

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.

The Nature of Yeshua in the General Epistles

“God,” more frequently claims about the nature of Yeshua are what is witnessed in the Apostolic Writings:

“It is objected that nowhere in the Epistles is Jesus unambiguously called God. This may mean no more than that the New Testament writers were careful to guard against ditheism for, quite apart from some probable instances of the attribution ‘God’ to Jesus (Jn. 1:1; 20:28; Rom. 9:5; 2 Thes. 1:12; Tit. 2:13; Phil. 2:6; Heb. 1:8; 1 Jn. 5:20), the early Christians were utterly convinced that Jesus embodied God. To claim with Paul that ‘in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form’ (Col. 2:9) is even more emphatic than simply calling Jesus God.”³⁶

The most frequent title employed in the Apostolic letters for Yeshua, is actually *kurios* (κύριος) or “Lord,” which rendered the Divine Name YHWH/YHVH (יהוה) in the Septuagint. When *kurios* as a title for Yeshua is used in conjunction with *theos* as a title for the Father, examiners widely conclude that this represents a plural Godhead of the Father and Son. This would align with the Apostle Paul’s reworking of the Deuteronomy 6:4 *Shema* in 1 Corinthians 8:6: “yet 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” (discussed further). However, while *kurios* is the title frequently applied to Yeshua the Son, this hardly means that the title *theos* cannot be applied to Him as well.

Is it permissible for English Bibles to translate *tu Theou hēmōn kai sōtēros Iēsou Christou* as “of God and our Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:1), depicting two entities? Many commentators do not believe that this is grammatically acceptable, especially given the fact that in 2 Peter 1:2 immediately following, the Father and Son are unambiguously separated out, with the dual employment of the definite article *tu* (τοῦ): *en epignōsei tu Theou kai Iēsou tu Kurīou hēmōn* (ἐν ἐπιγνώσει τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν), “in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord” (RSV). In the estimation of some, to translate 2 Peter 1:1 preceding, as though the definite article *tu* were employed twice—when it clearly is not—would be sloppy at best, dishonest with the Greek source text at worst. Further on in 2 Peter 1:11, the article *tu* is recognized by almost all authorities as referring to both the Lord and Yeshua the Messiah as the same entity. The clause *tu Kurīou hēmōn kai sōtēros Iēsou Christou* (τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν καὶ σωτήρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) or “our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:11, RSV) is almost identical to *tu Theou hēmōn kai sōtēros Iēsou Christou* or “our God and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:1, RSV). Richard J. Bauckham further summarizes some of these technical details:

“τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ σωτήρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ [*tu Theou hēmōn kai sōtēros Iēsou Christou*], ‘of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.’ Does this phrase refer to two persons (‘our God and the Savior Jesus Christ’) or one (‘our God and Savior Jesus Christ’)? The absence of the article before σωτήρος [*sōtēros*] (‘Savior’) favors the latter, but is not decisive...Some scholars therefore think the phrase intends to distinguish God and Jesus...but a large majority think θεοῦ [*Theou*] (‘God’) is here used of Jesus. The following arguments favor this view: ...Elsewhere in the letter the writer uses the similarly constructed phrase τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν καὶ σωτήρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ [*tu Kurīou hēmōn kai sōtēros Iēsou Christou*] (‘our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ’: 1:11; 3:18; cf. 2:20; 3:2), where there is no doubt that the whole phrase refers to Jesus Christ. When, however, this writer wishes to distinguish the two persons, in 1:2, the construction is different: τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν [*tu Theou kai Iēsou tu Kurīou hēmōn*] (‘of God and Jesus our Lord’) ...The doxology addressed to Christ in 3:18 is consistent with a Christology in which θεός [*Theos*] (‘God’) can be used of Christ.”³⁷

³⁶ Michael Green, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: 2 Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 69.

³⁷ Richard J. Bauckham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Jude, 2 Peter*, Vol 50 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 168.

