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Messianic Perspectives[®]

God has not forgotten the Jewish people, and neither have we.

THE DAY OF THE LORD

*Six Old Testament Verses
That Will Change The World Forever
(Malachi 4:1-6)*

by DR. GARY HEDRICK



This article is adapted from a message preached through an interpreter on Sunday morning, September 16, 2012, at Evangelical Baptist Church in Mytischi, Russia—a northeastern suburb of Moscow. Gary was there at the kind invitation of Pastor Nikolai Maslyakov and the Union of Evangelical Christian Baptists of the Russian Federation.

News flash: our world is in serious trouble!

Economies are crumbling. Crime is rampant. We are being overrun by pornography and perversion. Like the Prophet Isaiah once lamented, evil is now called “good” and good is called “evil” (5:20).

Western civilization is in decline by just about every conceivable standard of measurement. This current state of affairs has left many believers asking where God is in all of this. Why does it look as if He has forgotten about us?

Well, the problem isn’t so much the fact that He has forgotten us, as it is that *we have forgotten Him*. Our sinful rebellion against God and His ways is always what gets us into trouble.

We’re not the first people to find ourselves in a pickle because of our sins, and then to wonder where God is or to doubt His promises. It also happened to the Jewish people thousands of years ago.

Meet Malachi

The last book of the Older Testament is called Malachi.¹ In Hebrew, *malachi* means “my messenger.”

We know nothing about the Prophet Malachi apart from the book that bears his name.² We don’t know who he was or where he came from. We don’t know his mother’s name or his father’s name. But who the prophet was isn’t important. The only thing that matters is what he had to say—because he was, quite literally, God’s messenger.

Over and over in the Older Testament, God sent messengers who cried out, “Thus says the LORD.” In fact, 420 times in 418 verses, extending from Exodus 4:22 to Malachi 1:4, we find that phrase, “Thus says the LORD.”

God identified himself as the speaker in these instances because He wanted everyone to know whose authority was behind the message. Do you remember when we were children and one of the other kids said something we didn’t like? We’d blurt out, “Oh, yeah? Who says?” We wanted to know if it was really important or just a lot of hot air. Well, here in the Book of Malachi, the prophet says it’s God who says! And when God speaks, we’d better listen! We ignore Him at our own peril.

Historical Background

The writer of the Book of Malachi lived in the 5th century BC. The Jewish people had been allowed to return to their Land after the Babylonian Captivity. But even so, only a few of them went back. Most of them remained behind in Babylon. During those 70 years in Babylon, they had adapted to the culture and become comfortable.

We shouldn’t be so quick to judge them, however. Aren’t we often the same way? We get comfortable *with* the world, and we become more and more *like* the world, until finally we’re indistinguishable *from* the world!

Here in North America, I’m afraid this is what’s happening to the church. We’ve become too much like the world—and it shows! Some so-called “worship services” look more like a supercharged rock concert than a meeting of humble followers of Messiah Yeshua (Jesus). Many sermons are more about worldly standards of success (like health, wealth, and prosperity) than they are about serious sacrifice, kingdom work, and discipleship. Our thinking, our priorities, and our lifestyles are, all too often, mirror images of the world.



Malachi the prophet by Tissot / Duccio di Buoninsegna

I can almost imagine some of us, when the Rapture happens, being tempted to say, “Let’s not be in such a hurry, Lord. Let’s think about this first.” We’re too comfortable in this world with our satellite TVs and remote controls, our smart phones, our boats and cars, the Starbucks where they know just how we like our coffee, and our nice, comfortable neighborhoods with manicured yards.

There’s nothing wrong with these things, necessarily; but on the other hand, doesn’t the Bible teach personal *transformation* rather than *conformation*?³

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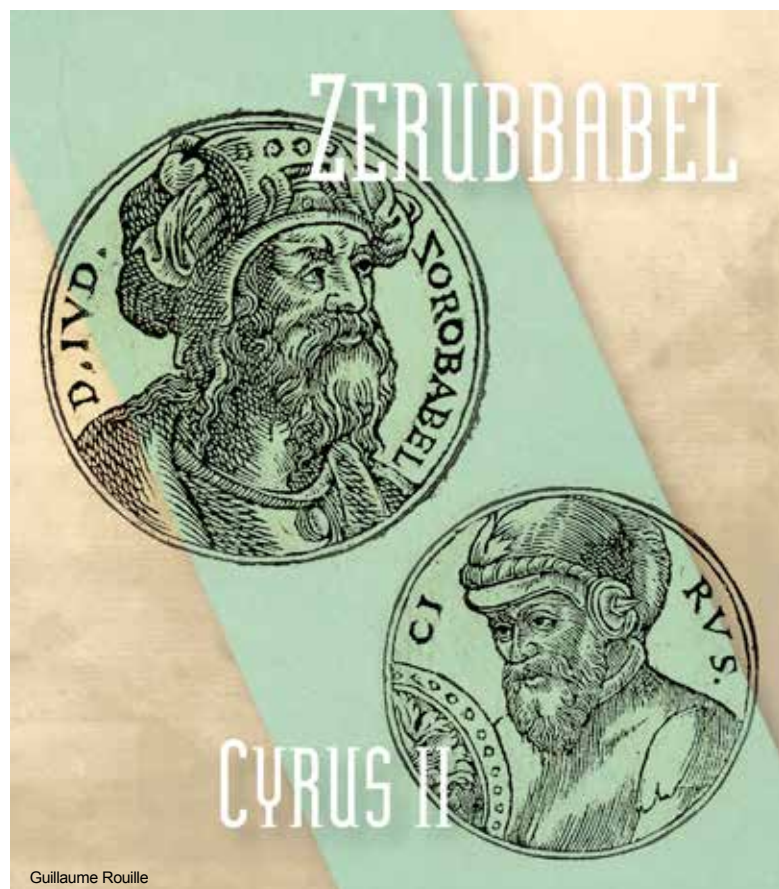
Their stay in Babylon had a profound effect on the Jewish people and their culture. For instance: they adopted the Babylonian calendar; they dropped Hebrew as their everyday language in favor of Aramaic;⁴ and to this day, the most authoritative and influential accumulation of Jewish teaching (outside the Bible itself) is the *Babylonian Talmud*.⁵

So in Malachi's day, when the king of Persia finally released the Jewish people and told them they could return to Israel, most of them said, "No, thank you. We're fine. We'll just stay right here."

