

The Deity of Jesus the Christ

By John Duffy

Introduction

Why is the doctrine of the Trinity so important? Firstly, it faithfully honours the God of Truth as described in the **whole counsel of God** (namely the *Holy Bible* as expressed in the Tanakh/Old Testament and B'rit Chadashah/New Testament). This paper examines the comments of the *Targums, Talmuds, Midrashim* and *Commentaries*, as the counsel of men (not elevated to canon). For millennia, most Judaism and Christianity have acknowledged a tri-une nature of God (although there are always aberrations to theology in each worship covenants)¹.

Secondly, the doctrine of the Triune God **represents the Truth** that is the source of our redemption, the gospel about the life and works of Jesus our Messiah. That is to say, The three persons in the God-head are constantly and collectively repeated throughout the entire Scriptures in nature and operations (although with distinct but integrated roles).

One of the greatest concerns expressed about this discussion is the Jewish concept that the *Trinity* denies the monotheism of YHVH (Dt. 6, etc). This view is not compatible with either the *Tanakh* or New Testament, and detracts from the attributes of God as being infinitely transcendent and humanly incomprehensible (Ps. 145:3).

This paper is addressing an article presented to the author, *Jesus' Pre-Existence – Literal or Ideal?*² It commences with claims of poor exegesis of a range of default verses discussing the *Incarnation of Christ*. The blog then continues to “examine” Jewish commentary of the concept of *pre-existence* meanings to substantiate the argument. He then expands on this “classic example of this Jewish ideal pre-existence taken right out of this Second Temple rabbinic commentary” [which is NOT Scripture or even ideal Jewish interpretive *PADRES*].

This reviewer will consider the **Deity of the LORD Jesus the Messiah** from an exegesis (Hebrew and Koine) predominantly from John 1:1-4, in the light of both Jewish theology and Christian theology based on various Scripture references and the Talmuds.

¹ Harvey, R. (2009). *Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology : a constructive approach*. Milton Keynes ; Colorado Springs ; Hyderabad Paternoster: Thinking Faith. 63-72.

² Deuble, G. (n.d.). *Jesus' Pre-existence - Literal or Notional? God, Jesus & the Holy Spirit*. Retrieved October 26, 2020, from https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/736cfcdc-0eaa-4e84-8bf2-045785c8eebe/downloads/1csafrn0a_554368.pdf?ver=1603411391066
Also available: <https://www.biblicalunitarian.com/articles/jesus-pre-existence-literal-or-ideal>.

Notes about this discourse:

- All scripture quotes will be from the *New American Standard Bible* [NASB] unless otherwise stated.
- There will be references to the canon of the *original Hebrew Tanakh* <תנ"ך>, *Koine Septuagint* [LXX] and *Koine New Testament* <ἡ κοινὴ προφορά>.
- **Non-canonical materials will NOT be used as special revelation** (ie. *the Apocrypha, the Pseudepigrapha, the Talmud, the Halakhic Midrashim and the Midrash Rabbah.*), but may be recognised as merely the inferior works of man, to enable context or historic insight.

Biblical Evidence for Christ's Deity

John 1:1-4

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men.*³

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος. οὗτος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν. πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν ὃ γέγονεν. ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν, καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων,

The first feature to note from this passage is the phrase, ***In the beginning*** <Ἐν ἀρχῇ>. John introduces Christ as present eternally before Creation, based on the very first words of the *Tanakh / Septuagint*, and v.2. All Jews would recognise <בְּרֵאשִׁית *in the beginning*>, and everybody in the ancient world would see the exact same words in the LXX <ἐν ἀρχῇ>. This traditional understanding throughout Biblical history was recognised by the Jewish LXX translators, the Latin Vulgate scholars and Jewish Targums as the ***absolute*** beginning. This is reinforced by Is. 46:10, where the word <רֵאשִׁית *from the beginning*> is used in the exact same context⁴. John then takes a minor divergence (seemingly) from Genesis 1:1:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

הָאֵרָץ: וְאֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם אֵת אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא בְּרֵאשִׁית

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ Θεὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν.