Davids further concludes,

“[T]he Greek {of 2 Peter 1:1} more naturally implies that one person is being intended. While the fact that a single article is used is not absolutely conclusive, it is highly suggestive. More important, there is only one ‘our,’ and that comes after ‘God’ and before ‘and.’ ‘Our’ certainly is intended to include ‘Savior’ as well as ‘God,’ thus also indicating that one person is being discussed.”³⁸

Davids makes light of the Granville Sharp rule being in play for 2 Peter 1:1, which was named after Granville Sharp (1735-1813), an English linguist and son/grandson of clergy. In his massive *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, Daniel B. Wallace describes the Granville Sharp rule as follows:

“In Greek, when two nouns are connected by *καὶ* [*kai*] and the article precedes only the first noun, there is a close connection between the two. That connection always indicates at least some sort of *unity*. At a higher level, it may connote *equality*. At the highest level it may indicate *identity*. When the construction meets three specific demands, then the two nouns *always* refer to the same person. When the construction does not meet these requirements, the nouns may or may not refer to the same person(s)/object(s).”³⁹

To review, 2 Peter 1:1 includes only one employment of the definite article *του* (τοῦ): *en dikaiosunē tou Theou hēmōn kai sōtēros Iēsou Christou* (ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ σωτήρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ). In his discussion of the Granville Sharp rule, employed in this verse, Wallace confirms how while some object to there being a single subject spoken of in 2 Peter 1:1, no objection tends to be raised regarding 2 Peter 1:11 following:

“Some grammarians have objected that since ἡμῶν [*hēmōn*] is connected with θεοῦ [*Theou*], two persons are in view. The pronoun seems to ‘bracket’ the noun, effectively isolating the trailing noun. However in v 11 of this same chapter (as well as in 2:20 and 3:18), the author writes τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν καὶ σωτήρος, Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ [*του Kuriou hēmōn kai sōtēros Iēsou Christou*], an expression which refers to one person, Jesus Christ...This being the case, there is no good reason for rejecting 2 Pet 1:1 as an explicit affirmation of the deity of Christ.”⁴⁰

To this, Kelly properly adds, “if we are to distinguish two persons here {in 2 Peter 1:1}, **our** must be taken exclusively with **God**, and **Saviour Jesus Christ** is an awkward expression when left standing thus on its own.”⁴¹

The CJB/CJSB, a major version that is used throughout the broad Messianic movement, is unfortunately seen to have, “our God and of our Deliverer Yeshua the Messiah.” No discussion is available in either David H. Stern’s *Jewish New Testament Commentary* or the 2016 *Complete Jewish Study Bible* explaining this. The Tree of Life Version (TLV), fully released in late 2014, does thankfully have “our God and Savior, Messiah Yeshua.” However, it is to be witnessed that various other versions, which are employed in either Messianic Judaism and/or the Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement, do follow a proper rendering of *του Theou hēmōn kai sōtēros Iēsou Christou*, even if there are a few questions as to whether various publishers hold to a low Christology:

³⁸ Peter H. Davids, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 163.

³⁹ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 270.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, pp 276-277.

⁴¹ Kelly, 298.

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- “our God and Savior, Jesus Messiah” (Power New Testament).
- “our Elohim and Saviour יהושע Messiah” (ISR Scriptures-2009).
- “our God and Savior Yeshua, the Messiah” (The Messianic Writings).

Noting the NIV rendering of 2 Peter 1:1, “through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ,” Moo, who forthrightly holds to a high Christology of Yeshua being God, raises some critical points that need not go overlooked in our deliberations on the nature of the Messiah. While concluding that the Apostle Peter indeed believed Yeshua to be God in his opening greeting, Moo points out that Peter hardly abandoned First Century Jewish monotheism. Likewise, Moo appreciably mentions how Peter could not have had a systematic understanding of the “Trinity,” seen in later Christian centuries:

“Here...we have one of the few verses in the New Testament where Jesus is explicitly called ‘God.’ This does not, of course, mean that for Peter Jesus Christ has taken the place of the Old Testament God he has worshiped since childhood. It means, rather, that he has now come to understand that Jesus, along with the Father, is God. Nor is it likely that in saying this Peter is giving up monotheism and conceiving of Jesus as another God alongside the Father. While it would be a gross anachronism to attribute to the apostle at this point a fully worked-out Trinitarian understanding of God, what he says here, along with other similar verses in the New Testament, provides the building blocks for the later elaboration of that central Christian doctrine.”⁴²

