**Christadelphian EJournal of Biblical Interpretation**

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**Editorial Policies**: The **Christadelphian EJournal of Biblical Interpretation** seeks to fulfil the following objectives: offer analytical and expositional articles on biblical texts; engage with academic biblical studies that originate in other Christian confessions; defend the biblical principles summarised in the common Christadelphian statement of faith; and subject the published articles to retrospective peer review and amendment.

**Submission of Articles**: Authors should submit articles to the editors. Presentation should follow *Society of Biblical Literature* guidelines (www.sbl.org).

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**Editorial**

This issue of the EJournal is a “special” devoted to analysis of biblical texts and without any scholarship; there are no footnotes or quotations of scholars. The articles have been written with nothing more than a lexicon, a concordance, a creed and the Bible. If feedback is supportive, we may repeat the exercise again next year, God-willing. Even though we may cite scholars and engage them, our only concern is the understanding of the text, and in particular a deeper understanding. We are passionate about intertextual analysis and the illumination of Scripture with Scripture. We do however finish up with some news about a debate on the Trinity.

The aim of the EJournal is to eventually extend the editorial panel to cover other specialisms like the Bible and Science, Apologetics, and Intertextual Analysis. This issue is an example of the sort of material we hope to publish under the rubric of “Intertextual Analysis”. I don’t know the exact number of years ago, but there was once a section in the UK Testimony magazine that was called “Analysis”, and I remember good material being published during the 1980s in that section. The aim of the EJournal is to co-opt more section editors to take care of this kind of material.

**Where the Vultures Gather**

**P. Wyns**

And when the vultures (o;rnea/LXX) came down on the carcasses (sw,mata/LXX), Abram drove them away. Gen 15:11 (NKJV).

Then they asked him, “Where, Lord?” He said to them, “Where the corpse (sw/ma) is, there the vultures (avetoi.) will gather”. Luke 17:37 (NRSV)

In the first instance, Jesus’ reply to his disciples seems to be a complete non sequitur—we expect a location not an event as the answer to the question, “Where, Lord?” We might expect ‘Jerusalem’ or ‘Sinai’ or ‘caught up to heaven’, but not an answer that refers to vultures and corpses. It is here that intertextual connections with the land-covenant (Genesis 15) come to our aid —however, the interpretation is complicated by the use of Hebrew and Greek across the Testaments, and with different Greek words in the LXX that denote the birds, birds of prey, eagles or vultures.

Of course, eagles and vultures are birds and both eagles and vultures are birds of prey—however, one would expect carrion to be associated with vultures. The modern English translations prefer ‘vulture’ for Luke 17:37 (NIB/NLT/NRSV) rather than ‘eagle’ (NKJV/KJV/RSV), but Gen 15:11 is always translated with either the more neutral ‘birds of prey’, or with ‘vultures’, but never with ‘eagles’.

This is of course a translational judgement call and the NT translators were no doubt influenced by the fact that the Roman ‘eagle’ had destroyed Jerusalem. There are many countries that use the eagle in an emblematic fashion (including the USA) and one would hardly expect a country to adopt the vulture as a national symbol (more on this *anon*). Nevertheless, a translation should be influenced by inner biblical exegesis rather than perceived historical correspondence. The situation is further complicated by the use of the saying in a different context—when Jesus offers it as the visible sign of his return;

Therefore if they say to you, ‘Look, He is in the desert!’ do not go out; *or* ‘Look, *He is* in the inner rooms!’ do not believe *it.* For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For wherever the carcass (ptw/ma) is, there the eagles (avetoi,) will be gathered together. Matt 24:26-28

Once again NT translators have chosen ‘eagles’ in preference over ‘vultures’ but it is the griffon-vulture that is really envisaged here – the ‘unclean’ vulture is fulfilling the divine will and serves as a signifier of the slaughter.

Doth the vulture mount up at thy command, and make her nest on high? She dwelleth and abideth on the rock, upon the crag of the rock, and the stronghold. From thence she spieth out the prey; her eyes behold it afar off. Her young ones also suck up blood; and where the slain are, there is she. Job 39:27-30 (JPS)

Against all other translations the Jewish Publication Society OT (1917) translates the underlying Hebrew as ‘vulture’ in Job 39:27.[[1]](#footnote-1) The idea in the Matthew passage seems to be the visibility of the slaughter—it can be seen from a great distance because it is marked by the circling vultures.

The saying concerning “vultures circling the corpse” is difficult to understand but in both NT instances it is associated with the Lord’s advent—as a visible sign of his (imminent?) return (Matthew) and as the location (?) where the disciples will be taken (Luke). The setting seems to be the judgement of the Jewish nation and the connection with Genesis 15 requires us to re-examine the land-covenant.

