

The Deity and Worship of Yeshua

by Michael Rudolph

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I spent most of last week at the Borough Park Symposium in New York, where Scholars in our movement, and from around the world, gathered to discuss the deity of Yeshua, and its relevance to Messianic Judaism. The actual title of the Symposium was “The Deity of Messiah and the Mystery of God.” Papers were presented on related subjects, responsive papers were given, and then time was allotted for all of those in attendance, including me, to ask questions of the presenters, and to make comments.

Some of those who attended the symposium, with whom we are acquainted, were Russ Resnik, David Rudolph, Mark Kinzer, Mitch Glaser, Jason Sobel, Barry Rubin, Elliot Klayman, Jeff Feinberg, Mike Brown, Paul Liberman, Joel Liberman, David Sedaca, Joseph Shulam, Marty Goetz, Jan Moskowitz, Joshua Brumbach, Howard Silverman, and Matt Rosenberg. There was also representation from Israel and England.

The main paper topics and presenters were these:

1. **The significance of the Deity of Yeshua** – Mark Kinzer & Mitch Glaser
2. **Jewish History and the Deity of Yeshua** – Klayman
3. **The Canon of Scripture and the Deity of Yeshua** – Darrel Bock
4. **Jewish Tradition and the Deity of Yeshua** – Joseph Shulam
5. **Communicating the Deity of Yeshua to the Jewish People** – Daniel Nessim and Richard Harvey
6. **Communicating the Deity of Yeshua to the Post Modern Jewish Community** – Jhan Moskowitz and Akiva Cohen
7. **The Future of the Messianic Jewish Movement and the Deity of Yeshua** – Joel Liberman, Howard Silverman, Matt Rosenberg, and Greg Zhelezny

Each presenter was given fifteen minutes – somewhat less time than I have to speak to you this morning, and since I did not deliver a paper at the symposium, I would like to deliver one to you today.

Let’s begin with a little dramatization from some Ohev Yisrael thespians. I give you Allen played by _____ and his aunt, *Tanta* Ida, played by _____:

Allen: Good morning *Tanta*, I thought I would drop these radishes by this morning. We grew them in our own garden.

Tanta Ida: Good morning yourself. You don’t just happen to drop by unless you want to *verdrey mein kopf* with that Masonic stuff and that goy Jesus.

Allen: You know me pretty well *Tanta*, but I do want to give you these radishes.

Tanta Ida: You know Allen, this Masonic thing you're into wouldn't bother me so much if this goy Jesus didn't claim to be God. I don't know why Jews need a *Mashiach* anyway, but at least the Lubavitchers picked Schneerson, who was a man, and they don't fall on their knees in front of his picture and worship him the way you do this Jesus.

Allen: *Tanta* Ida, you know better than that! We don't get on our knees in front of a picture of Yeshua; in fact, we don't encourage making pictures of Him at all. And it's "Messianic" – not "Masonic."

Tanta Ida: Okay, Messianic. But you worship him, don't you? You say He's God, don't you?

Allen: Well, yes, but ...

In *Tanta* Ida's mind, Allen has lost the argument and she has won, because Allen has agreed that he believes a man is God, and that he worships a man.

Thank you, thespians. [Actors are seated]

Unless a Jew has been touched by the Holy Spirit and educated in the Bible, he or she is not going to accept the idea that the man Yeshua is God, and that we ought to worship Him. We should not expect it and, a matter of fact, we shouldn't explain it that way in the first place. The deity of Yeshua is a very hard and mysterious concept for Jewish people and others also, so let's review what the Bible has to say about it:

Isaiah 9:6: *"For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."*

Combined Scriptures Isaiah 44:24; John 1:3-4; Colossians 1:16: *"Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, And He who formed you from the womb: "I am the LORD, who makes all things, Who stretches out the heavens all alone, Who spreads abroad the earth by Myself; ... All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him."*

Combined Scriptures John 1:1 and 1:14: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."*

Combined Scriptures Exodus 3:13-14; John 8:58: *"Then Moses said to God, "Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?" And God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' And He said, 'Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, I AM*

has sent me to you.’ Yeshua said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.’”

