

## Session Twelve

### *Battle lines: Yeshua*

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Inevitably, the issue of Yeshua as God’s Messiah is the dividing mark between those who are saved, and those who are lost.

John 3:36 “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

John 14:6 “Yeshua said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”

From the very beginning of the Messiah’s appearance as the incarnate Son of God, Satan attempted to do away with Him through Herod’s wicked plot to kill the newly born sons in the vicinity of Bethlehem (Matt 2:16–17). Having failed in that attempt, Satan continued to seek ways to destroy the Messiah. He tried to overcome Him in the wilderness temptation (Matt 4) and eventually thought he had won the victory when, through godless hands (Acts 2:23), our Master was crucified. But, of course, what Satan thought was his victory, turned out to be his utter demise. Yeshua was crucified according to “the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God,” and in His death and resurrection, secured the eternal salvation of all His people.

Yet the enemy of our souls has not accepted defeat. “...Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1Pet. 5:8). He continues his battle against Messiah by trying to undermine His person and thus, His saving work. It is no wonder, then, that in our day, the foundational issue of Yeshua is once again under attack. And primarily the point of Satan’s attacks center on the issue of Yeshua’s deity. If Yeshua can be portrayed as simply a good man, but not as the Son of God, then the enemy has won. For if Yeshua is merely a man and not God with us (Immanuel), then He is not the Savior of sinners. For no man, regardless of how good he might be, has the ability to forgive the sins of others. Nor is the death of a common man sufficient to meet the infinite demands of God as a sacrifice for sin. It is therefore essential that we understand the message of the Scriptures regarding the eternal, divine nature of Yeshua, and that we confess this mystery as a core element of our faith in God.

### *The mystery of the Divine One*

1Tim. 3:16 By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, was vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

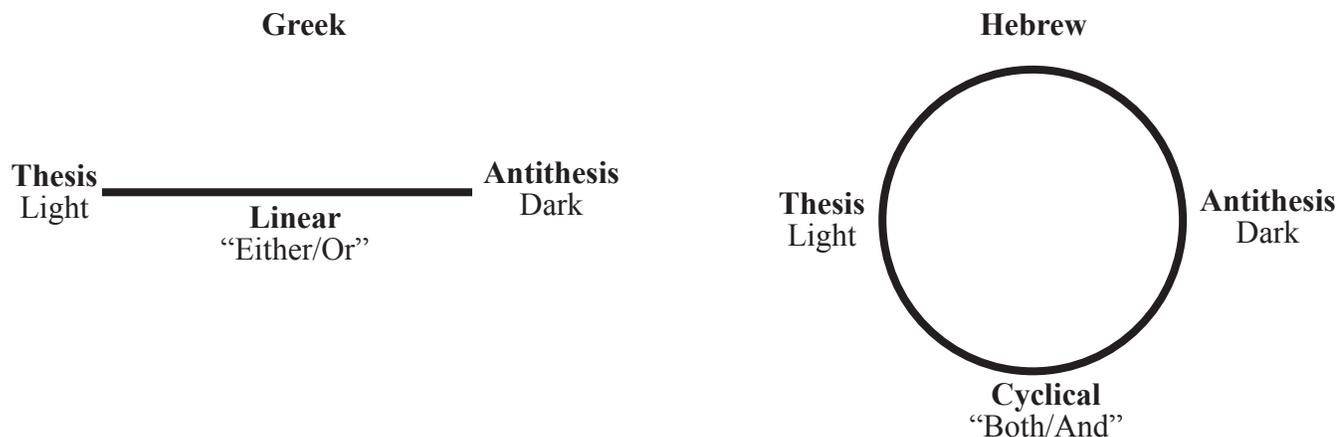
- Paul labels the incarnation as a “mystery” (μυστήριον, *musterion*)
  - this word speaks of “the private counsel of God” or “God’s secret.” It is something that *transcends normal understanding*

- it is something that cannot be fully explained by human rationale
- attempts to “unravel” the mystery of God will inevitably lead to error
  - this does not mean it is false simply because we cannot explain it
  - this does not mean that our faith is irrational (a “blind leap into the dark”)
  - it means that we recognize our inability to plumb the depths of God’s being

