

The Nature of Yeshua in the General Epistles

thus supportive of His Divinity. But whether one is a Calvinist or Arminian in soteriology, being “foreknown” (NASB/NASU; *proegnōsmenou*) is something that is true of humans as created beings, who did not pre-exist this universe. Whether the pre-existence of Yeshua is spoken of in 1 Peter 1:20, instead involves how to approach *phanerōthentos*: “has appeared,” “made manifest” (RSV), or “revealed” (NIV).

Various commentators have widely concluded that 1 Peter 1:20 does speak to Yeshua’s pre-existence. Yeshua was known *before the foundation of the world*, and *now He has appeared or been revealed at the end of the ages*. With these two concepts held together, Yeshua’s revealing to the world, is predicated on His having been foreknown before the foundation of the world. Witherington indicates, “In 1 Peter 1:20 the concept of the preexistence of Christ is implied not by the term ‘foreknown’ (God foreknows believers as well, but it does not make them preexistent) but in the phrase ‘but revealed...,’ implying that he existed before his incarnation (which is surely referred to here).”²⁵ Davids further elaborates,

“That Christ was *revealed* implies that he preexisted, as the hymn in 2 Tim. 3:16 indicates (cf. Heb. 9:26; 1 John 1:2; 3:5), just as he continues to exist before his final revelation at the close of time (Col. 3:4; 1 Pet. 5:4; 1 John 3:2). The period began by his first appearance and closed by his final appearance is the end of the ages, or, as Peter puts it, ‘the end of the times’ (Acts 2:16-21; 1 Cor. 10:11; Heb. 9:26). Christians stand, as it were, on the brink: the last age of the world has already dawned and God’s chosen ones expect...its close in the imminent future with the final manifestation of their King and Christ.”²⁶

Yeshua’s arrival onto the scene of history is telic, having a significant purpose. The final stages of human history began with the Messiah’s incarnation, sacrifice, and resurrection (Acts 2:16-17; Hebrews 1:1; 9:26), although His Second Coming and the total defeat of His enemies still await. Yeshua’s work on the tree is the cause of Believers’ spiritual regeneration (1 Peter 1:21, 23), and their required love for one another (1 Peter 1:24). The good news or gospel message, which was declared to Peter’s audience, is to be considered a steadfast and reliable word (1 Peter 1:24-25).

1 Peter 3:8-22

“Sanctifying Messiah as Lord”

“To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. For, ‘THE ONE WHO DESIRES LIFE, TO LOVE AND SEE GOOD DAYS, MUST KEEP HIS TONGUE FROM EVIL AND HIS LIPS FROM SPEAKING DECEIT. HE MUST TURN AWAY FROM EVIL AND DO GOOD; HE MUST SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT. FOR THE EYES OF THE LORD ARE TOWARD THE RIGHTEOUS, AND HIS EARS ATTEND TO THEIR PRAYER, BUT THE FACE OF THE LORD IS AGAINST THOSE WHO DO EVIL’ [Psalm 34:12-16]. Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED [Isaiah 8:12-13], but sanctify Messiah as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Messiah will be put to shame. For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong. 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,

²⁵ Witherington, *1&2 Peter*, 107.

²⁶ Davids, *1 Peter*, 74.

who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through *the water*. Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Yeshua the Messiah, who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.”

The Epistle of 1 Peter includes some significant moral exhortations to its audience: “Finally, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, tenderhearted, humble-minded. Do not repay evil for evil or insult for insult, but give a blessing instead—it is for this reason you were called, so that you might inherit a blessing” (1 Peter 3:8-9, TLV). It is hardly a surprise that Peter’s message is deeply rooted within the themes and messages of the Tanach or Old Testament, with 1 Peter 3:10-12 including a reference from Psalm 34:12-16²⁷:

“Who is the man who desires life and loves *length of days* that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it. The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous and His ears are *open* to their cry. The face of the LORD is against evildoers, to cut off the memory of them from the earth.”

Peter’s quotation from Psalms makes light of *ophthalmoi Kuriou* (ὀφθαλμοὶ κυρίου) or “the eyes of the Lord,” and *prosōpon de Kuriou* (πρόσωπον δὲ κυρίου) or “the face of the Lord” (1 Peter 3:12). With the Hebrew Tanach in view (likely via the Greek Septuagint), this is *einei YHWH* (עֵינֵי יְהוָה; Psalm 34:15) and *p’nei YHWH* (פְּנֵי יְהוָה; Psalm 34:17).