**Genesis 15**

It is proposed that the ‘cutting’ of the covenant in Genesis 15 forms the basis of the ‘vulture sayings’ found in the gospels. Usually a covenant was ‘cut’ for reasons of ratification and/or imprecation. By that we mean that both parties walked between the cut-pieces of a sacrifice in order to establish the agreement, with the implicit understanding that whoever broke the covenant ought to be cut in pieces like the sacrifice. The covenant in Genesis 15 is unusual on two accounts - firstly, only God ratified the covenant; secondly, any imprecation is not applicable to God who is immortal. The covenant is therefore unconditional and unbreakable because God has sworn it by himself. However, the word ‘unconditional’ must be qualified—for although it was not conditional on the obedience of Abram’s descendants (God would accomplish it despite disobedience), nevertheless, the disobedient would not inherit the land/kingdom. Abram (not yet Abraham the father of a multitude) was told that his descendants would be liberated from slavery in Egypt (Gen 15:14-15) and would inherit the land—indeed this occurred under Joshua, but only after a generation perished in the wilderness because of disobedience. The covenant is therefore unconditional, and will surely come to pass (despite disobedience), but God will not be mocked.

The other important aspect is that Abram was figuratively ‘dead’ when the covenant was ratified and therefore **Abram could not keep the vultures at bay** (only God could). The covenant was specifically about **inheriting the land** (“to give you this land to inherit it”, v. 7) despite having no heir. Finally, it is often not realised, but the covenant of Genesis 15 was made on the night of the Passover.

**Genesis 15 and the Passover**

The covenant of Genesis 15 was ratified at night. The time of day is stated as being between the period when *“the sun was going down”* (v. 12) and *“when the sun went down”* (v. 17). This would be equivalent to the time specified in later years for the offering of the Passover lambs, i.e. *“between the two evenings”* (Exod 12:6, RSV mg.), a phrase that apparently means ‘between mid-afternoon and sunset’. The Exodus account uses the expression *“the selfsame day”* (the Jewish day commences at sunset) making it clear that Abram’s descendants left Egypt exactly 430 years after the giving of the covenant (Exod 12:40, 41; Gal 3:17). So, Abram is given the land-covenant on the Passover night and 430 years later the Israelites are liberated from Egyptian slavery on the Passover night. On a Passover more than 2,000 years after Abraham another unconditional covenant (the new covenant) was ratified by God.

In Exodus, the Israelites, having departed from the land of death and slavery, passed through the sea—metaphorically, they were “resurrected” through the Abrahamic covenant. When they entered the land, they were baptized again, before re-establishing **the rite of circumcision** **covenanted to Abraham**; clearly, the Sinaiatic covenant should be understood as a subset to the Abrahamic covenant and certainly limited in what it could achieve. By obeying the law the Israelites made a choice for life, but that life was only made possible through the Abrahamic covenant. They were saved because of the Abrahamic covenant and **entered the land under the Abrahamic covenant—**ultimately the law could only bring death.



Egypt was known for its elaborate cult of the dead and preparations for the afterlife. Israel’s emergence from the land of death and slavery was similar to Abram awakening from the “horror of great darkness”. Moreover, the griffon-vulture, portrayed as the goddess Nekhbet, was also the symbol of upper-Egypt; her northern counterpart was the cobra goddess (cf. Exod 7:9-15). The unification of Upper and Lower Egypt was represented by the double crown bearing a prominent vulture and cobra. Over time Nekhbet was transformed from the personal protector of the Pharaoh and from the giver of the white crown to the Pharaoh; she became the symbol of sovereignty in ancient Egypt. Significantly, Nekhbet, who was the “wet nurse” of Pharaoh, became **the guardian of mothers and infants** (contrast the genocide of Hebrew male infants in Exod 1:6) and she took on the role of protector; she moved from being Pharaoh’s own goddess to one who looked after **mothers and children** through the whole land. Egypt’s oldest oracle was the shrine of Nekhbet at Nekheb, the original necropolis or city of the dead. A mamissi (**birth house**) can be found at the ancient city of Nekheb dedicated to Nekhbet. The temple was built around 2700 BC, and enlarged by later Pharaohs of the 18th through 30th dynasties, (1539-1069 BC) including Tuthmosis III, Amenophis II, and the Ramessids.



**The Covenant in Abeyance**

The corpses of this people will be food for the birds of the heaven and for the beasts of the earth. And no one will frighten *them away*.Jer 7:33 (NKJV)

The incident that provoked this response was the blatant reversal of the promise that the ruling elite had made to liberate their fellow Hebrew slaves in accordance with the Jubilee laws. Yahweh reminded them that he had, “made a covenant with your fathers (the Sinai covenant) in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (Jer 34:13). The Jews had once been a slave people in Egypt and the Jubilee law ensured that fellow Hebrews would not endure perpetual slavery or loss of property rights. The Jubilee enshrined the principle of liberty and restoration of land rights among the people of God.

