

*Jesus - Yeshua ...
What's in the Name?*

MISHKAN

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"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)



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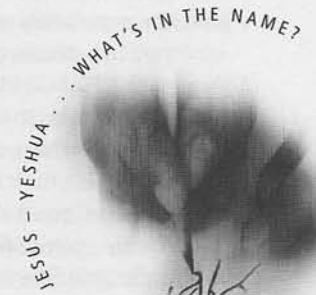
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Christological Observations within Yeshua Judaism*

by Gershon Nerel



In the following discussion of several Christological questions, I use the Hebrew Masoretic text of the Old Testament and the *Textus Receptus* of the New Testament, alongside some historical creeds. Hopefully this will stimulate further studies on Messiahology/Christology, yet without provoking a Crusader/Inquisition/heresy-hunt atmosphere.

Why Discern between God the Father and Yeshua the Son of God?

In Roman Catholic theology, *Mary* is called the "Mother of God" (*theotokos*), because in Catholicism Yeshua is defined as God. But in the New Testament, Yeshua is always referred to as the *Son of (the) God* (e.g., Matt 4:3; Mark 1:1; Luke 4:41; John 20:31; Acts 8:37; 2 Cor 1:19; Gal 2:20; Heb 4:14; Rev 2:18). In the Pauline Epistles, for example, the apostle always distinguishes between Yeshua the Messiah, the Lord – the Son of God – and the Father as (the) God (e.g. Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2).

In the New Testament, we read that the Father in heaven is above everything, as is obvious, for example, in the Lord's Prayer. According to this model prayer, Messiah Yeshua commanded his disciples to pray to the Father in heaven (Matt 6:9); in principle, prayers should be addressed to the Father, not to the Son, although occasionally one may also pray to the Son. Yet as a matter of routine, prayers should be addressed to the Father through the Son, in whose name his disciples should pray to the Father, so that "the Father may be glorified in the Son"¹ (John 14:13).¹ And, there also exists the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God (Gen 1:2) that descends upon the disciples, the Spirit which flows both from the Father and from the Son (Luke 11:13; John 14:26; 15:26).² Apparently there is a consensus among contemporary Jewish disciples of Yeshua (JDY) that the procession of the

* I am thankful to David and Eliyahu Bar David of the Messianic Congregation at Yad Hashmona, Israel, for their thoughtful reflections during Bible studies. Also I am grateful to Richard Harvey for sharing theological insights.

¹ Adolph Saphir, *The Lord's Prayer* (Heb. trans. Maya Rechnitzer; Jerusalem: 2005), 7–15; 267–68.

² The Latin word *filioque* ("and the Son") denotes the dogma concerning the Spirit flowing

Holy Spirit is from both the Father and the Son, so there is no need to repeat the arguments of the ancient *filioque* debate.³

Within the divine order of the Godhead there is a "pragmatic succession" of the Holy Spirit through the Father-Son "operative relationship." In the differing roles in the Godhead, the Father is never visible, as human beings cannot see him, while the Son manifests himself and mortals are able to see him with their human eyes.⁴ This "working differentiation" actually shapes the unique functions of the Father and the Son. Addressing prayers importantly exemplifies the relation between the Son and the Father, as it will be discussed further on.

It should be underlined that according to the Gospels there is an obvious "direction" in that the Father never prays to the Son – it is just the opposite, as the Son is the one who always prays to his Father. Within the Godhead there exists a hierarchical relationship between Father and Son, Son and Father. The Father is continually in the head of this holy rank, above the Son and the Spirit – yet still without downgrading the divinity of the Son and the Spirit. Therefore Yeshua himself explained that his Father had sent him to this world, and that he as the Son was fully willing to execute the Father's plan in one holy unity (John 5:36–38; 6:38–40). There is perfect interaction between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, based upon a special position and function for each person within the Godhead.

