

The Mystery of Monotheism

By Tom Roberts, PhD

For centuries, the people of God had fought an uphill battle attempting to defend the one God concept. Monotheism is defined as the belief in one deity. Amenhotep of Egypt believed the Great Monad was the sun god *Ra*. The mountain god *El*, in Hebrew traditions, was known as *Elohim*. Until our time, much of the Middle Eastern understanding was unavailable to us to evaluate some of the statements contained in Scripture about these other gods besides Yahweh that supposedly existed in other nations, Ashtoreth (1 Kings 11:33); Dagon (Judges 16:23-24; 1 Samuel 5:7); Chemosh (Judges 11:24; 1 Kings 11:33); Milchom (1 Kings 11:33); and Nisroch (2 Kings 19:37). Isaiah shows that there is no consort beside this God contrary to pagan documents from Elephantine, which asserted the existence of a “Mrs. Yahweh,” violating the First Commandment (Deuteronomy 5:7; Exodus 20:3). The Hebraic equivalent of the Elephantine concept is *Sophia*, or Lady Wisdom, who was to convey God’s wisdom to the prophets via the Holy Spirit, *Racah Kadesh*, who was also feminine in Hebraic terms.

Many scholars are now united with the view that the plurality contained in the title *Elohim* is *YHWH* addressing His mighty counsel (See Genesis 3:22). The superlative use included the royal “we” has been mistakenly used by theologians to refer to the rest of God’s nature contained in a compound unity. This is based on Deuteronomy 6:4, which was the national credo of Israel—“Hear O Israel, Our Lord is one.” The terms *echad* and *yahed* are two ways of saying “one” in Hebrew. It is said that these two terms for a single designation include more than one part of a unit. However, close grammatical scrutiny will show that where evening and morning become the first day, *yom*, (Genesis 1:5) is part of a single designation. Rabbis have pointed out that the term *yahed* may refer to a thistle of grapes. The imagery still shows many grapes but one thistle as singular, and both terms come from a Hebraic root system that shows one unit as a common root in both terms. In Genesis 2:24, the concept of man and wife who share part of the total image of God are glued back together through marriage as one flesh to form a single entity, thus restoring the total image of God.

As late as 1870, critical commentators such as Keil & Delitzsch (Vol 1, article, *Genesis*) and other Semitic scholars freely admitted that the term *Elohim* cannot be used to advance a Trinitarian formula. (See also Torah, A Modern Commentary by W. Gunther Plaut, article on *Genesis*, note on *Elohim*.) During this address, the Hebrew grammar changes from singular when Yahweh speaks to plural or superlative when the counsel answers Yahweh. Notice the phrase, “man has become as one of us.” With Yahweh’s divine command, all subjects are summoned. These mighty ones appear before the Mighty One who has complete authority over their activities. This explains how *Elohim* can refer to the

Great God Himself or refer to His subjects who range from judges found in Psalm 82:6 who will die like men or the *Bene Elohim*, “sons of God,” found in Genesis 6:2 who were the descendents of Seth called the “mighty men of renown.” (See the Jamison Fawcett and Brown One Volume Old Testament Commentary, 1930 edition, article on Genesis 6.)

This concept also pertains to the “mighty men” in David’s army found in 2 Samuel 23:8-39. The mighty counsel also sings praises, *h llpi*, to Yahweh (*Elohenu*, “our God”) with divine songs (1 Kings 18:39; 2 Samuel 7:28) whose words are true (See Ernst Jenni, Claus Westermann, Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament, pp. 504-505). All of the exalted patriarchs share in the worship, *shachah*, and praises which were granted to Yahweh in His Divine Court (Psalm 78). This is not to say that the patriarchs like Moses who were called *Elohim* (Ex 7:1) or the great kings such as David (1 Chronicles 29:20) and Solomon were to be worshipped with the final exaltation granted only to Yahweh, but they shared in the type of worship given to the Kings of Kings in the expectation of His Messianic throne that was yet to come due to fact that they represented God to His people (See BDB- Gesenius, 1979; p. 1005, Harkavy, 1914. p. 707). For example, Isaiah 7:6 applies locally to the King, son of Tabeel, then is widened to include Emanuel which means “God who is with us in the great battle” and, later, is applied to Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, son of Isaiah. The ultimate fulfillment would occur in Isaiah 9:6 with the Father of Eternity, the Exalted One, and the Mighty Counselor (See The Jewish Study Bible, Isaiah 9:6 footnote and The Emphasized Bible by Rotherham, translation of of Isaiah 9:6).

