

# The Deity of Yeshua

## Confirmed by The Hebrew Scriptures & The Writings of the Jewish Sages

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**“For those teetering on the brink of denying  
the deity of Yeshua the Messiah or  
for those who are battling with those  
who are attacking the deity of Yeshua the Messiah,  
this work is a must read!”**

FOR NEARLY 2000 YEARS A FEROCIOUS DEBATE HAS RAGED between rabbinic Jews and Christians over the deity and incarnation of Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ). The question is this: Can YHVH Elohim, the Creator of man, the Almighty Sovereign of the universe, the One who lives outside of time and space somehow transmit himself downward through time and space, from the heavenly realm to the earthly and transform himself into a humanesque or corporeal form and appear to mortal man? Is it possible for him to suppress or conceal his unfathomable glory and power in some manner so as not to instantly incinerate man, the earth and the entire solar system and galaxy while at the same containing himself in a human vessel?

The Christians say that it is possible for the Creator to accomplish this feat, while rabbinic Jews equivocate on this point leaning toward an opposing viewpoint. While neither side has any problem imagining a miracle-working and all-powerful Being who created the universe, earth and man by fiat, out of nothing, by simply speaking a word, a Being who split the Red Sea, stopped the sun from advancing in the sky, resurrected the dead, made an ass speak, caused fire to fall from heaven, covered the earth with a flood and as quickly caused the waters to give way to dry ground, and who performed countless other miracles, the idea of the same miracle-working Creative Being transforming himself into a human being, for many is unthinkable. Such a concept is the stuff of lore, mythology and the polytheistic heathen cults.

Though the Hebrew Scriptures reveal a Creator who is transcendent to his creation, unlike the gods of the heathens, it similarly reveals an Elohim who is neither absent nor distant from man, but personal and approachable. Scripture records him interacting with his creation. He walked with Adam and Eve in the cool of the garden, walked with Enoch, and appeared and even talked to Abraham, Jacob, and Moses. This no one can deny without obviating the veracity of Scripture itself.

Yet Scripture presents enigmas and, to the human mind, even seeming paradoxes if not inconsistencies and incongruities, in the nature of Elohim. Is he singular or plural in his Being-ness? After all, the very word *Elohim* (God)—a word which occurs some 2600 times in the Hebrew Scriptures—is itself the plural form of the Hebrew word *Eloah*. Why the plural? Jews and Christians have debated this from the beginning of the common era and each is firm in their position. The Jews say that Elohim is one/*echad* and recite the famous *Shema* weekly, if not daily, stating that “YHVH our Elohim is one/*echad*” (from Deut 6:4). On the other hands, the Christians have developed the concept of the Trinity in order to explain this oneness, but plurality. Some Jews accuse the Christians of polytheism, while the latter aver that they are solidly monotheistic.

The problem is that within the *Shema* (i.e., “Hear O Israel, YHVH our Elohim is one/*echad* YHVH ...”)—a phrase that a religious Jew hopes to have on his lips at the time he draws his last breath of life, a phrase that for

the Jew is the foundation stone of his monotheistic belief—there is a paradox. The very terms are muddy and unclear and have been debated by rabbis for millennia. As we have noted, the word *Elohim* is plural and the word *echad*, though its primary definition is *one*, it can have uni-plural connotations, as noted in the venerable *Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon*. As the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (TWOT)* states, *echad* can mean *one, same, single, first, each, once* and is closely related to the Hebrew word *yachad* meaning *to be united* and *rosh* meaning *first* or *head*. Therefore, do these linguistic authorities prove the rabbinic viewpoint that the Creator is One, or the Christian position that he is a unified plurality? That is a question which is outside the scope of this work, but the posing of which sets the stage for the concept of *theophany* or *christophany*—two theological terms common in Christian theology, but hardly mentioned in any rabbinical writings—at least the rabbinic writings of the Christian era. But what can we find on this subject in the writings of the Jewish scholars *prior* to the Christian era? This is an interesting and enlightening subject that we will discuss later.

It has been asserted by some rabbinic Jewish theologians that the deification of the Messiah is strictly a Christian concept and has no place in pre-Christian Jewish theology. Some further maintain that the concept of a divine Messiah was foreign to the writers of the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament) and that such a concept did not come into Christianity until after the death of the apostolic writers toward the end of the first-century as Christianity was separating from its hebraic roots and was melding with Hellenistic (pagan) concepts where the idea of god-men (i.e., in Greek mythology) had been dear to the Greek religious mindset for centuries. It is maintained that Christianity simply adapted itself to that prevailing ethos resulting in its deifying Yeshua—its Savior and Champion—as if he were no different than some Greek god-man.

Is this true? Perhaps, after examining the evidence presented in this work the reader will have some fresh viewpoints with which to deal with the issues presented above.

One thing cannot be denied and must be stated up front. Though on the surface, rabbinic Judaism has presented a very firm and even strident face toward the Christian belief in the multi-faceted nature of the oneness of the Elohim, and has vigorously asserted that Elohim cannot become like a man or present himself in human form, we shall learn in this work that the facade they present on this issue and the reality of what they really teach are two separate things. Any student of Jewish mysticism, the *Targumim* and the *Talmud* knows this. In these deep rabbinic writing—where few Christians ever venture—allowances are made for theophany (a term to be defined below). This is the truth. The facts we present below, from their own writings, will speak for themselves. The rabbinic veil of mystery is about to be pierced.

**For those teetering on the brink of denying the deity of Yeshua the Messiah or for those who are battling with those who are attacking the deity of Yeshua the Messiah, what we present below is a must read!**

## What is a Theophany or Christophany?

These are hundred dollar words that need not scare off the student of Scripture. In fact, when armed with the understanding of these terms in their scriptural-hebraic context they may prove to be one's best defensive, even offensive weapons against those who would lead one down the path of denying that Yeshua came in the flesh and is the Son of Elohim—something that the Apostle John warns is of the spirit of Antichrist (1 John 4:1-3 cp. 1:1-4 and John 1:1-14).

- A *theophany* is an appearance of YHVH/Elohim to man.
- A *christophany* is an appearance of Yeshua (in his preincarnate state) to man.

The *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, Vol XI in its article entitled “Theophany” states that a *theophany* is,

A manifestation or appearance of deity ... The Biblical narrators were here conscious of the distinction between the real being of God unapproachable to man, and his temporary manifestation; thus, in the passage Ex. xxxiii. 20, whatever of the person of God enters the visible represents only a partial revelation of his being as adaptable to human weakness and limitation ... That only an intermediate intercourse is meant in these instances is shown in Ex. xxxiii. 18 sqq., where direct vision of the glory is denied and only an after glimpse is permitted when Yahweh has passed by.”

*Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* defines theophany as follows:

[A]ny direct, visual manifestation of the presence of God. The key word is visual, since God makes His presence and power known throughout the Bible in a variety of ways. But even in a theophany a person does not actually see God Himself. This is an impossibility, according to Exodus 33:20; 1 Timothy 6:16; and 1 John 4:12. What a person sees are the effects of God's unmediated presence.... In the New Testament [Yeshua] as the physical expression of God is a kind of theophany (John 1:14, 18; 14:9). But such is the uniqueness of His Incarnation that the word is not entirely appropriate" (p. 1044).

In this work, we will explore various manifestations of the Creator as he manifested himself to humans in human or some physical form. We will examine the Hebrew words, the Scriptural context in light of notable rabbinic commentary (or the lack thereof) to see what insights can be gained and conclusions can be drawn.

## The "Angel" of YHVH/Elohim

As products of the popular culture in which we live, when we hear the word *angel* certain images come to our minds. Those images are based on the Judeo-Christian concepts of angels which, originate in theological concepts from Judaism and Christianity. So as one studies Scripture and one comes across the word *angel*, is it not normal to conjure up in one's minds the popular notion that we have of *who* an angel is, *what* an angel looks like and does? Few students of Scripture go beyond the caricatures and define terms in their original languages, and fewer still view these terms against the contextual backdrop of the whole counsel of Scripture.

For example, the venerable *Encyclopedia Judaica* (*Jewish Encyclopedia*), perhaps the definitive multivolumed reference on things Jewish, published 100 years ago, says of angels in its article by that name,

Angels are referred to in connection with their special missions; as, for instance, the "angel which hath redeemed," "an interpreter," "the angel that destroyed," "messenger of the covenant," "angel of his presence," and "a band of angels of evil" (Gen xlvi. 16; Job, xxxiii. 23; II Sam xxiv. 16; Mal. iii. 1; Isa lxiii. 9; Ps lxxviii. 49, R. V.). When, however, the heavenly host is regarded in its most comprehensive aspect, a distinction may be made between cherubim, seraphim...("living creatures")...("wheels"), and arelim (the meaning of which term is unknown). God is described as riding on the cherubim and as "LORD of hosts, who dwelleth between the cherubim"; while the latter guard the way of the tree of life (I Sam iv. 4, Ps lxxx. 2, Gen iii. 24).

Angels appear to man as the medium of God's power and will and to execute His dispensations. Angels reveal themselves to individuals as well as to the whole nation, in order to announce events, either good or bad, affecting them. Angels foretell to Abraham the birth of Isaac, to Manoah the birth of Samson, and to Abraham the destruction of Sodom. Guardian angels are mentioned, but not, as was later the case, as guardian spirits of individuals and nations. God sends an angel to protect the people after their exodus from Egypt, to lead them to the promised land, and to destroy the hostile tribes in their way (Ex. xxiii. 20, Num xx. 16). In Judges (ii. 1) an angel of the Lord—unless here and in the preceding instances (compare Isa xlii. 19, 13, Mal. iii. 1) a human messenger of God is meant—addresses the whole people, swearing to bring them to the promised land. An angel brings Elijah meat and drink (I Kgs, xix. 5); and as God watched over Jacob, so is every pious person protected by an angel that cares for him in all his ways (Ps xxxiv. 7, xci. 11).

There are angels militant, one of whom smites in one night the whole Assyrian army of 185,000 men (II Kgs, xix. 35); messengers go forth from God "in ships to make the careless Ethiopians afraid" (Ezek xxx. 9); the enemy is scattered before the angel like chaff (Ps xxxv. 5, 6). Avenging angels are mentioned, such as the one in II Sam xxiv. 15, who annihilates thousands. It would seem that the pestilence was personified, and that the "evil angels" mentioned in Ps lxxviii. 49 are to be regarded as personifications of this kind. "Evil" is here to be taken in the causative sense, as "producing evil"; for, as stated above, angels are generally considered to be by nature beneficent to man. They glorify God, whence the term "glorifying angels" (Ps xxix. 1, ciii. 20, cxlviii. 2; compare Isa vi. 2 et seq.). They constitute God's court,

sitting in council with him (I Kgs, xxii. 19; Job, i. 6, ii. 1); hence they are called His “council of the holy ones” (Ps lxxxix. 7, R. V.; A. V. “assembly of the saints”). They accompany God as His attendants when He appears to man (Deut xxxiii. 2; Job, xxxviii. 7). This conception was developed after the Exile; and in Zechariah angels of various shapes are delegated “to walk to and fro through the earth” in order to find out and report what happens (Zech vi. 7). In the prophetic books angels also appear as representatives of the prophetic spirit, and bring to the prophets God’s word. Thus the prophet Haggai was called God’s messenger (angel); and it is known that “Malachi” is not a real name, but means “messenger” or “angel.” It is noteworthy that in I Kgs, xiii. 18, an angel brings the divine word to the prophet.

This article is a synopsis of Jewish thought on angeology for thousands of years. There is, however, one problem. The writer fails to define the Hebrew word *malak*, which is translated *angel* in our English Scriptures. This is a serious oversight, as we shall see. One cannot do justice to any subject without precisely defining the main terms.

Here is a brief study of the word *malak* translated *angel*, *etc.* in the Hebrew Scriptures:

- *Malak*/ מַלְאָךְ (noun; *Strong’s* H4397; *TWOT* 1068); used 214 times in the Tanakh; *Strong’s* defines it as *to dispatch as a deputy; specifically, of God: an angel, prophet, priest or teacher*. It is translated in the AV as *angel* (11x), *messenger* (98x), *ambassador* (4x);

This is how the word *malak* is used in Scripture (according to *Strong’s Expanded Exhaustive Concordance*):

- It is used 18 times in the historical setting as *messenger*.
- It is seldom used in the Prophets (except in Zech 6:4-5) except in reference to angelic messengers sent from YHVH’s throne.
- It denotes someone sent over long distances by an individual (e.g., Gen 32:3) or by a community (Num 21:21)
- It can be a representative of a king.
- It can refer to YHVH’s sent messengers such as:
  - Prophets (2 Chr. 36:15-16)
  - Angels (Gen 19:1; Ps 91:11)
  - *Angel/Messenger of YHVH/Elohim* denotes a heavenly messenger or emissary who had a saving or protective function. The relationship between YHVH and the Angel of YHVH is often so close that it is difficult to distinguish between the two. This has led some commentators to see the “Angel” of YHVH as the preincarnate Yeshua.

How *malak* is used in reference to *Angel/Messenger of YHVH/Elohim* (according to the *TWOT*):

This figure has the same general range of functions as other messengers. He brought messages, good (Gen 16:10-13) and threatening (Judg 5:23). He performed specific commissions of judgment (2 Kgs 19:35; Ps 35:5-6) and deliverance (Gen 22:11; Ps 34:7). He could also be called the “angel of God” (Judg 13:6,9, cf. verse 3), though this title is not exclusively his. He alone had the ministry of intercession with God on behalf of men (Zech 1:12; 3:1-5).

There has been extensive discussion of his identity. He seems to be God, since those who see him marvel that they have seen God (Judg 13:21-22) and he speaks for God in the first person (Gen 16:10; Ex. 3:2,6; Judg 2:1). He is identified with the preincarnate [Messiah] on the grounds of similarity in functions, especially the intercessory function noted above.”