Inside this holy yet hierarchical relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, there is a divine "mapping," in which each and every one of the three persons of the Godhead has a specific role. Thus, for example, we cannot and should not just say that "God was crucified and shed his blood on Golgotha," or that "God was killed in Jerusalem," because it was actually the *Son of God* that came down to this sinful earth, whereas the Father always remained in heaven. It was "only" Yeshua who was hanged on the cross, while his Father always dwelled in a celestial locale, from which he accepted his Son's prayer: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46). It is significant to use terminology in the most transparent way.

The "Only Begotten Son of the Father"

Messiah Yeshua taught that no one has ever seen the Father at any time, but "the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared Him" (John 1:18). Hence, it was the role of the divine Son to perform the visible communications between the Father and human beings. Consequently, for example, from the book of Genesis it is also understandable

from both Father and Son (*The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Filioque").

3 "Filioque Clause," Theopedia, www.theopedia.com/Filioque_clause [accessed January 8, 2009].

4 Asher Intrater, "The Corporeal Revelation of God in the Hebrew Scriptures," *Zot Habrit* ["This is the Covenant"; journal of the Messianic Jewish Alliance of Israel] 6 (2007): 36–38.

that Yeshua was among the "three men" – YHWH himself, even before his incarnation – who appeared to Abraham sitting in the entrance to the tent (Gen 18:1–14). Later he struggled physically with the patriarch Ya'akov/Jacob (Gen 32:29–30). It was also Yeshua (*Mal'ach YHWH* – Angel of YHWH) who spoke to Moses from the burning bush (Exod 3:1–7). I also believe that Yeshua was the one who spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai and gave him the Ten Commandments (Exod 19:20–24).

While Yeshua already existed in heaven before his incarnation in Bethlehem, he occasionally came down to this earth in the image of a man in order to communicate with believers. Eusebius (AD 260–339), bishop of Caesarea and author of the *Ecclesiastical History*, wrote about such appearances of the Son on earth before his embodiment through Mary.⁵ Regardless, in all cases that Yeshua faced people before and after the incarnation, he did it in full cooperation with the Father, as he said: "I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me" (John 6:38).

It should be noted that Eusebius already shared the view of the early pre-Augustinian church that "God's appearances to men," mentioned in the Old Testament, were *de facto* the appearances of Messiah (*Christos*) Yeshua himself. However, it was St. Augustine of North Africa (AD 354–430) who was the first among the church fathers to introduce a different view. According to Augustine, the Son-Messiah could not have appeared to humans because the Father and the Son are of one and the same divine substance. Therefore the Augustinian view, which still prevails in the Catholic Church today, is that the *Logos* ("Word" – Yeshua) did not appear to men in Old Testament times, but that rather it must have been "just" an angel.⁶

Because Yeshua did exist alongside the Father even before the creation of the world (John 1:1), his existence for sure did not start when he was born in a manger. But still, textually and contextually, there remain some questions to be asked, as follows: What does it really mean that Yeshua is "the only begotten of the Father" (John 1:14)? And, when or how was he begotten? Or, if he existed with no beginning at all, why was he begotten? Or, why not use synonyms for "begotten," such as generated, originated, or even the verb "created"? Why accept the term "begotten," yet fear its synonym "created"? What does "begetting" really signify?

Psalm 2:7 provides the "key" for orientation, as follows: "The Lord has said to me, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you.'" When the Father talks to his Son, it is made clear that the Son was begotten or "made" by the Father. How to understand this? The focal point is that the Father did not, and would not, beget the Son out of nothing, *ex-nihilo*. Moreover, the Son was not begotten from any created matter or spirit, but from the very essence or substance of the Father himself. In other words, the Father

5 Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book 1, chapters 2, 4; Eusebius, *History of the Church*, Heb. trans. Rimona Frank (Jerusalem: Caspari Center/Akadem Press, 2001), 3–4; 12.

6 Eusebius, *History of the Church* (Hebrew), 4, note 3.

somehow supernaturally took part of himself, his own spirit and/or essence, and divinely begat his Son Yeshua. When did this mystery of divine "procreation" happen?

