

1-19-24 Message to Roeh Israel Abilene – Bo (Go)
Torah Portion; Exod 10:1-13:6
Haftarah: Jeremiah 46:13-28
Suggested Acheron K'tuvim: Heb 10:5-7

Deity of Messiah

Central question of this message: Is the concept of the deity of Messiah a Jewish concept, or a later Christian one?

We are in parasha *Bo*. It means “go.” This word is found as the seventh word of the parasha in English, and the 5th word in the Hebrew.

Ex 10:1-3

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may perform these signs of Mine among them, 2 and that you may tell in the hearing of your son, and of your grandson, how I made a mockery of the Egyptians, and how I performed My signs among them; that you may know that I am the Lord."

וַיֹּאמֶר	יְהוָה	אֶל־	מֹשֶׁה	בָּא	אֶל־	פַּרְעֹה	10:1
And said	the Lord	unto	Moses,	Go in	unto	Pharaoh:	
559	3068	413	4872	935	413	6547	
כִּי־	אֲנִי	הַקְבַּדְתִּי	אֶת־	לְבוֹ	וְאֶת־	לֵב	
for	I	have hardened		his heart,	and	the heart of	
3588	589	3513	853	3820	853	3820	
עֲבָדָיו	לְמַעַן	שָׁתִי	אֶתְנִי	אֵלֶּה	בְּקִרְבּוֹ:		
his servants,	that	I might shew	my signs	these	before him:		
5650	4616	7896	226	428	7130		
וְלְמַעַן	תִּסְפָּר	בְּאָזְנֵי	בְּנֶךְ	וּבֶן־			2
And that	thou mayest tell	in the ears of	thy son,	and of thy son's			
4616	5608	241	1121	1121			
בְּנֶךְ	אֶת	אֲשֶׁר	הִתְעַלְלֹתִי	בְּמִצְרַיִם	וְאֶת־		
son,		what	I have wrought	in Egypt,	and		
1121	853	834	5953	4714	853		
אֶתְנִי	אֲשֶׁר־	שָׁמַתִּי	בָּם	וַיֵּדְעֻם			
my signs	which	I have done	among them;	that ye may know			
226	834	7760	871a	3045			
כִּי־	אֲנִי	יְהוָה:					
that	I	the Lord.					
3588	589	3068					
הֵכֵן	אֲנִי	אֲנִי					
how	that	am					
9999	3588	9999					

This parasha has so many wonderful lessons. It is with some hesitation that I avoid teaching on them. I am confident that if I begin teaching any of these amazing lessons, I will exhaust all the time and space I want to spend on the next topic I have chosen to address to the body of faith, and that is the deity of Messiah. So, forgive my quick diversion from the parasha.

Today, I find that modern rabbinic Judaism has morphed considerably from its roots that existed more than 2000 years ago. What I find is that a considerable segment of modern Judaism has become a reaction *against* the concept of Yeshua being Messiah, and certainly against Him being divine. So much of today's Judaism seems to be focused on denying Yeshua as Messiah. The modern Jewish leaders see the members of the church worshipping Yeshua, and consider that to be idolatry, or at least polytheism.

But modern Christianity gets no "pass" either. It also has drifted far from its historical roots as a purely Jewish subgroup in Israel enjoying wide acceptance by many thousands of Jews who remained zealous for Torah (Act 21:20). Today, it has considerably distanced itself from its roots in Judaism, and has become in significant part a reaction *against* Judaism. Today, the "Jesus" of the church bears only a passing resemblance to Yeshua the true Messiah of Israel. The larger church body has distanced itself from the Tanach, and the righteousness of G-d. And it seems that the church has also been so focused upon the primacy of Yeshua, that they have forgotten to recognize and worship the Almighty.

Sadly, the idea that Messiah would be divine, and would be also able to take-on bodily form, is in dispute not only in the synagogue, but also in some portions of the church.

I have been shocked to discover that a number of leaders in the Messianic community (leaders in one of the two major associations of Messianic congregations) are today denying the deity of Yeshua the Messiah.

Today I wish to address the deity of Messiah.

First, I wish to discuss how the normative synagogue has chosen to condemn early Messianics (now “Christians”) and marginalize them.