John 14:9-11: *“Yeshua said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? 'Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.'”*

John 20:28-29: *“And Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ Yeshua said to him, ‘Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’”*

Colossians 2:8-10: *“Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Messiah. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.”*

Philippians 2:5-7: *“Let this mind be in you which was also in Messiah Yeshua, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.”*

1 Timothy 3:16: *“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory.”*

Titus 2:11-13: *“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Yeshua the Messiah, ... ”*

Hebrews 1:8-9: *“But to the Son He says: ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your Kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness more than your companions.’”*

I want you to notice something. In all of these Scriptures, Yeshua is referred to as God, He is addressed as God, we are told that in Him resides the fullness of the deity, but we never encounter the expression “Jesus is God!” The reason this is important is that that exact expression is the one we are so often confronted with, and challenged by, just as you heard *Tanta* Ida challenge Allen. The problem with Allen’s response was that, if you say that Yeshua is God and you do not qualify what you mean by it, the common understanding is that Yeshua is all of God, so that when Yeshua came to earth as a man, there was no longer God in Heaven taking care of the rest of the world. We know that isn’t the case, so we should avoid using the expression “Jesus is God,” or allowing it to be imputed to us.

If a Jewish person says to us “I understand you think that Jesus is God,” the best approach is to enlist his patience for a somewhat lengthy explanation, and first take him to Isaiah 9:6 which is in the *Tanakh* – his own Bible:

“For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

Inform him that this is commonly understood to be a Messianic passage and, point out that his Jewish Bible teaches that someone who is born on earth can be called “Mighty God.”

From there, proceed to John 1 to talk about “the Word,” (who is God), somehow becoming flesh as the son of God dwelling among us, while God the Father remained in Heaven. If he objects to using references from the New Testament, point out that you are not trying to convince him; you are merely showing him how you have come to your conclusion about the deity of Yeshua. Of course it’s a mystery to all of us as to how all this can be, but no more so than the mystery of Isaiah 9. The reality is that all of Judaism is supernatural and mysterious – not only New Covenant Judaism.

Now let’s look at what the Bible says about worshipping Yeshua – another “stick-in-the-crow” concept for a Jew. We begin with what Yeshua Himself taught about who is to be worshipped:

Matthew 4:8-10: *“Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, ‘All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.’ Then Yeshua said to him, ‘Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.’”*

So Yeshua says that only God is to be worshipped, yet we read, in Matthew 28:9, how Yeshua willingly received worship of Himself:

“And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Yeshua met them, saying, ‘Rejoice!’ So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him.”

Also, in John 9:35-38, referring to the man whose blindness Yeshua healed, we read:

“Yeshua heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, ‘Do you believe in the Son of God?’ He answered and said, ‘Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?’ And Yeshua said to him, ‘You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you.’ Then he said, ‘Lord, I believe!’ And he worshiped Him.”

And we read in Hebrews 1:1-6:

“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all

things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For to which of the angels did He ever say: 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You?' And again: 'I will be to Him a Father, And He shall be to Me a Son?' But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: 'Let all the angels of God worship Him.'

So clearly Yeshua received worship, yet it seems so un-Jewish to fall on our knees or our faces in worship, even to God, let alone to Yeshua, who most Jews do not accept as being God. In the synagogue, there is only one time of the year when we may see worshippers prostrate themselves, and that is on Yom Kippur and, even then, most cannot because the seating in synagogues typically doesn't allow for it.

So worshipping Yeshua is the second big hurdle for a Jew – even a Jewish seeker who comes to believe that Yeshua is *Adonai*. Is there anything we can do to soften the message? Not much without denying Yeshua's divinity. But we can show that falling to our knees and face is not the only way in which we worship God.

The Greek word for “worship” is *proskuneo*, and the Hebrew word is *shachah*. The literal meaning of both words is to fall on one's face in homage – bending the knee to a superior being – submitting oneself to another's will. Although bowing, kneeling, raising hands, and other physical posturing are authorized in Scripture in connection with worship, they are assigned less importance than obeying God. We read about the triad of worship, obedience and love in Exodus 20:5-6, where God says:

“... you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.”

Yeshua made the same connection between love and obedience in John 14:15 where we read:

“If you love Me, keep My commandments.”

And also in John 14: 23-24 we read:

“Yeshua answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me.”

Now I said that worship has to do with obedience, and you notice that in the John Scriptures, Yeshua references love but does not mention worship. Well, he means worship, because one does not submit his will to another in such complete obedience unless one is Lord over the other,

and that kind of submission is what worship is. When we refer to Yeshua *Adonai*, that is what we mean.

There are other expressions of worship as well, such as our lifting our hands to *Adonai*, singing hymns to Him, and so on. But in order to help our Jewish brethren understand the deity of Yeshua and the appropriateness of worshipping Him, we must first comprehend the critical importance of His deity ourselves.