The reader should see from this brief study that the popular notion of an “angel” may or may not fit the literal definition of the word. The word *malak* means *messenger*. All angels are messengers, but not all messengers are angels in the popular sense of the word. Scripture refers to human messengers sent by government officials who are obviously not flying, winged creatures from heaven. Scripture also speaks of the *Messenger of YHVH/Elohim*, which is so closely associated with YHVH Elohim himself that the two are almost indistinguishable. This messenger, as we shall see below, speaks in the first person for YHVH, has the authority of YHVH and is even called YHVH. Is this personage an angel in the popular sense of the word, or YHVH himself in some sort of a physically

manifested form, or is this messenger some intermediate being which is sub-deity in status, but of a higher order than the angels? These are all questions that the Jewish rabbis have been debating for millennia. There have been rabbis who have landed on all sides of this issue, as we shall see below. One thing is certain, the rabbis do not present a unified view on this subject among themselves.

In the rest of this work, we will examine a number of Scriptures where this *Malak of YHVH/Elohim* appears. We will also analyze Scriptures where the phrase is not used, but where YHVH appears in theophanic manner—where he appears to man, speaks and even eats with mortal beings. The goal and objective of this study is not hidden. **If we can show from a plain interpretation of the Scriptures, through a study of the Hebrew language and through rabbinical commentary—or the surprising lack thereof—that YHVH Elohim did appear in humanesque form, then why is it impossible to believe that Yeshua the Messiah could not have been YHVH in flesh form?** The implications of this are astounding and life-changing: either one accepts Yeshua for who he, along with the eyewitness who wrote of him, said he was, or we reject Yeshua Messiah as YHVH in the flesh and all convert to rabbinic Judaism or some other religion.

Now let's analyze some specific Scriptures where YHVH appears directly to men or where the terms *malak of YHVH/Elohim* are used to ascertain whether what the humans saw was a revelation of deity, or merely an angelic (in the colloquial sense of the word) messenger.

## Genesis 12:7 YHVH Calls Abraham

And YHVH appeared [ראָה/ra'ah the common Hebrew word meaning *see, look, behold, show, appear, observe, have vision, present oneself, be seen*] unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there built he an altar unto YHVH, who appeared unto him. (adopted from the KJV)

There God became visible to Abram and said ... (as translated in Rabbi S. R. Hirsch's Genesis commentary)

How and in what form did YHVH appear to Abraham? This is the question the rabbis have been pondering for two thousand years. On the one hand, the language of Scripture is clear and seems literal enough: "YHVH appeared unto Abram ... and said ..." Yet let's now note what some of the most notable rabbis have to say about this verse.

Rashi, the greatest Jewish Torah commentator of the modern era, has nothing to say about this verse in his commentary. Baal HaTurim, another notable Jewish commentator, in his Torah commentary, does not discuss the nature of the appearance. The *Soncino Edition of the Pentateuch* has no comments on verse seven. The *ArtScroll Bereishis/Genesis Commentary* states the following:

*And [YHVH] made Himself visible to Abram:* The stress is strongly on this *visibility*. The expression states that, not only was the Voice of God heard, but God Himself, so to speak, *appeared*, emerging from invisibility to visibility; revealing Himself. This is of far reaching importance because the Torah thereby specifically refutes the view of those who deny actual revelations and consider them products of human imagination and ecstasy. **The means by which God spoke to human beings is an eternal mystery. It is enough to recognize that He did indeed speak and reveal Himself to them in some tangible way** (*Hirsch*, p. 439). (emphasis added)

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, the great nineteenth orthodox Jewish scholar, in his commentary states, God made himself visible to Abraham, and said etc. The whole stress lies on this visibility ... Far from wishing to give even the very slightest idea of how God spoke to Abraham and to those chosen men to whom He revealed Himself, we still have to note what is actually told us here. The expression used says that not only was the Voice of God heard ... but [He was] made visible to Abraham (*Genesis*, p. 231).

Here the rabbis agree that YHVH literally appeared and spoke to the patriarch Abraham. If he could do this here, then why could he not send a "part" or "extension" of himself" (if you will) in the Person of Yeshua the Messiah?

**Genesis 16:7-13****Hagar and Ishmael Flee Sarah**

The first place in Scripture that the term “Angel [Messenger/*Malak*] of YHVH is used is found in Genesis 16:7. Here Hagar flees into the wilderness with her son, Ishmael, escaping from Sarah, her mistress and is resting by a pool of water when the Heavenly Messenger/*Malak* of YHVH suddenly appears to her. He commands her to return to Sarah and then proceeds to pronounce a prophetic blessing upon Ishmael:

<sup>10</sup> And the angel of YHVH said unto her, I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude. <sup>11</sup> And the angel of YHVH said unto her, Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; because YHVH hath heard thy affliction. <sup>12</sup> And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.

What was Hagar's response (Gen 16:13)? Christian translations of the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) record that she believed that she had (incredibly) seen YHVH and lived:

So she named YHVH who had spoken with her El of Seeing, because she said, “Have I really seen the One who sees me [and stayed alive]?” (adapted from the CJB)

Then she called the name of YHVH who spoke to her, You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees; for she said, “Have I also here seen Him who sees me? (NKJV)

Then she called the name of YHVH who spoke to her, “You are a God who sees”; for she said, “Have I even remained alive here after seeing Him?” (NAS)

So she named YHVH who spoke to her, “You are El-roi”; for she said, “Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?” (NRSV)

As we can see, the Christian translations give the impression that Hagar actually saw YHVH.

The *ArtScroll Stone Edition Chumash* (the modern Orthodox Jewish translation) translates verse 13 in this manner:

And she called the Name of HASHEM Who spoke to her “You are the God of Vision,” for she said, “Could I have seen even here after having seen?”

The Jewish *Soncino Edition of the Pentateuch* translates it this way:

And she called the name of the LORD that spoke unto her, Thou art a God of seeing; for she said: ‘Have I even here seen Him that sees me?’

Nineteenth-century Orthodox Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch in his commentary translates this verse as follows,

And she called the name of God that spake unto her: Thou art a God of seeing; for she said: Have I then also up to here too looked after anyone who might see me? [sic]

As we can see, modern rabbinic translations of this verse are ambiguous as to whether Hagar had a vision or actually saw YHVH with her natural eyes.

The *Targumim* translations (Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Scriptures from the pre-Christian era made by Jewish religious officials) translate verse 13 this way,

And she gave thanks before the Lord whose Word spake to her, and thus said, Thou art He who livest and art eternal; who seest, but art not seen! for she said, For, behold, here is revealed the glory of the Shekina of the Lord after a vision. (*Targum Jonathan*)

And Hagar gave thanks, and prayed in the Name of the Word of the Lord, who had been manifested to her, saying, Blessed be Thou, Eloha, the Living One of all Ages, who hast looked upon my affliction. For she said, Behold, Thou art manifested also unto me, even as Thou wast manifested to Sara my mistress. (*Targum Jerusalem*)

And she prayed in the Name of the Lord who had spoken with her; and she said: Thou art Eloha, seeing all: for she said, I also have begun to see after that He hath been revealed to me. [14] Therefore she called the name of the well, The well at which appeared the Angel [*Malak*] of the Covenant. (*Targum Onkelos*)

These pre-Christian era Jewish translations of this passage are less obscure and ambiguous about what Hagar saw. The first says that “the Word spake to her” through his manifest Presence in a vision; the second speaks of the Word of YHVH manifesting himself to her as to Sarah; the third says that YHVH spoke to her and revealed himself to her through the Messenger [*Malak*] of the Covenant.

So what did the Jews believe in the pre-Christian era? Did she have a vision or see a literal Heavenly Messenger? It would appear that they were more open to the latter interpretation than are some modern Jewish translations.

How do the Jewish rabbinical commentators explain this verse? Rashi, the preeminent Torah commentator of the modern era says she actually saw a messenger or an angel (*Rashi: the Torah – Bereishis/Genesis*, p. 159). The *ArtScroll Stone Edition Chumash* states that an angel or “God’s emissary” spoke to her (p. 73). Rabbi Hirsch in his commentary claims that Hagar saw an angel (a Messenger or Sent One) (*Genesis*, p. 289). *ArtScroll Breishis/Genesis* commentary also states that YHVH spoke to Hagar through an angel (p. 553).

So these commentaries unanimously agree that a literal Heavenly Messenger visited her, but upon what basis does this Messenger use the first person in pronouncing a blessing upon Ishmael? Here as in other places where the term “Angel/*Malak* of YHVH” is used, the rabbis insist that the Messenger is *not* YHVH and is *not* divine, but is only acting as an agent of YHVH and therefore is mandated by divine authority to speak in the first person, as if he were YHVH himself. As we shall see later in this work, the Jewish rabbis have not always had this interpretation—one which seems to have arisen during the Christian era to counteract the Christian concept of the incarnation of deity, and hence the deity of Yeshua the Messiah. (As we shall see later, the venerable *Jewish Encyclopedia* even admits this.) The rabbis of the pre-Christian era viewed this Messenger of YHVH as a manifestation of the Word or Presence of YHVH rather than as simply *an angel* in the common sense of the word. More on this later.

## Genesis 17:1,22

### YHVH Appears to Abraham and Establishes Circumcision As a Sign of the Covenant

And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, YHVH appeared [רא'ה/*ra'ah*, the common Hebrew word meaning *see, look, behold, show, appear, observe, have vision, present oneself, be seen*] to Abram, and said unto him, I am El Shaddai; walk before me, and be thou perfect.

YHVH proceeds to lay out to Abraham the terms of the Abrahamic Covenant including circumcision and the fact that Sarah would give birth to a son with whom YHVH would also establish his covenant. When YHVH was done Scripture records the following in verse 22,

And [YHVH] left off talking with him, and Elohim went up [אלה/alah, to go up, ascend, climb, depart] from Abraham. (KJV)

And when He had finished speaking with him, God ascended from upon Abraham. (*ArtScroll Stone Edition Tanach*)

And He ceased speaking with him; and the Glory of the Lord ascended from Abraham. (*Targum Jonathan*)

And when He had ended to speak with him, the Glory of the Lord ascended up from Abraham. (*Targum Onkelos*)

And he left off speaking with him, and God went up from Abraham. (LXX)

This text does not state *how* YHVH appeared or spoke to Abraham, just the fact that he did. According to the Hebrew rules of Biblical interpretation (and the rules of common logic when reading anything), a Scriptural text is to be taken at its literal or plain (*peshat*) meaning, unless the text itself suggests an allegorical (*drash*) or mystical (*sod*) interpretation. The Talmud (the Jewish Oral Law) states this in *Talmud b. Shabbath 63a* ( ... that a verse cannot depart from its plain meaning”) and *Talmud b. Yevamoth 24a* (“Although throughout the Torah no text loses its ordinary meaning ...”). Therefore, it is evident that YHVH appeared to Abraham in some tangible form with which humans are capable of interacting. If he did so once, we have to ask, cannot he do it again in the Person of Yeshua of Nazereth, the Messiah?

## Genesis 18

## YHVH Appears to Abraham and Sarah to Promises Them a Son

<sup>1</sup> And YHVH appeared [ראָה/ra'ah, the common Hebrew word meaning *see, look, behold, show, appear, observe, have vision, present oneself, be seen*] unto [Abraham] in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day. <sup>8</sup> And [Abraham] took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree, and they [i.e. YHVH and the two other malakim/heavenly messengers] did eat. <sup>13</sup> And YHVH said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? <sup>14</sup> Is any thing too hard for YHVH? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son. <sup>15</sup> Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And he said, Nay; but thou didst laugh. <sup>33</sup> And YHVH went his way, as soon as he had left communing [דַּבַּר, the common Hebrew word meaning *speak, say, talk, promise, tell, pronounce, utter, command*] with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place.

In this passage of Scripture, we find YHVH appearing in visible form to Abraham (verse 1), most likely eating a meal with Abraham (verse 8), conversing with Abraham and Sarah (verse 13-14), and having an ongoing discussion with Abraham over the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah (verse 16ff), and finally leaving Abraham after this lengthy time of communing or conversing with Abraham (verse 33).

The literal or *peshat* meaning of this passage of Scripture should be very clear. There are no hidden meanings, no metaphors or symbolisms. There is no allegorical language. It is simple historical narrative of the events that occurred. The writer presents it in a literal, matter-of-fact manner. Nothing could be more straight forward. YHVH appears to Abraham in some “diminished,” less potent form that humans can physically endure, he interacts at length with them through the partaking of a meal and conversation. But to many a Jewish scholar, the idea of YHVH interacting with humans in such a physical level seems absolutely contrary to what Scripture reveals about the nature of YHVH. The idea of YHVH literally appearing to men is enough to give them fits of mental apoplexy. Such a feat is scandalous and impossible ... even for an omnipotent and omnipresent Elohim who has the power *to do anything* and *be anywhere* he wants.

So what do the preeminent Jewish rabbis have to say about this passage of Scripture? *ArtScroll Stone Edition Chumash* admits that YHVH “visited him to show him honor for having carried out the commandment [of circumcision] and to acknowledge that he had thereby elevated himself to a new spiritual plateau” (p. 78). This commentary goes on to state that the three guests first mentioned in verse two were angelic messengers and that one of the same messengers was speaking for YHVH in verse 13 as his emissary. On what basis do these commentators draw this conclusion that it was not YHVH speaking, as the Scripture record clearly points out? They do not say. They simply state their opinion as if it were fact, yet no exegetical proof is given to prove their assertion (p. 80). As regards Abraham’s dialogue with YHVH over Sodom, the *Chumash* implies that Abraham was dialoguing through prayer (p. 83), yet states tersely in its commentary on verse 33 that YHVH the Judge departed from Abraham (p. 85). Jewish commentators here seem to understate YHVH’s physical involvement with Abraham by saying as little about it as possible almost, it seems, in hopes that readers will quickly pass over this portion of Scripture without questioning the implications of it; namely, if YHVH could appear to a man here, could he not appear later in the form of a Messianic figure, namely, Yeshua of Nazareth?