One example is the prayer found in the Ashkenaz Siddur (prayer book) on pages 106-107. It is a prayer which was added to the original 18 benedictions after the destruction of the second Temple, by Rabbi Gamliel at the council in Yavneh.¹

The leaders of the Jewish community met at Yavneh under the leadership of Gamliel to determine how we would go forward as a people, now that the Temple had been destroyed by the Romans, and the people scattered.

¹ Maseches Berachos 28:b.

They determined that the various sects of Judaism must be dissolved, and that Jews go forward under a single banner – and that banner was that of the Parushim.² All other sub-groups of Jewish religious expression were to be either subsumed within the Parushim, or marginalized.³ Since the Messianics declined to be brought under the umbrella of the Parushim, who were generally deniers of Yeshua as Messiah, they were marginalized and scorned.

Thus this prayer was added to condemn the Messianics (early Christians) and to make it clear to the other Jews, who would continue to use the standard prayers recited in the synagogue, that the Messianics were not “one of us.” Here is that added prayer:

Weekday, Shacharit, Amidah, Against Heretics

וְלַמְלַאֲשִׁינִים אֵל תְּהִי תִקְוָה וְכָל הָרָשָׁעָה כָּרְגַע תֵּאָבֵד וְכָל אִיִּבִיךָ
מְהֵרָה יִכָּרְתוּ וְהַזֵּדִים מְהֵרָה תַעֲקֹר וְתִשְׁבֵּר וְתִמְאָר וְתִכְנִיעַ בְּמְהֵרָה
בְּיָמֵינוּ: כָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה שׁוֹבֵר אֵיִבִּים וּמְכַנִּיעַ זֵדִים

And for slanderers let there be no hope; and may all wickedness perish in an instant; and may all Your enemies be cut down speedily. May You speedily uproot, smash, cast down, and humble wanton sinners – speedily in our days.

² A “parush” means a “separated one.” There were a number of groups within the Parushim, but the most powerful of these sects emerged as prominent, and was led by Rb. Gamliel II as the head.

³ The subgroups included the Sadducees, the Herodians, the Zealots, the Boethusians, the Essenes, and Messianics.

Blessed are You, Hashem, Who breaks enemies and humbles wanton sinners.

Here is what a modern Jewish siddur says in a footnote regarding this prayer:

This addition was created to counteract growing Christian influence, for the early Christians were Jews who were indistinguishable from their Torah-observant brethren and were having a pernicious influence on the Jewish people. Here, the Christians' refusal to recite this particular prayer was used to identify them.

It is reputed that during this same council at Yavneh, the Parushim wished also to remove another prayer from the liturgy. They wished to do so because such prayer was far too obviously messianic. It referred to Yeshua by name as Messiah, and stated our continuous national hope was always for Him to be exalted. It is found in the same section of the siddur, on page 108-109 of the Ashkenaz Siddur. Note: I will offer a better translation of the actual Hebrew in brackets so you can see the clear references to Yeshua in this prayer.

Weekday, Minchah, Amida, Kingdom of David

אַת־צֶמַח דָּוִד עֲבֹדְךָ מְהֵרָה תִצְמַח וְקִרְנֹתָו תִּרְוַם בִּישׁוּעָתְךָ כִּי
לִישׁוּעָתְךָ קִיִּינוּ כָּל הַיּוֹם: בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה מִצְמִיחַ קֶרֶן יִשְׁוּעָה

The offspring [branch] of Your servant David may you speedily cause to flourish [increase], and enhance his pride [prominence] through your salvation [Yeshua], for we hope for Your salvation [Yeshua] all the day long. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who causes the pride [prominence] of salvation [Yeshua] to flourish.⁴

This particular prayer was so beloved by the Jewish people for so many generations, the efforts of the Parushim to ban it from the siddur failed. The people were undeterred from reciting this prayer, and it persists until today.

The efforts by the anti-Yeshua leaders of the Jews at that time then also adopted what is called the 13 Principles of Faith, was created by Moses ben Maimon (1138–1204). He is also known by the name of Maimonides, and also by Rambam.