However, although the Judean rulers imitated the Abrahamic covenant “when they cut the calf in two and passed between the parts of it” (Jer 34:18), and released their Hebrew slaves, afterwards they changed their minds and enslaved them again. This was an abomination to God and therefore the Abrahamic land-covenant was put in abeyance and the people were exiled to Babylon.

**The Land Covenant in Matthew**

It has already been suggested that the ‘vulture saying’ echoes the land covenant made with Abram. Other points of contact establish a connection between the narratives:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Matthew 24** | **Genesis 15** |
| Vultures (v. 28) | Vultures (v. 11) |
| Carcass (v. 28) | Carcasses (v. 11) |
| The sun will be darkened (v. 29) | The sun went down and it was dark (v. 17)  Horror *and* great darkness (v. 15) |
| The sign of the Son of Man will appear (v. 30) | There appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch (v. 17) |

The signs of “the end” in Matthew’s gospel are an allusion to the land-covenant that God made with Abram. The events of AD 70 saw Christ coming in judgement against the Jewish nation and the land-covenant was again put in abeyance – however, this does not diminish the eschatological significance of the prophecy, as it clearly remains unfulfilled until the Second Advent. Forms of the Greek verb suna,gw (gather together) which describe the congregation of the birds of prey in the ‘vulture saying’ in Matt 24:28 are also used to describe the assembly of the enemies of Christ:

Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds (ovrne,oij) that fly in the midst of heaven, ‘Come and gather together (suna,cqhte)for the supper of the great God’. Rev 19:17 (NKJV).

And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together (sunhgme,na) to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Rev 19:19 (NKJV).

The supper of the great God consists of the enemies of Christ—the ‘banquet’ that has been laid on for all the birds (vultures) is a recasting of the land-covenant and the ‘supper’ is also probably meant to contrast with the ‘last supper’ covenant meal. Intertextual links with Ezekiel demonstrates shared themes based on the land-covenant (note the mention of the mountains of Israel):

And as for you, son of man, thus says the Lord God, ‘Speak to every sort of bird and to every beast of the field’: “Assemble (suna,cqhte) yourselves and come; Gather together (suna,cqhte) from all sides to My sacrificial meal Which I am sacrificing for you, A great sacrificial meal on the mountains of Israel, That you may eat flesh and drink blood”. Ezek 39:17

The assembly of the wicked gathered together against Christ in Revelation 19 mirrors first century opposition to the preaching of the apostles:

And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders, and scribes, as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest, were gathered together (sunacqh/nai) at Jerusalem. Acts 4:5-6 (NKJV)

In Acts 4:26 Peter addressed these rulers with the words of Psalm 2:2 –

The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together (sunh,cqhsan) against the Lord and against His Christ. For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together (sunh,cqhsan). Acts 4:26-27

Finally, it should be noted that instead of the more usual ‘body’ (sw/ma, *sōma*) used in Luke’s version of the ‘vulture saying’, Matthew employed the less frequently used ‘carcase’ (ptw/ma, *ptōma*) in order to describe the dead body. The usual Greek word for body (sw/ma) can denote a living or a dead body (the word is sometimes used metaphorically to describe the church as the ‘body of Christ’); however, ptw/ma is only ever used of a dead body or carcass. This is significant because besides the ‘vulture saying’ in Matt 24:28, ptw/ma is only used five times in the NT. The word is twice used to describe the corpse of John the Baptist (Matt 14:12; Mark 6:29) and it is used three times for the corpse(s) of the witnesses (Rev 11:8-9). This is significant because John the Baptist pre-figured the eschatological witnessing.

**Conclusion**

The ‘vulture saying’ is based on the land-covenant made with Abraham. The ‘cutting’ (decapitation) of the body of John the Baptist heralded the establishment of the unconditional New Covenant in Christ. The Jewish and Gentile authorities who gathered together to oppose Christ and his Church were like the vultures swooping down to devour the pieces of the covenant sacrifice. The Judaist attempt to corrupt the Church and lead the nation back to slavery and death was therefore not allowed and the land-covenant was put in abeyance as it had been during the Babylonian Exile. Once again God did not frighten the vultures away and the carcasses of the people in AD 70 were a poignant reminder that God cannot be mocked—nevertheless, the covenant is unconditional and therefore after a 2,000 year *Diaspora* Yahweh has restored his people to their land.

However, the ‘vulture saying’ is intimately associated with the Second Advent and we should therefore expect an eschatological purging of Israel. The period of tribulation will be accompanied by a final witness to the nation and will conclude with the introduction of the Kingdom. This time the vultures are not frightened away, instead they are invited to dine on the enemies of Christ—as in the first century, this will consist of Gentile opposition and Jews who still reject him and his witnesses.