The Remnant Returns

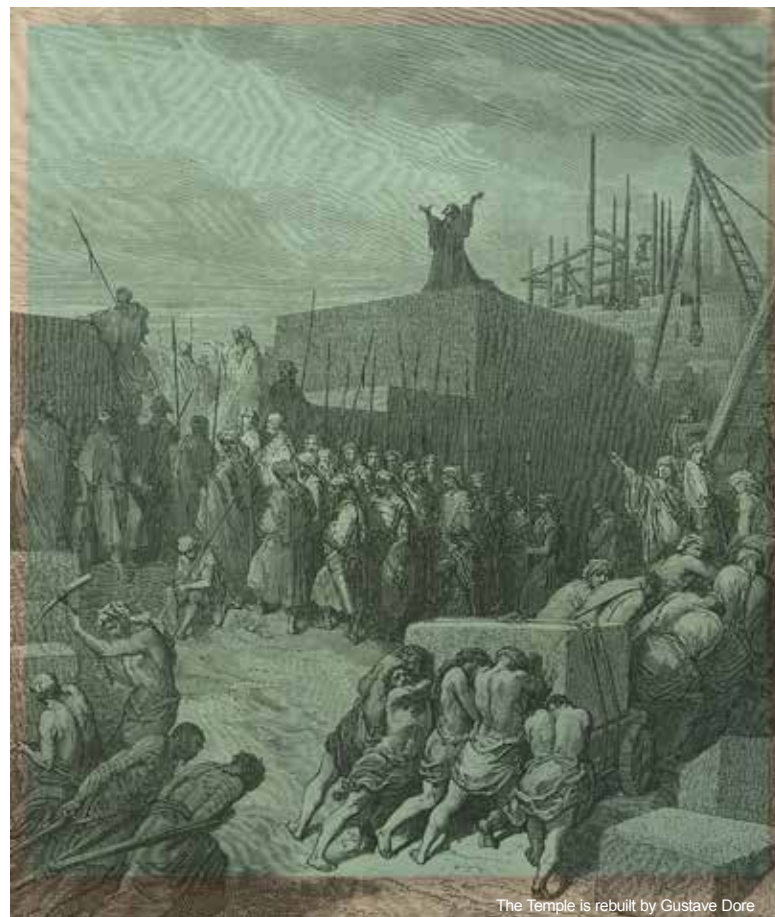
However, a few did go back. They returned in several waves, the first of which was led by Zerubbabel (Zech. 4:9; Matt. 1:12-13), to set themselves to the arduous task of rebuilding Jerusalem and its walls. They were excited about the possibilities because they remembered the prophecies about the restoration of Israel to her Land—and how glorious it would be.

For instance, they had read Jeremiah 31:8, where God said he would bring the Jewish people from the north country, and "gather them from the coasts of the earth . . . a great company shall return there." At long last, they would live in peace and security with all of their enemies vanquished (Jer. 32:37). And when they were restored to their Land, the Prophet Isaiah said the earth would be full of the knowledge of the LORD, just as the waters cover the sea (11:9).



The returning exiles remembered these promises—and many others, as well. It was going to be a glorious time! But then they stopped and looked around. Where was this great company of people that the prophets had talked about? Where was the prosperity and rejoicing that was supposed to follow God's great intervention in the Day of the LORD? Where was the righteousness that would cover the earth like the waters cover the sea?

From where they stood (newly returned to the Land), it sure didn't look like the great and awesome Day of the LORD had come! They were a small remnant because most of the captives had chosen to remain behind in Babylon. Jerusalem was in ruins. Its walls were broken down. The Temple was gone. And to make matters worse, treacherous, scheming enemies (who had taken over the Land during their absence) were infuriated by the return of the previous owners. What was left of Israel was under the thumb of the mighty Persian Empire. Understandably, then, the returning exiles were discouraged, demoralized, and disillusioned.



Nevertheless, they forged ahead with their plans to rebuild. They labored from sunup to sundown in spite of opposition from adversaries like Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites (Neh. 4:7). The men of Judah never knew when they might be attacked, so they held their tools in one hand and their weapons in the other as they worked (v. 17).

When they started rebuilding the Temple, the Bible says some of the old people remembered the magnificent edifice that Solomon had constructed. When they saw this one going up, they wept (Ezra 3:12). Their hearts were broken because this rebuilt structure was more like a little lean-to than the grandeur of Solomon's Temple.

What Went Wrong?

It's easy to see why the people thought something must have gone wrong. After all, God had promised to restore them to their Land. Not only that, but He said that once they were there, they would live in peace and security. That was His promise. But it wasn't happening!

Jerusalem was a pile of rubble. This little Temple was obviously shaping up to be a mere shadow of its predecessor. And enemies on all sides threatened the returning exiles! What kind of restoration was this, anyway?

That brings us to the Book of Malachi. Here, God has a special message for His people. He wants them to know several things:

- They should never doubt His covenant love (1:2);
- They should never doubt His promise-keeping power (1:11);
- They should repent of their sins and get their hearts right with Him (2:10-12);
- They should anticipate the coming of the forerunner (John the Baptizer/Elijah) and later, the Messiah (3:1ff);
- They should acknowledge their stewardship responsibilities as His people (3:6-18); and
- They should be comforted by the assurance that the ultimate Restoration is yet to come (4:1-6).

That last point was the piece of the puzzle they were missing. Their mistake was thinking that the return from the Babylonian Exile was the fulfillment of the ancient Restoration promises—and that the Day of the LORD had come. This error led them to doubt God’s love. It also caused them to wonder if God wasn’t able to keep His covenant promises to the Fathers (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) after all.

But they were wrong! This wasn’t the Day of the LORD. So here in Chapter 4, the prophet drives his point home: *the fulfillment of the Restoration promises is still in the future.*

The Day of the LORD

Notice what the LORD of Hosts says in Malachi 4:1: “For behold, **the day** is coming.” That’s the eschatological (end-time) Day of the Lord.⁶ The definite article (*ha* in Hebrew) is significant. This is not just “a” day of divine intervention—it’s “the” Day, a specific time when God’s judgment will be unleashed in an unprecedented fashion.

We sometimes think the Second Coming is all about exhilaration, elation, vindication, and other “warm fuzzy” feelings. We should remind ourselves, however, that the period that precedes it—the Time of Jacob’s Trouble—will be a dark and dangerous time for the people who are left here. It’s going to be serious business as the LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob intervenes and brings the nations—and the people of Israel—to their knees.



David Howard Hitchcock

“Burning like an oven, And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,” Says the LORD of hosts” (Mal. 4:1).

We’re still in the first verse and already He’s told us twice that this Day “is coming.” He doesn’t say, “It might come,” or “It could come.” He declares with absolute certainty that *it is coming*. This is a message for our generation, when many people scoff at the prospect of judgment or divine accountability. They thumb their noses at God and mock Him with impunity. But the Creator of heaven and earth assures us that a Day of reckoning “is coming.” It’s not merely someone’s opinion or a possibility. It’s a certainty!

