apostle Peter quoted Psalm 110:1 in his proclamation that Yeshua was the Messiah at *Shavuot*/Pentecost, comparing the Messiah to David, and how David did not resurrect from the dead and subsequently ascend into Heaven as Yeshua did:

“For it was not David who ascended into heaven, but he himself says: ‘THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, ‘SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET’” (Acts 2:34-35).

When we examine how this verse is quoted by both Yeshua and His Disciples, it is done in the context of proving that the Messiah is more than just a normal human being than King David was, and that He has supreme power. Yeshua asked the scribes the question, “If David

⁵² “[C]onsidering the reproach of Messiah greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward” (Hebrews 11:26).

To this can be added 1 Corinthians 10:4, “and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Messiah.”

⁵³ The term *theotēs* (θεότης) is different than the more general term *theiotēs* (θειότης), often just meaning “Divinity.” The term *theotēs* “occurs in the NT only in Col. 2:9. The one God to whom all deity belongs, has given this fullness of deity to the incarnate Christ” (E. Stauffer, “*theotēs*,” in *TDNT*, 330). Contrary to this, *theiotēs* only regards how “something is divine, whether a god or imperial majesty” (H. Kleinknecht, “*theiotēs*,” in *Ibid.*, 331).

Among Messianic Bible versions, the TLV includes the accurate rendering “For all the fullness of Deity lives bodily in Him” for Colossians 2:9, which is unmistakably similar to the NASB/NASU. The ISR Scriptures 1993/1998 has the rather puzzling, “Because in Him dwells all the completeness of the Mightiness bodily.” The ISR Scriptures 2009, however, has made a slight improvement with, “Because in Him dwells all the completeness of Elohim-ness bodily.”

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then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his son?" (Matthew 22:45), telling them to look at the Messiah as far more than just the son of David and part of the Davidic line, but as the Supreme King. At *Shavuot*/Pentecost the Apostle Peter told those gathered that Yeshua had ascended into Heaven and was seated at the right hand of the Father. In Yeshua's own words before the Sanhedrin, Yeshua seated at the right hand of God was considered to be blasphemy, a definite proof of His Divinity:

"But Yeshua kept silent. And the high priest said to Him, 'I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Messiah, the Son of God.' Yeshua said to him, 'You have said it *yourself*; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, AND COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN' [Psalm 110:1; Daniel 7:13]. Then the high priest tore his robes and said, 'He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, you have now heard the blasphemy'" (Matthew 26:63-65; cf. Mark 14:60-64; Luke 22:67-71).

The high priest considered Yeshua to be committing blasphemy because He said that He would be sitting at the right hand of His Father. Another instance where the Messiah was considered to be blaspheming occurs in John 10:32-33: "Yeshua answered them, 'I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?' The Jews answered Him, 'For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out *to be* God.'" These Jews mentioned here considered Yeshua to be a blasphemer, because by performing various miracles He demonstrated His Divinity, and to them a Divine Messiah was apparently incompatible with their theology.

When we see how Psalm 110:1 is quoted in the Apostolic Scriptures, it obviously relates to the nature of Yeshua, as He demonstrates Himself to be Divine. But what about the Hebrew text of Psalm 110:1? Has it been "purposefully mistranslated" to prove the Divinity of Yeshua as some claim?

Psalm 110:1 reads "**The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.'**" Most Bibles render the Divine Name of God, YHWH, as "the LORD." In the Masoretic Hebrew text, this appears as *ne'um YHWH l'adoni* (יְהוָה לְאֲדֹנָי).⁵⁴ TWOT notes how "'*ādôn* usually refers to men," but it also states that "there are numerous passages, particularly in the Psalms, where these forms, which are the only ones to apply to men, refer to God."⁵⁵

It is not inappropriate or manipulative at all to understand Psalm 110:1 as correctly reading *ne'um YHWH l'Adonai*. This is because the vowel markings underneath the Hebrew letters were not added to the Hebrew text **until the Seventh-Tenth Centuries C.E.** A commonly accessible resource to the layperson, like *Unger's Bible Handbook*, notes, "Before A.D. 500 Hebrew manuscripts had no system of vowel indication, except certain consonants to indicate long vowels. Between A.D. 600 and 950 Jewish scholars, called Masoretes (Traditionalists), invented a full system of vowels and accents to punctuate the text."⁵⁶ Without the vowel markings, the consonants that appear for the words *adoni* (אֲדֹנָי), which would be "lord" in the context of a human master, or *Adonai* (אֲדֹנָי), which would be "Lord" in the context of referring to God, appear **exactly the same** as *alef* (א), *dalet* (ד), *nun* (נ), and *yod* (י). As Michael Brown further explains,