The Exalted One in Daniel 7:6-7, is the Son of Man, *ben adam*, who lifts up nations and dominions as well as brings them down when a covenantal curse is issued from Heaven. And with Michael, “one who is like God,” has complete authority from the Son of Man to execute his judgments in defense of the Lord’s people (Daniel 12:1). The effects of the divine action originate from *Adonai* who speaks to His son, *Adonee*, in Psalm 110, who is given authority from God but who speaks with the complete authority of God. For centuries, commentators misinterpreted this play on words and taught that Christ was *Adonai* because they misread the case ending for the designation *Adonee*. There were 134 emendations to the Tanakh by the Soferim (priests in the Synagogue of Ezra’s time). Some of these changes included Psalms 110:5 where the word “Lord”, *Adonai*, was emended to avoid the misunderstanding of the term, *YHWH*. So in order to protect the use of the divine name and to keep the Torah correctly understood because Yahweh the Holy One was also Yahweh of Hosts, the Soferim used “Lord”, *Adonai*, to designate “Lord of Hosts”. Later, in Jewish thought, the debate would emerge where the divine name would be used consecutively in the same sentence. Some would speculate that Israel had either a “Mrs. Yahweh” or a second god who could appear as an angel but all one has to do is to read Exodus 15:1 and the Psalms adjacent to Psalm 110 and one thing becomes abundantly clear, especially in Psalms 113:5 which declares that there is none like Yahweh, our God. (Roberts, Tom, From Sacral Kingship to

Sacred Marriage, p. 110, Barker, Margaret, The Great Angel, A Study of Israel's Second God, p. 30)

The Son of Man and the Offspring of God

Peter stated, “we are the offspring of God (2 Peter 1:4) and our Lord Jesus Christ in John 10:22 exclaimed, “ye are gods,” for you are “children of the Most High.” In light of present-day research, it is shown that some Jewish things and other cultures believed man was directly descended from his Maker in heaven and special rights and priestly blessings were passed through a sacerdotal (divine patriarchal) system. Although the name *Yahweh* is a proper name which is derived from a causative Hebrew verb, which is translated “He caused to be,” it denotes in a few instances sons of God to be born either as offspring or by the New Covenant method of adoption. “These are terms which indicate familial or blood relationships, such as father and brother – the name Abijah means – “YHWH is my father” (1 Kings 14:11) and Ahijah means “YHWH is my brother,” (1 Kings 11:29)—but they are not Israel’s primary way of referring to the deity” (S. T. Kimbrough, Jr. *Theological Table Talk*, Theology Today, Vol. XLVI, No. 2, July, 1989, p. 195).

The primary methodology used in Israel’s relationship to Yahweh was through the initiation of blood covenants, which brought the Israelite or the Gentile into a patriarchal and familial relationship with God. The literal offspring concept was on of general Semitic acceptance. Later in salvation history, the father-to-son patriarchal blessings were broadened to include all the holy people whom God has consecrated for His purposes. Over the centuries this theology has been weakened in the West by modern evangelicals. Paul uses the term “adoption” to show that we are adopted into the family of God as sons of God due to the re-establishment of our citizenship (Philippians 3:20; *politia*, the condition or life of a citizen) rather than simply being Gentiles converted into the house of faith. Many theologians believe that Genesis 5:3 teaches that man lost his original image and sonship, and the only hope of restoration that humankind has is in Christ with His plan of redemption.