All of New Covenant spiritual life begins with the salvation event we call being “born again.” Scripture gives a number of different formulae for acquiring salvation, but the most central one is to receive Yeshua as Lord, which is tantamount to worshipping Him as we have shown. Here are two Scriptures in point:

Romans 10:8-9: *“But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart ” (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Yeshua and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”*

Acts 16:29-31: *“Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ So they said, ‘Believe on the Lord Yeshua the Messiah, and you will be saved, you and your household.’”*

When I first came to faith, I understood the need to make God the Lord of my life, and I believed that Yeshua was the Messiah – God’s “messenger son” – but I did not, at first, come to terms with the idea that Yeshua was “God incarnate.” I was mainly dealing with English translations of the Bible, and to me the word “Lord” meant someone to whose authority I had to submit, but that person did not have to be God. After all, we are all familiar with English Lords, Landlords, and so on. I was slow in coming to the conviction that in Yeshua “dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” and, when I finally conceded it, I still did not understand why it mattered so much. It is clear to me though, that all during that time, I was already walking in God’s salvation because I was growing spiritually by leaps and bounds, and experiencing the Holy Spirit in a powerful way.

I now understand that it is impossible to fully appreciate Yeshua’s atoning sacrifice without acknowledging His deity; here is why: When God placed the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden, he told Adam that if he ate of it, he would surely die. So when Adam ate from the tree, his sentence of death was already pre-determined, and therefore He and all mankind who would come from his loins had to die or else God would have been a liar. In his mercy, God did not want to destroy His creation, yet at the same time he could not go back on His Word that all men from Adam had to die. So God devised a plan whereby mankind would indeed die, but each man would have a choice of two kinds of deaths. One kind of death, a death of total annihilation, would befall an individual if he rejected God’s Messiah who was God Himself. The other kind of death would be granted to an individual who repented and embraced God, and although he would also have to die, he would not be annihilated; he would be resurrected to new and eternal life.

Now God concluded that, in man's fallen and unholy state, no man alive could stand in repentance for mankind. So God placed a very special man on the earth, begotten of Miriam (a natural woman), and of the Holy Spirit (God Himself); the man was named "Yeshua." Yeshua was special because he was fully mortal (i.e. He could experience physical death) and, at the same time, he was also fully divine. This duality was vital to fulfilling God's promised justice that all mankind from Adam had to die for its sin and, at the same time, it showed God's mercy by allowing each individual to choose between the two deaths – the death of finality, and the one from which he would be resurrected (see Ezekiel 18:14ff which says that the repentant son shall not die for the sin of his father). Because Yeshua was fully man, He could legitimately stand as a representative of mankind and repent for mankind's sin in a way that no one else could. Because He was also the sinless son of God, He could qualify as an unblemished sacrifice that would be acceptable and sufficient to atone for the sin of Adam. In this profound way, Yeshua was both the sacrifice and the sacrificer.

If I, an individual man, want the kind of death that leads to life, I must make God my Lord and savior in Yeshua, and receive His sacrificial death as my own. Making Yeshua Lord is not just saying it. It requires dying to self, and exchanging my mortal life for the life given by the Holy Spirit; in other words, it requires being "born again." You would think the choice would be a no brainer, but people who do not acknowledge Yeshua for who He is, the divine Son of God, find little reason to choose His will over their own because, to them, serving Him seems like foolishness.

So let's summarize. Yeshua is indeed the Word, God Himself who came to earth as a man. And while in Him was the fullness of the deity, He was not all of God because God the Father remained in Heaven (and we have not even discussed the Holy Spirit). For that reason, the expression "Jesus is God" should be avoided because it is misleading, and is very difficult for Jewish people to accept. At the same time, the full deity of Yeshua should never be denied because it is the reason that His atoning sacrifice works for us. We should also give worship to Yeshua, and the most important kind of worship is to love Him and obey His commandments. If a person to whom we are ministering accepts Yeshua as Lord but not as God, rejoice and don't panic. Don't feel that you have to push him to the understanding before he is ready. I got there, you got there, and he will get there through being impacted by the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit. Even after receiving Yeshua, it often takes awhile before we fully trust the Scriptures against our conflicting intuition.

Finally, we should be willing and able to explain all of this to any Jewish person or any other person who will listen, especially the part about having a choice of the two kinds of death – the one leading to destruction, and the other leading to eternal life.

Thank you Lord, for giving me this message with new clarity.

B'shem Yeshua.