"As every student of Hebrew knows, biblical Hebrew was written with consonants and 'vowel letters' only; the *vowel signs* were added hundreds of years later. Yet both '*adonai*' (used

⁵⁴ *The Jerusalem Bible* (Jerusalem: Koren Publishers, 2000), 782.

⁵⁵ Robert L. Alden, "'*ādôn*," in TWOT, 1:12.

⁵⁶ Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Handbook* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1967), 883.

only for Yahweh) and *'adoni* (used for men and angels...) are spelled identically in Hebrew, consisting of the four consonants *'-d-n-y.*⁵⁷

Old Testament textual criticism has determined that the Masoretes, while eloquently preserving the Hebrew text of the Tanach since the compilation of the Masoretic Text in the Middle Ages, are likely to have made some alterations here or there. This is evidenced by the fact when some verses from the Tanach are quoted in the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament), they do not fully align with the Tanach. Often, these quotations do align with the Greek Septuagint, and the Hebrew text being referred to in the Tanach can align with the Septuagint if in some cases the vowel markings are changed. Readings among the Dead Sea Scrolls may also confirm that an LXX reading is superior to the MT, or that the Hebrew *Vorlage* behind the LXX is different than today's MT.⁵⁸ Areas of potential challenge are usually associated with Messianic prophecies, and it is for this reason why Christian Bibles do not exclusively use the Hebrew text for the Old Testament, and consult outside sources like the Greek Septuagint, Latin Vulgate, Dead Sea Scrolls, etc. Messianics today should learn to do the same.⁵⁹

I am of the opinion that the Jewish scribes of the Middle Ages, who compiled the MT text widely used today, were likely to have known that Psalm 110:1 was a verse quoted in the “Christian New Testament” regarding the nature of Jesus. Could they have altered the vowel markings so that *a-d-n-y* (אֲדֹנָי) would read with *adoni*, a human master, rather than with *Adonai*, a clear reference to God? This is something to be considered in one's reading of the Tanach. Fortunately, we are aware of how when Psalm 110:1 is alluded to in passages like Matthew 26:64; Mark 14:62; and Luke 22:69, that those hearing took notice of Yeshua's Divine status by it.

False Claim #9

Yeshua the Messiah never said “I am God.”

How can Yeshua be God if He never said “I am God”?

Those who do not believe that Yeshua is God, at first, when making this claim, can seem to have a case. There is no specific instance of the Messiah ever saying, “I am God.” However, there are instances where He says “I am,” and it is “I AM” of a very specific context. Interpreters across the spectrum have all had to recognize in their reading of the Gospels some specific places where Yeshua uses “I AM.”

In the Hebrew Tanach when the Lord appeared to Moses at the burning bush, we see, “Then Moses said to God, ‘Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, “The God of your fathers has sent me to you.” Now they may say to me, “What is His name?” What shall I say to them?’ God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM’; and He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you’” (Exodus 3:13-14). God specifically told Moses that He

⁵⁷ Michael L. Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus, Volume 2: Theological Objections* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 137.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 138 goes on to further conclude, though, his view that “When Jesus quoted this verse in Hebrew, he would have said, *ne'um 'adonai la'adoni.*”

⁵⁹ Biblical references where the LXX and/or DSS may prove superior to the MT must all be considered on a case-by-case basis. The able interpreter must be acquainted with good, technical commentaries on various books of the Bible, which examine these issues in detail.

⁵⁹ We recommend that if you use a Hebrew text for the Tanach, that you have a critical text like the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1977). While this text reads practically identical to the Rabbinical Masoretic Text used in the Synagogue today, it does offer in its footnotes alternate readings that appear in the Greek Septuagint, Latin Vulgate, Aramaic Targums, Dead Sea Scrolls, and other ancient translations and Hebrew manuscript fragments.

Consult Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* by (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), for a more detailed examination of the preservation and copying of the Hebrew Tanach.