**A New Age**

**A. Perry**

**Introduction**

It is said that a new age in the purpose of God began with Jesus Christ. This age has been called various things, for instance, “The Christian Dispensation”. People have identified various starting points for this new age including, in chronological order, the birth of John the Baptist, the birth of Jesus (or both); the baptism of Jesus (and/or the beginning of his ministry); Jesus’ death and/or his resurrection; Pentecost; and finally, the end of the Jewish Commonwealth in AD70. The purpose of this article is twofold: first, to think about what it means to say that a new age began; and secondly, to show that if there is such an age, it did not begin with the baptism of Jesus.

**Baptism of Jesus**

What begins a new age in God’s purpose? Is the “baptism” of Jesus by the Spirit just such a beginning? If there was such a beginning, is the new age properly called “the messianic age”? What arguments could be made for there being such an age and for it beginning with the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus?

**Anointing with the Spirit**

The characterization of a period of time as an “age” could be based upon the reign of a king, although a messiah is not necessarily a king. The work of deliverance that a messiah executes could constitute the beginning of a new age. This analogy could be the basis for identifying the **coming of Jesus** to Jordan as the beginning of a new age that is defined by him—the messianic age—the age of the Anointed One.[[2]](#footnote-2)

John answered, saying unto *them* all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: Luke 3:16 (KJV)

On this interpretation, the old age ended with John the Baptist, and the new age is defined by Jesus, who would baptize with the Spirit and with fire. Jesus was “anointed” as messiah by the Spirit (Luke 4:18). This messianic age is characterized as one of spirit and fire.

This argument is fair enough, but it is inconclusive. Whether an age began in the purpose of God with the baptism of Jesus **depends on what subsequently happened**. The argument begs the question if the bestowal of the Spirit ceased at some point and/or Jesus ceased to baptize with the Spirit after his resurrection. The declaration that Jesus was coming and that he would baptize with the holy Spirit and fire does not of itself show that a new age was now beginning.

Instead, we should consider the work of a messiah: his first work is that of deliverance of the people from the enemy; subsequent to his victory, there is the beginning of a new age for the people. The proposal that the baptism of Jesus begins the messianic age overlooks this structure in the concept of “messiah”: properly speaking, the messianic age does not begin until the victory has been won and the people thus delivered can enjoy the peace and security of the new age.

**The Law and the Prophets were until John**

It is said that John belongs to the age of the Law and the Prophets:

The law and the prophets *were* until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it. Luke 16:16 (KJV)

This would characterize the new age is one of “the kingdom”, one in which the Law of Moses was no longer operative. The text has been taken as saying that a new age began after John and with the ministry of Jesus; thus, it is said that the baptism of Jesus began the new age.

There are problems with this proposal: first, the text excludes John from the old age—the putative new age begins with him because the Law and the Prophets were *until* John; secondly, the argument begs the question as to what then happened—an age has a beginning if, retrospectively, we can identify an age. The “preaching of the kingdom” happened in the ministry of both John and Jesus, but did it continue in the decades and centuries that followed?

If the new age began with John, it didn’t begin with the baptism of Jesus. We could say that the new age began with the birth of John and Jesus. This would be a more plausible interpretation if we saw continuity between John and Jesus in their respective ministries. However, does the “end” of the Law and the Prophets mean that there is now a new age in the preaching of John and Jesus?

Since Jesus did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets (Matt 5:17) but to fulfil their terms, the meaning of the saying ‘the Law and the Prophets were until John’ must be consistent with this idea of fulfillment. Thus, we can say that what Jesus means is that the teaching of the Law and the prophets in the synagogues were until John, but now there was the work of preaching the kingdom of God. He is drawing a contrast between the daily *teaching* of the Law and the Prophets and the *preaching* of the kingdom. We could make this difference the marker for a new age, but the new age so defined is then limited by this characterization: it is the age of the preaching of John, Jesus and their disciples. We do not have in this idea of a new age, a description of the messianic age, or the age of the kingdom, or the age of a restored Israel, or even “the age of the church”.

**The Kingdom of God is at Hand**

Since the concept of an “age” is one to do with time, any reference to “the times” is critical evidence.

And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel. Mark 1:15 (KJV)

This declaration takes place as Jesus returns to Galilee after his wilderness temptations. The kingdom is said to be “**at hand**” which implies that a new age had not yet begun: it was being preached. The reference to the “time is fulfilled” is therefore prospective and means a new age is about to begin. This line of interpretation suggests that the baptism of Jesus does not represent the beginning of the new age and it also excludes the birth of John and Jesus as the beginning of the new age if we take “the kingdom” to be the characterization of the new age.

This observation is important: if we take the new age to be the age of the kingdom, we would say that it did not begin with John or Jesus. If we take the new age to be instead the proclamation of the kingdom, we might say that it began with the births of John and/or Jesus or even the announcements to Zacharias and Mary. In this case, the baptism of Jesus does not look the obvious candidate for the beginning of a new age of preaching.