Divine Judgment

When judgment comes, “All who do wickedly will be stubble.” In other words, evildoers are going to be burned up on Judgment Day! Fire, of course, is emblematic in the Bible of God’s judgment (Gen. 19:24; Ex. 9:24; Psalm 104:4; Isa. 5:24; Ezek. 30:8; 38:19; 39:6; Hosea 8:14; Amos 1:4, 7, 10, 12, 14; 2 Peter 3:7; Jude 1:7; Rev. 19:12). Israel will feel the “fire” of God’s judgment along with the rest of the world!

Interestingly, the emphasis here is on what people do: “All who *do* wickedly will be stubble.” Actions are important to God. He knows that what we *do* outwardly is a reflection of what we *are* inwardly. Yeshua said, “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45). The Book of Revelation says that unbelievers will someday be “judged according to their works” at the Great White Throne (20:12).⁷

Just look at all of the evil and injustice in our world. An oft-quoted variation on the Golden Rule says, “He who has the gold makes the rules!” The rich take advantage of the poor and the powerful tread on the weak. Power brokers and opportunists in world cities like Washington, Toronto, Brussels, Moscow, Beijing, Tokyo, London, or Sao Paulo think they’re getting away with their evil scheming and conniving. But someday, they’ll be in for a big surprise!



Last Judgment by John Martin

No Escaping Heaven’s Justice

Wrongdoers throughout the ages have committed horrendous crimes against innocent and defenseless people—and many of them thought they got away with it!

But they’re wrong. Even if earthly law enforcement never catches up with them, or if they kill themselves before they can be brought to justice, they will someday answer to God for what they have done. God’s messenger here says that evildoers are destined for fire!

Sometimes people ask me if I believe in a literal hell. Yes, I do. Not only do I believe that hell is real, *I believe it is a just and a priori necessity*. If there’s a God in Heaven (and we say there undoubtedly is), and He’s a good and just God (and we believe He is), there’s no way Hitler (to cite one notorious example) could escape judgment simply by putting a gun to his head and pulling the trigger. God’s justice demands that wrongdoers—especially someone responsible for the murder of millions of innocent victims—pay for their crimes. And pay he will!⁸

A Future Day of Healing and Restoration

“But to you who fear My name
The Sun of Righteousness shall arise
With healing in His wings . . .” (Mal. 4:2).

The beneficiaries of God’s promises are those who fear His name. The Book of Proverbs is the Bible’s great treatise on “the fear of the LORD.” That phrase, in fact, occurs 14 times in the first 23 chapters of Proverbs. For instance, it says, “*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding*” (9:10).

In what sense should we fear the LORD? It’s not like someone being afraid of spiders (arachnophobia) or heights (acrophobia). The fear of the LORD is rational and practical—unlike most phobias. It simply means we’ve experienced His goodness and we don’t want to lose those blessings by departing from His ways. We’re afraid of the consequences of disobedience. We don’t want to get “spanked!”⁹

In Malachi 4:1, then, He warns about the destiny of evildoers, saying they’re destined for the fire of God’s judgment. But in Verse 2, He says that for those of us who fear the LORD, “The Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings.”

What does it mean when the sun rises? It’s a new day! But Malachi isn’t talking about just any day. This is the Day of the LORD, when the Messiah returns to this world with healing in His wings. He will heal this world. He will fix everything that’s wrong—politically, religiously, and in every other way.

Out with the Old, In with the New

This process of transformation will require the tearing down of the old world order to make room for a new one. The Book of Revelation (18:1-24) describes the fall of commercial “Babylon”—headed by “the kings of the earth” (political leaders) and “the merchants of the earth” (business and economic interests; v. 3)—leading up to the Messiah’s return in power and glory (19:11ff). Satan, “the prince of the power of the air,” is the head of the current, corrupt, old world order (Eph. 2:2; cp. 2 Cor. 4:4). Over and over again, throughout history, the Evil One has sought to preempt the future, prophesied Kingdom of the Messiah with a counterfeit kingdom of his own. He has procured the services of earthly tyrants in this quest. In the 20th century, for example, Hitler famously sought to establish Nazi Germany’s thousand-year, worldwide Third Reich (or, “Rule”).¹⁰

Prophetic “Babylon,” portrayed graphically in Revelation 18, appears to be one more such attempt. It will be the devil’s last stand—the final, earthly expression of his old world order. Once again, he will try to head off the Lord’s coming Kingdom by establishing one of his own.

But that counterfeit kingdom, like its predecessors, is destined to fail, as Malachi points out:

“ . . . And you shall go out
And grow fat like stall-fed calves.
You shall trample the wicked,
For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet
On the day that I do this,”
Says the LORD of hosts (Mal. 4:2-3).

When the Day of the LORD comes, evildoers will be like ashes under the soles of our feet! The Messiah will move swiftly and forcefully to fix the world and usher in a new era of universal peace and prosperity.¹¹

When you think about it, the role of Builder and Fixer fits the Lord perfectly. After all, Yeshua, like His earthly father, was a carpenter from Nazareth—and that’s what carpenters do. They build things, and they fix things. That’s what the Lord is still doing today—He’s building people; He’s building congregations. And when they’re broken, He fixes them. He fixes broken hearts and broken homes. *Someday, He’ll fix the whole world!*

Wanted: Law-Abiding Believers!

“Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, With the statutes and judgments” (Mal. 4:4).

God tells the people to remember His Law. In Judaism, the five Books of Moses are “the Law,” known collectively as the Torah.¹² The Torah is a reflection of God’s nature and character. It was designed to nurture and to protect His people by helping them learn God’s ways. The Lord Jesus said the whole Law could be condensed down into two simple commands: first, love God; and second, love your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22:37-40). According to the Messiah, that’s the essence of the whole Law!

And it makes sense! First and foremost, God wants us to love Him (that’s a vertical relationship). Second, He wants us to love each other (that’s our horizontal relationships). Everything that’s wrong in this world today can be traced back to a violation of one of these two simple, fundamental requirements: either we’re not loving God, or we’re not loving each other!

But someday, God’s Law will be internalized—that is, it will be placed in our minds and written on our hearts (Jer. 31:33).¹³ He will intervene supernaturally to vanquish His enemies in a series of events we know collectively as the eschatological “Day of the LORD.”

As we approach the conclusion of Malachi’s message, it’s like he’s anticipating this question from the returning exiles: “If what we’re experiencing now isn’t the Day of the LORD, when will it happen and how will we know when it’s finally here?”

The Second Coming of Elijah

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD” (Mal. 4:5).