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was to be identified as *ehyeh asher ehyeh* (אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה), “I Shall Be As I Shall Be” (ATS). It is from the Hebrew verb *hayah* (הָיָה) or “to be” that the Divine Name YHWH/YHVH (יהוה) is derived, a loose meaning of which would be something like “Eternal One.” In the Greek Septuagint, the Hebrew phrase *ehyeh asher ehyeh* was rendered as *egō eimi ho ōn* (ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὢν), “I am THE BEING” (LXE) or “The One Who Is” (NETS).

Within the Tanach, it is the LORD or YHWH (Exodus 3:14; cf. Isaiah 41:4; 43:10; 46:4) who is the “I am,” best identified with the Hebrew *ehyeh* (אֶהְיֶה) in Exodus 3:14: “I AM has sent me to you,” *ehyeh shlachani eleiykhem* (אֶהְיֶה שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלַיְכֶם). Yeshua speaking *egō eimi* or “I AM,” especially in some very distinct places, has long been recognized by numerous interpreters of the New Testament as an affirmation that the Messiah was identifying Himself as the One with supreme power. These include Yeshua’s control over the weather, reactions to questions asked of Him, claims of salvation and redemption exclusively coming from Him, affirmations of pre-existence, and affirmations of His Messiahship. Yeshua’s response to the Sanhedrin at His trial by speaking “I AM,” is notably what ultimately convicted Him.

The following are some important places in the Gospels where “I AM” or *egō eimi* (ἐγὼ εἰμι) appears in the source text, all of which have some significant degree of Christological importance:

“But seeing Him walking on the sea, they thought it to be a phantom. And they cried out. For all saw Him, and were troubled. And immediately He spoke to them and said to them, Have courage. **I AM** [*egō eimi*]! Do not fear” (Mark 6:49, LITV).

“But He kept silent and did not answer. Again the high priest was questioning Him, and saying to Him, ‘Are You the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?’ And Yeshua said, ‘**I am** [*egō eimi*]; and you shall see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER [Psalm 110:1], and COMING WITH THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN’ [Daniel 7:23]. Tearing his clothes, the high priest said, ‘What further need do we have of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy; how does it seem to you?’ And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death” (Mark 14:61-64).

“And seeing Him walking on the sea, the disciples were troubled, saying, It is a phantom! And they cried out from the fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, Be comforted! **I AM** [*egō eimi*]! Do not fear” (Matthew 14:26-27, LITV).

“But from now on THE SON OF MAN WILL BE SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE POWER OF GOD’ [Psalm 110:1]. And they all said, ‘Are You the Son of God, then?’ And He said to them, ‘Yes, **I am** [*egō eimi*].’ Then they said, ‘What further need do we have of testimony? For we have heard it ourselves from His own mouth’” (Luke 22:69-71).

“See My hands and My feet, that **it is I Myself** [*egō eimi autos*, ἐγὼ εἰμι αὐτός]; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have” (Luke 24:39).

“Jesus said to her, **I AM** [*egō eimi*]! the One speaking to you” (John 4:26, LITV).

“And the sea was aroused by a great wind blowing. Then having rowed about twenty five or thirty furlongs, they saw Jesus walking on the sea. And He having come near the boat, they were afraid. But He said to them, **I AM** [*egō eimi*]! Do not fear. Then they desired to take Him into the boat. And the boat was instantly at the land to which they were going” (John 6:18-21, LITV).

“Yeshua said to them, ‘**I am** [*egō eimi*] the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst’” (John 6:35).

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“Therefore the Jews were grumbling about Him, because He said, ‘**I am** [egō eimi] the bread that came down out of heaven” (John 6:41).

“**I am** [egō eimi] the bread of life” (John 6:48).

“**I am** [egō eimi] the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh” (John 6:51).

“Then Yeshua again spoke to them, saying, ‘**I am** [egō eimi] the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life” (John 8:12).

“**I am** [egō eimi] He who testifies about Myself, and the Father who sent Me testifies about Me” (John 8:18).

“Therefore, I said to you that you will die in your sins. For if you do not believe that **I AM** [egō eimi], you will die in your sins” (John 8:24, LITV).

“Then Jesus said to them, When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that **I AM** [egō eimi]; and from Myself I do nothing; but as My Father taught Me, these things I speak” (John 8:28, LITV).