*Comparing the Hebrew and Greek worldview*

Category	Hebrew	Greek
Truth	That which is seen and experienced. I explain what is true by what I see in life and history; that which is concrete.	Contained in the realm of philosophy. I explain the truth in terms of ideas; that which is abstract
Values	That which is lived out within the realm of relationships; community, family	Found in the realm of ideas: that which is considered “good” and “bad” in terms of ethical concepts
Concepts	Action oriented. Note that the Hebrew language itself is dominated by verbs (actions).	Idea oriented. The idea of a thing is more important than the thing itself (Plato).
God	The “unseen One” is known through what He has done. He is described in physical ways (having eyes, ears, nose, hands). I describe God by His actions in history and in my own life (creation, exodus, Sinai)	God is known as an idea, a lofty esoteric concept, a philosophical category of “good.”
Theology	The truths of God are known in the realm of historical relationships (covenants) in which the invisible God manifests Himself through covenant relationships within time and space.	The truths of God are compiled into a list of ideas (creeds). One who “believes” in God agrees with a list of ideas (a “theological system”).
Man	Man is a whole, made up of material (body) and immaterial (soul/spirit). Both are necessary and equally important (proven by the belief in resurrection).	Man is a combination of parts, and is known when each part is analyzed and understood. The immaterial is more important than the material.

*The path of knowledge (how I know what is true)*



- The differences between the Hebrew and Greek models of thinking (worldview) are profound and important.
- The Greek model seeks to avoid “tension.” Truth is an “either/or” proposition. One finds oneself at one end of linear path, and all “facts” fit on the linear line.
  - All facts are integrated so that one fact must lead to the next fact (like dominos)
  - “step logic:” fact A, therefore fact B, therefore fact C, etc.
- The Hebrew model recognizes the necessity of “tension” and is therefore willing to live within this tension without seeking to resolve it in an “either/or” way.
  - “facts” that seem to contradict may still be true. This creates “tension” (like a rope for tying)
  - “box logic:” facts in box A may seem to contradict facts in box B
- Examples of “tension” in the Hebrew worldview
  - Who hardened Pharaoh’s heart? God & Pharaoh
  - God is wrathful / God is merciful
  - Messiah is the Lamb of God / Messiah is the Lion of Judah
  - Hell is black darkness / Hell is a fiery lake of fire (Jude 13; Rev 19:20)
  - whoever comes I receive / only those drawn by God come (John 1:12; 6:44)
  - life comes through death (Matt 10:39; John 12:24)
  - the one who is a servant (lowest position) is greatest of all (highest position) (Matt 20:26)
  - the way “up” is the way “down” (Phil 2:5ff)
  - God controls all things / prayer changes things (Rom 8:28; James 4:2; 5:16)
  - God dwells apart from sin / God dwells in the midst of Israel
  - God is uncontrolled / we grieve the Spirit of God by our sin
  - God is sovereign / evil exists in His universe
- Yet, in spite of these tensions, the Scriptures do not seek to resolve the tension through philosophical explanations. The greatest unresolved tension is the Incarnation.

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.  
 14 And 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.  
 18 No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

- The Word (the *memra*) refers to Messiah, Who is identified as God
- The Word became flesh, meaning He was seen (cf. 1Jn 1:1, What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life”)
- Yet John has no problem saying that “no one has seen God at any time”
- There seems to be an obvious and apparent contradiction, but John finds no compulsion to attempt to resolve it. He willingly leaves the tension which the unexplainable mystery holds.

### *The pre-incarnate appearances of Yeshua in the Angel of the Lord*

- The Angel of the Lord appears throughout the Tanach, doing things that only God could do
- Those to whom the Angel of the Lord appears recognize that they have “seen God”

Gen. 18:1 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.

17 The LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do...?”

19 “For I have chosen him...”

22 Then the men turned away from there and went toward Sodom, while Abraham was still standing before the LORD.

25 “...Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?”

- the LORD appears to Abraham as one of three men
- the man speaking identifies Himself as the One who had chosen Abraham
- Abraham recognizes the “man” with whom he spoke as God, the “Judge of all the earth”
- yet Moses does not give us any explanation of how the invisible God could reveal Himself to Abraham as a man!

Gen. 48:15 He blessed Joseph, and said, “The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, 16 The angel who has redeemed me from all evil, Bless the lads;

- Jacob wrestled with a man (Gen 32) whom he identified as “God,” calling the place where he wrestled “Peniel” (the face [presence] of God)
- in his blessing over Joseph, he equates “the angel” with God who had redeemed him from evil

Gen. 22:12 He said, “Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.”

- the Angel of the Lord calls to Abraham (v. 11)
- Yet the Angel of the Lord has the authority to overturn a direct command of God: v. 2, “Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.”
- the Angel of the Lord states that Abraham had not withheld his son “from Me”
- Abraham calls the place *Adonai Yir'eh* (יהוה יראֵה), “Adonai is the Seeing One”

Ex. 3:2 The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush  
 4 When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush...