Some of us take this literally. We believe it means Elijah the Prophet will return someday as Messiah’s forerunner. But we’re not the first ones to figure this out. The rabbis have been teaching it for thousands of years. They believe Elijah will be here to announce Messiah’s coming. When Jewish families celebrate Passover, they typically set an empty place at the table for Elijah. It signifies the traditional anticipation that Elijah will someday come and take his honored place.¹⁴

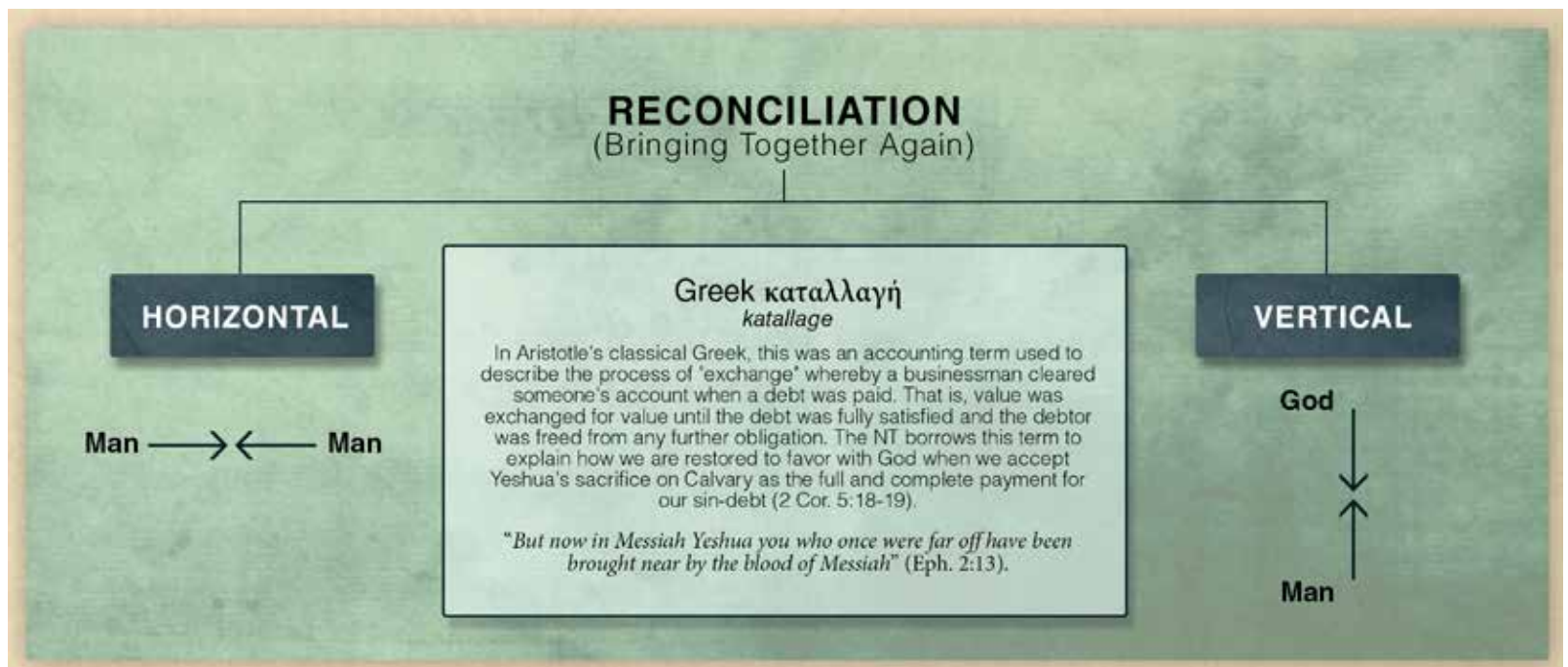


A seat saved for Elijah by Moritz Daniel Oppenheim

Then the LORD, through Malachi, tells us what Elijah will do:

“And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse” (Mal. 4:6).

That might seem like a strange way to close the Old Testament.¹⁵ However, it’s really not so strange at all. The theme here is reconciliation—children and their fathers being restored. Reconciliation is the central message of the Bible. In classical Greek, the term was used to describe the reconciling of a financial account when a debt is fully satisfied and the debtor is freed of any further obligation. The NT borrows the same term to describe the restoration of our relationship with God through the payment of our sin-debt on Calvary 2,000 years ago.



This, then, is the heart of God. He wants the hearts of the fathers to be turned to the children, and the hearts of the children to be turned to their fathers.

Why is the reconciling of fathers and their children so important to God? Because our heavenly Father, like any earthly father, longs to be reconciled with His children.

The reconciliation that Elijah will bring *horizontally* (between fathers and their children), God wants to do *vertically* (between us and Himself)!

Two thousand years ago, John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17). But John wasn't the ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy because He didn't come during the great Day of the LORD.¹⁶

The great and awesome day of the LORD is yet future—and we believe Elijah himself will come someday (during the Tribulation) to prepare the way for the return of the Messiah (Rev. 11:3ff).

The events described in these six verses will shake the world and change it forever. Once Messiah returns, and He's sitting on His throne in Jerusalem, this world will never be the same again.

More importantly, though, the message of Malachi can change *you* and *your life* forever. If you've never placed your faith and trust in the Son of God, you can do that right now.

And if you're already a believer but your faith has been wavering (like the returning exiles in Malachi's time), why don't you allow the prophet's message of God's unchanging character and His promise-keeping power to give you renewed hope?

“For I am the LORD, I do not change;
Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob”
(Mal. 3:6).



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ENDNOTES

¹The last book of the traditional Jewish Bible, the Tanakh, is Second Chronicles. The last book of the Christian Old Testament (OT) is Malachi. We sometimes call the OT the “Older” (rather than “Old”) Testament to emphasize its continuing importance and relevance. It's unfortunate that some people equate “Old” with “no longer useful.” We should remember that when Paul said that “all Scripture” is “profitable” (2 Tim. 3:16), he was talking about the OT!

²The ancient Greek Septuagint (LXX) took the term *Malachi* here as a title rather than as a personal name. The Targums and other traditional Jewish sources, however, identify Malachi as either Ezra or Mordecai (Ehud ben Zvi, “Malachi” in *The Jewish Study Bible* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2004], 1268).

³“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2).

⁴Keith Schoville, *College Press NIV Commentary: Ezra and Nehemiah* (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 2001), 19. However, 19th-century proponents of “Pan-Babylonianism” carried the hypothesis too far when they claimed that much of the OT, as well as some of the NT, took on baggage borrowed from Babylonian mythology.

⁵There is also a Jerusalem Talmud, but it's not nearly as widely used and influential as *Bavli* (the Babylonian Talmud). See “Tale of Two Talmuds” by Jill Jacobs at www.myjewishlearning.com.