There is obviously some rhetorical intention in Peter’s question, “Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?” (1 Peter 3:13, NIV). 1 Peter 3:14 following recognizes that there will likely be some harm which comes to Believers, including a reference to Isaiah 8:12-13²⁸: “But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED.” Isaiah 8:12-13 in its totality reads,

“You are not to say, ‘*It is a conspiracy!*’ In regard to all that this people call a conspiracy, and you are not to fear what they fear or be in dread of *it*. It is the LORD of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear, and He shall be your dread.”

The intended focus of the attention of righteous people, is asserted by Isaiah 8:13 to be *YHWH Tzevaot* (יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת) or “HASHEM, Master of Legions” (ATS).

With clear references to the One God of Israel, the LORD or YHWH, made via Tanach intertextuality (Psalm 34:12-16; Isaiah 8:12-13) in the preceding passages (1 Peter 3:12, 14), with the title *Kurios* (κύριος)—how are readers to approach the Apostle’s admonition? “Instead sanctify **Messiah as Lord** in your hearts. Always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15, TLV). Here, we encounter a reference to “Messiah as Lord.” Given the statements following, sanctifying Messiah as Lord definitely involves the proper conduct of Believers in interacting with those of the world, and in representing the upstanding character of the Lord when ridiculed or persecuted for their faith (1 Peter 3:16-17). However, it has to be recognized how reverencing or honoring Messiah as Lord, is a statement reflecting a high Christology. The language of Isaiah 8:13 in the Septuagint, “Sanctify the Lord himself” (NETS), *Kurion auton hagiastate* (κύριον αὐτὸν ἁγιασάτε), is adapted by

²⁷ Erwin Nestle and Kurt Aland, eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece, Nestle-Aland 27th Edition* (New York: American Bible Society, 1993), pp 603-604; Kurt Aland, et. al., *The Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/United Bible Societies, 1998), 792; Barbara and Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger, eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece, 28th Revised Edition* (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft: Stuttgart, 2012), 702.

²⁸ Nestle and Aland, 604; Aland, pp 792-793; Aland, Karavidopoulos, Martini, and Metzger, 702.

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1 Peter 3:15 having *Kurion de ton Christon hagiastes* (κύριον δὲ τὸν Χριστὸν ἁγιάσατε). The Lord of Isaiah 8:13, YHWH, is the Lord Messiah of 1 Peter 3:15.

A number of commentators have had to acknowledge, in light of the Tanach passages preceding 1 Peter 3:15, that the Lordship of Yeshua the Messiah involves His integration into the Divine Identity:

- J.N.D. Kelly: “[S]ince the author is adapting the LXX ‘sanctify the Lord [i.e. Yahweh] himself’, it seems more natural to construe **Christ** (*ton Christon*) as appositional, intended to clarify the reference of **the Lord**...The verse has a bearing on 1 Peter’s Christology, for ii.3 the title ‘the Lord’, which in the Hebrew original denotes God, is unhesitatingly attributed to Christ.”²⁹
- Peter H. Davids: “Peter...asserts that Jesus is to be honored, revered, and obeyed as Lord. This quotation also reveals more about Peter’s Christology, for he takes a passage definitely speaking about God in the OT and refers it to Christ, making clear by his addition that this is the sense in which he is taking ‘Lord.’ This way of expressing his high Christology is typical for Peter.”³⁰
- I. Howard Marshall: “The text in Isaiah 8:13 speaks of regarding the Lord Almighty as holy. By adding the words ‘the Christ’ Peter applies to Jesus what was originally said with respect to God, a clear indication of how Jesus was ranked alongside God the Father by the early Christians (and yet not identified with him; see 1:3).”³¹
- Ben Witherington III: “What Peter is doing {with Isaiah 8:12-13} is substituting Christ for Yahweh in the second verse of this allusion. It is now Christ who is to be hallowed, and in the heart.”³²

With Tanach statements about the LORD or YHWH applied to Yeshua the Messiah in 1 Peter 3:15, it is clear that the Apostle Peter regards Him as being integrated into the Divine Identity. If Yeshua were only a supernatural yet created being, then to say “sanctify Messiah as Lord in your hearts” (PME), adapting Isaiah 8:13, would be blasphemy against the God of Israel.