I accept the explanation of the late Haim Haimoff/Bar David (1905–91),⁷ that the Son was indeed begotten by his divine Father. When Yeshua affirmed that he was "the Son of the living God" (Matt 16:16–17), he also confirmed that as the Son of God he had full divinity, just as the son of a man is a man, or the offspring of an animal is an animal.⁸ Yeshua testified to the truth of the words in Psalm 2:7, but surely this unique "begetting" happened outside of time or before time even existed.

Thus, the "goings forth" of the Son, the divine ruler from Bethlehem as the prophet Micah called him, are "from of old, from everlasting" (Mic 5:2). From this perspective, the Son was begotten/created by the Father, from the Father, from infinity; i.e., Yeshua is the "Beginning of the creation of God" (Rev 3:14). Such a state of timelessness is beyond human understanding, because humans normally think within chronological limitations. Mortals are bound to the movement of time and the cycles of calendars. Yeshua's begetting is a great mystery.

Yet it is not unreasonable that Yeshua was begotten divinely "somewhere" in eternity. Eternity is understood as being dateless or ageless. The fact that the Father had begotten the Son does not bring into question Yeshua's timelessness, nor undermine his full divinity. The Son is the only one sitting at the right side of the Father's throne in heaven (Mark 14:62; Rev 5:1). He was always divine, and he is and remains entirely divine – God from God, as in his prayer Yeshua also stated that he and the Father are one (John 17:11).

It is surprising, however, that not all versions and translations of the New Testament contain the words "only begotten Son" of the Father. Various texts simply omit the term "begotten." Thus, while in the *textus receptus* of the classical King James Version one finds the words "only begotten of the Father" (John 1:14), and "only begotten Son" (John 1:18; 1 John 4:9), in the critical texts of other versions the term "begotten" was removed. Such editions or paraphrases include the *Living Bible* ("the only Son of the heavenly Father"); the *Phillip Modern English* ("a father's only son"); the *Revised Standard Version* ("only Son from the Father"); the *Today's English Version* ("the Father's only Son"); the *New International Version* ("one and only [Son] who came from the Father");⁹ the *Jerusalem Bible* ("only Son of the Father"); and the *New English Bible* ("the Father's only Son").¹⁰

What do these textual omissions and dissimilarities mean? The different

7 Gershon Nerel, "Haim (Haimoff) Bar David: Restoring Apostolic Authority among Jewish Yeshua-Believers," *Mishkan* 37 (2002): 59–78.

8 H. Ben Joseph (Haimoff's pseudonym), *Does God Have a Son – What Says the Old Testament?* (Jerusalem: Living Waters Printing Press, 1937), 3. Hebrew title: *Ha'oumnam Yesh Ben Le'Elohim?*

9 A footnote in the *New International Version* mentions after "only [Son]" the following: "Or the Only Begotten." Yet the main text omits the term "begotten."

10 *Eight Translation New Testament* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1977).

passages of Scripture *a priori* present different theological interpretations, which suit the outlook of the selectors of a specific manuscript. Upon the text which each and every person chooses is built his/her personal theological beliefs. This situation suits the saying, "Show me your biblical version/translation, and I will predict your theology."

"Yeshua Is Human in the Full Sense of the Word"

On June 7, 2002, a gathering of Israeli Messianic elders (*Kenes Artzi* – National Leaders Forum) took place at Beth Asaf Congregation in Netanya, near Tel Aviv, to discuss the issue of Yeshua's divinity/deity.¹¹ About fifty participants attended from all over the country.¹² Following the discussion, a pre-printed draft "creed" was presented, and the attendants were asked to sign it. This one-page "Principles of Faith of the Conference" was intended to be a declaration concerning the unity of God and Messiah's divinity, focusing only on one paragraph: "God." The Hebrew text was translated into English, Russian, and Amharic, as follows:

God: "The Lord our God, the Lord is One." The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the only God and Creator. There is no other besides Him and all the divine attributes are His alone. His unique unity consists of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Each of them eternal and divine in the perfection and fullness of deity. The Son, our Messiah, who was born without sin by the Holy Spirit to the virgin Miriam, is also human in the full sense of the term.