The Lifting Up of Our Messiah

The Hebraic concept of messiahship is the anointed one who is lifted up. The Messiah even said, “If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto Myself” (Luke 3). The concept of one God who works through a Divine Messiah is found in both Testaments. Even the Apostle James declares, “If you believe in One God, you do well” (James 2:19; See 1 Timothy 2:5). “Though there are so-called gods, in the heavens or one earth – and there are plenty of gods and plenty of lords – yet for us there is only on God.” (1 Corinthians 8:5-6). In John 17:13, Jesus referred to the Father as the only true God and that He came in concert to represent all that the Father as a personification to His people (See Luke 1:30-36). No

wonder Thomas exclaimed, “My Lord and my God”, or *kurios mou theos mou* in Greek. (See Psalm 45:7; Hebrews 1:7-8). Dr. Scott Hahn explains the motif in John’s Gospel to be the Father teaching His Son His trade with phrases like “I work and my Father works” amplifying this fact, for the time was coming when no man could work. The Father in Psalm 118 is progressively revealing the High Priest in John 14-16 to the people. So God and Christ are in complete union.

Dr. James E. Talmage explains: “The revised version gives for John 10:30: ‘I and the Father are one’ instead of ‘I and my Father are one.’ By “the Father.” the Jews rightly understood the Eternal Father, God. In the original Greek “one” appears in the neuter gender, and therefore expresses oneness in attributes, power, or purpose, and not a oneness of personality which would have required the masculine form” (Jesus the Christ, p. 465). In the high priestly prayer of Jesus, John uses the word “comforter,” *that one; parakletos* (J. Green, A Greek-English Lexicon to the New Testament), which is expressed in English in a masculine form even though the Greek text uses masculine verbal forms as a grammatical tool to establish neuter activity from a masculine being who is, in this case, God. The same dynamic occurs when the word “spirit” (*pneuma*), which is neuter and used with masculine pronouns to illustrate the Spirit of the Father (Romans 8:16). The masculine use of these terms is not a reference to the Spirit’s personality (See Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics, Daniel B. Wallace, p. 332, note on relative pronouns). Jesus was sired by the Holy Spirit through the Virgin Mary. Thus, the nature of Christ was that of the New Adam for He would rewrite history and not fall as the first Adam did, but He was completely sinless in all He did and all He was (Romans 5:12-21). “It was by one’s man offense that death came to reign over all, but how much greater the reign in life of those who received the fullness of grace and the gift of saving justice, through the one man, Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:17). He represented the perfect will of the Father.

This Divine-Man concept was constantly debated among the rabbis who wondered if the Messiah would be Daniel’s Man of Daniel 7:6-7 or whether the Greek concepts of the savior gods, *theioiandres* (divine men), would describe deity’s activity in His Messiah (Esther 4:17 Septuagint). According to many New Testament scholars, the concept of divine men as saviors did influence the writers of the Gospels about this Messianic figure of Daniel. The vertical apocalyptic parallelism of Daniel 6:6-7 is believed by many commentators to show that there are at least two persons of deity mentioned. However, with close examination, these timeless poetic prophecies do not tell us when the appearing of the Great Messiah will become evident. The Hebraic concept of deity was God, Savior and Lord. This theme is amplified in Hebrews 1:8 and Titus 2:13. Notice at the appearing of Jesus, it is accompanied with the Father’s glory, *doxa*. Some commentators use 1 Timothy 3:16 to prove an incarnation but that term is not in the majority of manuscripts. This passage is a hymn or liturgical profession of faith (New Jerusalem Bible, p. 1961, note 3e), which shows that Christ “appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels,

was preached among the nations, was believed in the world, was taken up in glory (NIV). So this verse is a summary of the Gospel message.

Logos Theology and the Understanding of Christian Expositors

From the post-exilic period (586 BCE) to the writing of the New Testament, many theological shifts took place during the dispersion of Judah into Babylon as well as the exiles who found their way to Egypt during Jeremiah's ministry. And with the cultures overlapping one another, terms like wisdom and *logos* had international repercussions. Philo, a Hebrew in Alexandria, Egypt, taught that the *logos* was mere divine speech. The ancients used over 80 definitions of this term. The Christian church debates three of them.