The term for **God** in Gen. 1:1 is <אֱלֹהִים 'elohiym> and <ὁ Θεὸς *ho Theos*>. There are many commentators from various theologies with different perspectives on this phrase. In the Hebrew *Tanakh* God <אֱלֹהִים *elohim*> is plural, but the created <בָּרָא *bara*> is singular, while the LXX, God Θεὸς <N1M> created ἐποίησεν <Aorist Active Indicative 3rd Singular> doesn't seem to emulate the Hebrew's plurality. In a private communication from Jennifer Rose, she states:

... the plural form of אֱלֹהִים when it is paired with a singular verb is a plural of majesty, ie God of gods or the greatest God. The fact that the Greek doesn't pick up on the plural suggests that it

³ English Translations are NASB unless otherwise stated. NT is in *Koine italicised*. LXX is *Koine unitalicised*. Hebrew is *WLC* unless otherwise stated.

⁴ Sarfati, J. D. (2015). *The Genesis Account: a theological, historical, and scientific commentary on Genesis 1-11*. Creation Book Publishers. 89.

*isn't to be understood as Trinitarian. (The translators were very respectful of Scripture and here we even see them keeping to the Hebrew word order).*⁵

The editor of Calvin's Commentary, referring to Dr Hengstenberg, also claims this plural title of God as "more especially descriptive of the [awe full] aspect of the Divine character". The editor continues that the 18th Century Jewish Rabbis describe this reference as "the Lord of all powers". Calvin himself explained Gen. 1:1 as inadequate proof of the Trinity, as although the analogy may refute *Arianism* (Unitarianism), however it would be very easily developed into *Sabellianism*⁶ (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three different modes or aspects of God).

Others such as Sarfati, quoting Leupold, Hamilton and Hasel, embrace this apparent *uniplurality* of the Hebrew *God created* as a description of *Trinitarianism* (especially coupled with v.26)⁷. This is endorsed by Lombard⁸, Jamieson, Fausset & Brown⁹, and Matthew Henry¹⁰.

The Gospel's **Word** *which was with God and ... was God* is not named as such in Genesis, but is seen immediately observed in it's action in Gen. 1:3, 5 as the agency of creation by His Word:

And God **said**, "Let there be light." And there was light.

Καὶ εἶπεν ὁ Θεὸς Γενηθήτω φῶς. καὶ ἐγένετο φῶς.

וַיִּהְיֶה-אֹר: אֹר יְהי אֱלֹהִים וַיֵּאמֶר

And God **called** the light Day, and the darkness He **called** Night. And there was evening and there was morning, day one.

Καὶ ἐκάλεσεν ὁ Θεὸς τὸ φῶς ἡμέραν, καὶ τὸ σκότος ἐκάλεσεν νύκτα. καὶ ἐγένετο ἑσπέρα καὶ ἐγένετο πρωί, ἡμέρα μία.

פ אָדָם: יוֹם וַיִּהְיֶה-בֹקֶר וַיִּהְיֶה-עֶרֶב לַיְלָה קָרָא וְלַחֹשֶׁךְ יוֹם לְאוֹר אֱלֹהִים וַיִּקְרָא

Throughout the entire OT, this represents one of the two major themes, namely God expressing Himself by creating, commands, and calling (sovereignty)¹¹. (The other predominant theme being

⁵ Rose, J. (2020, October 24). *Uncertain translation of Gen. 1:1* [Email to John Duffy].

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⁶ Calvin, J. (1999). *Calvin's Commentaries: Commentary on the First Book of Moses called Genesis*. (Vol. 1). Baker Book House. (Original work published 1554). 71 - 72.

⁷ Sarfati, J. D. (2015). 95-96.

⁸ Calvin, J. (1999). 72.

⁹ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1993). *A Commentary, Critical, Experimental and Practical on the Old and New Testaments*. William B. Eerdmans, Reprinted. 1.