Rabbi Hirsch in his commentary says even less than the commentators of *ArtScroll Stone Edition Chumash*. His commentary on Genesis alone is 688 pages, yet when it comes to this passage of Genesis Hirsch has next to nothing to say pertaining to YHVH’s appearing in humanesque form. On verse one of Genesis 18, Hirsch states that “God’s Presence is everywhere, but it is not apparent to everybody” and because of Abraham’s devotion to YHVH through the act of circumcision (see chapter 17) Hirsch seems to imply that due to Abraham’s position of heightened spiritual awareness he was now able to perceive YHVH’s “Presence” (*Soncino Edition Pentateuch/Genesis*, p. 310). Yet is this what the Scripture says, that Abraham’s spiritual eyes were opened and now he “saw” YHVH with some new spiritual eyesight? Again, this is not what Scripture states. The plain (*peshat*) meaning of the text is that YHVH “appeared” to Abraham who saw him with his eyes. Hirsch seems to ignore the *peshat* (plain) meaning of Scriptural interpretation and implies an allegorical or symbolic meaning to it thus ignoring one of the fundamental rabbinical rules of Scriptural exegesis: the *drash* or allegorical level of interpretation cannot negate or

supplant the literal, plain or simple (*pesbat*) meaning of a passage (*Hermeneutics: How to Understand the Scriptures*, p. 34, by James Trimm; *Talmud b. Shabbath 63a* [“...that a verse cannot depart from its plain meaning”] and *Talmud b. Yevamoth 24a* [“Although throughout the Torah no text loses its ordinary meaning...”]). In his commentary on verse two and three, Hirsch refers to Abraham’s encounter with YHVH as a “vision,” which he sees while he is praying which abruptly ends when Abraham spies the three visitors (p. 313). As Abraham is entertaining the three guests with food (verses 4-8), the narrative immediately transitions to the three guests entering into conversation with Sarah where in verses 13 and 14 YHVH begins speaking to Abraham. He is either one of the three guests, or he reappears after being absent from verses two through 12. What does Hirsch say to this? NOTHING! In his commentary, he skips commenting on verses 13 and 14. He comments on every verse before and after, but not verses 13 and 14 which clearly state and show YHVH conversing with Abraham and Sarah. When we finally come to verse 33 where YHVH “left communing with Abraham” Hirsch in a very brief comment states, “Finally, this dialog—so to call it—between Abraham and the Judge of the World, in which a creature of dust dares to step before the Presence of God ...” (p. 329). Hirsch will not allow himself to call YHVH’s talk with Abraham a dialog, even though that is what Scripture presents it as, so he uses the term “tongue-in-cheek” and suggests Abraham was having a vision, though the rabbi fails to address verses 13 and 14, which seem to nullify that supposition.

As regards Genesis 18:1, Baal HaTurim in his commentary says little about the implications of YHVH appearing to Abraham in humanesque form except that for the passing statement, “God chose to dwell in the tent of Abraham” (p. 136) and that “[i]t is in honor of the circumcision that He appeared to him” (p. 137). He then goes on to say that the three guests Abraham subsequently entertains were the three archangels Michael, Gabriel and Raphael. This he deduces from the gematria valuation of the phrase “And behold! three [men]” (p. 137). It must be noted that though the first two angelic beings are mentioned in Scripture, the last one, Raphael, is not, but is a character of Jewish Apocryphal and mystical literature. On verses 13 and 14, Hirsch, Baal HaTurim has no comment.

Rabbi Shelomoh Yitzhaki (Rashi) in his commentary on Genesis similarly acknowledges YHVH’s visiting Abraham in verse one, but says nothing beyond that (p. 174). On verse 10, Rashi states that the one speaking here is an angel speaking in the “agency of the Omnipresent” (p. 181). As with the two previous Torah commentators Rashi, likewise forgoes any comments on verses 13 and 14 pertaining to YHVH’s appearance and conversation with Abraham and Sarah (p. 183). The subject is passed over almost as if it did not happen. In verses 22 and 23, Scripture states, “Abraham stood yet before YHVH and Abraham drew near [to YHVH] and said ...” (*KJV*), “Abraham was still standing before [YHVH]” (*ArtScroll Stone Edition Tanach*) (implying that YHVH had been there all along and had indeed been part of the earlier conversation (in verses 10-15). To this statement of Scripture, Rashi comments that, “But is it not true that he did not go to stand before Him; rather, the Holy One, Blessed is He, came to [Abraham] and said to him ...” Rashi states that this phrase as written in the Scriptures (as noted above) is incorrect and is “an enhancement of the scribes, i.e., authors and editors (p. 188). What is Rashi implying here to the point he questions the way the Torah is written claiming it has been redacted? He does not say. One can only guess, that perhaps the idea of YHVH’s being with Abraham all along from verse one to the present verse does not set well with Rashi and he feels the need to imply that YHVH had been absent from the scene between verses two and 17, but now reappears on the scene. If this is the case, we must again ask the question, is the idea of YHVH appearing in human-type form so contrary to rabbinic thought that Scripture needs to be warped and morphed to fit rabbinic inclination? Let us not forget that Rashi, Baal HaTurim and many of the other notable Medieval and early Renaissance Jewish sages were writing during the Crusades and just prior to the Spanish Inquisition. So their view of Christians and Christian theology was rather dim in light of the fact the Jews were being murdered, their synagogues sacked, their books and scrolls burned, and they were being forced to flee from their homes and communities. In fact, in Baal HaTurim’s Genesis commentary (p. 135) is a facsimile of a page from a Torah scroll from Venice (1524) with certain lines of the scroll inked out by Christian censors. Censors regularly entered synagogues, looked over the Jewish scrolls and removed or inked out statements they felt disparaged Christianity or Christian theology. We are not attempting to justify the rabbis’ bending of Scripture to fit their theologies (Christian theologians have doing it for nearly 2000 years), but we must understand that this may have contributed to their reluctance to accept the incarnation of deity. Against the contextual backdrop of the times where Jews were being persecuted at the hands of Christians, is it any wonder that he rabbis steered wide of anything in their Torah which might even slightly validate a Christian doctrine?

On verse 33, Rashi has nothing to say except “Once the advocate become silent the judge departed (p. 191).

So what is the “bottom line,” so to speak of our above discussion? Simply stated, the rabbis do not know what to think of YHVH’s appearance to Abraham. They offer differing, confusing and even contradictory explanations. They cannot deny the fact that he was there, yet they attempt to blunt the reality of his being in some human-type form. That just does not suit their fancies, for whatever reasons, and they do everything possible to steer the thoughts of the reader away from that conclusion without appearing to rewrite Scripture to state their opposing viewpoints to Scripture. All this confusion is cleared up when one brings to the table the ultimate Torah commentary: the *Brit Chadashah* (the Apostolic Scriptures). This we will discuss below.

## Genesis 22:11,15

### The Messenger of YHVH at the Binding of Isaac

In Genesis 22:11,15-17 we read the following,

<sup>11</sup> And the Messenger/*Malak* of YHVH called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I . . . <sup>15</sup> And the Messenger/*Malak* of YHVH called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, <sup>16</sup> And said, By myself have I sworn, saith YHVH, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: <sup>17</sup> That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven.

In this passage, there is no mention of the Messenger of YHVH appearing to Abraham in some bodily form, only his voice calling from heaven. What we want to emphasize in this passage is that the Messenger of YHVH is equating himself with YHVH (verse 16). The biblical passages where the *Malak* of YHVH equates himself with YHVH while appearing in human form have perennially defied reasonable explanation by the Jewish sages.

Notwithstanding, the ancient *Targum Jerusalem* (the pre-Christian Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Scriptures) equates the *Malak* of YHVH with “the Word of Elohim” in verse eight implying that YHVH and the Word of YHVH are in some way different from each other (this will be discussed at length later):

And Abraham said, The Word of Elohim will prepare for me a lamb; and if not, then thou art the offering, my son! And they went both of them together with a contrite heart.

Some rabbis asserts that “the angel speaks in God’s name, in first person” while others maintain that it was “God Himself who opened the heavens and addressed Abraham’ (*ArtScroll Bereishis/Genesis Commentary*, p. 808). If the latter is true, than the *Malak* of Elohim/YHVH here is none other than Elohim himself. And logically, if he is Elohim here, then he must be Elohim/YHVH in the other passages where he is mentioned. And if Elohim can appear in human form, speak to men and eat with them (as in Genesis 18) then the question must be asked: why can’t YHVH appear in human form as the Messiah; namely, Yeshua the Messiah? After all, in Proverbs 30:4 (a passage we will discuss at length later) we read,

Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists?  
who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth?  
**what is his name, and what is his son’s name**, if thou canst tell? (*KJV*) (emphasis added)

Additionally, in Isaiah 53, a passage recognized by both Jewish and Christian scholars as referring to Messiah verse one states,

Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of YHVH revealed?

Here, the Messiah is called “the Arm of YHVH.” Is the *Malak* of YHVH/Elohim this “Arm of YHVH” who does the earthly bidding of the One in heaven and who acts as the intermediary between Elohim and man? Read on as we further explore this idea.

## Genesis 32:24-32

### Jacob Wrestling With the Messenger of YHVH

In verse 24 we read,

And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled with a man [Heb *iysb*, *Strong’s* H376] or *heavenly messenger* [i.e. Heb *malak*]. (*KJV*, see Hosea 12:4)

In the following passages, we see that this man was Elohim.

You have power with Elohim and with men, and have prevailed. (verse 28, based on the KJV)

... for you have striven with the Divine [Elohim] and with man and have overcome. (verse 28, *ArtScroll Stone Edition Tanach* and *Chumash*)

Then Jacob says that he has “seen [Elohim] face to face” (KJV, CJB and *Soncino Edition Pentateuch*, Second Edition). The two standard Orthodox Jewish versions of the Torah, the *ArtScroll Stone Edition Tanach* and the *ArtScroll Stone Edition Chumash*, and Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch’s Torah commentary *The Pentateuch* (by Judaica Press) all read, “For I have seen the Divine face to face.” Here they have translated the Hebrew word *Elohim* as *the Divine* (אלהים פנים/*Elohim panim*).

Which translation of the word *Elohim* is the correct one? Before resorting to human sources to solve this dilemma, does Scripture itself interpret this passage for us giving it clear light? Most assuredly so. In Hosea 12:2-5 we read,

[YHVH] hath also a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his doings will he reward him. He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and by his strength he had strove with [Elohim]. He strove with an angel [Heb *malak* or *heavenly messenger* in many instances referring to YHVH himself, as noted elsewhere in this work] and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication to him; he found him in Beth-El, and there he spoke with us; and [YHVH Elohim] of hosts; [YHVH] is his name. (based on the KJV)

The *Stone Edition Tanach* renders this passage as follows (starting in verse four):

In the womb he seized his brother’s heel, and with his strength he struggled with [an angel of] God; he struggled with an angel and prevailed; [the angel] wept and beseeched him: ‘In Beth-el He will find us and there He will speak with us.’ HASHEM is the God of Legions; HASHEM is His remembrance. (bracketed supplied word are in the original)

So which translation is correct? The first one indicates Jacob was wrestling with a Heavenly Messenger who was none other than YHVH Elohim, while the second translation is cast in such a light as to imply that Jacob was wrestling with merely an angel.

Does the word *Elohim* mean *the Divine*? It is interesting to note that in the Authorized Version the word *Elohim* appears 2606 times in the Hebrew Scriptures. It is translated as *God* 2346 times, *god* 244 times and several other words less than five times each (e.g. *judge, goddess, great, mighty, angels*). As in all cases with a word which can have several meanings, the context of the Scripture passage will determine its meaning and its subsequent translation from the original language into English. The word *divine* was not employed in the 1611 Authorized Version (KJV) in reference to *Elohim* anywhere in the Tanakh, since the word had a pejorative connotation (as in *divination* or one who *divines* the future). This is not the case in our modern parlance as the modern *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary* defines *divine* in its primary definition as “relating to, or proceeding directly from God, being a deity, directed to deity.” All standard English (Christian) versions (NKJV, NAS, NIV, NRSV) translate this passage as “God face to face” and none use the term “the Divine face.” *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon* defines *Elohim* (in those Scripture passages where it is a clear reference to deity, as opposed to a goddess or a human judge) as *the true God, Yahweh is (the) God*. Never does this Hebrew lexicon define *Elohim* as *the Divine*. Similarly, nowhere does the *TWOT* in defining the word *Elohim* suggest that *the Divine* could be an appropriate substitute for the title of YHVH, *Elohim*. So we must ask, why do the two Jewish translations of this passage (noted above) seem to run cross grain to a plethora of other translations, both Jewish and Christian, as well as noted lexicographers to translate it as they do? Is this a case of translation bias? Could translating *Elohim panim* as *Elohim face to face* as so many other translators do be a tacit admission that Elohim can appear as a man, hence giving credence to the Christian assertion that Yeshua was Elohim in the flesh? It is interesting to consider this. But before jumping to conclusions, let us examine other passages in the Hebrew Scriptures where Elohim and man seem to come face to face. How do the rabbis treat these passages? How do their commentaries explain these difficult passages?

### An Analysis of Some Leading Rabbinic Commentaries

☞ *Stone Edition Chumash* (pages 176-177): This commentary states that the man with whom Jacob wrestled was an angel (no doubt based on the passage found in Hosea 12:4), yet the fact that the *malak* was an angel in

the common meaning of the word, is an assumption, since as we have already noted *malak* means *messenger* and in this context *heavenly messenger* with *angel* being but one type of heavenly messenger. Furthermore, the *Chumash* refers to the *malak* as a *Divine*. What is the terminology here supposed to imply, based on the meaning of the word *divine*? Was the angel deity or not? At the very least, the reasons given for explaining away the idea that Jacob was wrestling with Elohim are ambiguous.

- ✎ *The Soncino Edition Pentateuch* (p. 124): Here the authors state simply, “We have here another instance of ‘God’ interchanging with ‘angel of God’, as in [Genesis] 16:7 [and] 31:11” (commentary on verse 29). On verse 31 this commentary states, “The Targum [the Aramaic translation of the Pentateuch made in the second-century in response to the spread of Christianity “when proponents of the new religion began to interpret certain passages to accord with their own doctrines” (*The Encyclopedia of the Jewish Religion*, p. 376)] translates, ‘I have seen angels of God face to face.’” One can only wonder if the *Targum’s* translation of this passage is not an example of the translators redacting this Torah passage in attempts to steer the reader away from the suggestion that YHVH appeared to Jacob in the form of a man (as a plain reading of the text seems to suggest)—a conclusion that could pave the way for the concept of idea that Messiah was YHVH incarnate (in the flesh).
- ✎ *ArtScroll Bereishis Genesis Commentary*, Vol. 1b postulates a total different explanation as to who Jacob wrestled with. Was it Elohim, an angel or something else. They state, “The ‘man’ who struggled with Jacob was not a human being, nor was he an ordinary angel. As Rashi comments, the ‘man’ was Samael, the guardian angel of Esau” (p. 1397) who was the angel of evil (Ibid. p. 1437). The commentary goes on to say that not all rabbis agreed with Rashi’s assertion. Tanchuma suggests that this was the angel Michael, while Rabbi Bachya “perceives this as symbolizing the righteous person’s inner struggle against the forces of evil.” Rambam “regards this incident as a prophetic vision (just as he regards Abraham’s vision of the three angels in [Genesis] 18:2f). Ramban ... challenges this vigorously, posing man questions (for example: If Jacob’s wrestling was only a vision, why did he limp when he awoke? Abarbanel cites Ralbag who in defense of Rambam, holds that Jacob’s hip injury might have been caused by autosuggestion, an aftermath of the prophetic vision” (Ibid.) and the debate between the rabbis continues on and on as to the nature of the angel with whom Jacob wrestled.