This paragraph is actually the second item in a broader creed that holds six chapters dealing with the following topics: 1) Sacred Scripture; 2) God; 3) Man and Sin; 4) Atonement and Salvation; 5) God's People; and 6) Eschatology. Initially, this text was drafted by the organizers of *Kenes Artzi* in 1989-90, and was proposed for approval by the same forum as guidelines for an accepted doctrinal platform. However, this text did not become the formal credo of Israeli believers in Yeshua. Still, the draft was attached to an invitation promulgated on the Messianic Congregational Leadership Network (MCLN) to another meeting in September 2008, near Tel-Aviv.

However, while nowadays few Israeli JDY question Yeshua's divinity, some of them still examine the issue of his so-called humanity. As the topic of Messiah's divinity has become by now almost a non-issue,¹³ there remains the question of how to explain the "doctrinal" statement which says: "[He] is also human in the full sense of the term."

It sounds paradoxical to state that "the Messiah was born without sin by the Holy Spirit," and at the very same time to add that "Yeshua is also

11 The gathering discussed opposing views of twelve Israeli JDY about Yeshua's divinity: "Messianic Jews Debate the Deity of Jesus," *Israel Today* 22 (2001): 21.

12 List of participants in my archive.

13 Gershon Nerel, "Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History and the Modern Yeshua-Movement," *Mishkan* 39 (2003): 80–82.

human in the full sense of the term." Human identity means, *de facto*, to be sinful, errant, biased, etc. A human being born to a worldly father and a worldly mother automatically inherits sin and wickedness, which are part and parcel of human nature and substance (Gen 6:5). By definition, "Human in the full sense of the term" cannot be sinless. Can holy divinity contain humanity, which cannot but be sinful? The clarification of this issue should provide a broader explanation that Yeshua did *not* have an average or ordinary human body, but he always remained holy, just, perfect, and pure – namely, divine. In a mysterious way, he "became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14), but his holy body, which was uniquely real flesh and real blood, was not subject to human imperfection such as obsession, corruption, or natural decay.

One must truthfully admit that according to the New Testament, Yeshua was born as a flesh and blood baby. He was even circumcised. This was a unique, one-time incarnation of God's Son, with indisputable "human" characteristics such as thirst (John 19:28), hunger (Matt 4:2), anger (John 2:15–16), sadness (Matt 26:37), fatigue (John 4:6), and weeping (John 11:35). But at the same time, one should also not forget to ask: Could he, with his sacrosanct embodiment, also share human weaknesses – certain mundane shortcomings which are not sins, such as limited knowledge, limited memory, and limited strength? Or, could he "just" become sick or simply die of frailty or old age? If he had a human body in the full sense of the word, in the *fullness* of the term, could he have died of lack of food or lack of drink?

No doubt Yeshua had a body of flesh and blood – a physical body that looked and functioned like a human body, but he never lost his divinity in this outward "body." In his "humanity," Yeshua "shared" in the flesh and blood of normal people (Heb 2:14), yet this was not at the expense of his divinity. Thus, for example, if Yeshua had wanted, he could have ordered legions of heavenly angels to come and rescue him from the *Via Dolorosa* and the crucifixion (Matt 26:53). But as the Son of God who "wore flesh and blood" (Heb 2:14),¹⁴ he chose to suffer with a humility that human beings cannot even grasp.

Moreover, his death on the cross was not just the death of a feeble and vulnerable human being, because then, actually, his disciples would have all been idol worshippers who bow before flesh and blood. No one should bow before a human person, not even before an angel, but only before God (Rev 22:9). For sure, after his body was taken down from the cross, it did not become an impure corpse as normally happens with a dead human body. According to the Torah, a human corpse automatically brings defilement: "He who touches the dead body of anyone shall be unclean seven days" (Num 19:11). In Jewish tradition the corpse is defined as *avi avot hatum'a*, which means the ultimate source of impurity,¹⁵ but can any

¹⁴ Delitzsch Hebrew New Testament.