5 Then He said, "Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."

6 He said also, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

- the Angel of the LORD is clearly identified as God
- the Angel of the LORD is the same as "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob"
- the presence of the Angel of Lord in the bush creates "holy ground"

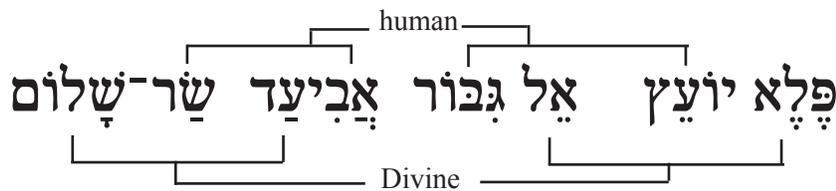
Ex. 23:20 "Behold, I am going to send an angel before you to guard you along the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. 21 "Be on your guard before him and obey his voice; do not be rebellious toward him, for he will not pardon your transgression, since My name is in him.

- God promises to send an angel before the people of Israel as they leave Egypt for the Promised Land
- the Angel is to be obeyed
- the Angel has the ability to pardon transgression
- the Angel "has My name" within Him = the very essence of God
- Other examples:
  - Num 22:22ff
  - Joshua 5:13–15
  - Judges 2
  - Judges 6:11ff
  - Judges 13:3ff
- **Conclusion: the appearance of the Angel of the Lord prepared the way for mankind to realize that God could be manifest in the flesh. Though mysterious, the incarnational reality of God was not contrary to His essential nature.**

*The promise of Messiah as Immanuel (God with us)*

Is. 9:6 For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. 7 There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.

- the early Rabbis identified this text as speaking of Messiah. Note that the Targum explicitly states that this description is that of Messiah
- the context of Isaiah also identifies the coming child as One Who would accomplish only what God could do
- the names given to the child are the very attributes of God Himself
- the names reveal the human and divine nature of the Messiah

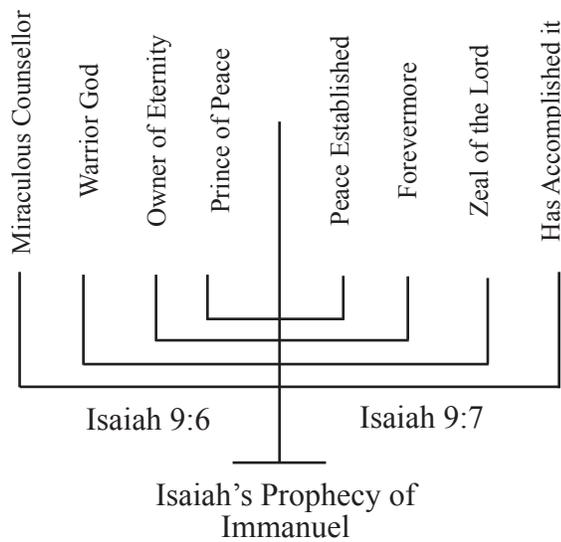


- Each name is a combination of a divine and human attribute, given in chiastic arrangement

Divine		Human
Wonderful (פְּלֵא, “miraculous”)	→	Counsellor
God (אֵל)	→	Warrior
Eternity	←	(Owner) Father
Shalom	←	Prince

- this corresponds directly with the following verse, again by chiasm (v. 7):

Verse 6	Verse 7
Wonderful Counsellor	will accomplish this
Warrior God	Zeal of the Lord of host
Owner of Eternity	from then on and forevermore
Prince of Peace	no end of His government or of peace



Zech 14:3 Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle. 4 In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south.

- Zechariah foretells of the time when the LORD (יהוה) will fight for Israel
- In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives. Does the invisible God have feet?
  - note Ex 24:10, “and they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself.”
  - here, once again, we have the mystery of the incarnation, without further explanation or any attempt to explain what seems to be a clear contradiction

***The witness of the Apostolic Scriptures to the Deity of Yeshua***

John 8:58 Yeshua said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.”

- Yeshua does not say “before Abraham was born, I was” but rather “I am.”
- in claiming to be “I am,” Yeshua made Himself one with the “I AM” of Ex 3:14
- those listening took up stones to stone Yeshua, because they recognized that in claiming to be “I AM,” He had made Himself equally eternal with the Almighty
- This accords with Micah’s prophecy of the Messiah:

Mic. 5:2 “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.”

Rom. 9:5 whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Messiah according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

- Paul is listing the blessings bestowed upon Israel by God
- some have tried to punctuate this sentence in such a way that the phrase “who is over all” is separated from the concluding phrase “God blessed forever.” However, the grammar and construction of the sentence favors the understanding that Paul was equating the Messiah with “God who is blessed forever.”