As these quotes have been provided (and there are more to come) to show the reader that there are some thing the Jewish rabbis for all their learning, brilliance, respectability and passion for Torah simply cannot figure out. Some will even contrive fantastical scenarios and explanations in attempts to explain a passage in such a way all the while leaving out some of the more plausible conclusions.

To the rabbis’ credit, they have in mind the passage in Exodus 33:20, which plainly states that, “You cannot see my face, for no man shall see me and live.” This, the reader will recall, is the occasion where Moses requested to see the glory (or splendor) of YHVH Elohim (verse 18). Indeed, can the man look into the glorious face of the One who made our sun, which is the smallest of billions of suns, and expect to live? Yet is it possible for the same YHVH to place all his glory “on the proverbial shelf” so to speak and to appear to man without his glory? Can he do anything? If this is possible, then can Jacob have seen the face of Elohim temporarily without his glory and Exodus 33:20 still be valid? After all, the rabbis have numerous reasons, and some very creative ones to explain why Elohim is actually an angel in Genesis 32, when a simple explanation, based on the literal meaning of the text, could suffice to explain why the Being Jacob encountered really was Elohim, as Scripture seems to indicate so plainly.

Rashi (Rabbi Shelomoh Yitzhaki, 1040–1105), considered by some to be the most notable Orthodox Jewish Torah commentary of the modern era, should have some notable comments on verses 28 and 30 (*The Sapirstein Edition Rashi, The Torah*) regarding Jacob’s the nature of the being with whom Jacob was wrestling. Was it Elohim, an angel, or something else? In fact, he has *no* comments at all in his venerable commentary! (pages 371–372) It must be noted at this point, that not only can one learn much from what the rabbis say, but one can learn as much by what they *do not say*—especially when they comment voluminously on Scripture preceding and proceeding a certain troublesome Scriptural passage, but say little or nothing on that particular, especially controversial, passage.

As noted above, Rashi does cite certain rabbinic traditions equating the man Jacob wrestled with to the ministering angel of Esau (p. 370). He also notes, as further discussed below, that the phrase in verse 24, “a man wrestled” can mean, “and a man became dusted” because, according to the meaning of the Hebrew words, this phrase can literally mean, “because they raised dust with their feet through their movement” as they wrestled (p. 370).

Let us now turn our attention to the comments of noted nineteenth-century German rabbinic scholar and founder of neo-Orthodoxy, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888). On verse 30, Hirsch admits that “Jacob recognized in this opponent, something divine, something justified, appointed by God.” Then Hirsch pens a supposed conversation that Jacob and the Heavenly Messenger might have had where the Messenger states that he is a Messenger of God, created of Elohim, yet neither an ordinary angel nor deity (p. 507). This idea is similar to that expressed by other rabbinic writers that this was Samael, the guardian angel of Esau, “a man who climaxed the Patriarchal tradition” (*ArtScroll Bereishis*, p. 1397)

What does another eminent Jewish rabbinic Torah scholar state in his regarding *who* Jacob wrestled with in Genesis 32? We should like to analyze now what Rabbi Jacob ben Asher (c. 1270-c. 1343) who is known as Baal HaTurim (*Davis Edition Baal HaTurim Chumash — Bereishis*) says in his commentary. Virtually nothing! He simply refers to the *man* with whom Jacob wrestled as *the angel* and fails to comment on the implication in verses 28 and 30 of this individual being Elohim himself in human form. Again, we can learn much from the silence of the rabbis. This is the case here with Baal HaTurim (p. 307).

This rabbi does have some interesting comments on verse 24 of our passage, however where we read, “And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.” Here Baal HaTurim comments that the gamatria (the letter-number valuation of the Hebrew letters) of the phrase, “a man wrestled” is 118, which equals that of the phrase, “the throne of glory” (*Talmud, Challin 91a*). The phrase “a man wrestled” can also mean “he covered with dust” or “he raised dust” in reference to the fact that during the wrestling match the two men stirred the dust of the ground as they entangled. Baal HaTurim gives a fanciful explanation of this wording. He states that as they wrestled they raised dust heavenward to the throne of glory. This must have been some dual! (Ibid. p. 305).

What can we deduce from the comments of the Jewish rabbis on this passage of Scripture? They refuse to admit that Jacob was wrestling with Elohim though every indication is that Scripture points to the fact that this must have been the case. Additionally, the rabbis are prone to concoct fanciful, non-biblical explanations as to why this being was not Elohim. They state that he was an angel, some divine being, no ordinary angel, or Samael, the demon-guardian angel of Esau. They debate and argue and sometimes contradict each other and themselves as to who this being was. There is much confusion and uncertainty. But one thing upon which they can all agree: it was not Elohim in human form. On this point the honest inquirer is compelled to ask, “Why?” Is it because the rabbis refuse to admit what the Christians have been saying all along, that the Being with whom Jacob wrestled was a preincarnate appearance of Yeshua?

Now consider this. As noted above from the rabbis’ own understanding of the meaning of the Hebrew text, “a man wrestled” (verse 24) can mean “a man covered with dust” or “raised dust to the throne of glory.” If Jacob saw the “face of Elohim” (verse 30) and Yeshua in the Apostolic Scriptures clearly state that no one has seen the face of the Father (John 1:18), yet Scripture, as noted above, seems to clearly state that Jacob was wrestling with Elohim how can this be and yet Scripture remain unbroken (John 10:35)? Was Jacob indeed wrestling with Yeshua in his preincarnate state? Preposterous? The rabbis have no clear answers to this difficult passage—only numerous reasons why it cannot be so, when all they lack is one good reason why it could be so, especially when confronted with the plain meaning of Scripture which states that Jacob was wrestling with Elohim (in some form or another, but still Elohim). If this was Yeshua in his preincarnate state could the rabbinical covered-in-dust concept lend credence to the Christian incarnation concept of Yeshua and the Christian idea that Yeshua appeared on a number of occasions in the Hebrew Scriptures in human form (called Theophanies or Christophanies)? Could this not be a picture of Elohim condescending himself to come to earth in human form from the throne of glory covered in the clay dust of human flesh wrestling with the carnal, prideful and devious nature (of which Jacob, the heel snatcher or supplanter, was a type), breaking the stubborn will of man, wounding the flesh (Jacob left the dual wounded in the hip), and left with a new name and identity (Israel meaning *prince, power, strength and prevailer of E*)? Jacob left this spiritual encounter with YHVH a new, changed, humbled and wounded in the flesh man ready to encounter Edom (representing the giants of the land and spiritual warfare on experiences in the wilderness of life before entering the “Promised Land” of YHVH’s kingdom) and overcome his enemies no longer in his, but YHVH’s strength. Jacob was now ready to enter Beth-el (House of El) of the Promised Land as a resurrected new man in Yeshua the resurrected God-man.

**Genesis 35:1,6-7,9-10,15 (cp. 32:23-31)****Jacob Returns to Bethel and Encounters Elohim**

<sup>1</sup> **And Elohim said unto Jacob**, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto **El, that appeared unto thee** when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother. <sup>7</sup> And he built there an altar, and called the place Elbethel: **because there Elohim appeared unto him**, when he fled from the face of his brother. <sup>9</sup> **And Elohim appeared unto Jacob again**, when he came out of Padanaram, and blessed him. <sup>10</sup> **And Elohim said unto him**, Thy name is Jacob: thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name: and he called his name Israel. <sup>11</sup> **And Elohim said unto him**, I am El Shaddai: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins; <sup>12</sup> And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land. <sup>13</sup> **And Elohim went up [literally, ascended] from him in the place [maqowm] where he talked with him.** <sup>14</sup> **And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he talked with him**, even a pillar of stone: and he poured a drink offering thereon, and he poured oil thereon. <sup>15</sup> **And Jacob called the name of the place where Elohim spake with him, Bethel.** (emphasis added)

The Scriptural account of the encounter between Elohim and Jacob is so matter-of-fact and is written in such a manner as to be familial, if not almost casual. There are no embellishments or hyperbole, just statement of literal fact. Again, the plain (*peshat*) meaning of the text seems clear: Elohim spoke with man face-to-face. This was not the only time Jacob had experienced such a divine encounter as we have previously noted in his encounter with Elohim in Genesis 32.

It could be said that Elohim spoke to Jacob in some sort of a vision form, until we come to verse 13 and 14, which states that “Elohim went up from [Jacob] where he talked with him. And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he talked with him.” These verses indicate that Elohim was literally there at that place and when finished “went up from [Jacob].” The word *maqowm* in verse 13 is a “performative noun [which] represents the physical location where something is or ought to be ... so it is translated *place, home, room ...*” (*TWOT*, vol 2, p. 794). Perhaps the Hebrew lexicon which is the most widely recognized by both Jewish and Christian scholars alike is that of Brown, Driver and Briggs who like *TWOT* define *maqowm* as a literally physical place, spot or locality (p. 879). The word *maqowm* is used 402 times in the *Tanakh* and only four times does it refer to YHVH’s heavenly dwelling place (1 Kgs 8:30; 2 Chr. 6:21; Hos. 5:15 and Mic. 1:3); all other Scriptural passages where the word is used is referring to literal or figurative place on earth including Genesis 35:13. The evidence is clear: YHVH Elohim was on this earth, speaking to Jacob in some form of diminished glory that man could see him and live.

**Exodus 3:2; 13:21; 14:20****The Burning Bush and the Messenger of YHVH****The “Angel” of YHVH In the Pillar of Fire**

In Exodus 13:21 we read,

And YHVH went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night.

Then in Exodus 14:19 it is written,

And the angel of Elohim, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them.

*Who* is this “Angel” of Elohim (in other places: he is called “the Angel” of YHVH)? *Angel* is an unfortunate translation. The Hebrew word for *angel* is *malak*/מַלְאָךְ and simply means *a heavenly or a human messenger*. Prophetically this word can refer to human messengers such as the one coming in the spirit of Elijah prior to Messiah’s coming, as well as to the Messiah himself (“Messenger/*Malak* of the covenant” in Malachi 3:1). In Genesis 32:22-30 Jacob wrestles with a man Scripture identifies as the *Malak* of YHVH (Hosea 12:3-5) and whom Jacob called Elohim (verse 30). This same Individual redeemed Jacob (Gen 48:18) and is identified with the *Malak of Elohim ... the Elohim of Bethel* (31:11 and 13) and appeared to Moses at the burning bush (Exod 3:2). Now he is leading Israel in

the Wilderness. Again who is he? Stephen in Acts 7:37-39 identifies the Messiah (i.e. “that Prophet” Moses mentioned in Deut 18:15) with the “Angel” or Heavenly Messenger which spoke to the Children of Israel from Mount Sinai and who gave them the “living oracles,” who the Israelites later rejected for pagan gods. Paul elsewhere said of that same Personage that the Israelites did “all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Messiah” (1 Cor 10:4).

Of that pillar of fire that led them we see that it gave them light. As we have amply demonstrated above, light, in Scripture, is synonymous with Torah. We have seen that Yeshua the Messiah is the Light of the World — the Word of Elohim in living form (personified).

In Nehemiah 9:12 and 19 we read,

Moreover thou leddest them in the day by a cloudy pillar; and in the night by a pillar of fire, **to give them light in the way wherein they should go** ... Yet thou in thy manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness: the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, **to lead them in the way**; neither the pillar of fire by night, **to show them light, and the way wherein they should go.** (emphasis added)

*Light* in Scripture allegorically refers to *Torah* while the term *the way* (Hebrew: *derek*, דֶּרֶךְ) means *the way of Torah righteousness*. Scripture uses the term *way(s)/derek* as a reference to the Torah in the following passages (and many more, as well):

Therefore thou shalt keep the commandments of YHVH thy Elohim, to walk in his ways, and to fear him. (Deut 8:6)

And now, Israel, what doth YHVH thy Elohim require of thee, but to fear YHVH thy Elohim, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve YHVH thy Elohim with all thy heart and with all thy soul. (Deut 10:12)

For if ye shall diligently keep all these [Torah] commandments which I command you, to do them, to love YHVH your Elohim, to walk in all his ways, and to cleave unto him. (Deut 11:22)

And a curse, if ye will not obey the [Torah] commandments of YHVH your Elohim, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known. (Deut 11:28)

I have chosen the way of [Torah] truth: thy judgments have I laid before me. (Ps 119:30)

I will run the way of thy [Torah] commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart. (Ps 119:32)

Teach me, YHVH, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end. (Ps 119:33)

The Messenger of Elohim from within the pillar of fire not only directed the Israelites in the way (Exod 13:21; Deut 1:33); they should go, but the Messenger spoke to Moses from within the pillar, as well:

And it came to pass, as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and YHVH talked with Moses. And all the people saw the cloudy pillar stand at the tabernacle door: and all the people rose up and worshipped, every man in his tent door. And YHVH spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend. And he turned again into the camp: but his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the tabernacle. (Exod 33:9-11)

And YHVH descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of YHVH. (Exod 34:5)

And YHVH came down in a cloud, and spake unto him, and took of the spirit that was upon him, and gave it unto the seventy elders: and it came to pass, that, when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease. (Num 11:25)

And YHVH appeared in the tabernacle in a pillar of a cloud: and the pillar of the cloud stood over the door of the tabernacle. And YHVH said unto Moses ... (Deut 31:15-16a)

What can we gather from all the above texts pertaining to the Messenger of YHVH (improperly translated “Angel” of the LORD)? This Divine Messenger thundered out the words of the Written Torah from Mount Sinai, he gave divine revelation to Moses out of the pillar of fire, he lit the path of the Israelites through the wilderness with both physical and spiritual light. He led them in the physical and spiritual way they should go as they were trekking through the wilderness. This fiery Messenger who gave both physical and spiritual light to the Israelites is nothing else but another manifestation of the complete, supernal light which shone upon this earth during the first three days of creation – a light which will once again shine at the end of days in the New Jerusalem replacing the physical sun. This supernal Torah-light was concealed after day three of creation, but was hidden in the Written Torah and in the Person of Yeshua the Messiah, the Living Torah, who was none other than this fiery Messenger who led the Israelites through the wilderness, and who became the Torah-Word of Elohim made flesh and the spiritual Light of the world in the first-century. As the fiery Messenger led the Israelites out of the land of Egypt and out of the house of bondage through the wilderness, is this same Torah light, concealed to most, but revealed to those who have eyes to see, leading and guiding you through the wilderness experience of your life as you are heading to the Promised Land of the New Jerusalem?