¹⁵ "Kohanim Visiting Cemeteries," Darché Noam, http://www.darchenoam.org/articles/web/q-a/ar_qa_tumatmet.htm [accessed January 8, 2009].

person think that Yeshua's crucified body became impure?

Because of his divinity, with his divine power Yeshua was able to raise himself from the dead – following his earlier statement, "I lay down my life that I may take it again" (John 10:17–18). In other words, the Son had the full divine power to resurrect himself after he "breathed his last" (Mark 15:37; Luke 23:46).

The New Testament does not teach that Yeshua was just like any other mortal creature, because only he could know the thoughts of others (Matt 9:4; 12:25; Luke 5:22; 11:17), and only he could forgive sin (Matt 9:6; Mark 2:5). Although incarnate, he could never lose his divinity. By all means his "humanity" did not, and could not, reduce or detract from his divinity. He was always divine, even while he shared human attributes and acted and looked like a man.

The two concepts, "fully divine" and "human in the full sense of the term," as it was suggested by the Draft Creed, should be explained and understood very carefully. This issue can be exemplified by the following question: When on earth, was Yeshua's blood absolutely the same as the blood of any mortal, "composed, like our blood, of red cells, white platelets and plasma," as for example Baruch Maoz phrased it?¹⁶ But one should apprehend the nature of the incarnate Messiah through different terminology, because Yeshua's blood could not have had the potential to carry maladies or pathological conditions of body or mind.

Indeed, the Son of God did become man in a supernatural way, physically and concretely, but in a doctrinal context it is not enough to say very briefly that he was sinless. "Sinless" appears as the opposite of "human in the full sense," but Yeshua's sinless-ness must be explained in more than that one word. Maoz stated that Yeshua "was subject to the Torah, it was forbidden for him to steal, lie, profane God's name, covet and commit adultery, profane the Shabbat or bow before false gods, and he needed to worship God alone."¹⁷ Yet Yeshua was *above* the Torah (!), because he is the one that had formulated it and given it to Moses. Did Yeshua need to be reminded to keep the Torah which he himself planned and coined?!

Moreover, Yeshua had the full divine authority – as he had declared, "But I say to you" – to change the Torah, as he did indeed in his Sermon on the Mount, for example, when he forbade divorce which was permitted according to the Torah (Matt 5:31–32), and commanded not to swear at all (Matt 5:33–37). Furthermore, even with his "human nature," Yeshua could not have committed sin or acted against his own divine nature. He knew exactly what to do even without the written Torah, so he did not need the Pentateuch in order to be instructed in each and every thought and deed, as he testified about himself being "the door" (John 10:7) and "the way" in everything: "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

Therefore, a clearer and broader understanding is needed in order to

¹⁶ Baruch Maoz, "The Nature of the Messiah," *Zot Habrit* 6 (2007): 41.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

emphasize that any teaching on Yeshua's "humanity" should neither present an ordinary human nor underestimate his divinity. Instead of the expression "human in the full sense of the term and without sin," I would suggest the following terminological replacement: "Yeshua, incarnated miraculously by the Holy Spirit as true flesh and blood through Miriam, never shared inherited human limitations and/or a sinful nature." Yeshua the holy Son of God became man and acted as a man in a very unique manner, but this Christological enigma will be deciphered only in heaven.

Was Yeshua Literally the Son of David?

"Ben David," i.e. Son of David, is the title of a small booklet of the Gospel of Matthew published in contemporary Hebrew.¹⁸ The immediate impression it gives is of dealing with the Jewish Messiah, because *Ben David*, according to Jewish tradition, is the Messiah, a descendant of David and Jesse his father. But because of this context, one should ask: Was Yeshua really the Son of David in the sense that he physically belonged to a mundane line of Jewish royalty with Davidic "blue blood"?