¹⁰ Henry, M. (1991). *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*. (New Modern, Vol. 1). Hendrickson Publishers. 2-3.

¹¹ Stern, D. H. (1999). *Jewish New Testament Commentary: a companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (6th ed.). Jewish New Testament Publications. 153.

His justice, mercy and salvation of mankind).

Examining the theme of the **Divine Word**, the *Tanakh* itself endorses this **Word is God**; that a God who fails to speak is not God, and a word that accomplishes nothing is not God (Is. 55:11). This becomes the foundation for John to emphasize the *Word was with God and was God*. Expanding on this, he declares that Jesus is the **Messiah** (1:14), and the explicit **Word of God** (Rev. 19:13):

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.

καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν καὶ ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας

He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.

καὶ περιβεβλημένος ἱμάτιον βεβαμμένον αἵματι καὶ κέκληται τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ

Examining the concept of word <λόγος>, many moderns believe is an alleged foundation in Greek philosophy and appropriated by pagan Gnosticism (which lead to early Jewish, Christian and later the Muslim heresies). This is quite erroneous, and Jewish scholars and Rabbis actually refer to this term derived centuries earlier from the Aramaic for “word” <אמרא memra>¹². It is a theological term pertaining to God’s expression of Himself. The LXX translated <דבר davar> as <λόγος> also means *word*, as well as *matter, thing, and issue*. This collectively demonstrates according to Judaism that the **Messiah existed before all creation** (refer John 17:5)!

Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

καὶ νῦν δόξασόν με σύ πάτερ παρὰ σεαυτῷ τῇ δόξῃ ἣ εἶχον πρὸ τοῦ τὸν κόσμον εἶναι παρὰ σοί

Also, the NT declares that the Messiah was active in creation Col. 1:15-17 and Heb.1:2-3:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.¹¹

¹² Jastrow, M. (2005). *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic literature* (2 vol. in 1). Hendrickson.

ὅς ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως ὃτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς τὰ ὄρατὰ καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα εἴτε θρόνοι εἴτε κυριότητες εἴτε ἀρχαὶ εἴτε ἐξουσίαι τὰ πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν

*in these last days [God the Father] has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also **He made the world**. And He [Jesus] is the radiance of His [God the Father's] glory and the exact representation of His [God the Father's] nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high¹³*

ἐπ' ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων ἐλάλησεν ἡμῖν ἐν υἱῷ ὃν ἔθηκεν κληρονόμον πάντων δι' οὗ καὶ ἐποίησεν τοὺς αἰῶνας ὃς ὦν ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης καὶ χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ φέρων τε τὰ πάντα τῷ ῥήματι τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ καθαρισμόν τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν ποιησάμενος ἐκάθισεν ἐν δεξιᾷ τῆς μεγαλωσύνης ἐν ὑψηλοῖς

The *Textus Recepticus* NT refers to the creativity of the person of Christ explicitly in Eph. 3:9:

and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery from the beginning of the ages has been hid in **God who created all things by Jesus Christ**

καὶ φωτίσαι πάντας τίς ἡ κοινωνία τοῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ ἀποκεκρυμμένου ἀπὸ τῶν αἰώνων ἐν τῷ θεῷ τῷ τὰ πάντα κτίσαντι διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ,

The non-canonical *Talmud* even teaches the Messiah's pre-existence, according to the apocryphal *Baraita* <אביתא ארמאית: external or outside>, although it's value and interpretations vary amongst Jewish scholars¹⁴.

Pesachim 54a:8

*Not difficult. Our fire [was created] at the conclusion of Shabbat, the fire [of Gehenna] was created on Shabbat eve. Was the fire of Gehenna created on Shabbat eve? Wasn't it taught in a baraita: **Seven phenomena were created before the world was created, and they are: Torah, and repentance, and the Garden of Eden, and Gehenna, and the Throne of Glory, and the Temple, and the name of Messiah.***

¹³ **[Bold emphases]** supplied to provide context of the passage.