**The Kingdom of God is in your Midst**

John preached that the kingdom of God was “at hand” (Matt 3:2), but this message changed to some extent with Jesus because he says that the kingdom of God is in some sense present:

But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. Matt 12:28 (KJV)

Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, “The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look, here *it is*!’ or, ‘There *it is*!’ For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst.” Luke 17:20-21 (NASB)

If we are going to date the beginning of the kingdom age, we should do so to the ministry of Jesus and this began with his baptism. Jesus’ baptism by the Spirit is as good a starting point as any for the new age.

This argument is ambiguous at just the crucial point: it relies on the premise that the kingdom of God is in *some sense* present. But is this sense **the relevant sense** that allows us to say that a new kingdom age has begun with the baptism of Jesus (or even the beginning of the gospel story)?

The kingdom of God was present in the sense that the powers associated with the kingdom age were being shown in the ministry of Jesus, but the kingdom age itself had not yet begun; it was still **at hand**. Hence, we cannot say that the new age had begun with the baptism of Jesus. This line of interpretation is clear from the link Jesus makes between his exorcisms and the kingdom of God:

But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. Matt 12:28 (KJV)

But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you. Luke 11:20 (KJV)

Insofar as Jesus cast out demons, the kingdom of God had “come upon” them, but it was not present as an “age” unless we define the “new age” to include the ministry of Jesus. Jesus’ anointing with the Spirit at his baptism was an empowerment for his ministry but it was not the beginning of the new age which was still “at hand”.

**Battling the Kingdom of Satan**

In Luke’s account, Jesus is empowered by the Spirit (Luke 4:14) and he engages and resists Satan in the wilderness. His exorcisms throughout his ministry were an extension of this initial engagement, and in them he was continually defeating Satan (Mark 3:22-30). Although Jesus had possessed the Spirit since his childhood (Luke 2:40), it was only after his baptism by the Spirit that the clash between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan began. The beginning of the new kingdom age is, therefore, his baptism.

This argument does not work for the reason that it begs the question as to whether Jesus’ ministry is the new kingdom age in the purpose of God. The counter-argument is that his ministry was in the **last days** of a dying age and that the new age was **at hand**. In this case, Jesus’ baptism does not have the significance of inaugurating a new age. In typological terms, a cosmic battle with Satan is a figure for the defeat of an enemy before the restoration of Israel and the beginning of new age. (It is beyond the scope of this article to explore the meaning of this narrative parable of the cosmic battle.)

**The Descent of the Dove**

The mention of the dove at Jesus’ baptism may allude to the account of the Flood and the dove/homing pigeon sent out by Noah. The connection of the Spirit with a dove may also allude to the Genesis creation and the Spirit hovering as a bird over the waters. In either case, the symbology is of a new beginning at the baptism of Jesus and we could characterize this as the beginning of a new age.

The problem with this argument is that the two allusions are “new creation” types rather than types that signal a new age; they **relate to creation** rather than the structure of God’s purpose in the working out of the history of Israel. We can accept the symbology of a new creation in the baptism of Jesus as that relates to him, but this does not make his baptism the beginning of a new age. The concept of a new kingdom age **relates to God’s dealings with Israel**.

**Messianic Anointing**

Jesus’ quotation of Isa 61:1-2a in his Nazareth address links his baptism by the Spirit at Jordan with the “anointing” of Isaiah’s anonymous conqueror. This is a messianic anointing rather than an anointing associated with the Davidic dynasty. We could say therefore that the messianic age began with the baptism of Jesus (Acts 10:38).

This argument does not work. The anointing of an individual and the beginning of an age associated with that individual do not necessarily coincide. For example, the anointing of Saul or David did not coincide with the beginnings of their reigns; similarly with the dynasty of Jehu. The question is whether we take the beginning of the messianic age to coincide with Jesus’ Davidic enthronement or his anointing at Jordan.

Given the conflict that Jesus engages upon and prophesies in his ministry, it is better to place the beginning of the messianic age after this conflict and tribulation—and place it at the beginning of the era of peace and good governance. We might want to speak of a new *stage* in God’s dealings with Israel with the ministry of John and Jesus, but this is not the beginning of a new age, a kingdom age, or a Christian dispensation.

**Beloved Son**

The words spoken to Jesus at his baptism were,

And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased. Luke 3:22 (KJV)

The words quote elements of Ps 2:7 and Isa 42:1,

I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ps 2:7 (KJV)

Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. Isa 42:1 (KJV)

The elements being quoted are ‘Thou art my...son’, ‘delight/well-pleased’, ‘with thee/in whom’ and ‘I/my soul’. The question is whether these OT texts indicate the beginning of a new age.

The Isaiah source refers to God’s Servant, Hezekiah in its primary application. The catalyst for the oracle is Hezekiah’s return from the east of Jordan and a victory over Ammon and/or Moab;[[3]](#footnote-3) he has liberated Judahites recently deported to this region during Sennacherib’s invasion in 701. It is this action of which God is well pleased, but there are yet further enemies around Judah for Hezekiah to subdue. The quotation of these words by the divine voice identifies Jesus as God’s servant.