It is true indeed that the Old Testament prophecies anticipate the Messiah as the "Rod from the stem of Jesse" (Isa 11:1), referring to him as the "Branch of righteousness" who is raised to David (Jer 23:5), who will sit "upon the throne of David and over his kingdom" (Isa 9:7). This "Davidic Kingdom" is already foreseen in the initial messianic promise given to David himself, that his seed shall reign forever (2 Sam 7:13–16). But the notion of "David's Kingdom" can also be understood differently, as a synonym for a kingdom of a divine ruler, not a kingdom under a mundane dynasty. In other words, the sacred kingdom headed by Yeshua is linked only indirectly to Davidic ancestry because Joseph, Miriam's husband, was from the house of David (Luke 1:27), but in fact the beginning and the end of Yeshua's divine kingdom are outside of this world, not physically dependent on Davidic parentage.

So how should we understand the opening words of the Gospel of Matthew, which declare: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, Son of Abraham" (Matt 1:1)? The Davidic line in Matthew's genealogy is also connected to the Abrahamic lineage, providing the general comprehension that the "seed" of the Messiah was fully Hebraic and Jewish, namely not strange to Israel. Additionally, Luke also writes that Yeshua's contemporaries considered him to be the son of Joseph, Mary's husband, and in this human line the carnal descendant of Adam (Luke 3:23–38). Yet we clearly know that from a human/mortal point of view Yeshua was *not* the son of Joseph. He was born miraculously through the Holy Spirit (Matt 1:18).¹⁹ For this reason, the opening words of Mark declare: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1).

¹⁸ *Ben David – Habsora al-pi Mattai*, new trans. (Jerusalem: Bible Society Israel, 2007).

¹⁹ Cf. Serge Ruzer, "Son of God as Son of David: Luke's Attempt to Biblicalize a Problematic Notion," *Babel und Bibel 3, Orientalia et Classica 14* (2007): 341–47.

Furthermore, in his message to Mary, the angel Gabriel tells her not merely that the son who would be born from her shall be called "Son of the Highest," but also that the Lord God "will give him the throne of his father David" (Luke 1:32). So, then, is David Yeshua's father? Is Yeshua the "Son of David"? Or in other words, did Yeshua physically descend from David's family?

The primary answer to that comes from the words of Yeshua himself. During a meeting in the Jerusalem temple between Yeshua and the Pharisees and scribes, he raised the following question: "What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?" They answered him and said, "The son of David." But Yeshua continued and asked them, "How then does David in the Spirit call him 'Lord,' saying: 'The Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool?'" [Ps 110:1]. Further on, Yeshua asked, "If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is he his son?" However, no one was able to answer Yeshua a word (Matt 22:41–42; Mark 12:35–37). By this examination, Yeshua challenged the rabbinic authorities of his time, but they remained speechless. They did not know how to explain the belief, already common in those days, that the Messiah would be the Son of David.

Because the Messiah is David's Lord (Ps 110:1), David cannot really be his father. *De facto*, then, Yeshua was not the physical descendant of King David and his dynasty. Consequently, one should grasp not only the concept "Throne of David" (Luke 1:32), but also the concepts "Key of David" (Rev 3:7) and "Root of David" (Rev 5:5), as metaphors representing the divine and holy authority of King Messiah Yeshua, the foundation of the real "Davidic Kingdom." Namely, the expressions "Kingdom of David" or "Seed of David" are basically figurative images or illustrations for Messiah's everlasting dominion and sovereignty starting from Israel. In other words, the idioms "Seed of David" (John 7:42), "Key of David," and even "Lion of Judah" (Rev 5:5) speak metaphorically about a divine king on earth – Messiah Yeshua's kingdom, focusing around the territory of King David and David's specific people, the Jews.

However, Yeshua's kingdom is not limited by human and physical confinements as was David's realm. Thus the kingly language in Scripture about Messiah's Davidic linkage is mainly a parlance that parallels other biblical phrases which underscore the unique kingly authority of the Messiah, such as "I am the Alpha and the Omega" (Rev 1:8) or "I am the First and the Last" (Rev 1:17). Even today, Jews sing the song "David King of Israel" (*David Melekh Yisra'el*) and dance while shouting these same words. Since David and his dynasty symbolize the sovereignty of the Jewish kingship, his name became synonymous for the powerful Messiah, Son of God, who also holds in his hands "the keys of Hades and of death" (Rev 1:18).