⁶“The Day of the LORD” (Heb., *Yom YHVH*) refers to a period of God's dramatic and sometimes cataclysmic intervention in the affairs of His people Israel and the rest of the world. In a few contexts, it refers to more immediate developments that were still in the future when the prophet talked about them (like the destruction of Babylon in Isaiah 13) but may not have been associated with the much more remote Eschaton (i.e., the final consummation of history). Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum, on the other hand, holds that Isaiah 13 refers to an end-time resurgence of the literal city of Babylon—and God's subsequent judgment against it (*The Footsteps of the Messiah* [San Antonio, TX: Ariel Press, 1982], 539). Mark Hancock, one of my favorite prophetic writers, takes a similar position in *The End: A Complete Overview of Bible Prophecy and the End of Days* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2012), 361-69. In any event, many evangelicals recognize that *Yom YHVH* points for the most part to end-time events from the beginning of the Tribulation Period to the close of the Millennium. Any prophetic utterance that remains unfulfilled in our day will come to pass in the future at the biblical “end of days” (Heb., *qetz hayamim*, the period leading up to the coming of the Messiah; Dan. 12:13). True to form, old-school liberals and preterists disagree. They are skeptical of anything eschatological or apocalyptic. David Aune, professor of New Testament at Notre Dame, states: “An ancient Israelite thought the terms ‘ahārit’ (‘end’), ‘ahārit yāmim’ (‘end of days’), and *yôm YHWH* (‘day of the Lord’) do not refer to the eschatological consummation or the end of the world but rather to the more or less distant future (Lindblom 1952: 79-114). While the OT speaks of the ‘day of the Lord,’ such phrases do not refer to the end of history but rather to a future time (sometimes considered near and at other times more remote), when God is expected to act in human history to accomplish his purpose” (“Eschatology: Early Christian Eschatology” in Vol. 2, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman [New York: Doubleday, 1992], 596). Once again, then, we see that liberals and futurists view the Bible through very different grids. The liberal grid usually doesn't allow for supernatural intervention or predictive prophecy while the evangelical-futurist grid does.

⁷Some Bible teachers point to the mention of the Book of Life in this Great White Throne passage as an indication that believers will also be judged according to their works. That's impossible, though, since the sins of every believer who ever lived

(or ever will live) were judged collectively on Calvary 2,000 years ago (Rom. 8:1; Gal. 3:13; Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:20; 2:14). The Book of Life is evidently opened here to confirm that unbelievers' names are not recorded in it. To maintain a balanced view, however, we should point out that works are important for believers because of the Bema Judgment—a judgment to determine rewards (not salvation). Another name for the *Bema* (for believers) is the Judgment Seat of Messiah (Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:10). It occurs independently of the aforementioned Great White Throne Judgment, which is for unbelievers and takes place at the close of the Millennium.

⁸On the other hand, mass murderers aren't the only ones in danger of God's judgment. Sin is not only measured quantitatively, but also qualitatively. If someone hears the Good News of God's love as expressed through His Son, Yeshua of Nazareth, and rejects the offer of salvation—that person, too, will be judged, even if he has been a model, law-abiding citizen. One cannot help thinking that a person who can gaze fully into the face of pure, unadulterated love and then willfully turn away from it is also “evil” on some level.

⁹“For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives” (Heb. 12:6).

¹⁰See *Nazi War Aims: the Plan for the Thousand-Year Reich* by John R. Bengtson (Sioux Falls, SD: Augustana College Library, 1962). The first Reich was the Holy Roman Empire of Charlemagne (c. AD 800) and his successors, who claimed to have resurrected the Western Roman Empire. The second Reich was the unified Germany that arose in 1871 under Bismarck. The Nazis' claim of a thousand-year Third Reich came to an abrupt end with Germany's defeat in the closing days of World War Two in 1945.

¹¹In Judaism, the rabbis have a concept known as *tikkun olam*—literally, “fixing the world.” It's based on their recognition that the creation has been badly scarred by human failure and is therefore in need of repair or renewal. In traditional Jewish sources, it's sometimes expressed in the context of “perfecting” an imperfect world or otherwise performing acts that are in the public interest (as in the Mishnah at *Gittin* 4:2 and 5:3, or in the *Aleinu*, a traditional daily prayer).

¹²The Hebrew word *torah* literally means, “instruction” or “teaching.”

¹³Strictly speaking, of course, Jeremiah 31:31 refers to what God will do for the Jewish people when they “all” come to faith in their Messiah, Yeshua of Nazareth (Rom. 11:26). In the meantime, however, non-Jews who exercise Abraham-like faith become co-beneficiaries of the New Covenant along with Israel and Judah (Rom. 4:9-12). For New Covenant believers, the process of internalization and vitalization has already begun through the ministry of the indwelling Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:1-27).

¹⁴See my article “The Second Coming of Elijah” in *Messianic Perspectives*, March-April issue (San Antonio, TX: CJF Ministries, 2012). Available in the online archives at cjfm.org.

¹⁵The editors of *The Jewish Study Bible* (Ibid.) comment: “The connection between intergenerational reconciliation and Elijah is enigmatic” (1274). But it may not be quite as enigmatic as they think!

¹⁶It's evident that Malachi's “great and awesome Day of the LORD” hasn't come yet because its prophecies remain unfulfilled. On that Day, for instance, the nation Israel will be brought to her knees in repentance (Joel 2:11-32) as the military might of the nations is brought to bear against her (Zech. 14:1-3). That will be followed by the Second Coming of Messiah Yeshua (v. 4), the defeat of the nations, and the universal recognition of the LORD as King of all the earth (v. 9). That's when evildoers will be like ashes under our feet (Mal. 4:3). All we have to do is look around us to see that these things haven't happened yet—so they must still lie in the future.

THE DEITY OF MESSIAH IN THE TENACH & OTHER JEWISH WRITINGS

BY DANIEL BOTKIN

Some people reject the idea of a divine Messiah, either because they do not believe in Yeshua (Jesus), or because they do not believe in the inspiration and authority of the New Testament. They say it is not enough that the New Testament declares the deity of Messiah; if the idea of a divine Messiah is to be accepted, it must also be declared, or at least hinted at, in Jewish writings.

All the books of the New Testament, with the possible exception of Luke and Acts, were written by Jewish writers. Therefore the deity of Messiah *is* clearly declared in Jewish writings. Nonetheless, for those who do not recognize the inspiration and authority of the New Testament Jewish Scriptures, let's look at some other Jewish writings that declare the divine nature of the Messiah.

Those who argue against the deity of Yeshua often quote Numbers 23:19, "God is not a man." In their minds, this five-word statement (three words in Hebrew) settles the matter once and for all. If God is not a man, then the man Yeshua could not have been God in the flesh.