The first is that John 1:1, a Stoic hymn where Jesus replaces the god Zeus, in the Johannine prologue (See Interpreter's One Volume Bible Commentary on the Gospel of John, p. 710).

Second, due to the Greek concept of the pre-existence of all things, the *logos* would have pre-existed eternally in the bosom of God's internal image. Then, after His birth, He would have been the express image of God (The One Volume Bible Commentary, J. R. Dummelow, p. *civ*).

And finally, the teaching of Athanasius would advocate the personal pre-existent *Logos* as fully God in whom heaven and earth could not be contained. This tradition would prevail in the West and overcome the position of Origen, whom the Eastern Fathers would base their *logos* concept. The Son and the Spirit are not independent centers of divine being but unfoldings of the eternal spirit in an emerging purpose. Tertullian would expand this Stoic philosophy by calling the Great Triad a *trinitos*. The Capadocian Fathers of the East would follow this tradition with their interpretations of John's Gospel (pp. 258-300, Essays on the Trinity and the Incarnation, A/E.J. Rawlinson, ed.).

But how do we as modern-day Christians evaluate this data when so many of these concepts have been so theologized? It is difficult to decipher the original meaning. Nineteenth-century expositor Adam Clarke and modern expositors F. F. Bruce and Raymond Brown maintain that the pre-existent Son *logos* was of a later Christological development (Jesus, God and Man, pp. 15-18, see also, The Birth of the Messiah, p. 432) and Professor James D. G. Dunn, (Christology in the Making, p. 150, 163-176). Dr. R. E. Rubenstein in his famous work, When Jesus Became God, asserts that the *logos* became fully God after the theological wars took place between the Aryans with their Low Christology and the Trinitarians, with their High Christology and, caught in the middle, where the Binitarians, who were considered Semi-Aryans. The Binitarians tried to compromise between both extremes and argued for two persons in the one God concept and the Holy Spirit remained a neuter force, though it was seen as a

feminine force in Eastern Church traditions (See The Holy Spirit in Eastern Christian Traditions by Dr. Stanley Burgess, Odes of Solomon, pp. 172-182).

The Gospel of John tends to follow the tradition that Jesus' origin was from heaven above to show His Sonship (John 3:13). Therefore, as critical commentators have pointed out, the pre-existence of the Son of God may have been in the Father's bosom or mind as J. R. Dummelow contends. But one might ask, "Weren't all things created by Jesus?" The instrumental case used here has been problematic for scholars for some time. Bart Ehrman has shown evidence to suggest a Christological tampering with the text in the early Latin period may have taken place and as an alternate reading, this may be rendered, "all things were created *because* of Jesus" due to the fact that some of our translations use the term "by and for" Him creating an awkward tense structure that is very difficult to reconcile. It is due to this problem that some scholars feel that the term "by Christ" was a later redaction (The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture by Bart Ehrman, note on Colossians 1:16). Some might exclaim, "Didn't Jesus say that He was returning to the Father and does that prove that He was there in eternity past?" The Greek grammar in John's Gospel doesn't literally translate "return" as often as it should be rendered "go to the Father" (See John 16:28; Zondervan Greek Interlinear, pp. 324-336). These verses, according to Alford, show us that the origin of Jesus in the form of *logos* was with His Father (Alford's Greek Testament, An Exegetical and Critical Commentary, Henry Alford, note on John 16:28).

In later Johannine Christology, specially in 1 John 4:2, the New Jerusalem Bible correctly renders the verse, "This is the proof of the spirit of God: any spirit which acknowledges Jesus Christ, come in human nature, is from God . . ." (See Goodspeed). Notice "come in human nature" rather than "to come into *eis*"; this would have been the term used in the Greek text had Christ pre-existed and His previous nature been brought into His bodily existence.