Acts 20:28 “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the assembly (*ekklesia*) of God which He purchased with His own blood.

- here, once again, the presupposition of the Apostle is that Yeshua is God, for it was Yeshua who shed His blood on behalf of sinners
- some Greek texts have “Lord” (κύριος) rather than “God” (θεός), but it is clear that the earliest and most trusted manuscripts have “God.” Some scribes, uneasy with the obvious implications of Paul’s words, changed the text to read “Lord.”

Titus 2:13 “looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Messiah Yeshua ...”

- the Greek construction (Granville Sharp’s rule) makes it clear that the terms “God” and “Savior” both apply to “Messiah Yeshua”
- here, once again, the presupposition of the Apostolic Writers was that Yeshua is God in the flesh.
- **Conclusion:**
  - **the Tanach anticipates the coming of a Messiah Who is, Himself, eternal, having the attributes of the Almighty, Who accomplishes what only God can do**
  - **the Apostolic Scriptures, including the witness of Yeshua Himself, affirm the eternal, divine nature of the Messiah Yeshua**
  - **if we deny the deity of Messiah, we stand against the uniform witness of the Scriptures**
  - **we don’t pretend fully to understand this mystery, but we affirm it.**

### *The Trinity Doctrine as an explanation for the mystery*

- The Scriptures affirm the eternity of the Father, the Messiah, and the Holy Spirit
  - the Spirit of God is constantly spoken of as giving divine revelation to the prophets, yet Paul affirms that the Scriptures are “God-breathed”

- Peter equates the Spirit with God:

Acts 5:3 But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land?  
4 “...You have not lied to men but to God.”

- the Father, Messiah and Spirit are all accredited as being the Creator
  - Gen 1:1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”
  - John 1: 3 “All things came into being through Him (the Word), and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.”
  - Ps 104:30 You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; and You renew the face of the ground.
  - Gen 1:2 The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.
  - Job 33:4 “The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.”
- **Conclusion: the Scripture clearly speak of God as Father, Messiah (Son), and Spirit. This is without question**

***But the Scriptures do not attempt an explanation of the mystery of the godhead***

- The need to formulate the Trinity Doctrine in the 4th Century CE came as a result of the Christian Church being captivated by Greek thought
  - the center of Greek philosophy is the issue of “being:” what constitutes reality
  - as the Greek fathers contemplated the mystery of the Godhead, they were not satisfied to hold it as the mystery that it is
  - the conflicting ideas that the Scriptures present did not fit nicely into the Greek theological model
  - there was the need to understand the “constituent parts” of God
  - therefore, the Trinity Doctrine became a Greek answer to a Greek question
  - for thousands of years, the Hebrew scholars of Scripture never felt the need to seek a rational explanation for the mystery of God’s being. They lived in the tension of:
    - + the God who is invisible, yet seen
    - + the God who is “wholly other” yet dwells among men
    - + the God who is Himself the controller of all things, yet is approachable, moved by man’s needs, and receptive to man’s cry for help (salvation)
- in some ways, the formulation of the Trinity Doctrine attempts to unravel the mystery of God Himself, and in so doing, falls short
  - Yeshua is described as “of the same substance” as the Father (Athanasian Creed, 31), yet God is revealed as having no “substance”
  - the formulation of the Trinity Doctrine became the substance of salvation. “He therefore that will be saved, must thus think of the Trinity.” In this way, a man-made “explanation” of the mystery became the primary focus of “salvation” in the Christian Church

- **Conclusion: the Scriptures clearly teach a plurality within the being of God, yet they do not attempt to explain this mystery. We align ourselves with Scripture by confessing this mystery to be true, not by accepting a man-made philosophical explanation for the mystery.**

*Yeshua as the Eternal One: implications*

- the truth of Yeshua's mysterious nature, as Immanuel, God in the flesh, is not a theological thought or axiom: it is an essential reality
- since our sin is against God, and since He is infinitely holy, our sin is likewise an infinite transgression
- only a sacrifice of infinite proportions could atone for an infinite transgression
- if Yeshua is not Himself infinite, He could never have accomplished atonement for sinners
- if we deny the mystery of Yeshua's deity, we, at the same time, deny that He could be the promised Messiah who "takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29).
- rather, we must affirm what the Scriptures everywhere teach, that God would send His Son as Immanuel (God with us), and that through Him final atonement would be accomplished for all who would believe in Him.
- we admit that the incarnation is a mystery that is beyond us, yet we affirm it as true because God has declared it to be true

Rom. 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! 34 For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? 35 Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? 36 For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.