That reasoning sounds simple enough. However, it's not just simple, it's simplistic and flawed. Why? First, because it ignores the context of the statement, and secondly because it is not really a statement at all. It is only part of a statement. The complete statement says, "God is not a man, that He should lie: neither the son of man, that He should repent. Hath He said, and shall He not do it? Or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?"

Balaam's statement was spoken to explain to Balak the reason he could not curse Israel. God, unlike sinful man, always keeps His word. If we wanted to paraphrase Balaam, we could say that God is not undependable, like men so often are. Balaam's statement says nothing that rules out the possibility of God taking on a body of human flesh at a later date in history.

A divine Messiah can be inferred from several Messianic prophecies in the Tenach. Micah 5:2 (5:1 in Jewish Bibles) speaks of Israel's Bethlehem-born ruler "whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting [*miymeï olam*, 'from days of eternity']". The preexistence of Messiah is also spoken of in the Talmud, "before the creation of the world."¹

In Isaiah 9:6 (9:5 in Jewish Bibles) the Messiah's name is called "Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." A child who is given these names is obviously not an ordinary child. No ordinary child would be called "the mighty God."

Targum Jonathan, one of the pre-Christian Aramaic paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible, translates Isaiah's prophecy this way: "For unto us a son is born, unto us a son is given: and he shall receive the Law upon him to keep it; and his name is called from of old, Wonderful, Counselor, Eloha [God], the Mighty, Abiding to Eternity, the Messiah, because peace shall be multiplied on us in his days."² Before Yeshua, Jews had no problem believing in a future Messiah with divine attributes in this prophecy. Modern-day Jews want to avoid and evade this obvious reference to Yeshua's deity. The Jewish Publication Society's 1917 English translation leaves this compound name of Messiah untranslated, and simply transliterates it: "And his name is called Pele-joez-el-gibbor-Abi-ad-sar-shalom." Unless the English reader knows Hebrew, he will not see that this Child has divine attributes and is called "the mighty God."

Jeremiah 23:6 gives a shorter divine name to the Messiah: "and this is the name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS [Yahweh tsidkenu]." Curiously, the Talmud likewise assigns this divine name to the Messiah: "What is the name of the King Messiah? R. Abba, son of Kahana, said, 'Jehovah,' for it is written, This is his name whereby he shall be called, 'THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.'"³

Divine attributes of the Messiah are also declared in the rabbis' comments on Malachi 3:1, which says, "Behold, I will send My messenger, and he shall prepare the way before Me: and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his Temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith Yahweh of hosts." Commenting on this prophecy, Kimchi said, "'The Lord' is the King Messiah; he is also the Angel of the Covenant."⁴ Aben Ezra said, "'The Lord' is both the Divine Majesty and the Angel of the Covenant, for the sentence is doubled."⁵

The rabbis' reference to this special "Angel" brings up that which is perhaps the most compelling and convincing argument for the deity of Messiah. Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures there are several passages where "the Angel of Yahweh" appears to various individuals—to Hagar, to Abraham, to Jacob, to Moses, to Gideon, to Samson's parents. The Angel of Yahweh is visible and in human form. He walks and talks. He even eats and drinks. He speaks as Yahweh, in the first person ("I"), and appears to be indistinguishable from Yahweh. Jewish scholar Nahum Sarna says, "From several texts it is clear that the demarcation between God and his angel is often blurred."⁶

In the Bible, Yahweh says to Moses, "Thou canst not see My face: for there shall no man see Me and live" (Ex. 33:20). The New Testament likewise affirms this: "No man hath seen God at any time" (John 1:18). Yet the Bible plainly states that Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders of Israel "saw the God of Israel... they saw God, and did eat and drink" (Ex. 24:9-11).

How do we reconcile what appears to be a glaring contradiction? We have to understand it this way. No man can see God in His full, unveiled glory, for He is the God who dwells "in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see" (1 Tim. 6:16). Yet God *can* be seen in a veiled human form. He was seen by men when He took on a visible, tangible human form as the Angel of Yahweh in the Old Testament, and He was seen by men when He took on a visible, tangible human form as Yeshua of Nazareth in the New Testament. This is the reason that people who saw the Angel of Yahweh saw God, and it is the reason Yeshua could say, "he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9).

Theologians call the Old Testament appearances of the Angel of the Lord "Theophanies" or "Christophanies"—pre-incarnate appearances of the Messiah. Christophanies are defined by Dr. James A. Borland as "those unsought, intermittent and temporary, visible and audible manifestations of God the Son in human form, by which God communicated something to certain conscious human beings on earth prior to the birth of Jesus Christ;"⁷ Dr. Borland views Christophanies as "part of God's advance announcement of the coming of the Messiah."⁸

These Christophanies not only announced the coming of the Messiah, they also announced the deity of the Messiah by identifying the Angel of Yahweh as Yahweh in a human form. If Yahweh intermittently and temporarily manifested Himself in human form in the Old Testament, why is it difficult to believe that He visibly and audibly manifested Himself as a human in the person of Yeshua in the New Testament?

If one looks at what the pre-Christian Aramaic Targums say about the Memra (Aramaic, the Word of the Lord), and at what the Jewish writer Philo said about the Logos (Greek, the Word), and at what the rabbis said about the angel they call Metatron, it's obvious that the idea of a supernatural Messiah with divine attributes was not foreign to Judaism before the Christian era. After the establishment of Christianity, later Jewish commentators are usually silent or evasive about those Scriptures which speak of people seeing God or the Angel of Yahweh.

The reason for the rabbis' evasive tactic is obvious: these manifestations of God look too much like pre-incarnate visitations of Yeshua. Indeed, many of the pre-Christian Jewish comments about the Memra, the Logos, and Metatron are remarkably similar to New Testament teachings about the role of Yeshua. Such comments are far too numerous to list them all, but here are just a few examples:

- According to the Aramaic Targums, the **Memra** (Word of the Lord) created man; man was created in the image of the Memra; Jacob said, "the Memra of the Lord will be my God"; Abraham was justified through the Memra of the Lord; the Memra of the Lord gave Israel the Law; Moses prayed to the Memra of the Lord.⁹

- According to the Jewish writer Philo (born c. 20 B.C.), the **Logos** (the Word) was the instrument through whom God created all things; the Logos is the image of God; the Logos announces and interprets the will and mind of God to man; the Logos acts as a mediator; the Logos is the real High Priest, Melchizedek, who by his purity takes away man's sins and who by his intercession obtains God's mercy for man; the Logos is the medium of divine revelation to the soul; the Logos is the true Manna; the Logos brings righteousness and peace to the soul, but does not come into any soul that is dead in sin.¹⁰
- In the Talmud, **Metatron** is identified as the Angel who went before the Israelites in the wilderness in Exodus 33:20, the Angel whose voice was to be obeyed, the Angel who had authority to pardon transgressions. Because Yahweh's name is "in him," the Talmud refers to Metatron as the Angel "whose name is the same as his Master's."¹¹