Conclusively, then, how can one still grasp Yeshua's connection to the Davidic succession? The answer lies not in the direct, personal, and physical ancestry of a family tree, but rather in pointing generally to a royal status, with no less regal authority than David himself – but which is in fact a supreme divine sovereignty. Namely, because the generations in the

early centuries could not fully comprehend Yeshua's divinity, at least they were able to grasp that Messiah's royalty stemmed from regal connections with David, Israel's "model king."²⁰ No doubt in Yeshua's time, the Jewish people expected the restoration of David's kingdom: "Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest" (Mark 11:10). So the New Testament linkage between Yeshua and the messianic promises attached to David was a unique tool to easily introduce Yeshua to the generation that saw and heard him on earth.

Therefore, because Joseph was "of the house of David" (Luke 1:27) and of the "lineage of David" (Luke 2:4), Yeshua was "born" into a royal Davidic family. But actually Yeshua was "born" into it, not from it. His deity and divine sovereignty were neither comparable nor parallel to those of the fleshly Davidic royalty. Just as Yeshua was the Lord of David, he was also "greater than Solomon" (Luke 11:31), and thus he was *de facto* Solomon's Lord (Matt 12:42), not vice versa.

The Chalcedonian Creed

The first ecumenical synod which took place in AD 325 in Nicaea determined that the Son of God, or the *Logos*, was truly God. At the fourth ecumenical council, held in AD 451 in the city of Chalcedon, it was declared that Yeshua was fully man. Today the same question is raised: Is the Messiah both 100% God and 100% human?

The relevant part of the definition of Chalcedon states:

We . . . confess the one and only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. This self-same one is perfect both in deity and also in human-ness; this self-same one is also actually God and actually man, with a rational soul [*psyche logikes*] and a body. He is of the same reality as God as far as his deity is concerned and of the same reality as we are ourselves as far as his human-ness is concerned; thus like us in all respects, sin only excepted. Before time began [*pro aionen*] he was begotten of the Father, in respect of his deity, and now in these "last days," for us and on behalf of our salvation, this selfsame one was born of Mary the virgin, who is God-bearer [*theotokos*] in respect of his human-ness [*anthropoteta*].²¹

The Chalcedonian phraseology about Yeshua's divinity and humanity is quite labyrinthine. It continues:

We apprehend this one and only Christ-Son, Lord, only-begotten-in two natures [*duo physisin*] . . . without confusing the two natures

20 Cf. Serge Ruzer, "Who Is Unhappy with the Davidic Messiah? Notes on Biblical Exegesis in 4Q161, 4Q174, and the Book of Acts," *Cristianesimo nella Storia* 24, 2 (2003): 229–55.

21 John H. Leith, ed., *Creeeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: John Knox, 1982), 35–36.

[*asunkutos*], without transmuting one nature into the other, without dividing them into two separate categories, without contrasting them according to area or function. The distinctiveness of each nature is not nullified by the union. Instead, the "properties" of each nature are conserved and both natures concur in one "person" [*prosopon*] and in one *hypostasis*. They are not divided or cut into two *prosopa*, but are together the one and only and only-begotten Logos of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.²²

So, was Yeshua begotten in heaven in two natures? Actually the Chalcedonian Creed goes a step beyond Scripture, saying that the Son was dually begotten in heaven – both in full divinity and in full humanity. Namely, that in eternity the Father made the Son equally divine and human, and his physical body which was on earth also resides now near the throne of grace. Interestingly, however, the Chalcedonian definition does not bring any scriptural verses to support this interpretation.

According to plain Scripture, Yeshua was miraculously born as a baby in Bethlehem with a unique physical body. However, one should also ask whether this earthly body was necessarily the same exact body of the resurrected Messiah who told Mary Magdalene: "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to my Father" (John 20:17). This resurrected body could be an incomparable transformed body. In other words, from reading the text one may understand that the incarnated Son who became a baby eventually returned to heaven not with a human physical body, but that in his ascension there was a mysterious metamorphosis, perhaps the same as during the transfiguration of Yeshua on the mountain as reported in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt 17:2; Mark 9:2; Luke 9:29).