The psalm source shares thematic elements with Isaiah and it is an appropriate text with which Isaiah can be combined in a quotation. The declaration in the psalm is in favour of David and Zion; God announces that he will subdue his enemies. The use of the quotation at the baptism of Jesus is an announcement of Jesus’ rights as the Davidic king.

The two OT contexts do not lend a typological basis for seeing the beginning of a new age in the baptism of Jesus. We are in the middle of Hezekiah’s reign in Isaiah 42; furthermore, while there is a new beginning in his reign after 701, and the times can be characterized as a time of restoration, this does not allow us to say that it was a new age. What happened in just over a hundred years was the dissolution of Judah as an independent kingdom and exile for the upper and middle classes. Moreover, God was shortly to announce the deportation of the royal house to Babylon (Isa 39:6) which is a prophecy that would be fulfilled in the Babylonian Exile.

Similarly, the Psalm is not from the beginning of David’s reign, but from some time during his reign at a time when Israel are dominant in the region (Ps 2:3). The declaration that God had begotten David is a metaphor for his *renewal* of the choice of David as his king upon Zion. The use of the quotation in the divine voice at Jesus’ baptism is for the same purpose: it is a metaphorical avowal of Jesus as God’s anointed.[[4]](#footnote-4) The metaphor is used again by Paul in Acts 13:33 in relation to Jesus’ resurrection: Jesus is raised from the dead and declared again to be the Son of God with power in this act (Rom 1:4).

**The Last Adam**

The sequence of events at the start of the synoptic gospels suggests that Jesus is being presented as an antitype to Adam:

* the Spirit descended into Jesus (eivj auvto,n, Mark 1:10)/God breathed into Adam the breath of life
* Jesus is tested by Satan/Adam is tempted through the Serpent

Luke’s gospel confirms this comparison because he includes the genealogy of Jesus between the account of his baptism and his temptations in the wilderness. Jesus is presented as the descendent of Adam, the son of God (Luke 3:38) and declared to be a beloved son. The typology here is one of new creation—the creation of the “second man” and the “last Adam” (1 Cor 15:45, 47), but it is not a typology of a new age, unless we insist that a **new creation** is by definition a new age.

We could compare Jesus’ conception by the holy Spirit to God breathing the breath of life into Adam. If we do so, we might then try and find a typical analogue to Jesus’ receiving the holy Spirit at his baptism and construct a typological pattern with three elements:

* Jesus is born of the holy Spirit/Adam received the breath of life
* the Spirit descended into Jesus/compared to ??
* Jesus is tested by Satan/Adam is tempted through the Serpent

This would work if we paralleled the command to Adam in the garden (a spirit-word to not eat of the tree of knowledge) with the Spirit coming upon Jesus at his baptism. This would make the new creation type begin with Jesus’ birth and any new age would be seen to have begun at that time.

Once again, the argument here turns upon how we think of the concept of an age. Is this a concept that just describes **the history of Israel**; or is it a concept that also embraces creation as a whole?

**Israel**

There are typological links between Jesus and Israel’s experience in the Book of Exodus. Since the exodus from Egypt and all that ensued at Sinai represents a new beginning in God’s purpose, it is argued that the Gospel writers are presenting Jesus’ baptism and wilderness experience as a new beginning, the beginning of a new age:

* Israel crossed the Red Sea/Jesus was baptised. The crossing of the Red Sea is a type of baptism (1 Cor 10:2).
* Jesus was led by the Spirit in the wilderness just as Israel/Moses were led through the wilderness (Luke 4:1, NASB; Exod 13:21; Isa 63:14).
* Israel was in the wilderness 40 years; Jesus was in the wilderness 40 days.
* Israel was tested in the wilderness (Deut 8:2-5); Jesus was tested in the wilderness and cited texts from Deuteronomy 6-8.

Israel was God’s son (Hos 11:1) and this pattern reinforces the identity of Jesus as God’s son. However, there are other types in the account:

1) The heavens were “rent” (sci,zw, Mark 1:10), which fulfils the hope expressed in Isa 64:1, ‘Oh that thou wouldst rend the heavens’. This hope follows on from the remembrance of the exodus story (Isa 63:7-19) and it reflects that story: God had come down and delivered his people in their exodus from Egypt, and the prophet urges Yahweh to come down and deliver his people once again. This echo to the exodus through Isaiah configures the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus as a theophany and a type of deliverance.

2) The Spirit descended into Jesus (eivj auvto,n, Mark 1:10); the holy Spirit likewise was put within Moses (Isa 63:11). Jesus is a “new Moses” for the people—he will deliver them. This type should not be misconstrued as an analogue to Sinai; the giving of the Spirit cannot parallel the giving of the Law because there is no corresponding element for the new covenant. The **new covenant sacrifice still lay in the future** with the death of Jesus (Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20). The covenant transaction had not yet been effected.