Because Metatron seems to be divine, the Talmud asks the question "Are there then *two* Powers?"¹² Some say that Christians who believe in Yeshua's deity believe in two Gods, two Yahwehs. No more so than Jews do. Consider the following, taken from the teachings of Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, who was "the unchallenged leader of enlightened Orthodoxy" of the 20th century. Commenting on Exodus 34:6, Rabbi Soloveitchik taught:

"The Lord, the Lord' [why does it say 'the Lord' twice?—I am He who is there before man sins and I am He who is there after man sins and repents . . . 'Your iniquities have separated between you and your God' (Isaiah 59:2). The end result of sinning is the driving out, as it were, of the Holy Presence. But who, then, will take care of the sinner after the Holy One removes Himself and the sinner is left alone? Who will help him to cut himself off from his sins and escape from their contamination? Who will lead him back home to his heavenly Father? Who will extend a helping hand to rescue him from the quicksand into which he has sunk? 'Thou extendest a hand to sinners and Thy right arm stretches forth to receive the penitent.' . . . Who is it that extends a hand to the sinner and stretches forth his right arm to receive penitents? . . . 'The Lord, the Lord': two times the Ineffable Name is mentioned—the first removes Himself from the sinner, abandons him, but the second, the Lord who is there after man sins, remains. . . . The second Holy Name is ready to listen even after the first has shut the gates of 'Glory' through which man passes to stand before his Maker."¹³

The above discourse from a prominent Orthodox Jewish source sounds very much like a Christian discourse on the role of Yeshua. Yeshua is the arm of Yahweh stretched forth to receive penitents. He is "the second Holy Name" who rescues us. Those who say that this is impossible are guilty of the same error committed by the generation in the wilderness, that unbelieving generation who "limited the Holy One of Israel" (Ps. 78:41). Let's not limit the Holy One of Israel by telling Him that He cannot appear in a human body in the person of Yeshua of Nazareth.

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ENDNOTES

¹Pesiqta Rabbati, Pisqa 36.

²Kenton Beshore, D.D. LL.D. *The Messiah of the Targums, Talmuds, and Rabbinical Writers* (Montrose, CA: International School of Biblical Research, 1971), 16.

³Midrash on Lam. 1:16 & Midrash on Ezk. 48:35.

⁴Beshore, 11

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶Nahum Sarna, *Genesis*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 383 (Excursus 10, Angelology).

⁷Doug Ward, "The Angel of the Lord," *Gates of Eden* Vol. 8 No. 3, May-June 2002, 9.

⁸*Ibid.*, 10

⁹Michael Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus, Volume 2* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 19-21.

¹⁰Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Book I* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1976), 49.

¹¹Sanhedrin 38b.

¹²Chag. 15a.

¹³Pinchas H. Peli, *Soloveitchik On Repentance* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 84-87.

Fruit from the Harvest

by Violette Berger



When CJFM representatives lead Messianic Passover Seders and demonstrations in churches and other venues “in season and out of season,” the events are evangelistic, with a purpose that is two-fold: (1) to reach “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” with the Gospel message by showing them the foreshadowing of the Messiah, Yeshua (Jesus) in the Passover Seder and how He fulfilled the feast of Passover; and (2) to enlighten non-Jewish individuals to the Jewish roots of Christianity.

A Safer Haven

Michelle Beadle, CJFM representative (New Orleans), is blessed with a diverse, multifaceted ministry. She has shared Messiah in the Passover presentations for many years at the local Covenant House, whose purpose is “to provide a safe haven for homeless and at-risk youth ages 16-21. When kids walk through the doors, the Covenant House staff provides a hot meal, clothes, a bed, and much more.” An extensive, personalized case plan is developed for each youth, which includes goals in employment, education, health, and parenting based on individual medical and mental-health assessments. A variety of skill-building classes are available.

However, Michelle writes, “Along with physical and emotional support, these kids really need spiritual support as well. Often when we share the Good News of Messiah through the Passover presentation, kids find Jesus. This year, 13 young people prayed, for the first time, to receive Jesus as their Redeemer.” Each of them received a copy of the Book of John, and Michelle also left additional copies in the chapel. One of the young ladies who prayed for salvation approached Michelle, requesting help in learning more about the Bible. (She was reared as a Jehovah’s Witness.) Michelle has begun a weekly Bible study with her. Praise God that He has provided an even *safer* haven for these 13 young people.

Yeshua Heals

Yossi, CJFM worker and pastor of Kehilat Haderech (The Way Congregation) in Israel, shares the spiritual journey of one of his congregants. “A” comes from an ultra-orthodox Jewish background, but prayed to receive Yeshua as his Lord and Savior and was subsequently baptized. He suffered from a medical condition attributed to Asperger’s, and would easily explode with fits of rage. However, after he was born again, Pastor Yossi writes how he witnessed A’s transformation: “The Lord Yeshua has been renewing his mind and his actions, and we can see joy reflected in his eyes! He comes regularly to our Shabbat services and midweek meetings. He’s been set free from his anger attacks, is in good relationships with other people, and has even become a good testimony for the Lord in his family.”

Lost and Found

Richard Hill, CJFM representative and pastor of Beth Yeshua (Las Vegas), is praising the Lord as he reports that he led 13 Passover Seders within a three-week period at churches in Nevada and Western Arizona in which 35 persons, including one Jewish individual, prayed to receive salvation. Two individuals who shared their struggles especially touched Richard’s heart. After many years of caring for her husband who was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s, “Sarah” told Richard that her husband’s health had deteriorated so much that he was now institutionalized. She was feeling very sad and lost when a friend invited her to come to the Passover Seder. Out of desperation, Sarah decided to attend, and “the rest is history.” She expressed the joy she feels now that she found Jesus. And Richard is thankful that she is in a loving church that will encourage and help take care of *her*.

At another Passover Seder, “Edith,” a young Messianic Jewish woman, who had been walking away from the Lord, rededicated her life to Yeshua. She told Rich that she was convicted after, “I heard how Jesus, my Jewish Messiah, the Passover Lamb, loved me so much that He was willing to suffer a great death just so that I could have life and a relationship with the Lord. How could I walk away from God?”



More Blessings . . .