“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw *it* and was glad.’ So the Jews said to Him, ‘You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?’ Yeshua said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, **I am** [egō eimi].’ Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Yeshua hid Himself and went out of the temple” (John 8:56-59).

“So Yeshua said to them again, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, **I am** [egō eimi] the door of the sheep” (John 10:7).

“**I am** [egō eimi] the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture” (John 10:9).

“**I am** [egō eimi] the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep” (John 10:11).

“**I am** [egō eimi] the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me” (John 10:14).

“Yeshua said to her, ‘**I am** [egō eimi] the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies” (John 11:25).

“From this time I tell you before it happens, that when it happens you may believe that **I AM** [egō eimi]” (John 13:19, LITV).

“Yeshua said to him, ‘**I am** [egō eimi] the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6).

“**I am** [egō eimi] the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser” (John 15:1).

“**I am** [egō eimi] the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

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“Yeshua, who knew everything that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, ‘Whom do you want?’ ‘Yeshua from Natzeret,’ they answered. He said to them, ‘I AM [*egō eimi*].’ Also standing with them was Y’hudah, the one who was betraying him. When he said, ‘I AM [*egō eimi*],’ they went backward from him and fell to the ground. So he inquired of them once more, ‘Whom do you want?’ and they said, ‘Yeshua from Natzeret.’ ‘I told you, “I AM [*egō eimi*],”’ answered Yeshua, ‘so if I’m the one you want [so if you seek Me, NASU], let these others go’” (John 18:4-8, CJB).⁶⁰

Each one of these Gospel references, describing some aspect of the ministry and service of Yeshua the Messiah, can be probed for the significance of what *egō eimi* (ἐγώ εἰμι) or “I AM” involves, where Yeshua likely orally spoke the Hebrew *ehyeh* (אֶהְיֶה) or “I AM” as seen in Exodus 3:14. The direction of G.M. Burge cannot be overlooked here, as he says, “In the many ‘I AM’ sayings Jesus is publicly applying the divine name of God—and God’s authoritative presence, to himself. No prophet or priest in Israelite history would ever have done this. For Judaism it is the most severe christological affirmation of all, leading audiences in the Gospel either to believe in Jesus or accuse him of blasphemy.”⁶¹

There are two important instances in the Gospels, where in the narrative source text Yeshua speaks *egō eimi*. The first is at His trial before the Sanhedrin (Mark 14:61-64; Luke 22:69-71). The Messiah is asked, “Are You the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?” (Mark 14:61) or “Are You the Son of God, then?” (Luke 22:70). Yeshua replies with, “I AM,” and there are quotes made from both Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13. In this instance, Yeshua is ruled guilty of committing blasphemy, and is condemned to death. Nothing could be clearer in that referring to Himself with “I AM,” that Yeshua was identifying Himself as Deity. While there is no instance of Yeshua ever verbalizing the Divine Name YHWH, per the practice in Second Temple Judaism of the Divine Name only spoken on *Yom Kippur* by the high priest (m.*Yoma* 6:2), Yeshua speaking “I AM” is about as close as He ever got to speaking YHWH.

By the text employing *egō eimi*, Yeshua did *not* just say “I am He,” in the context of Yeshua being a human Messiah empowered by God, as some might like to say. Ancient history proves that there were many people in the milieu of First Century Judaism who believed themselves to be the “messiah” or some kind of “savior” or “deliverer” for Israel (cf. Acts 5:36-37). But the difference between those others who believed themselves to be some sort of messiah, is that Yeshua said “I AM,” and the testimony about Him is that He is God in human flesh. The Sanhedrin court considered this blasphemy, and Yeshua was condemned to be executed.

Note that Pontius Pilate asked, in regard to Yeshua’s conviction, “Why, what evil has He done?” (Matthew 27:23). Yeshua did not break any Roman law. If He wanted to call Himself the Messiah, or even call Himself God, He could not have been convicted by Roman law unless He advocated an uprising against Caesar. Pontius Pilate did not care if Yeshua called Himself the Messiah, or God, or whatever. But the Sanhedrin condemned Yeshua because He claimed not only to be the Messiah, but to be the very God who identified Himself as the “I AM” before Moses at the burning bush. Pilate had to go along with what the Sanhedrin wanted in order to maintain civil peace.⁶²

The second instance of importance regards a discussion that transpired between some Jews who talked to Yeshua about the Patriarch Abraham (John 8:31-47). Yeshua’s teaching was

⁶⁰ Other notable places where *egō eimi* is used include: Revelation 1:8, 17; 2:23; 21:6; 22:16.