## Piercing the Veil of Secrecy

What did the sages of the pre-Christian era really teach about personifying of YHVH and the Messiah? This is a question whose answer potentially has gigantic implications.

When studying the Jewish rabbis, most of what we read has been written during the modern era, from the first-century A.D. onward. Nearly everything we have in written form (the Hebrew Scriptures and Apocryphal writings excepted) originates primarily from the second-century A.D. to the present. This includes the *Mishnah*, *Gamara*, *Talmud*, the Jewish mystical literature and the rabbinical commentaries on the Torah and the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures. These were written at a time when Christianity was casting a very large, powerful and even threatening shadow over the entire Jewish landscape of that time. The Jewish people were already the “bad-boys” of much of the Roman empire due to their revolts against Rome dominion over Judea and their monotheistic religious stance, which categorized all other religious systems, including that of Rome, as pagan and idolatrous.

In the early years of the Christian era, the Roman authorities viewed Christianity as simply another sect of Judaism. So Christians were likewise persecuted. But through the second and into the third centuries A.D. as Christianity gradually separated from its Jewish roots and gentilized, it slowly became acceptable throughout the Roman Empire until it was recognized as the state religion of Rome in the fourth-century under Roman emperor Constantine. Now Christianity was the dominant religion of its day with the full force of Rome’s political, economic and military might behind it. This began an era of state-backed Christian persecution of Jews lasting through the pogroms, Crusades, Inquisition, and into the modern era with the Holocaust.

It was in this atmosphere of Christian persecution against the Jews that bulk of the ancient Jewish oral traditions (which purportedly originated from the time of Moses onward and were passed on down form generation to generation) were committed to writing. The *Mishnah* was finalized after A.D. 200, the Palestinian Talmud in c. A.D. 400 and the Babylonian Talmud c. A.D. 500.

Most of the great Jewish sages, philosophers and rabbis lived and wrote during the ebbings and flowings of Christian persecution against the Jews (who were derisively referred to as the “Christ-killers”). Bear in mind that the first Crusade to free the Holy Land from Moslem oppression started in 1096. There were seven Crusades in all lasting until the early part of the thirteenth century. Though directed against Islam, collateral persecution occurred against Jews who were in the Crusaders’ path.

During this era Rashi, the greatest Torah commentator of the modern era lived and wrote (1040-1105) in France, from where many of the Crusades originated. Maimonides (or Rambam), the a noted rabbi and the greatest Jewish philosopher of the modern era was born in Spain and moved to Egypt lived from 1135 to 1204. Other great rabbinic scholars whose teachings and commentaries form the bedrock of orthodox Jewish religious thought to this day include Nachmanides of Spain (Ramban) (1194-1270), Kimhi (Radak) of Spain and France (1160-1235), Baal HaTurim (1270-1343) of Germany and Spain, Ibn Ezra (1070-1138) of Spain, Sforno of Spain (1475-1550) to name a few.

These notable personages are the perennial stars on the Jewish Rabbinic scene and are still quoted as the experts commentators of the Hebrew Scriptures—and they all lived during the time of Christian persecution against

Jews. True, these commentators are mirrors reflecting an ancient conversation among Jewish rabbis and sages in process since after Moses. Many fundamental truths of this conversation, put into written form only after the third to fifth centuries, remain true to the original ideas of the First and Second Temple periods, yet to what degree did subsequent Christian persecution cause the rabbis and sages, including those listed above, to spin ancient Jewish thought away from anything smacking of Christian theology?

Again this is a huge question since there is little Jewish Scripture commentary extant from the pre-Christian era. So what did the Jewish rabbis of this time really think about Messiah? About YHVH appearing to men in humanesque form, called theophanies? This is fundamental to Christian theology, since the very incarnation of Yeshua the Messiah is dependent on such an interpretation of certain passages of the Hebrew Scriptures, as we are exploring in this work. The modern rabbinical commentators either deny or are opposed to this view, for obvious reasons. Yet, what was the view of their ancient predecessors? We will attempt to examine this issue now. Can we pierce the veil of silence of rabbinic spin which prohibits discussion on such matters? We believe so.

## Memra: the Living Word

The *Targumim* (Aramaic for *translation*) were the Aramaic translations (or paraphrases) of the Tanakh or Hebrew Scriptures put into written form (from earlier oral form) in the first several centuries of the A.D. or Common Era. This development occurred out of necessity since the majority of Jews, as a result of the Jewish exile, lived in Babylonia and gradually forgot their native Hebrew for Aramaic, the language of the Babylonian Empire including the region around modern-day Syria and Israel. Until that time, the Hebrew Scriptures would be read in Hebrew in the synagogues with instant translation given in Aramaic the common language of the people by an official translator was known as a *meturgeman*. These oral translations were not considered authoritative and there appears to have never been any definite system of interpretation formally adopted by which these oral translations were given. The rendering of the Hebrew into the Aramaic vernacular was left to the discretion of the *meturgeman* (*Encyclopedia Britannica, Eleventh Edition*, vol. 26, pages. 419-420). "At first, no doubt, the translator endeavoured to reproduce the original as closely as possible, but inasmuch as his object was to give an intelligible rendering, a merely literal rendering would soon be found to be insufficient, and he would be forced, especially in the more difficult passages, to take a more elastic view of his obligations (Ibid., p. 420).

Professor Julius Stott Jr. notes that "[t]he Aramaic language, which was known by some Jews as early as the time of Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18:26), became the common tongue of the region" (*The Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament*, p. 77). "Written in Aramaic, a *targum* is a running paraphrase-commentary on the Hebrew text. Nehemiah 8 gives an example of the situations in which targums arose and of their use. The rebuilding of the temple and the walls of Jerusalem was complete. It was now essential that the inhabitants of Judea know and apply the law to both worship and life. Although Hebrew was still the sacred language, Aramaic was the common tongue. Ezra rose to read the law of Moses in an assembly in Jerusalem. As he did so, a number of Levites stood with him and 'helped the people to understand the law, while the people remained in their places. So they read from the book, from the law of God, with interpretation. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading' (Neh. 8:7-8). The concern was for knowledge and understanding. Presumably, Ezra read in Hebrew while his associates gave both an Aramaic translation and explanation which conveyed the meaning" (Stott, p. 128).

The sources quoted above states that the Aramaic language was prevalent in the area of Judea during the Second Temple eras and therefore the Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Scriptures (later to become the *Targumim*) would have been in use in the Synagogues to accommodate those Jews not conversant in Hebrew.

Is this correct historically? What was the prevalent language in Judea and the surrounding Jewish territories during the first century? This has been, and still remains, a subject of debate among scholars. Can we even rightly assume that the disciples of Yeshua who wrote the *Brit Chadashah* (Apostolic Scriptures or "New Testament") would have been exposed to the Targumic readings of the Hebrew Scriptures? In commenting on Acts 21:40 which states that Paul, the Apostle, addressed the Jews of Jerusalem in the Hebrew tongue." David Stern, the Messianic Jewish Bible scholar and the translator of the *Complete Jewish Bible* states in his commentary on this verse, "[This] could have been either the Aramaic heard more often in public or the Hebrew still spoken in public but more often at home" (*Jewish New Testament Commentary*, p. 305). Stern goes on to address this issue in his comments on Mark 5:41 where Scripture records Yeshua speaking Aramaic. As to how common Aramaic was in the time of Yeshua, Stern quoting the late Professor David Flusser, an Orthodox Jewish scholar in Jerusalem,

“The spoken languages among the Jews of that period were Hebrew, Aramaic, and to an extent Greek. Until recently, it was believed by numerous scholars that the language spoken by Jesus’ disciples was Aramaic. It is possible that Jesus did, from time to time, make use of the Aramaic language. But during that period Hebrew was both the daily language and the language of study. The Gospel of Mark contains a few Aramaic words and this was what misled scholars.... [I]n light of more profound studies of the Jewish sages, it is accepted that most people were fluent in Hebrew. **The Pentateuch was translated into Aramaic for the benefit of the lower strata of population** (Ibid., p. 91) (emphasis added).

Nineteenth century Jewish-Christian scholar Alfred Edersheim, perhaps reflecting the earlier scholarly view to which Flusser makes reference above, but he makes a statement which is not inconsistent with Stern’s comments on Acts 21:40, “[O]ur Lord [Yeshua] taught in Aramaen [i.e., Aramaic], and ... He used and quoted the Holy Scriptures in Hebrew, perhaps sometimes rendering them for popular use into Aramaean.... He then goes on to state what Stern above hints at, that Paul may have addressed the Jewish mob in Jerusalem in Aramaic (which is closely akin to Hebrew) in Acts 21:40 even though the Authorized Version says he addressed them in Hebrew. Edersheim then notes that obviously the young Yeshua was conversant in Hebrew or else he would not have been able to debate in the Temple with the learned scholars ‘both hearing them and asking them questions’ (Luke 2:46) (*The Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, by Alfred Edersheim, pp. 112-113), this in spite of the fact that he was raised in the seeming backwater town of Nazareth (John 1:46).

Even Hebrew roots scholars of the Christian faith, David Bivin and Roy Blizzard, while making a strong case for Hebrew primacy among the general populace of first century Israel still state about themselves, “The authors do not wish to imply that Aramaic, as well as Greek, were not spoken in Israel in the first centuries B.C.–A.D. Certainly most of the people were multilingual, or least bilingual, with Aramaic, Greek, and even some Latin in common use alongside of Hebrew. To quote Segal: ‘What was the language of ordinary life of educated native Jews in Jerusalem and Judea in the period from 400 B.C. to 150 A.D.? The evidence presented by Mishnaic Hebrew and its literature leaves no doubt that the language was Mishnaic Hebrew. Of course, those educated Judeans also understood Aramaic, and used it even in writing, but only occasionally, and not habitually in the same way as ... the Flamand in Belgium may often use French’” (*Understanding the Difficult Words of Jesus*, p. 12). In light of what we have just read, the following question is begged: Were the disciples of Yeshua considered educated? Or were they in the “strata of population” that more commonly spoke Aramaic and thus was exposed to the Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Scriptures in their local synagogues (as we discuss below)? The Book of Acts records that in the eyes of the Jewish leaders the disciples of Yeshua were “unlearned and ignorant men” (Acts 4:13).

*The Encyclopedia of the Jewish Religion* in its article entitled *Aramaic* states, “The use of A[ramaic] as a trade language (*lingua franca*) as the everyday language of mixed populations spread widely. In some places local A[ramaic] dialects turned into literary languages, the most important being Syriac. Among Jews, a number of such literary dialects formed at various places and times: (1) early Judean A[ramaic] preserved in inscriptions found in the Dead Sea Scrolls; (2) the A[ramaic] Targums, which differs from one to the next; (3) the Galilean dialect of the Palestinian Talmud; (4) Samaritan A[ramaic] ...” (p. 39). Similarly, *The New Jewish Encyclopedia* states that Aramaic “was first adopted as a common Jewish tongue by the Jews in Babylonia (probably about 525 B.C.E.), then by the Jews of Egypt, and later by the Jews in Palestine (about 325 B.C.E.). It flourished as the Jewish tongue until the seventh century C.E., when Arabic become the language of the East” (p. 20). Edersheim writes that after the Babylonian exile, “The language spoken by the Jews was no longer Hebrew, but Aramaen, both in Palestine and in Babylonia; in the former the Western [dialect], in the latter the Eastern dialect. In fact, the common people were ignorant of pure Hebrew, which henceforth became the language of students and of the ‘Synagogue. Even there a *Methurgeman*, or interpreter, had to be employed to translate into vernacular the portions of Scripture read in the public services, and the addresses delivered by the Rabbis. This was the origin of the so-called *Targumim*, or paraphrases of Scripture” (*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, pp. 7-8). Later in the same book, Edersheim states, “We know, that the language of the Temple and the Synagogue was Hebrew, and that the addresses of the Rabbis had to be ‘targumed’ into vernacular Aramaean ... Ibid., p. 92). Were some of the disciples of Yeshua among those who were exposed to the teachings of the *Targumim*—teachings we will discuss later, which interestingly parallel some of what we find recorded in the writings of the twelve apostles?

Well known modern rabbinic scholar Jacob Neusner weighs in on the ongoing discussion among scholars as

to the prevalence of the targumic texts in Israel during the early part of the common era (first century onward). Neusner is a heavyweight in the field of Judaism in the first centuries of the Christian era and is considered by some to be the world's preeminent authority on this subject. He is the author of some 500 books. In his book, *Introduction to Rabbinic Literature*, Neusner has much to say about the origination of Targumic literature in Israel in early common era.

First, according to Neusner, there were two families of *Targumim*: the Palestinian *Targumim*, which included the *Targum Neofiti* and *Pseudo-Jonathan*, the Fragmentary *Targumim* and the *Targum* fragments from the Cairo Geniza, the *Targum toseftot* and the sole Babylonian Targum, *Targum Onkelos* (Ibid., p. 612). Neusner goes on to date these targumic texts. *Targum Neofiti* was written sometime between the mid-second century to the early fourth century Common Era (C.E.). It was written in Jewish-Palestinian Aramaic and covers the Pentateuch (Ibid., p. 613). Let us not forget that though these earliest *Targumim* were composed in the early second century at the earliest they originated from earlier oral translations which had been circulating not only in the synagogue, but also in Jewish educational institutions (yeshivas) and in private study (Ibid., p. 627).