CJFM Director of Missions, Emeritus, Barry Berger (Phoenix) leads a monthly fellowship, *Tikvah BaMidbar* (Hope in the Desert), which recently held its 20th-Annual Citywide Messianic Passover Seder. This year 274 people attended, and 11 individuals prayed with Barry to receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

Following a Passover Seder led by **Michael Campo, CJFM Area Director (Chicago)**, a 14-year-old girl prayed with Mike to receive Jesus as her Lord and Savior.

David Lovi, CJFM representative (Chicago), requests prayer for salvation for a Jewish woman who attended a Passover Seder at a church. She told David that she has attended Passover Seders her entire life, but for the first time she saw and understood how much of it points to Jesus.

Bible Questions AND Answers

by DR. GARY HEDRICK

Have a Bible question?

Submit it to Dr. Hedrick at garyh@cjfm.org, or mail it to 611 Broadway, San Antonio, Texas 78215.

You may see your question addressed in a future issue of *Messianic Perspectives*.

QUESTION: I enjoyed your message this past Friday on the radio. However, you compared the Godhead to a man: body, soul, and spirit. That's correct in a certain sense, but there's a problem in the fact that God is only one Person—not three as proposed by the teaching of a "Trinity." I believe that is why Jesus said, "If you see me, you see the Father," since the Son is the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15). Furthermore, the Holy Spirit can also be the Father according to Luke 1:35.

ANSWER: This is an important question and I appreciate your bringing it up for our consideration. However, your argument is flawed from the beginning because you start out with an error—namely, that there's only one Person in the Godhead. That's not what the Bible teaches. The Scriptures are clear that there are three distinct Persons, each of whom has His own administrative function, within the Godhead. The Father (*Abba*), Son (*Ben*), and Holy Spirit (*Ruach haKodesh*) all have their unique ministries and roles in God's ongoing plan. They are known collectively as *Elohim* (which is a plural noun, by the way) or the Godhead (Gk., *theotes*; Col. 2:9).

Some people hear the word "Person" and think we're saying that God is a human being. However, the term "Person" has a specialized meaning when it refers to the members of the Godhead. It's admittedly not perfect, but I don't know a better way to convey the concept of the Trinity's complex nature. We can't say it is "three aspects of one God" because that's modalism (see below). And we can't say it's "three Gods" because that's tritheism. So, we say something to the effect that the Godhead consists of three co-existent and co-eternal Persons.

"Person" is defined by the Wikipedia online dictionary as, "a being, such as a human, that has certain capacities or attributes constituting personhood, which in turn is defined differently by different authors in different disciplines, and less formally by different cultures in different times and places." So even Wikipedia recognizes that a "person" isn't always human!

The Incarnation of the eternal Son of God is one of the "mysteries" of Scripture (1 Tim. 3:16), so I'm sure there are aspects of it that we will never fully comprehend. And frankly, I'm not in the least bothered by the prospect of never fully comprehending our almighty, infinite God. However, we know enough about the Incarnation to help us avoid these historical errors:

Modalism was the ancient teaching that there's one God who manifests Himself in three different forms or modes (and that the three never exist at the same time because they are really the same entity).

Monarchianism was the notion that the Father is the only God-Person—and that the Son is a lesser being.

Arianism taught that God the Father created the Son.

Apollinarianism insisted that Jesus was not fully human (it said He had a divine mind and a human body).

Docetism claimed that Jesus of Nazareth was a phantom (i.e., His body wasn't real).

Socinianism said that Jesus was not divine (and that His death, therefore, did not pay for the redemption of the world).

Nestorianism was the theory that Jesus was really two persons—one human and the other divine.

Tritheism was/is a misconception that turns the Triunity into three Gods rather than one (Heb., *echad*) God.

In the Jewish Bible, as you probably know, we have the definitive monotheistic statement of God's unity in Deut. 6:4: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!" In Hebrew, it's "Sh'ma, Yisrael: Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad!" (שמע ישראל יהוה אחד). The word *echad* in this verse includes the idea of a compound or complex unity—a unity that is composed of constituent parts. It's used, for example, in the Book of Numbers to describe a cluster of grapes (Num. 13:23)—"one" (*echad*) cluster made up of many grapes. If Moses had meant that *Elohim* is a simple unity (that is, monolithic), he could have used the word *yachid*. This word typically denotes a singular "one." In modern Hebrew, it has come to mean "only" or "alone."

Echad = Complex (Multiple) Unity

Yachid = Simple (Singular) Unity

If there was no distinction between the Persons of the Godhead, as it appears you may be suggesting, we would have several problems. For instance, what about the NT verse that tells us, "Then comes the end, when He [i.e., Yeshua] delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power" (1 Cor. 15:24)? The Kingdom originates with God the Father but is delegated to God the Son (Luke 22:29). At the end of the Millennium, the Son gives the Kingdom back to the Father. It is a beautiful picture—but it falls apart if God the Father and God the Son are one and the same Person with no distinction between them. It makes the Godhead schizophrenic with God giving the Kingdom to Himself—twice!

The *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995) has an informative note on this passage in 1 Corinthians: "The Son himself will be made subject to him. The Son will be made subject to the Father in the sense that administratively, after he subjects all things to His power, He will then turn it all over to God the Father, the administrative head. This is not to suggest that the Son is in any way inferior to the Father. All three persons of

continued on page 12

IN THIS ISSUE

The Day of The Lord
by Dr. Gary Hedrick
Page 1

**The Deity of Messiah in
Jewish Writings**
by Daniel Botkin
Page 8

Fruit from the Harvest
by Violette Berger
Page 10

Bible Q&A
by Dr. Gary Hedrick
Page 11

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continued from page 11

the Trinity are equal in deity and in dignity. The subordination referred to is one of function . . . The Father is supreme in the Trinity; the Son carries out the Father's will (e.g., in creation, redemption); the Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son to vitalize life, communicate God's truth, apply His salvation to people, and enable them to obey God's will (or word). *So that God may be all in all.* The triune God will be shown to be supreme and sovereign in all things" (note at 15:28, 1758).

You cited Luke 1:35, but nothing in that verse blurs the distinction between the Holy Spirit and the Father. On the contrary, here we find the functions of all three Persons of the Triunity as they relate to the Incarnation of the Messiah: "*And the angel answered and said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.'*" The Holy Spirit comes upon Mary; the power of *El Elyon* (the Father) overshadows her; and the Holy One (the Son) assumes a body of flesh in Bethlehem.

Similarly, all three members of the Triunity were present at Yeshua's baptism: "*And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice [i.e., the Father's voice] came from heaven which said, 'You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased'*" (Luke 3:22). The Spirit descended, the Father spoke, and the Son was immersed! Again, none of this makes any sense if all three of them are the same Person, like Oneness Pentecostals, Unitarians, and other anti-Trinitarians teach.



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