⁶¹ G.M. Burge, “‘I am’ Sayings,” in Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 356.

⁶² Consult the relevant sections of the author’s article “The Last Seder and Yeshua’s Passover Chronology” (appearing in the *Messianic Spring Holiday Helper*).

certainly challenging their behavior and attitudes, and they refused to be convicted. These individuals considered Yeshua to be demon possessed (John 8:48-52), and they taunted Him by asking Him who He thought He was by making Himself greater than Abraham (John 8:53). Yeshua said that His glory comes from the Heavenly Father (John 8:54-55), and He then asserted, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw *it* and was glad” (John 8:56). Somehow, Yeshua had knowledge about what had transpired during Abraham’s life on Earth, even though Abraham had been almost two millennia dead by this time. The dialogue between Yeshua and these Jews then reveals something quite startling:

“So the Jews said to Him, ‘You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?’ Yeshua said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, **before Abraham was born, I am.**’ Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Yeshua hid Himself and went out of the temple” (John 8:57-59).

There is no escaping what the narrative text records with *prin Abraam genesthai egō eimi* (πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμί): “before Abraham was born, I am!” This is not only a definite statement of Yeshua’s pre-existence, but also a statement of Yeshua’s identification of being the “I AM,” as the uncreated Son who has existed for eternity with the Father. The Jews present picked up stones because they considered Him to be blaspheming. Colin G. Kruse explains how “when Jesus said...‘before Abraham was born, I am’, he was identifying himself with God. Perhaps Jesus was also implying that Abraham, great though he was, had lived and died, but that he, Jesus, because he is one with God, remains forever as the ‘I am.’”⁶³ The view of David H. Stern in his *Jewish New Testament Commentary* is that “This [John 8:58] and 10:30 are Yeshua’s clearest self-pronouncements of his divinity...It was very clear to the Judeans exactly what Yeshua’s claim was, because they immediately took up stones to put him to death (v. 59) for blasphemy”⁶⁴ (cf. Leviticus 25:15-16; m.*Sanhedrin* 7:5).

In John 8:58, in saying “Before Avraham came into being, I AM!” (CJB), Yeshua affirms His pre-existence as God. **Yeshua did not say**, “Before Abraham was born, I was” in the past tense.⁶⁵

All Bible readers, Messianic and Christian alike, can have confidence that Yeshua the Messiah is God from the affirmations delivered to us in Scripture, which depict His power, authority, and pre-existence, where the source text employs *egō eimi* (ἐγὼ εἰμί) or “I AM.” The connection intended to be made is how the LORD or YHWH Himself once said, “I AM WHO I AM” (Exodus 3:14).

⁶³ Colin G. Kruse, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 218.

⁶⁴ David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), 183.

⁶⁵ John 8:58 is a definite verse where Messianics need to be rather cautious with how they use the Delitzsch Hebrew Gospels by First Fruits of Zion/Vine of David. Here, Delitzsch’s Hebrew New Testament has rendered the Greek *prin Abraam genesthai egō eimi* (πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμί), “Before Avraham came into being, I AM!” (CJB), as *b’terem heyot Avraham ani hayiti* (בְּתֵרֵם הָיִיתִי אֲנִי הָיִיתִי), “before the existence of Avraham, I was” (DHE).

The Qal perfect first person singular verb *hayiti* (הָיִיתִי) is certainly witnessed in the Hebrew Tanach. In Joshua 3:7 we see, “Now the LORD said to Joshua, ‘This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that just as I have been with Moses [ki k’asher hayiti im-Moshe, כִּי כַאֲשֶׁר הָיִיתִי עִם-מֹשֶׁה], I will be with you.’” The DHE rendering of John 8:58 can certainly be used to affirm Yeshua’s pre-existence of Abraham, but not necessarily Yeshua’s identification with the LORD or YHWH.

While the Hebrew *ehyeh* (אֶהְיֶה) or “I AM” is seen in Exodus 3:14, and this was what we believe Yeshua orally spoke in the many places where the Greek *egō eimi* appears in the Gospels, the 1991 UBSHNT has rendered John 8:58 with *ani hu* (אֲנִי הוּא). This simple present tense Hebrew expression for “I am” appears in Isaiah 41:4; 43:10; 46:4 in reference to God, His supremacy, and His Deity. Why Delitzsch did not originally choose *ani hu*, which would have been far better than *hayiti* for his Hebrew New Testament translation, is probably unknowable, but is very problematic.