Neusner goes on to say that the Neofiti and Cairo Geniza fragments contain some of the same materials indicating that they both originate from a common, earlier source which he refers to as Proto-Palestinian *Targum*. Even *Targum Onkelos*, though originating in Babylonian Jewry, contains features which link it to the west and specifically to the Palestinian *Targumim*. According to Neusner, *Targum Onkelos* contains many elements that link it to Palestinian dialects of Aramaic, in particular, that evidenced by the Aramaic texts from Dead Sea community at Qumran. He goes on to say that based on linguistic evidence scholars think that *Targum Onkelos* originated in Palestine prior to 135 C.E. and was thoroughly revised in Babylonia subsequently. This accounts for the Qumran-like aspects of its Aramaic (Ibid., 614). Remember that the Qumran community, most likely the source of the famous Dead Sea scrolls, existed from around 130 B.C. to A.D. 135. What Neusner is saying above is that the Aramaic language was a vital part of the linguistic landscape during the time of Yeshua and the apostles and that the Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Scriptures were in common usage in Israel (or Palestine) up until the time they were put into written form beginning in the early part of the second century which was only a few decades after the death of the last apostle. Therefore, it is very likely that Yeshua and his disciples were very familiar with the pre-targumic Aramaic oral translations of and commentary on the Hebrew Scriptures, if not the written proto-Palestinian Targum, to which Neusner refers above.

Furthermore, in addition to the *Targumim* of the Pentateuch, two *Targumim* to the Prophets existed in the rabbinic period as well. Among Babylonian Jewry *Targum Jonathan* dominated while among Palestinian Jewry Palestinian *Targum* to the prophets seems to have been used (Ibid., p. 616). *Targum Jonathan* was originally composed between A.D. 70 and 135. This *Targum* also contains an Aramaic dialect unique to Palestine of that era and resembles that found in the Qumran Aramaic texts and the Bar Kochba letters. The same can be said for the *Targum* to Isaiah (Ibid., p. 617).

So according to Neusner, not only were the precursors to the Aramaic translations of the Torah (Pentateuch) in common use in Palestine in the first century onward, but that of the prophets including Isaiah, as well.

How commonly used among the public were the Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Scriptures during the intertestamental period up until the period of the Apostolic Scriptures? Neusner asks, "Were targums used in ways that would publicize their contents to a broad audience? The answer is yes, to the best of our knowledge." He continues, "According to different rabbinic texts, the general practice of translations occurs in three places, each of which provides for the use of written targums: synagogue worship, education in the schools, and private study. *The Mishnah* (*M. Meg.* 4:4-6) states that in synagogue worship the weekly readings of the Torah and the Haftarah should be read in Hebrew and then translated into Aramaic" (Ibid., p. 627). For example the Mishnah states, "He who reads in the Torah should read no fewer than three verses. He may not read to the translator more than a single verse [at a time, so the translator will not err] and in the case of a prophetic lection, three. [If] the three constitute three distinct pericopae, they read them one by one. They skip [from place to place] in the prophetic lections, but not in the Torah lections. And how far may one skip? [Only] so much that the translator will not have stopped [during the rolling of the scroll]" (*Mishnah Megillah* 4:4). The translator here, according to Rabbi Neusner is the one translating the Hebrew text into Aramaic for the benefit of those present who may not know or fully understand the Hebrew. *The Mishna* was written in Palestine around A.D. 200 (Neusner, p. 97). This was occurring in the first century in the very region where Yeshua lived and died and where the apostles spent their formative years.

According to Neusner, the *Targumim* were viewed as authoritative in that they presented themselves as

Scripture. The *Targumim* were ideal tools for promoting ideas, for the views incorporated into the *Targumim* are presented as divine revelation, not as human understanding. Thus the *Targumim* become the perfect vehicle for propagating the rabbinic world-view not only to adherents of the rabbinic movement, but more important, to Jews who do not participate in the rabbinic movement (Ibid., p. 627).

The official *Targum* of the Pentateuch was the *Targum Onkelos* or *Babylonian Targum* “which subsequently gained currency and general acceptance throughout the Babylonian schools, and was therefore called the “*Babylonian Targum*” dated from the third century (*Encyclopedia Judaica*, article entitled “Targum”). This *Targum* is still viewed as a credible and authoritative source information by rabbinic Torah commentators and is quoted with regularity. The *Targum Jonathan* was the official *Targum* to the Prophets, like the *Targum Onkelos* was to the Pentateuch, and gained general recognition in Babylonia in the third century; and from the Babylonian academies it was carried throughout the Diaspora. The *Targum Yerushalmi* was another *Targum* to the prophetic books of the Bible and is quoted by medieval Torah commentators such as Rashi and Kimhe. Shortly later, other *Targumim* came into existence translating the Writings (Psalms, Proverbs, etc.) into Aramaic (Ibid.).

Edersheim confirms Neusner in *Life and Times of Yeshua the Messiah*, “[The] *Targumim* seem to have existed from a very early period, and, amid the varying and often incorrect renderings, their necessity must have made itself increasingly felt. Accordingly, their use was authoritatively sanctioned before the end of the second century after Christ. This is the origin of our two oldest extant *Targumim*: that of Onkelos (as it is called), on the Pentateuch; and that on the Prophets, attributed to Jonathan the son of Uzziel. These names do not, indeed, accurately represent the authorship of the oldest *Targumim*, which may more correctly be regarded as later and authoritative recensions of what, in some form, had existed before. But although these works had their origins in Palestine, it is noteworthy that, in the form in which at present we possess them, they are the outcome of the schools of Babylon” (p. 8).

What is the point of all this? The *Targumim* of the early part of the common era give us insights into the Jewish interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures from several centuries before the birth of Yeshua the Messiah until the Christian era. What is of particular interest to us in this study are the passages that speak of the *Malak/Angel of YHVH/Elohim* as well as other Scriptural passages that seem to personify YHVH or show him revealing himself in some manner in a humanesque form to mortal beings. We are also intrigued by the idea that the historical circumstantial evidence weighs strongly in favor of the idea that the disciples of Yeshua and the eventual authors of much of the “New Testament” were most likely exposed to these same Hebrew concepts. Indeed, neither you nor I were there to verify this assertion. We can only collect the views of learned experts on the subject and armed with the best and most reputable historical data available attempt to reconstruct correct scenarios that will give us understanding into the lives, times and understandings of the ancients. In this case, we are endeavoring to understand the theological fabric out of which the Apostolic Scriptures were cut, or the religious soil from out of which they grew.

The next concept we need to discuss is that of the *memra*. In the authoritative *Encyclopedia Judaica* under the article entitled “Memra,” we find that whenever an anthropomorphic expression was used by the authors of Scripture the *Targum* substitutes the Aramaic term *memra* for the Lord/YHVH. The Aramaic word *memra* is equivalent to the Hebrew term—*Imrah/אמרה* (*Strong’s* H565; *TWOT* 118b), which means *word, utterance, speech, saying*. (*Imrah* is from *emer/אמר* [*Strong’s* H561] which means *words, something said* which is from *amar/אמר* [*Strong’s* H559] which means *said, speak, answer, etc.*).

An anthropomorphism is the literary device where something not human or personal is described in terms of human or personal characteristics. In reference to the Scriptures, it is describing Elohim in human terms (q.v. Exod 24:10; John 10:29; Matt 18:10; Hos. 11:8 etc.). True, the examples cited here may be viewed as Hebrew literary or poetic devices (e.g., similes and metaphors) to simply aid man in comprehending the complex nature and character of Elohim. But literary devices do not explain Biblical narrative passages, which are not literary in nature, where similes and metaphorical language is not employed and where in the plain or literal (*peshat*) meaning of the text Elohim is described as appearing in human form talking to humans. For example, Scripture, using anthropomorphic language in describing YHVH is *as a rock* (Deut 32:31) or *as an eagle* (Deut 32:11), and the face of Yeshua is *as the sun shining in its strength* (Rev 1:16). Yet, In Genesis 17:1 there are no similes (e.g. *like* or *as*) when Scripture states quite literally, “YHVH appeared to Abram and said unto him ...” or “YHVH appeared unto [Abraham] in the plains of Mamre” (18:1), or Jacob after wrestling with a “man” states that he had seen the “face of Elohim” (32:30). In this case, if this were simply symbolic language, or a vision that Jacob had of Elohim, how is it

that he physically limped after his wrestling match with “the man” (verses 25 and 31)? This shows that Scripture is *not* describing such events as allegorical, symbolic or metaphorical, but as literal events that happened.

Now with these thoughts in mind, let us go on to see what the *Jewish Encyclopedia* has to say about the *Targum's* usage of the word *memra* as a substitute for *YHVH*. “In the *Targum*, the *Memra* figures constantly as the manifestation of the divine power, or as God’s messenger in place of God himself, wherever the predicate is not in conformity with the dignity or the spirituality of the Deity” (Ibid.). Listed below are a few examples of what the author of this article is referring to as occurring in the various *Targumim*. Compare the bold portions of each reference.

- ☞ The Word of YHVH created the earth and man:
  - *Targum* Isaiah 48:13, Not “His” hand, but “**His Word has laid the foundation of the earth**” (Ibid.).
  - *Targum* Isaiah 45:12, The Word was the agent of Elohim in the creation of the earth.
  - Standard Genesis 1:27, So Elohim created man in his own image, in the image of Elohim created he him; male and female created he them
  - *Targum Jerusalem* Genesis 1:27, And **the Word of the Lord created man in His likeness**, in the likeness of the presence of the Lord He created him, the male and his yoke-fellow He created them.
- ☞ The Word of Elohim spoke/communed with Adam and Eve:
  - Standard Genesis 3:8, And **they heard the voice of YHVH Elohim** walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of YHVH Elohim amongst the trees of the garden.
  - *Targum Jonathan* Genesis 3:8, And they heard the voice of **the Word of YHVH Elohim** walking in the garden in the repose of the day/ alternate rendering of the Jerusalem Targum: Walking in the garden in the strength of the day... And the **Word of YHVH Elohim called to Adam**, and said to him ...
- ☞ The Word of YHVH established a covenant with Abraham:
  - Standard Genesis 17:7, And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be an Elohim unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.
  - *Targum Onkelos* Genesis 17:7, I will set a covenant between My Word and thee, and I will multiply thee exceedingly much.
- ☞ Abraham had faith in the Word of YHVH and he was made righteous/saved through it (cp. Rom 4:1–25):
  - Standard Genesis 15:6, And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.
  - *Targum Onkelos* Genesis 15:6, And he believed in the Word of the Lord, (*Memra da Yeya*), and He reckoned it to him unto justification.
- ☞ The Word of Elohim met with Moses at the burning bush:
  - Standard Exodus 3:14, And Elohim said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.
  - *Targum Jerusalem* Exodus 3:14, And the Word of YHVH said to Mosheh, He who spake to the world, Be, and it was; and who will speak to it, Be, and it will be. And he said, Thus shalt thou speak to the sons of Israel, EHEYEH hath sent me unto you.
- ☞ The Word of YHVH was the One who dealt with the Children of Israel:
  - Standard Deuteronomy 5:5, **I stood between YHVH** and you at that time, to shew you the word of YHVH ... (emphasis added)
  - *Targum Jonathan* Deuteronomy 5:5, **I stood between the Word** of YHVH and you at that time ... (emphasis added)
  - Standard Numbers 23:21 the YHVH his Elohim is with him
  - *Targum Jonathan* Numbers 23:21, The Word of YHVH their Elohim is their help/The Word of YHVH is with them,

- ☞ The Word of YHVH gave and established the Sinaitic or Mosaic Covenant to the Israelites:
  - Standard Exodus 20:1, And Elohim spake all these words, saying,
  - *Targum Jonathan* Exodus 20:1, And the Word of YHVH spake all the excellency of these words saying
- ☞ The Word of YHVH met with Moses on Mount Sinai:
  - Standard Exodus 33:22, And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will **cover thee with my hand** while I pass by. (emphasis added)
  - *Targum Jonathan* Exodus 33:22, And it shall be that when the glory of My Shekinah passeth before thee, I will put thee in a cavern of the rock, and **will overshadow thee with My Word** until the time that I have passed by. (emphasis added)
  - The Word of YHVH established the Sabbath as a sign of the Mosaic/Sinaitic Covenant with the Israelites:
    - Standard Exodus 31:13, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for **it is a sign between me and you ...** (emphasis added)
    - *Targum Jonathan* Exodus 31:13, Ye shall keep the day of My Sabbaths indeed; for **it is a sign between My Word and you ...** (emphasis added)
- ☞ The Word of YHVH redeemed his people:
  - *Targum Jerusalem* Leviticus 22:12, My Shekinah I shall put among you, My Word shall be unto you a redeeming deity, and you shall be unto my name a holy people.
- ☞ The Word of YHVH brought judgment upon sinful people:
  - Standard Numbers 33:4, For the Egyptians buried all their firstborn, which the LORD had smitten among them
  - *Targum Jonathan* Numbers 33:4, and the Mizraee buried those whom YHVH had killed among them, even all the firstborn; and upon their idols did the Word of YHVH do judgments ...
  - Standard Exodus 32:35, And YHVH plagued the people, because they made the calf, which Aaron made.
  - *Targum* Exodus 32:35, And **the Word of YHVH** plagued the people, because they had bowed themselves to the calf that Aharon had made. (emphasis added)
- ☞ The Word of YHVH spoke to his servants in the Tabernacle in the wilderness:
  - Standard Exodus 25:22, **And there I will meet with thee**, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat. (emphasis added)
  - *Targum Jonathan* Exodus 25:22, **And I will appoint My Word with thee there**, and will speak with thee from above the mercy-seat. (emphasis added)
- ☞ The Word of YHVH protected the Israelites and led them into the Promised Land:
  - Standard Deuteronomy 9:3, YHVH thy Elohim is he which goeth over before thee; **as a consuming fire**.
  - *Targum Jonathan* Deuteronomy 9:3, that the YHVH your Elohim, whose glorious Shekinah goeth before you, **whose Word is a consuming fire**. (emphasis added)
- ☞ Additional Targumic references the *Jewish Encyclopedia* cites, which are of interest to this study:
  - Standard Numbers 27:16, Let YHVH, the Elohim of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation,
  - *Targum Jonathan* Numbers 27:16, And Mosheh spake before YHVH, saying May the Word of YHVH, who ruleth over the souls of men ... (“in ruling over the destiny of man the Word is the agent of Elohim,” Ibid.)
  - *Targum* Isaiah 45:25, Through His Word Israel shall be justified.