Probably the main reason the Roman Catholic Church embraced and still affirms the Chalcedonian definition is because of its Marian dogma. The heavy Catholic emphasis on the veneration of the Virgin Mary is largely based upon the unification of Yeshua's divine and human natures. Since these two substances are believed to be one, as the Catholic credo claims, Mary deserves to be called and worshiped as the Mother of God (*Theotokos*). But if these two essences, i.e. the divine and the human, are distinct one from the other and their consolidation in Yeshua is just "moral" or symbolic, then Mary is only the Mother of Christ (*Christotokos*).²³ Therefore Yeshua's "humanity" according to Catholic doctrine is essential for Mary's exalted position in the history of salvation. It seems that Catholic Mariology fueled the great emphasis which was put upon Yeshua's "eternal humanity."

Summary

While the term *trinity* (Greek *trias*; Latin *trinitas*) is not biblical, it is deeply

22 Ibid., 36.

23 David Flusser and H. Vardi, "Christianity, Doctrine," *Encyclopaedia Hebraica* 25:339–40.

rooted in the historic creeds of the churches.²⁴ Today the question is about the content and conception of "Trinity" beyond the technical word pointing to a triune God. In this paper I raised the themes of functionality and hierarchy within the Godhead between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. As the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit share the same divine quality or essence, they also allocate specific "position" and functionality within the holy operative relationship among them.

There is a clear differentiation of respective position and function within the one holy Godhead. My preliminary discussion attempts to highlight the vertical or hierarchic relationship between the Father and the Son. There is a perfect/holy "functional differentiation" between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit which also reflects a functional holy hierarchy.²⁵

While contemporary Jewish Yeshua disciples fully embrace the canonical Old and New Testaments,²⁶ they do not accept automatically or "blindly" the dogmatic creeds of the historic churches. Particularly in Israel, where theologizing is done in Hebrew, JDY feel the responsibility to review the historic creeds and not just to adopt or translate them verbatim.²⁷ Likewise JDY do not accept unthinkingly the synagogue traditions and definitions.

Nowadays, JDY have not only the privilege but also the duty to re-evaluate "irrefutable" theological formulas and historic practices which prevail within both Christendom and Jewry.²⁸ JDY should not only believe according to traditional slogans, but rather ought to analyze each and every theological topic from their unique Hebraic position, without allowing Gentilization of the Jews or Judaization of the Gentiles.

Christological issues need to be discussed and understood even before ecclesiological matters. Only with an unclouded Christology that is anchored in biblical-Hebraic roots can one also frame a proper ecclesiology (*ekklesia*) of both Jews and non-Jews. A "bilateral ecclesia,"²⁹ made up of two distinct but united communal entities of JDY/Israel and the nations, can exist and share a mature testimony only with a clear Christology.

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24 W. A. Jurgens, *Faith of the Early Fathers* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1970).

25 Cf. also Aryeh Kofsky and Serge Ruzer, "Logos, Holy Spirit and Messiah: Aspects of Aphrahat's Theology Reconsidered," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 73 (2007): 347-78.

26 Gershon Nerel, "The Authoritative Bible and Jewish Believers," *Messianic Jewish Life* 73, 4 (2000): 16-19, 30.

27 "Statement of Faith," Brit Ahm Messianic Synagogue, <http://www.britahm-messianic.org/statementoffaith.html> [accessed January 8, 2009]; "Our Faith," Adat Yeshua Messianic Synagogue, http://www.ubmjc.org/adat_yeshua/pages/stmt_of_faith.html [accessed January 8, 2009]; "Foundations of Faith," Yeshua (Hebrew), <http://www.yeshua.co.il/library/libitem.asp?libitemid=22&chapterid=284> [accessed January 8, 2009].

28 Gershon Nerel, "Creeds among Jewish Believers in Yeshua," *Mishkan* 34 (2001): 61-79.

29 Mark Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 5; Richard Harvey, "Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology," (Ph.D. diss., University of Wales, 2007), 123.