¹⁴ Stern, D. H. (1999). *Jewish New Testament Commentary: a companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (6th ed.). Jewish New Testament Publications. 154.

דגיהנם ואור שבת בערב דגיהנם אור שבת במוצאי דידן אור דגיהנם באור הא דידן באור הא קשיא לא
עדן וגן ותשובה תורה הן ואלו העולם שנברא קודם נבראו דברים שבעה תניא והא איברי שבת בערב
משיח של ושמו המקדש ובית הכבוד וכסא וגיהנם

Nedarim 39b:4

*Is that so? But isn't it taught [in a baraita]: Seven phenomena were created before the world was created, and they are: Torah, and repentance, the Garden of Eden, and Gehenna, the Throne of Glory, and the Temple, and **the name of the Messiah.***

כסא וגיהנם עדן גן ותשובה תורה הן אלו העולם שנברא קודם נבראו דברים שבעה תניא והא איני
משיח של ושמו המקדש ובית הכבוד

It is interesting that a document presented these Talmud references as evidence that the Christ didn't exist prior to creation (based on the *name* or concept existed, but the person of Messiah didn't)¹⁵. This is not a valid interpretation by orthodox Jews over the centuries¹⁶. It has been demonstrated Jesus was not only **with God** (as the second person of the uniplurality) in John 1:2 but that Jesus was also the First Cause (*Supreme Being Creator*) and therefore **was God** in 1:3. It is critical to note the Jews acknowledged that the Messiah/LORD (YHWH) as their Creator (Ps. 33:6). Saul of Tarsus (an historic Pharisee and later Apostle) recalls that Jesus the Messiah was also the Creator as mentioned earlier in Eph 3:9, Col. 1:15-17 and (possibly authored?) Heb. 1:2-3.

As it continues in John 1:2, *He [the Word] was in the beginning with God*, indicative that **prior to creation Jesus was with God at the point** (or sooner) of creation (just like God). The third iteration in sequence, 1:3 re-emphasises this pre-existence of Christ by stating *All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being*. This verse alone demonstrates John, inspired and reminded by the Spirit, claims Jesus was the theological and philosophical **First Cause** (the Supreme Being from whom all things are created). He Himself is uncreated, because (as a more literal translation reads) *All things through Him came into being, and without Him came into being **not even one [thing] that has come into being***. John here explains that Jesus was not only uncreated, but He is the First Cause from which ALL things are made.

Why did John consider it essential to repeat the presence of the Word as God and with God *in the beginning* prior to creation? Even in the first century (John most likely wrote his gospel circa

¹⁵ Deuble, G. (n.d.). *Jesus' Pre-existence - Literal or Notional?* God, Jesus & the Holy Spirit. Retrieved October 26, 2020, from <https://www.biblicalunitarian.com/articles/jesus-pre-existence-literal-or-ideal>. 2-3.

¹⁶ Stern, D.H. (1999). 154.

85AD), the church encountered several heresies regarding the fact the Christ was from eternity fully God and after the incarnation fully human.

Conclusion

The Apostles' teaching of the *Trinity* is essential to salvation (John 14:6). To worship a "monotheistic" God of *Judaism or Islam*, is to worship an idol. It is a contravention of the first moral law, namely

Then God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. "You shall have no other gods before Me. "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them nor serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, inflicting the punishment of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing favor to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. [Ex. 20:1-6]

If a soul does not know the true nature of *Jesus of Nazareth* as fully human and fully God, then there is nothing in which to place their *justification!* That is why it is critical to specifically know who Jesus is, and His substance (Heb.1:1-4)!

This paper is by no means exhaustive, but is a short outline to consider the article, *Jesus' Pre-Existence – Literal or Ideal?* It is based on examining John 1:1-4 in relation to other critical sections of the Bible in the early languages and Jewish commentaries.

Soli Deo Gloria

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