- *Targum Joshua 22:24, 27*, With the Word of YHVH Israel stands in communion.
- *Targum Isaiah 46:13*, In the future the Word shall be the comforter
- *Targum Hosea 11:5, 10*, My Word shall be unto you like a good plowman who takes off the yoke from the shoulder of the oxen ...the Word will roar to gather the exiled.

The *Jewish Encyclopedia*, in its article on the “Memra” draws a parallel between the Targumists usage of the Aramaic word *memra* (as cited in the examples above) and the Greek word *logos* as found in the Greek “New Testament.” The writer of this article finds inescapable the similarities between the Targumists’ and Philo’s concept of the Word of YHVH and the Christian concept of Messiah being the Logos/Word from Elohim:

The Memra as a cosmic power furnished Philo [a first century Jewish Hellenistic philosopher from Alexandria, Egypt] the cornerstone upon which he built his peculiar semi-Jewish philosophy. Philo’s “divine thought,” “the image” and “firstborn son” of God, “the arch-priest,” “intercessor,” and “paraclete” of humanity, the “arch type of man,” paved the way for the Christian conceptions of the Incarnation (“the Word become flesh”) and the Trinity. The Word which “the unoriginated Father created in His own likeness as a manifestation of His own power” appears in the Gnostic system of Marcus (Irenæus, “Adversus Hæreses,” i. 14). In the ancient Church liturgy, adopted from the Synagogue, it is especially interesting to notice how often the term “Logos,” in the sense of “the Word by which God made the world, or made His Law or Himself known to man,” was changed into “Christ.” **Possibly on account of the Christian dogma, rabbinic theology, outside of the Targum literature, made little use of the term “Memra”** (emphasis added).

These admissions on the part of the highly respectable and authoritative *Jewish Encyclopedia* are stupendous and extremely revelatory! This, especially in light of the fact that the *Talmud* (Soncino Edition) contains no reference to the word *memra*, nor could this author by electronic word search of the same *Talmud* find any references to the phrase “the Word of the Lord” as relating to the above discussion and usage of the term in the *Targumim* (confirming the *Jewish Encyclopedia’s* admission above). This seems amazing in light of numerous such references in the Targumic passages, yet within the pages of the *Talmud* (completed in ca. A.D. 500) there is silence with the exception of one Talmudic reference which totally contradicts an earlier, pre-Christian Targumic passage. Note the following:

In Genesis 19:4, we find two YHVH’s mentioned in the same text:

Standard Genesis 19:14, Then YHVH rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from **YHVH out of heaven** ...

*Targum Jonathan* Genesis 19:14, And **the Word of YHVH** had caused showers of favour to descend upon Sodom and Amorah, to the intent that they might work repentance, but they did it not: so that they said, Wickedness is not manifest before the Lord. Behold, then, there are now sent down upon them sulphur and fire from before **the Word of the Lord from Heaven**. (emphasis added)

The Talmud totally contradicts this Targumic passage in the following manner:

A Min [a Christian] once said to R. Ishmael b. Jose: It is written, Then the Lord caused to rain upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord: but from him should have been written! A certain fuller [one of the lowest and most ignoble of all trades] said, Leave him to me, I will answer him. [He then proceeded,] It is written, And Lamech said to his wives, Ada and Zillah, Hear my voice, ye wives of Lamech; but he should have said, my wives! But such is the Scriptural idiom — so here too, it is the Scriptural idiom. (*Talmud* — *Mas. Sanhedrin* 38b:)

Another example can be cited of the rabbis of the modern era seeming to have contradictory views from those of their predecessor, the Targumists of the pre-Christian era. This example is from Exodus 19 and 20, the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. The rabbis note that there seems to be a contradiction between statements made in Exodus 19:20 which says that, “YHVH came down onto Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain, then YHVH

called Moses to the top of the mountain ...” and Exodus 20:22(19) which states that YHVH spoke to the Israelites “from heaven.” The question is this: was YHVH in heaven or at the top of the mountain when he spoke to Moses and the Israelites? Rashi notes this contradiction in his commentary on the two passages and resolves the difficulty by quoting earlier a rabbinic tradition that states that to be in two places at once YHVH “bent the upper and lower heavens like a sheet on a bed, and the Throne of Glory descended upon them. Thus by bending the heavens, God was both in the heavens and on Mount Sinai simultaneously” (*Rashi – Shemot/Exodus*, pages 231 and 242).

The *Targum Jonathan* Exodus 20:1 seems to resolve this “contradiction” by stating, “And the **Word of the Lord** spake all the excellency of these words saying ...” (emphasis added). Is this another case of a YHVH in heaven and a YHVH on earth as the Targumists note in Genesis 19:4? Rashi and his fellow commentators go to great lengths to reconcile these passages through a rather novel (kabbalistic-like) interpretation to cleanse, perhaps, it of any hint of there being a YHVH in heaven and one on earth acting as an “arm” (Isa 53:1) or extension of the one in heaven. Is this the case here? You be the judge.

In light of the spread of Christianity and its growing influence and persecution against the Jews, was this a deliberate or, at least, a reactionary response on the part of the Jewish sages to steer their own theology wide of anything remotely Christian in nature? As noted above, the venerable *Jewish Encyclopedia* posits the possibility. One can only wonder.

*The Jewish Encyclopedia* is not the only source to note Philo’s use of the term *memra/logos* either. Edersheim devotes several pages along with extensive footnote references to the discussion of these terms in his book, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. He notes that in light of the Apostolic Scriptures’s teachings regarding the “Logos of Elohim” one cannot not investigate Philo’s writings about this concept. He admits that Philo’s concept of the *logos/memra* share something in common with earlier platonic philosophies, but at the same time the apocryphal Book of Wisdom “almost arrives so far as to present ‘Wisdom’ ... as a special ‘Subsistence’ (hypostatizing it). More than this, in talmudic writings, we find mention not only of *Shem* [or “Name”], but also of the ‘Shekinah,’ God as manifest and present, which is sometimes also present as the Holy Spirit. But in the Targumim we meet yet another expression, which, strange to say, never occurs in the Talmud. It is the *Memra*, Logos, or “Word” (p. 32). He admits that not every occurrence of the *Memra* in the Hebrew Scriptures has anthropomorphic implications, “But it stands out as perhaps the most remarkable fact in this literature, that God—not as in His permanent manifestation, or manifest Presence—but as revealing Himself, is designated *Memra*” (Ibid.). Edersheim notes that this term as applied to God, occurs in the *Targum Onkelos* 179 times, in the *Jerusalem Targum* 99 times, and in the *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* 231 times. He says that “a critical analysis shows that in 82 instances in *Onkelos*, in 71 instances in the *Jerusalem Targum*, and in 213 instances in the *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, the designation *Memra* is not only distinguished from God, but evidently refers to God as revealing Himself” (Ibid.). Edersheim goes on to say that in many targumic passages “the distinction between God and the *Memra of [YHVH]* is marked ... Similarly, the *Memra of [YHVH]* is distinguished from the *Shekinah*. Nor is the term used instead of the sacred word [YHVH]; nor for the well known Old Testament expression ‘the Angel of the Lord’ [except in Exod 4:24].” Edersheim then ponders, “Does it not then represent an older tradition underlying all these? Beyond this Rabbinic theology has not preserved to us the doctrine of Personal distinctions in the Godhead, And yet, if words have any meaning, the *Memra* hypostasis, though the distinction of permanent, personal Subsistence is not marked. Nor yet, to complete this subject, is the *Memra* identified with the Messiah. In the *Targum Onkelos*, distinct mention is twice made of Him (Gen 49:10, 11; Num 24:17), while in the other *Targumim* no fewer than seventy one biblical passages are rendered with explicit reference to Him” (pp. 32-33).

In summary, Edersheim says that an analysis of Philo’s view of the *Memra/Logos* is hesitating and even contradictory. Ultimately, Edersheim does not see a connection between the Logos of Philo and the *Memra* of the *Targumim*, for the former is philosophically based while the latter rests on theological grounds. He sees a connection, however between the Logos of Philo and the *Metatron* of the *Talmud* (the Jewish oral tradition in or commentary on Scripture in written form having its origin in ancient times) and Kabbalah (the Jewish mystical writings). He sees a connection between Philo’s Logos and the latter works use of the term *Adam Qadmon* (Ibid., p. 34).

So, in the final analysis, what does Edersheim gather from Philo’s use of the term *Logos*? The *Logos* is “not a concrete personality, and yet, from another point of view, not strictly impersonal, nor merely a property of the Deity, but the shadow, as it were, which the light of God casts—and if Himself light, only the manifested reflection of God, His spiritual, even as the world is His material, habitation. Moreover, the Logos is the ‘image of God’ upon which man was made (Gen 1:27), or to use the platonic term, ‘the archetypal idea.’” The Logos is the instrument

through whom Elohim created the world, the Logos acts as an intermediary separating between Elohim and the world. It separates, yet unifies, at the same time. The Logos announces and interprets to man the will and mind of Elohim, he acts as Intermediary and High Priest and as such by his purity takes away the sins of man, and by his intercession procures for us the mercy of Elohim. Hence, Philo designates him not only as the High Priest, but as the *Paraclete* (Comforter). He is also the sun whose rays enlighten man, the medium of Divine revelation to the soul; the Manna, or support of spiritual life; he who dwells in the soul” (Ibid., p. 34).

The reader may have found this discussion a bit convoluted and even contradictory, but remember that we are trying to prove one point and one point only: That prior to the time of Yeshua and to the penning of the Apostolic Scriptures the concept of YHVH in humanesque or theophanic form was not foreign to Jewish religious thought. It certainly did not originate with the apostolic writers of the first century, as some detractors of the deity of Yeshua the Messiah would like to assert. The idea of YHVH becoming Yeshua as the Word of Elohim made flesh, as the Light of the world, the Living Manna, the Intermediary or High Priest between man and Elohim and the Image of Elohim on this earth did not originate in the imaginations of the disciples of Yeshua. This is the point on which we are trying to educate the reader.

Now let us review some of the passages found in the Apostolic Scriptures which parallel the concepts of Philo and the Targumists.

## **The Word of YHVH, The Logos, the Arm of YHVH: A Picture of Yeshua**

In Isaiah 53, a passage both Christian and Jews alike recognize as referring to Messiah Son of Joseph, the Suffering Servant, verse one Messiah is called “the arm of YHVH.” Though the arm is an appendage of the body, it is still a part of the body functioning as the head directs. Is this not a picture of the Word of YHVH as the both the Targumists and first-century Messianic Believers understood it? The parallels between the Memra of the Targumim and the Logos of the Apostolic Scriptures, as the *Jewish Encyclopedia* points out above are inescapable.

By the Word of Elohim were the heavens and earth made,

By the word of YHVH were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. (Ps 33:6)

For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of Elohim the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water. (2 Pet 3:5)

Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of Elohim, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear. (Heb 11:3)

Who is the Word of YHVH?

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with Eloah, and the Word was Eloah. The same was in the beginning with Eloah. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men.... And the Word was made 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.... For the law was given by Moses, and grace and truth came by Yeshua the Messiah. No man hath seen Eloah at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. (John 1:2-4,15,17-18,)

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Yeshua the Messiah. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. (1 John 1-4)

The Apostolic Scriptures clearly link the Word of Elohim/YHVH to the Person of Yeshua the Messiah.

I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of Elohim abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one. (1 John 2:14)

Who bare record of the word of Elohim, and of the testimony of Yeshua the Messiah, and of all things that he saw. (Rev 1:2)

I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Yeshua the Messiah, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of Elohim, and for the testimony of Yeshua the Messiah. (Rev 1:9)

And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of Elohim, and for the testimony which they held. (Rev 6:9)

And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of Elohim. (Rev 19:13)

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Yeshua, and for the word of Elohim, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with the Messiah a thousand years. (Rev 20:4)

The practice of accompanying Aramaic translations along side the Hebrew readings of the Scriptures in the synagogue was so common place an occurrence by the second-century of the Common Era that the *Mishnah* takes it for granted (*Encyclopedia Britannica, Eleventh Edition*, vol. 26, p. 419). And since Aramaic was the language of many the common Jewish folk in the first-century in Israel should it be strange to think that the idea of the personification of the Word of YHVH, as we have shown was presented in the *Targumim*, would not have been a foreign concept to the first-century Believers in Yeshua including the Apostolic writers. So is it any wonder that those who believed that Yeshua was the Messiah, the Suffering Servant and the Arm of YHVH that Isaiah 53 speaks about would attribute to Yeshua those characteristics that the *Targumim* attributed to the Word of YHVH, as noted above?

For example, we have already seen that for hundreds of years prior to the first-century the Aramaic Scriptures had attributed the following characteristics to the “Word of YHVH”:

- The Word of YHVH created the earth and man.
- The Word of YHVH met with Moses at the Burning Bush.
- The Word of YHVH was the One Who dealt with the Children of Israel.
- The Word of YHVH spoke at Mount Sinai.
- The Word of YHVH met with Moses on Mount Sinai.
- The Word of YHVH forged a covenant with them.
- The Word of YHVH established the Sabbath as a sign of that covenant.
- The Word of YHVH delivered them from their enemies and redeemed them.
- The Word of YHVH brought judgment upon the people for their sin.
- The Word of YHVH judged their enemies, spoke to Moses from the Tabernacle in the wilderness.
- The Word of YHVH led the Israelites into the Promised Land.
- The Word of YHVH was the Comforter of Israel.
- The Word of YHVH would justify Israel.
- The Word of YHVH would take the heavy yoke from of the shoulders of his people.
- The Word of YHVH would call the exiles back.