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False Claim #10

God says that “I am not a man.”

Bible readers cannot doubt the fact that Numbers 23:19a establishes that “God is not a man,” *lo ish El* (לֹא אִישׁ אֱלֹהִים). But can this be viewed as definitive evidence against the Eternal God taking on human flesh in the person of Yeshua the Messiah? No. Numbers 23:19b further explains *why* God is not a man, saying, “that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent.” The issue of Numbers 23:19 clearly relates to the incorruptible and unchanging character of God, as He follows through on His promises and commitments: “God is not man to be capricious, or mortal to change His mind. Would He speak and not act, promise and not fulfill?” (Numbers 23:19, NJPS). Human beings, most contrary to God, frequently say things that they do not mean, or commit to doing things that they either forget about or decide not to do.

God is unchanging in His character, not only in His abilities to remain true to His Word and promises, but also in His righteous judgment. As we see in Hosea 11:8-9, “How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I surrender you, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart is turned over within Me, all My compassions are kindled. I will not execute My fierce anger; I will not destroy Ephraim again. For I am God and not man [*ki El anokhi v’lo-ish, וְלֹא־אִישׁ אֲנִי אֱלֹהִים*], the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.” Human judges in executing punishment or chastisement can have a tendency to be unbalanced and unfair, exceeding what is most appropriate. In the case of the Lord, though, He knows the appropriate limits of judgment and punishment of His people.

The idea that a Bible reader can quote a half-verse from the Tanach or Old Testament, “God is not a man” or “God is not mortal,” and from this assume that the Incarnation of Yeshua is invalid—is not only irresponsible, but is rather stupid at that. And why is this *stupid*? Is it not true that Psalm 14:1 and 53:1 say, “There is no God”? Of course these verses say *ein Elohim* (אֵין אֱלֹהִים). Does this not mean that there is no Eternal Creator at the helm of the universe? Does this not mean that human civilization is only the result of a distant cosmic accident? This is obviously where it is useful to keep in mind what Psalm 14:1 and 53:1 fully communicate:

“For the choir director. *A Psalm* of David. The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; there is no one who does good” (Psalm 14:1).

“For the choir director; according to Mahalath. *A Maskil* of David. The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God,’ they are corrupt, and have committed abominable injustice; there is no one who does good” (Psalm 53:1).

The Tanach does say that “God is not a man,” but this is a qualified statement regarding the character of God. With this in mind, we see in the words of Yeshua, “If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also” (John 14:7), as the Son surely represents the magnanimous character and moral incorruptibility of the Father as seen in passages like Numbers 23:19 and Hosea 11:8-9. Those who would offer the statement “God is not a man” as a proof against the Divinity of Yeshua, have not carefully read the surrounding text.

The Ongoing Issue of Yeshua’s Divinity in the Messianic Movement

In the 1990s and 2000s, the issue of Messianic people denying Yeshua the Messiah as God was something often found out in the fringes of the Messianic world. It was something that many ministry and congregational leaders surely knew about, it was something that upset both them and their constituents, and it was something that was rightfully opposed. In the past, the issue of the nature of Yeshua, His pre-existence, His Divinity, and indeed His status as the LORD—remained in Messianic sectors not considered to really be a part of the mainstream. Now in the 2010s, however, all of the issues surrounding the Divine Identity of Yeshua the Messiah have steadily shifted toward the more mainline, recognizable Messianic sectors, organizations, and ministries. *Questions have been asked of some recognized leaders, and not enough have stepped up to directly affirm Yeshua as God.* No one is completely protected, today, from encountering someone in a position of Messianic leadership—who may not have completely Biblical views about the Divinity of Yeshua. Knowing who does, and who does not, believe that Yeshua is God in today’s Messianic movement is something significantly blurred.