Of those 13 principles, Maimonides made a doctrinal statement which was a stark reversal of previous Jewish theology regarding whether Messiah

⁴ This prayer invokes many prophecies of Messiah, such as Zech 3:8, Prov 30:4, and Jer 23:3-6.

would be divine, and also have a body, so He could interact with us as a man.

He began with the correct principle that the Almighty cannot be seen by humans and live, and that He is spirit and not flesh. Then he extended that concept, by implication, as proof that the Messiah (who definitely will be flesh and blood among us) cannot be divine, since He has a physical body. He also insisted that since G-d is “one” He cannot exist in a triune basis, as was the previous Jewish theological understanding.

Here are some of his comments regarding his 13 principles of faith which he created, disputing the triune G-d.

Rambam on Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:1:17

The second principle [is] the unity of God, may He be blessed, which is to say that we believe that He who is the cause of everything is one. And He is not like one of a pair and not like one of a group and not like one person that can be divided into many [smaller] units and not like a simple body which is numerically one [but] can be infinitely divided. Rather He - God, may He be blessed - is one in a unity that has no unity like it. And this is the second

principle, [and] it is indicated by that which is stated, "Listen Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one."

The third principle [is] denial of His physicality and that is that we believe that this Unity that we mentioned is not a body and not the power of a body and that actions of a body do not relate to Him, not in His essence and not in His doings. ... But were He a body, He would be comparable to [other] bodies. And everything that comes in the holy Scriptures that describes Him in physical ways, such as walking or standing or sitting or speaking, or similar to it, it is all by way of metaphor. And so did the rabbis say (Berakhot 31b), "The Torah speaks in the language of people." And the sages already spoke much about this matter. And this third principle is indicated by that which is stated (Deuteronomy 4:15), "for you did not see any image" - which is to say, you did not perceive Him as something with an image, because He is - as we mentioned - not a body and not the power of a body.

But in modern times, there have been Jewish scholars who have begun to rethink the strict “no body” and “not divine” aspects of Messiah. Their research has uncovered and rediscovered that which our people have

understood and believed firmly from the time well before Maimonides put pen to paper, redirecting the theology of our people.

One of the first things that has come to light has been the realization by scholars that the Masoretes mistranslated and concealed some of the obvious Scriptures regarding this topic. A great example is how the Masoretes treated Psalm 40, written by David, who lived 1000 years before the Common Era (when Yeshua walked as a man among us).

Ps 40:6

6 Sacrifice and meal offering Thou hast not desired;
My ears Thou hast opened; Burnt offering and sin offering
Thou hast not required.

What doesn't seem to fit here? Let's read the same verse from the Septuagint, written about 1000 years before the Masoretes.

6 Sacrifice and offering you don't desire; **but a body you have prepared for me:** whole-burnt-offering and sacrifice for sin you did not require. 7 Then I said, Behold, I come: in the volume of the book it is written concerning me, 8 I

desired to do thy will, O my God, and your law in the midst of my heart.

And we find that in the Messianic writings found in Hebrews 10:5-7, such quotes from this passage, nearly word for word.

Heb 10:5-7

5. Sacrifice and offering you have not desired, **but a body you have prepared for me.** 6. In whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin you have taken no pleasure. 7. Then I said, ‘Behold I have come. In the scroll of the Book it is written of me, to do your will, O God.

This Psalm is clearly referencing the Messiah, who will become the “sacrifice” that gives complete and final atonement, but will also show precisely what G-d’s will looks like in daily life. And most importantly, Messiah will have a body, which has been prepared for Him by G-d Himself... not by any act of man.

Now, let’s move forward in time to the time surrounding the birth of Yeshua as a man. One of the sages of our people was Philo of Alexandria. The best estimates of his birth put it between 15-10 BCE. He spent his

life in Alexandria Egypt, a province of the Roman empire of that day. His writing referencing an event occurring in the reign of Emperor Claudius suggests that he died sometime between 45-50 CE. So, during his lifetime, he lived at the same time as Yeshua. His distance from Israel suggests that he was not aware of the birth of, or the activities of, Yeshua. But his writings tell us much of the Jewish theology of his time.