Now what person in the entire 3500 year history of the Judeo-Christian religion has ever come close to fulfilling these prophetic expectations? Each week in the synagogues throughout the land of Judea, Samaria and Galilee and

across the ancient Babylonian and later Parthian Empires wherever Israelites were scattered, the reading of the Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Scriptures placed these prophetic and Messianic expectations in the hearts of faithful Hebrews. So when Yeshua was born, in the exact epoch that fulfilled the prophetic expectations of the Jewish prophets and people, should it be strange that so many first-century Jews looked to Yeshua as the one who had fulfilled those prophetic expectations? (After all, the Jewish sages had taught that on the fourth day of creation, or during the fourth millennia from the time of creation (along with the prophet Daniel in his seventy weeks [490 years] prophecy [Dan 9:20-27]) that the Messiah would arrive on the scene to establish a Messianic Age—all this at the exact same time when Yeshua was born [*ArtScroll Bereishis/Genesis Torah Commentary*, Vol. 1a, p. 359; *ArtScroll Baal HaTurim Chumash*, Vol. 1, p. 9]). So should it be considered strange that when Yeshua of Nazareth appeared on the scene at the right time prophetically verifying his fulfillment of those prophecies with unparalleled power, authority, wisdom and knowledge coupled with his own predictions of his own redemptive and salvific death and resurrection which, when fulfilled, confirmed the authenticity of his claims, that in the eyes of his followers he was the man? After all, the attributes the targumists had ascribed to the Word of YHVH in all instances in the Hebrew Scriptures where YHVH appeared to man in humanesque or personified form fit Yeshua Messiah perfectly? And this is exactly what the first-century Believers of Yeshua the Messiah did.

Here is a list of the attributes the targumists ascribed to the *Word of YHVH* and how the apostolic writers related them to the Person and work of Yeshua the Messiah:

- The Word of YHVH created the earth and man. (John 1:3,10; 1 Cor 8:6; Eph 3:9; Col 1:16,17; Heb 1:2,10; Rev 3:14)
- The Word of YHVH met with Moses at the Burning Bush. (Acts 7:35-38)
- The Word of YHVH was the One Who dealt with the Children of Israel. (Acts 7:35-38; 1 Cor 10:4)
- The Word of YHVH spoke at Mount Sinai. (Acts 7:35-38; 1 Cor 10:4)
- The Word of YHVH met with Moses on Mount Sinai. (Acts 7:35-38; 1 Cor 10:4)
- The Word of YHVH forged a covenant with them. (Acts 7:35-38; 1 Cor 10:4)
- The Word of YHVH established the Sabbath as a sign of that covenant. (Heb 4)
- The Word of YHVH justified and redeemed them. (Matt 1:21; Luke 1:68-77; 2:11,30-32,34; John 1:9; 29; 3:16-17; Rom 5; 1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5:18-21; Col 1:14; Heb 9:15; 1 Pet 1:18; Rev 5:9; 14:3-4)
- The Word of YHVH delivered them from their enemies. (1 Cor 15:51-57; Rom 8:31,37; 1 John 4:4)
- The Word of YHVH brought judgment upon the people for their sin and judged their enemies. (Matt 3:12; 25:31-34; Acts. 10:42; 17:31; Rom 2:16; 14:10; 1 Cor 4:4-5; 2 Cor 5:10; 2 Tim 4:1,8; Jas 5:9; Rev 2:23)
- The Word of YHVH spoke to Moses from the Tabernacle in the wilderness: Yeshua taught his people giving them the Living Oracles of his Father in heaven. (Acts 7:38; John 5:19; 6:63; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10)
- The Word of YHVH led the Israelites into the Promised Land. (Heb 3; 4; 12; 13:12-14)
- The Word of YHVH was the Comforter of Israel. (John 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7)
- The Word of YHVH would take the heavy yoke from of the shoulders of his people. (Matt 11:28-30)
- The Word of YHVH would call the exiles back. (Matt 10:5-6; 15:24)

## Yeshua Prophesied That the Eyes of the Blind Would Be Opened At His Coming

Both sides—the rabbinic Jews and the Christians—have well entrenched dogmas, biases, theologies, belief systems, cultures and 2000 years of history of polarization over the issue of the deity of Yeshua, and neither is likely to budge. Both sides are equally right in their own eyes, but the fact remains one side is right and one side is wrong on the issue of the deity of Yeshua. If Yeshua was not who he said he was, then he was either a liar or a lunatic, as one well-known Christian apologist has stated. There is no middle ground in this debate.

The debate over whether Yeshua of Nazareth is deity or not will not go away until he returns and settles the matter once and for all. One Jewish prophet predicted that at the very (second) coming of Messiah Yeshua there will be those of Judah who will finally see Yeshua for who he really is,

And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit

of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. (Zech 12:10)

At this point, it is important to note that the four Gospels of the Apostolic Scriptures or B'rit Chadashah (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John), not only record the literal physical events that occurred in the life of Yeshua, but that these same events can be interpreted as prophetic allegories of events that were happen in the future. This is a deep and fascinating study in its own right. In this work, we will touch only on those events that are allegorical, prophetic shadow-pictures of how the blind eyes of Judah (the Jews) will be opened at Yeshua's second coming to his being their long-awaited Messiah.

Hebraically, there are several levels of Biblical interpretation that the Jewish rabbis use to exegete or dig out the truths of Scripture. Most students of the Scriptures understand the Gospels at the very literal (*peshat*) level of understanding. Many understand his life and ministry on the homiletic (*drash*) level; that is, how the teachings, examples and principles apply to one's own life. But few understand his life on the allegorical level (another aspect of *drash* level of Scriptural understanding or interpretation). From understanding the events of Yeshua's life and ministry on an allegorical level we see that he prophesied that the rabbinic Jews would be blind to his Messiahship and deity, but that in due time their eyes would be opened. Below, are few examples taken from the life and ministry of Yeshua's which show that in the end times at his second coming, the eyes of the Jews will be opened to the reality of who Messiah Yeshua really is.

#### ☞ **Matthew 9:27-31, Yeshua Heals Two Blind Men**

- Who are these two blind men? These are the two houses of Israel (the House of Ephraim/Israel—the Northern Kingdom, and the House of Judah—the Southern Kingdom). They recognized him by his Messianic title: Messiah Son of David (i.e., Messiah, the Conquering King). This is a prophecy about Yeshua's Second Coming as Messiah Son of David when he will heal Israel who is blind in part (Rom 11:25, the House of Judah/rabbinic Judaism is blind to Messiah Yeshua, the Living Torah and the House of Israel/Christianity is blind to the Written Torah). Yeshua opened the eyes of these two blind men just as he will open the eyes of both the Jews and the Christians to their respective blindnesses.

#### ☞ **Matthew 21:1-11, Yeshua Enters Jerusalem**

- When Yeshua returns as Messiah Son of David, he will return to Jerusalem via the Mount of Olives (verse 1); he will return on a horse the second time (verse 2) as Conquering King, unlike his first entry into Jerusalem riding a colt as the Suffering Servant (Messiah Son of Joseph). A great (and innumerable) multitude will follow him singing, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of YHVH! Hosana in the highest!" This occurs on the *Yom Kippur*/Day of Atonement or just prior to *Sukkot*/Feast of Tabernacles. Jerusalem (i.e., Judah/the Jews) will say, when he returns, "Who is this verse 11?" (verse 11). The multitude (Ephraim?) will say, "Yeshua (Jesus) of Nazereth. At that moment the Jews will look upon him whom they pierced and recognize him as their Messiah, as well (Zech 12:10).

#### ☞ **John 7:1-53, Yeshua At the Feast of Tabernacles**

- After the apostasy (falling away) comes the Millennium (pictured prophetically by the Feast of Tabernacles/*Sukkot*).
- There was division among the Jews as to who Yeshua was. From this it would appear that this debate will occur right up to the very last moment as end time events unfold.

#### ☞ **John 8:1-11, The Woman Caught In Adultery**

- Yeshua went to the Mount of Olives (verse 1 and Zech 14:4). This is a picture of his second coming. He then went to the temple to teach (Torah and reveal to all there the true purpose of his mission to earth) which is what he will do upon his Second Coming (Mal 3:1).
- The woman, a picture of adulteress Israel, should have been stoned for her unfaithfulness to YHVH, but grace was granted to her with the provision she go and sin no more. Likewise, Yeshua took upon himself the penalty of the Torah-law (death) which as sinners we all deserve, and has granted us grace.
- At this time Yeshua will reveal to all present in Jerusalem (the Jews) the true reason for his coming,

the first time: to repair the breach between Ephraim (the Northern Kingdom) and Judah (the Southern Kingdom), to save and redeem all who were lost — both Israelite and Gentile — and to establish the Kingdom of Elohim on earth. This is the Gospel/Good News: the remarriage of Yeshua to his adulterous bride, Israel (both houses). He did not come to judge her, but to restore her and marry her. “I do not condemn you. Go and sin no more,” he said to the woman caught in adultery. Is it possible that those Jewish men (the House of Judah) who wanted to stone her left in embarrassment when they realized that they too were guilty of adultery (either physically or spiritually) and so were in no position to throw stones at her. Likewise, when Yeshua returns, the non-believing Jews who may still be arguing over whether Yeshua is the Messiah or not will have the scales fall from their eyes in realization of the fact that they are as guilty as the adulterous woman, for they too have strayed from their covenantal agreements with their Maker, as has the House of Ephraim. Both are equally guilty, and both need the Messiah.

#### ☞ **John 8:12-30, Yeshua Is the True Light of the World**

- This event occurred during the Feast of Tabernacles (see 7:2), which pictures the Millennium when at each night of the Feast the Jews would light giant menorahs at the Temple. On the last night (seventh day) of the Feast occurred the grand finale called Hoshana Rabbah when there was a great menorah lighting ceremony involving four 75-foot tall menorahs on the Temple Mount. This is a picture of Yeshua who is the Light of the world. Verse 30 says that after he explained that he was the light of the world (verse 12) many Jews believed on him (verse 30). This will happen again after his return (during the Millennium) and the reality of these prophetic events is fulfilled in the sight of the Jews.

#### ☞ **John 8:31-59, The Truth Frees You**

- Yeshua, in the Temple, continues to teach the Jews who he is. He exposes their real motives and encourages them to walk in the Torah-Word of Elohim (instead of their vain traditions by which the Word of Elohim is made void [Matt 15:9; Mark 7:7,9]). Will Yeshua be doing this very thing in Jerusalem, in the temple (verse 59) after his second coming until all Israel (Rom 11:26) believes on him and is saved?

#### ☞ **John 11:1-45, Lazarus Dies and Yeshua Resurrects Him**

- This was another miracle for the glory of Elohim. It had a higher purpose and message (verse 4).
- He stayed in the same place where he was for two days (verse 6) after which he would return to Judea again (verse 7). Prophetically, he would be in heaven for 2000 years after which he will return, the second time, to Judea.
- The death of the righteous is considered sleep to YHVH (verse 11-14).
- The purpose of this episode was to teach about the resurrection of the righteous dead at Yeshua's second coming (verses 4,23-26).
- Lazarus had been dead for four days (verse 39). Is this a picture of the Jews being in the fourth millennia of spiritual deadness since their Babylonian exile until now? Yet the time is coming when the righteous ones will resurrect at the coming of the Messiah? The resurrection at the return of the Messiah in the last days will aid the non-believing Jews in accepting Yeshua as the Messiah, the One sent from Heaven (verse 42). Yet Yeshua will call the spiritually dead Jews forth out of the spiritual graves of their dead religion (verse 43).
- Lazarus was bound with grave clothes. The Jews are bound with the grave clothes of dead, spiritless religion and traditions of men whereby YHVH's Word has been made of none effect.

#### ☞ **John 9:1-41, Yeshua Heals A Man Born Blind**

- This man was born blind from birth and neither he nor his parents sinned to bring this malady upon him. He was made blind that through his healing the work YHVH might be made manifest (verses 1-3). At the same time Yeshua declares that he is the Light of the world (verse 5). Yeshua mixes water and mud (water represents the spirit/Torah while the earth represents man who was made from the

earth). The spittle was water (Torah-truth, see Deut 32:2) that proceeded from Yeshua's mouth (i.e., the word of Elohim [Matt 4:4] by which one is washed [Eph 5:26]). When the truth of the Living Torah is applied to our eyes our blind eyes are opened to Yeshua, the Light of the world. This man born blind represents the non-believing Jewish people who are spiritually blind from birth (verse 40-41; Matt 15:14; Rom 11:25) to Messiah Yeshua who is the Light of the World. They needed the water of the Spirit (John 7:37-39) to open their spiritually blind eyes. Yeshua instructed the blind man to go wash his eyes in the Pool of Siloam (Hebrew for *sent* [*shalach*]). The word *shalach* in the Hebrew Scriptures (according to *TWOT*) is used in referring to the prophets (sent ones) of Elohim (Isa 6:8; Jer 1:7; 25:4; 26:5; 35:15; Ezek 2:3-4), to Moses (Exod 4:28; Deut 39:11), to the message of the Elohim's prophets (Zech 7:2; Isa 9:8), and finally to Messiah himself (Isa 61:1). What Yeshua was telling the disbelieving Jews who later found out about this miracle was this: Go wash your eyes spiritually in the very Word of Elohim (the Torah and Prophets) about which you claim to be experts and your eyes will be opened to the Sent One about which the prophets of old prophesied, who is the Light of the World, who is standing before you this day, to the glory of the Father (John 9:3).

## Conclusion

It has been the purpose of this work, as stated in the opening remarks, to show that rabbinical thought, the Hebrew language and a plain interpretation of the Scriptures indeed show that Elohim, in some manner or another can, in his omnipotent capabilities beyond the ken of human understanding, condescend to the human level somehow setting aside his glory and power and interact with mortal man. Hopefully the reality of this has been amply demonstrated above. This being the case, Elohim can likewise pour himself into a human body specially prepared for such a mission through which he then reached out to humans, on human terms and on a human plane in efforts to reconcile sinful man to himself. This is the message of the Gospel (Good News), and the story of Elohim's love for errant man, and Elohim's reaching out a hand to man on human terms is not Christian mythology, but is grounded solidly in the Hebrew Scriptures, language and writings of the rabbinical Jews.

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