One very subtle trend, which has gone largely undetected by most in the more mainstream Messianic community, has been witnessed in seeing Yeshua the Messiah *exclusively* referred to as “the Master.” Obviously within the Greek Apostolic Scriptures, Yeshua is referred to as *Despotēs* (δεσπότης), which in most English versions has been rendered as “Master.”⁶⁶ The more prominent and frequent title that Yeshua is referred to, though, is *Kurios* (κύριος). This is the same title that renders the Divine Name YHWH (יהוה) in the Greek Septuagint, with many taking it as a definite sign of His Divinity. While it is linguistically possible to render *kurios* as “master,” why some people in the Messianic movement—who are notably not advocates of a Sacred Name Only perspective that treats the English title “Lord” with utter disdain⁶⁷—would change English Bible quotes where Yeshua is called “Lord” to “Master,” is that it could very well be with wanting to purposefully disconnect any association between the Lord Yeshua and the LORD God.⁶⁸

There has been a proverbial “underground” of groups here and there, sitting in what many would consider “safe” Messianic congregations—which officially *and* rightfully affirm Yeshua as Divine—who do not believe that Yeshua is Divine. At the very most, they might consider Him to have pre-existed the universe as some kind of supernatural entity or force, but they would never consider Him to be the LORD or YHWH. *Their numbers are growing.* Their ability to spread their heretical beliefs and ideas is also increasing as well. The technological tools to spread information are making the job of congregational leaders and teachers, to protect people from false teachings against the Lord Yeshua, far more complex than they ever have been before.

What does this mean for the future? It means that we cannot be afraid or hesitant about speaking forth the truth of who Yeshua is as the Divine Savior. *Things are likely to get worse, and not better.* **Romans 10:9 is clear that this is a salvation issue, as Yeshua must be confessed to be the Lord (YHWH) in order for people to have eternal redemption!** While there are surely aspects of Yeshua’s Divinity that limited humans cannot fully understand, and there are more studies and analyses to be conducted as one fine-tunes his or her understanding about Yeshua

⁶⁶ Cf. K.H. Rengstorf, “*despôtēs*,” in *TDNT*, pp 145-146; M.W. Meyer, “Master,” in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed. et. al., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 3:278.

⁶⁷ This is analyzed further in the author’s article, “Sacred Name Concerns.”

⁶⁸ For some useful discussion, consult B. Witherington III, “Lord,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, pp 484-942; L.W. Hurtado, “Lord,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, pp 560-569.

Confronting Critical Issues

being both God and man—the Scriptures are clear that only a Divine Messiah can save us from our sins!

This concludes our ministry response to the so-called “frequently avoided questions” relating to the Divinity of Yeshua. You have seen in our responses to the various questions posed, that arguments against the Divinity of our Savior are often surface level, they purposefully ignore other Scripture passages, and most of all they *ignore* the Biblical reality that only God and He alone can save us from our sins. Some ancient scribes recognized this in Yeshua when they asked, “Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Mark 2:7; cf. Luke 5:21). They believed Yeshua’s forgiving people of their sins to be blasphemy because only God can forgive sins, as the Psalmist plainly declares, “Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Your name; and deliver us and forgive our sins for Your name’s sake” (Psalm 79:9).

If Yeshua the Messiah is not God, yet the Scriptures tell us that only God can save us from our sins and forgive us of our sins, then how can Yeshua be our Savior? If Yeshua is not God in the flesh, then who is He?

What are we to do about those who deny Yeshua as God in the flesh, yet still recognize Him as the Messiah? Have they left the faith? Thankfully, it is only up to the Lord of all to ultimately decide who is saved and unsaved, as only He knows the true heart intent of any individual. However, those who have denied Yeshua’s Divinity have denied Him being a Divine Savior, and they have denied the Source of their salvation and the Biblical reality that only God can save us. **God help them all!**

The subject of Yeshua’s Divinity is not going away anytime soon. There will be additional criticisms that will be given by those who are denying the Divine Savior, and this article will certainly not be the last piece written on the subject matter.⁶⁹ We need to be ready for what is coming—and hold on to the fact that He is the Divine Savior, because a human being cannot redeem another human being. We must always question the motives of those who deny Yeshua’s Divinity and His part as a member of the Godhead, wondering why they are doing what they are doing. It is the established pattern that once you deny Him as God in the flesh, it is not that much longer before you deny Him as the Messiah.

⁶⁹ The author is presently preparing a work, entitled *Salvation on the Line*, which will classify and examine all of the major passages, in detail, about the Divine nature of Yeshua from the Tanach and Apostolic Scriptures.