Indeed, while today’s Messianic people tend to have an aversion to the Christian term “Trinity,” we have to fairly recognize that for many, the term “Trinity” is simply akin to “plurality of God.” In the case of 2 Peter 1:1, we have an explicit reference to “our God and Savior, Yeshua the Messiah” (PME), which definitely plays a role in evaluating whether or not Yeshua is a supernatural but created being, or is indeed integrated into the Divine Identity. Yeshua’s identification with the One God of Israel, is perhaps best indicated via the associated employment of the title *sōtēr* (σωτήρ) or “Savior,” which was often used in “the Septuagint for יֵשׁוּעַ [*yeshua*], יֵשׁוּעָה [*yeshuah*] מוֹשִׁיעַ [*moshia*] savior, deliverer; preserver” (Thayer).⁴³ Witherington details how *sōtēr* actually has both Tanach and classical background, which affected how the First Century Believers thought of Yeshua the Messiah:

“The term *sōtēr*, ‘Savior,’ was used of God the Father in the Old Testament. Here it is applied to Jesus as the one who brings salvation. It was, however, a popular Hellenistic word, widely used of pagan deities and even the emperor, and this may explain its use here.”⁴⁴

It is important that not only Yeshua the Messiah be thought of as “Savior,” and integrated to a plural *Elohim* Godhead—but that Yeshua the Messiah be recognized as the true “Savior,” meaning that Caesar was a false savior. That the message of Yeshua the Messiah was subversive to Caesar and the Roman Empire is hardly surprising! As Peter detailed to his First Century audience, “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness” (2 Peter 1:3, NIV). Rather than one of the Caesars trying to, in a strongly limited capacity, be beneficent toward the population of the Empire, Yeshua the Messiah “has by his own action given us everything that is necessary for living the truly good life” (Phillips New Testament).

The term *theios* (θεῖος) or “divine power” is especially significant, as it “**pert. to that which belongs to the nature or status of deity, divine**” and can involve “**persons who stand in close**

⁴² Douglas J. Moo, *NIV Application Commentary: 2 Peter, Jude* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), pp 35-36.

⁴³ Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 612.

⁴⁴ Witherington, *1&2 Peter*, 295.

relation to, or reflect characteristics of, a deity, including esp. helpfulness to one's constituencies, *divine*" (BDAG).⁴⁵ The *theios* of Yeshua provides Believers with the supernatural impetus that they need in order to have the right knowledge of Him (1 Peter 1:3). Believers are further labeled to be *theias koinōnoi phuseōs* (θείας κοινωνοὶ φύσεως), "participants of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4, NRSV) or "sharers in the divine nature" (Lattimore), particularly in terms of what it means to "escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires" (NIV). While mortal Believers in Israel's Messiah are hardly going to find themselves titularly labeled "our God and Savior" (2 Peter 1:1), they do nevertheless because of the trust that they have placed in Him, benefit from the Messiah's Divine nature, and see their character transformed to be more like His:

"Now for this very reason, making every effort, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly love; and to brotherly love, love. For if these qualities are in you and increasing, they keep you from becoming idle and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah" (2 Peter 1:5-8, TLV).

The need for Believers to maintain their guard against sin, and continually mature in faith, is stressed by the Apostle Peter, communicating to his audience, "But anyone who lacks these qualities is blind—nearsighted because he has forgotten his cleansing from past sins" (2 Peter 1:9, TLV). Peter further admonishes, "Therefore, brothers and sisters, make all the more effort to make your calling and election certain—for if you keep doing these things, you will never stumble" (2 Peter 1:10, TLV).

The opening statements of 2 Peter end with a doxology, notably issued to Yeshua: "For in this way entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Messiah Yeshua, will be richly provided for you" (2 Peter 1:11, TLV). No one disputes the translation "our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (RSV) for *tou Kuriou hēmōn kai sōtēros Iēsou Christou*. However, it cannot be avoided how Believers are to enter into *tēn aiōnion basileian* (τὴν αἰώνιον βασιλείαν) or "the eternal kingdom" of Yeshua. How does this reflect on the nature of the Messiah? Truly, no one would expect a supernatural, but ultimately created being, to have an eternal kingdom. It would seem most out of place, at best, for a doxology to be said along the lines of "the eternal kingdom of the Archangel Michael." Only if Yeshua were genuinely a being to be regarded as "our God and Savior" (2 Peter 1:1) and "our Lord and Savior" (2 Peter 1:11), would He likewise be expected to have "an eternal realm" (2 Peter 1:11, Moffat New Testament).

2 Peter 1:16-18

"Peter Testifies to the Transfiguration"

"For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased'—and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain."

The author of 2 Peter claims to be an eyewitness of Yeshua the Messiah, which, notwithstanding various secretaries or scribes being employed for the composition of the

⁴⁵ 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), 446.