Of course, per the initial exclaim of 1 Peter 1:3, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah!” (TLV), while integrated into the Divine Identity, Yeshua the Son is hardly all that composes the Divine Identity, nor does Yeshua act independently and all on His own. As Peter describes Yeshua’s sacrificial work, “For Messiah also died for sins once for all, *the* righteous for *the* unrighteous, so that He might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18ab, PME). Contextually, “that he might bring-you – to God” (Brown and Comfort),³³ *hina humas prosagagē tō Theō* (ἵνα ὑμᾶς προσαγάγῃ τῷ θεῷ), involves the Son providing reconciliation to the repentant with the Heavenly Father.

The work of the Messiah in being sacrificed is something which has multi-dimensional significance, as made clear by the mysterious and debated statements made by Peter regarding

²⁹ Kelly, 142.

Kelly makes a reference here to 1 Peter 2:3, “if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.”

Via Tanach intextuality, the title *Kurios* as applied to the Messiah in 1 Peter 2:3, could be associated with the LORD or YHWH, per a passage such as Psalm 34:8: “O taste and see that the LORD is good; how blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!”

³⁰ Davids, *1 Peter*, 131.

³¹ Marshall, *1 Peter*, 115.

³² Witherington, *1&2 Peter*, 178.

³³ Brown and Comfort, 815.

the spirits in prison, and Yeshua's declaration to them (1 Peter 3:18c-20)³⁴ and subsequent resurrection (1 Peter 3:21). That Yeshua's ascension into Heaven and exaltation, involves the most supreme of power, is exclaimed by the Apostle in his words, "He has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels and authorities and powers subjected to Him" (1 Peter 3:22, TLV).

2 Peter 1:1-4, 8, 11

"Our God and Savior, Yeshua the Messiah"

"Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Yeshua the Messiah, to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Yeshua the Messiah: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Yeshua our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust...For if these *qualities* are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah...for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Yeshua the Messiah will be abundantly supplied to you."

The opening greeting of the Epistle of 2 Peter, immediately presents readers with questions about the nature of Yeshua. In most English Bibles, 2 Peter 1:1 reads with "the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ" (RSV), with the title "God" or *theos* (θεός) seemingly applied to Yeshua the Messiah. 2 Peter 1:1 is not isolated in the Apostolic Writings, as there are other passages where the title *theos* is used to refer to Yeshua (John 1:1; 20:28; Romans 9:5; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8). While many English translations indeed have "the righteousness of our God and Savior, Yeshua the Messiah" (HNV) in 2 Peter 1:1, it cannot go overlooked how the KJV originally had "the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ," apparently representing two entities, giving some reason to pause as to whether or not the title *theos* is actually applied to the Messiah.

Why would a version like the KJV have, "the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ," and its successor the NKJV have, "the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ"? The issue involves Greek grammatical concerns, in how a single article, *tou* (τοῦ), controls two nouns as a single entity, in the clause *en dikaiosunē tou Theou hēmōn kai sōtēros Iēsou Christou* (ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ σωτῆρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ), "by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Yeshua the Messiah" (2 Peter 1:1, PME). This has not escaped the notice of commentators, although both theological and grammatical factors have to be evaluated in what is communicated in 2 Peter 1:1.

Michael R. Greenwald forthrightly acknowledges in the annotations for the relatively liberal *Jewish Annotated New Testament*, "Our God and Savior may be an early, and if so, unusual instance of the equation of God with Jesus."³⁵ Indeed, those who hold to a high Christology of Yeshua the Messiah genuinely being God, seldom come to this conclusion because of infrequent, titular references to Yeshua as "God"—but instead conceptual deductions based on Yeshua's sayings, activities, or intextual Tanach passages involving the LORD or YHWH applied to Yeshua. Michael Green observes how while there are various titular ascriptions of Yeshua as

³⁴ Consult the discussions provided on 1 Peter 3:18-20 in the author's publications *To Be Absent From the Body and Why Hell Must Be Eternal*.

³⁵ Michael R. Greenwald, "The Second Letter of Peter," in Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, NRSV (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 444.