The Jewish historian Josephus (Joseph ben Matthias) mentions him and his intercession on behalf of the Jews before the Emperor,⁵ but no rabbinic Jewish literature either recognizes him, nor gives him credit for any Jewish contribution to theology. That may be telling, particularly because Philo's extensive writings, and the writings of other Jewish theologians who created targums⁶, all record the Jewish theology which stands in stark contrast to the revised theology which was later advanced by the leaders of post-Yeshua Judaism.

In the first century, there was a cryptic statement referring to a "throne chariot" which Philo saw in Ezekiel 1 and in the account of creation in Genesis was "the Word." Philo gave a detailed description of the Word as the creator.⁷ He taught that the Word was the shadow of G-d and was the instrument of creation.⁸ This agrees with the Targum of Jonathan

⁵ Antiquities of the Jews, xviii.8, 1

⁶ Targums are ancient Aramaic paraphrases or interpretation of the Tanach, created in the first century CE.

⁷ Philo; On Creation V 20.

⁸ Philo; Allegorical Interpretation III XXXI (96)

which described the Word [Aramaic: Memra] as the one who created man in the likeness of G-d.⁹ And is also in agreement with the Jerusalem Targum who says the Word [Memra] was the one who spoke to Moses at the bush declaring Himself to be “I am.”¹⁰ And a fragment of the Targum of Torah declares that the “Word of the L-rd” was bright and illuminating on the first day of creation.¹¹

Philo declares that G-d didn’t create mankind in the image of any other animal of creation, but used “His own Word” alone for the pattern.¹² Thus, the source of the “in our image” statement in Genesis.

Philo writes that the “divine Word” “which is placed in the closest proximity to the only truly existing God, without any partition or distance being interposed between them.”¹³ He also writes, “The primal existence is G-d, and second the G-d-Word.”¹⁴

The Jerusalem targum makes it clear that the ancients prayed to the “Word of G-d.” “And Hagar praised and prayed in the name of the Word [Memra] Of G-d who had revealed Himself to her...”¹⁵

⁹ Targ. Jonathan Gen. 1:27

¹⁰ Jerusalem Targum Ex. 3:14

¹¹ Fragmentary Targum Ex. 12:42

¹² Philo; On Creation XLVIII (139)

¹³ Philo: On Flight and Finding XVIII (101)

¹⁴ Allegorical Interpretation II, 86

¹⁵ Jerusalem Targum Gen. 16:3

Philo records the theology of the triune nature of G-d:

...it is reasonable for one to be three and for three to be one, for they were one by a higher principle... ...in the place of one, He makes the appearance of a triad ... He cannot be seen in his oneness without something [else], the chief Powers that exist immediately with him... the Creative, which is called “Elohim” and the Kingly [Messiah], which is called “Lord”... he begins to see the sovereign, holy, and divine vision in such a way that a single appearance appears as a triad, and the triad as a unity.¹⁶

Philo continues:

‘I am that I am’; and the beings on each side are those most ancient powers which are always close to the living God, one of which is called his Creative Power [Almighty], and the other his Royal Power [King Messiah]. And the Creative Power is God, for it is by this that he made and arranged the universe; and the Royal Power is the Lord, for it is fitting that the Creator should lord it over and govern the creature. Therefore, the middle person of the three [Messiah], being

¹⁶ Philo; Questions on Genesis, IV, 2

attended by each of his powers as by body-guard, presents to the mind, which is endowed with the faculty of sight [the part of G-d which is visible], a vision at one time of one being, and at another time of three;¹⁷

Philo declares that the “divine Word” is also known as the firstborn son, who can inhabit our soul:

For there are, as it seems, two temples belonging to God; one being this world, in which the high priest is the divine Word [Messiah], his own firstborn son. The other is the rational soul, the priest of which is the real true man,¹⁸

Philo clarifies that the Word is a priest in the order of Melchisedek:

But Melchisedek shall bring forward wine instead of water,¹⁹ and shall give your souls to drink, and shall cheer them with unmixed wine, in order that they may be wholly occupied with a divine intoxication, more sober than sobriety itself. For the Word is a priest, having, as its inheritance the true God, and

¹⁷ Philo: Abr. 119-123.

¹⁸ On Dreams 215

¹⁹ Compare with John 2:3

entertaining lofty and sublime and magnificent ideas about him, “for he is the priest of the most high God.”²⁰

Philo describes the Word as the advocate for us before G-d.