3) Jesus came up out of Jordan and after a wilderness period entered Galilee (cf. Josh 4:14). This typical comparison sees Jesus “coming up” out of Jordan, which echoes the crossing of Jordan under Joshua, even though Jesus does not then immediately enter Galilee. The prominence of the verb “to come up” in the Joshua account, particularly in relation to the ark, makes this echo likely (Josh 4:16-19, 5x), and the point being made is that after baptism, or in baptism, a person should then “enter” the kingdom of God (John 3:5). Jesus’ own example is an enacted demonstration of the message he was preaching.

These various types in the baptism of Jesus are not designed to signal a change in the ages but the **nature of deliverance** through water and the spirit.

**New Covenant**

Jeremiah prophesied,

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah… Jer 31:31 (KJV)

This is picked up in Hebrews,

In that he saith, A new *covenant*, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old *is* ready to vanish away. Heb 8:13 (KJV)

For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were *committed* under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. Heb 9:15 (KJV)

Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant insofar as he is its high priest and its sacrificial death. Individuals enter this covenant through water baptism since they are baptized into the death of Christ (Rom 6:3). Such individuals are then in the position of waiting for the Abrahamic promise of inheritance, an inheritance that would last forever, to be fulfilled. Jesus’ baptism is different to the baptism of his followers because they are baptized **into him** and into his death.

We cannot say therefore that the new covenant began at Jesus’ baptism or that he entered the new covenant when he was baptized of John or the Spirit. The old covenant was passing away and did so finally in the destruction of the temple in AD70. The new covenant was and is mediated by Christ and the critical event for that covenant is the death of Christ. The structure of the concept of “covenant-making” is: God-mediator-covenant-people; in this structure, Jesus is the mediator and not the people; it is a mistake to have Jesus *entering* a new covenant in his baptism.

We can exclude the baptism of Jesus as the beginning of a new age, but we could say that a new age began with the death of Christ, because this is the one sacrifice that did away with the Mosaic system. However, this raises the question as to what an age *is* from God’s point of view. It is possible to mix up different “beginning and ending” motifs and get into a muddle. Thus, while we might say there is no evidence that the messianic age or the kingdom age began, because there is no evidence that Israel were restored, but the reverse—they were scattered among the nations in AD70, we could say that the mosaic order did come to end and a new covenant age began. Is this the correct analysis?

**Conclusion**

This has been a discursive essay. We haven’t successfully argued that *any* new age began in the first century; we haven’t shown that a Christian dispensation began. This is because while the Mosaic Age ended, we haven’t shown that a new age based on the new covenant has **continued** since the first century; it may be that the introduction of the new covenant does not signal a new age from God’s point of view. The subject is large and complicated, involving as it does, the interpretation of Revelation as well as Daniel and the Prophets. However, the subject is not just an arcane matter of prophetic interpretation; the doctrine of the Spirit is bound up with the correct understanding of the structure of the ages.[[5]](#footnote-5)

**Three “Last Days” Prophetic Utterances**

**J Adey**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Numbers 24** | **Psalm 110** | **2 Samuel 23** |
| vv. 3–4 ‘Said’ = ‘ne’um’ (x3); incl. ‘said the man’ = Heb. nü´ùm haGGeºber.  (Cf. Prov 30:1 ‘said the man’). | v. 1 ‘Said Yahweh’ = Heb. ne’um Yahweh | v. 1 ‘Said’ = ‘ne’um’ (x2); incl. ‘said the man’  = Heb. nü´ùm haGGeºber.  (Cf. Prov 30:1 ‘said the man’). |
| v. 17  (subject) him x2 | vv. 5–7  his/he (x 6) | v. 3  (subject) he |
| v. 17  star out of Jacob | v. 3  dawn/morning  (Cf. Rev. 22:16) | v. 4  light of the morning |
| v. 17  sceptre | vv. 2 & 4 rule . . . Melchizedec | v. 3  he . . . rules |
| v.17  shall rise | Theme of the Psalm (Cf. Acts 2:24, 32, 33; 5:31). | v.1  raised up |
| v. 17  shall smite | vv. 5–6  shall smite x 2 | v. 6  [war/judgement . . . Belial thrust away…fire]. vv. 10 and 12: Yahweh wrought a great victory. |
| v. 18  possession  (of his enemies…) x 2 | vv. 1–2, 5–7  acquiring enemies’ dominion |
| v. 18  (subject) him x2 | vv. 5–7  his/he (x 6) | v. 3  (subject) he |
| v. 18  enemies  (Cf. Gen. 22:17–18) | v. 1  (thine) enemies | Cf. 2 Sam. 23:6–39 |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Numbers 24** | **Psalm 110** | **2 Samuel 23** |
| v. 18 Israel | v. 3  thy people | vv. 1, 3 Israel (x2) |
| v. 18  Heb. Hayil  valiantly/powerfully | v. 3  Heb. Hayil  power | Heb. Hayilcf. 2 Sam. 22:40 & 23: 6–39 |
| v. 19  he…dominion | v. 2  rule thou  (= he, vv. 5–7) | v. 3  he…rules |
| v. 19  [Amalek] first = head/chief | vv. 6–7  heads…head | vv. 8, 13, 18  head/chief |
| Cf. 24:7 his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. | v. 7 Lift up [the head] | v. 1  raised up |