The prologue of the Gospel starts with *en arche*, or "in the beginning," when the Great Architect uttered His divine speech and this *logos* was God. Adam Clarke asks, How can a person be separated from his own speech? Others try to maintain John's use of the nominative predicate *ho theos*, "God" and the word *pros* for "with God", *pros ton theon*, "with the God" as a separate entity, therefore, the *logos* is an eternal entity and not just a speech or thought. Dr. Gene Scott and Wescott and Hort have argued that the term *pros* should be rendered "face to face with God" and should be used here to prove two personages, but many modern exegetes have not landed on this side of the issue. Some commentators espouse the concept of the direct object used in conjunction with the definite article proves the *logos* was a separate and equal personification of the God and was with God. However, one still has the use of God expressing Himself through His divine speech as one person with or without the use of the definite article. Each side uses the passages in other texts to back up their theological position.

The Origins of the Son of God

Another stumbling block is John 1:14, “and the Word became flesh”, or *gennomoi*, and tented or tabernacled among us. The term *gennomoi* has traditionally been interpreted as “a change of state” motif or to begin as the eternal *Logos* and to be transformed by His divine birth into a new physical entity. Other lexicons render this term to mean “to generate a beginning.” Hans Kung, a renowned 20th-century theologian, has recently reversed his position on “Jesus being God” to “Jesus being God’s Son” due to the fact that the theological changes were not based on exegetical studies but were based on the decisions of later creeds and councils.

Come Let us Worship the King

There are five Greek words that express the English term “worship,” which range from a simple bow to human dignitary, a divine monarch, or to God Himself: *Proskume*, “to show reverence”; *kuneo*, “to kiss”, (in Coptic, “to impart knowledge”), Revelation 4:10, Hebrews 1:6, John 4:21-24, Matthew 4:10; *sebomai*, “to revere or to possess a feeling of awe or devotion to God,” Matthew 15:9, Mark 7:7, Acts 16:14; *latreuo*, to “render religious service of homage”; Philippians 3:3, Acts 7:42, Hebrews 10:2; and *eusebeo*, “to act piously towards or to show piety,” Acts 17:23. Therefore, as biblical researchers, we need to be careful in how we apply we apply the various terms. Jesus is the object of the church’s worship because He is truly the Unique One of Romans 8:29. He is Kings of Kings and no other monarch in history has had deity within His own nature. Therefore, He and God alone are the only objects of our unbridled affection. This teaching should bring unity to the Body of Christ as we seek to understand the concept of God in Sonship. The term *homoousion* developed during the creeds that was attributed to the one God through the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is not a biblical term but is from the creeds alone. So when we worship God, He is not of a “tritheistic” nature but truly is the God of true Monotheism.

The theology of Colossians states in Colossians 2:9, “In him, in bodily form, lives divinity in all its fullness” (New Jerusalem Bible) and “because God wanted all fullness to be found in him and through him to reconcile all things to him” (Colossians 1:19). (for more information, see Hermeneia Biblical Commentary) Only Christ in whom we worship can close this great chasm which divides us from the Father as well as separates creation (v. 20). For God was in Christ so we might be reconciled to God (For more information see the theological work entitled, *Geloven Vandaag* by E. Flessemann-van Leer, p. 101, “God-in-Christus”). Church of God Pastor Dr. John Hoskins of Jubilee Ministries has completed extensive research in the God in Sonship concept. His findings at Yale University concluded that most American seminaries held this view at the

time of our colonial fathers. As late as 1511-1533, when Michael Servetus met his fate at the hands of John Calvin, righteous scholars such as Servetus were still giving their lives for simply offering another explanation of God being in Christ.

We should all love and accept our Christian brethren regardless of what their Godhead theology dictates as long as they believe that deity was truly in Jesus in some form. Our theology in human terms cannot begin to capsule or define the fullness of God's revelation. Let us praise and thank God for He is too magnificent to put into human terms, but may the Church of God continue to struggle to worship our biblical God by using biblical theology to obtain biblical results. And by the name of His dear Son, may we all grow in the Grace and Knowledge of His Great Salvation.