...the twelve stones arranged on the breast in four rows of three stones each, namely the logeum, being also an emblem of that reason (Word) which holds together and regulates the universe. For it was indispensable that the man who was consecrated to the Father of the world, should have as a paraclete [advocate]²¹, his son, the being most perfect in all virtue, to procure forgiveness of sins, and a supply of unlimited blessings;²²

Philo describes the Word as both the divine, as Messiah, and as the Head of those who believe.

“The head of all things is the eternal Word [Messiah] of the eternal God, under which, as if it were his feet or other limbs, is placed the whole world, over which He passes and firmly stands. Now it is not because Messiah is Lord that He passes

²⁰ “De Allegoriis Legum,” iii. 26, compare with Hebrews 7

²¹ Yeshua as the Messiah is also known as the paraclete in the Greek version of 1John. 2:1

²² Life of Moses II, 133-134

and sits over the whole world, for His seat with His Father and God²³ but because for its perfect fullness the world is in need of the care and superintendence of the best ordered dispensation, and for its own complete piety, of the Divine Word, just as living creatures (need) a head, without which it is impossible to live.”²⁴

In our day, the Jewish Chronicle has published an article entitled, *Why a ‘divine’ Messiah was not beyond belief*.²⁵ It details a growing trend in modern Jewish scholarship to recognize that the Jewish people during the time of the Second Temple believed that the promised Messiah was divine in nature.

The article declares, “There is now a greater willingness to reclaim Jesus as a radical rabbi who preached Jewish teachings to Jews. Christianity is explained as the creation of his followers who introduced into it pagan notions such as the rebirth of a dying god.”²⁶

And then says that, “But a daring new book by one of the world’s leading Jewish scholars challenges this simple contrast. *The Jewish Gospels* is a

²³ See Hebrews 12

²⁴ Q&A on Exodus, II, 117

²⁵ <https://www.thejc.com/judaism/why-a-divine-messiah-was-not-beyond-belief-f2ov2zh1>

²⁶ Gavasi’s Lectures at page 290, record that a flood of pagans coming into the faith brought their pagan beliefs with them including customs, practices and idols. See also, Arthur Weigall, *The Paganism in Our Christianity* [New York, 1928], p.145.

short work aimed at general readers by Daniel Boyarin, a professor of Talmud at the University of California in Berkeley. In ancient times, the borders between what Judaism and Christianity were far more porous than we conceive today, he argues: it was not until the fourth century that the doctrinal differences were clarified, not least because of the desire of the Roman-backed church to put clear water between the spreading new faith and those it considered Jews.”

The article continues: “[Boyarin’s] most explosive contention is that the concept of a divine messiah was not an alien import but part of the cauldron of ideas that bubbled in the volatile world of classical Judaism. ‘The basic underlying thoughts from which both the Trinity and the incarnation grew are there in the very world into which Jesus was born,’ he writes.”

And the author addresses the book of Daniel. “Boyarin also shows how Daniel’s vision could be decoded to lend credence to the idea of suffering redeemer. The New Testament, he concludes, is “much more deeply embedded within Second Temple Jewish life and thought than many have imagined, even... in the very moments that we take to be most characteristically Christian as opposed to Jewish: the notion of a dual godhead with a Father and a Son, the notion of a Redeemer who himself

will be both God and man, and the notion that this Redeemer would suffer and die as part of the salvational process.”

The article concludes with a wonderful admission, although in a bit angular manner, of what we as Messianics have been saying from the beginning:

“If Boyarin is right, then messianic Jews whose belief in Jesus as messiah puts them currently beyond the Jewish pale might have more claim to be an offshoot of Judaism than we think.”

I have heard many declare that the deity of Yeshua was developed initially by early Messianics, and then fully formulated by Christians. I have regularly disputed that assertion. Today I provide some solid proof that the deity of Messiah, and His characterization as King Messiah, the Word of G-d, and as a priest in the nature of Melchizadek are all deeply rooted in Jewish theology which predates the birth of Yeshua.

I have also heard that the church developed the concept of the “trinity.” I assert that the triune nature of G-d is a core of my belief system. That is not because I believe in Yeshua and would be called a “Christian”, but because I am a Jew, and follow the faith of my forefathers.