**The Faithful and Wise Servant**

**P Wyns**

Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Matt 24:45 (NKJV)

When we read a text like this a number of questions suggest themselves. Does Jesus have a specific servant in mind? Is this text applicable to the first century or ‘the end’ or both? What does it mean to give the household food (literal/metaphoric…or both?) in due season? The wise and faithful servant is contrasted with the servant who abuses his fellow servants and eats and drinks with the drunken. How do we understand this?

The faithful and wise servant is made ruler over (kate,sthsen) the household. The Greek implies delegated responsibility and is translated as ‘put in charge’, ‘give the responsibility’ or ‘appointed’—the NLT renders the sense of the verse as follows; “Who is a faithful, sensible servant, to whom the master can give the responsibility of managing his household and feeding his family?” The same word is used in Acts for the appointment of the seven brethren (including Stephen) to oversee the Greek widows;

Therefore, brethren, seek out (evpiske,yasqe) from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over (katasth,somen) this business (th/j crei,aj). Acts 6:3 (NKJV)

One of the criteria for choosing the seven is that they are “full of the Holy Spirit and **wisdom**” and Stephen himself is described as a “man full of **faith** and the Holy Spirit” (v. 6) and “full of **faith** and power” (v. 8) and Stephen’s opponents “were not able to resist the **wisdom** and the Spirit by which he spoke” (v. 10).

Stephen forms the benchmark for the “faithful and wise servant” who is appointed (made ruler over) “this business”. Of course Stephen was following in the footsteps of his Master, whose own appointment had been foreshadowed by Moses—“[Jesus] who was faithful to Him who appointed (poih,santi) Him, as Moses also *was faithful in all his house”* (Heb 3:2, 5). During his trial Stephen reminded his accusers that the Hebrews resented the fact that Moses had been made ruler over them (the parallel with Jesus being implicit); “Who made you a ruler (kate,sthsen) and a judge over us?” (Acts 7:27) The answer was, of course, that God had appointed both Moses and his Son over his household – and now his Son had appointed Stephen – and the Jews rejected all three appointments.

**Food in Due Season**

The apostles appointed Stephen over “this business” (th/j crei,aj), the same word is used to describe the welfare requirements of first century Christians in Acts 2:45—“and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need” (crei,an). Stephen was therefore put in charge of solving the problem of discrimination against the Greek widows (Greek speaking Jewish widows from the *Diaspora*) in the distribution of welfare (v. 1). The apostles gave the instruction to seek out (evpiske,yasqe) seven men to resolve the problem. Interestingly, the same word is used by James; “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit (evpiske,ptesqai) **orphans and widows** in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world (i.e. ‘of *good* reputation’)” (James 1:27).

Inner-biblical evidence from James supports an early dating of the epistle and points to composition by James the brother of John (not James the brother of the Lord) with the background shaped by the death of Stephen and the persecution that followed. The trial of Stephen operated as a catalyst in triggering a chain reaction that culminated in the conversion of Paul and the inclusion of the Gentiles. No longer would the early Christian church be regarded as a Jewish sect within the Synagogue. The inclusion of the Gentiles hastened the “parting of the ways”.

The way that James (a former disciple of John the Baptist) directs his invective against “adulterers and adulteresses” (James 4:4) and murderers (James 4:2) demonstrates that he has in mind the murder of John the Baptist (for condemning the adultery of Herod) and the murder of Stephen for “envy” (James 4:4-5; compare Num 11:26-29). James’ comments are therefore directed at a mixed audience within the synagogue which was compromised of Judaists and Christian converts.

For James, Stephen was the paradigm of a Jew who practised “true religion” the perfect combination of faith and works (James 2:26). The twelve apostles, including James, did not want to “leave the word of God” in order to “serve tables” (Acts 6:2). Stephen demonstrated that it was possible to do both—to give the Greek widows organic *and* spiritual food. He was fulfilling the commission given to Peter in John 21:16—“feed my sheep” and he is the first Christian outside the apostolic group to perform “signs and wonders” (Acts 6:8). It was the trial and death of Stephen which forced a parting of the ways between Judaism and Christianity:

Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. Acts 6:9 (NKJV)

There is confusion regarding this synagogue. Some consider it a singular institution, others as referencing more than one synagogue. What does the term “Freedmen” (Liberti/noj) mean? Were they former Roman slaves and converts to Judaism who had their synagogue at Jerusalem? It is possible that they were Jews living in Rome who had been made slaves by the Romans under Pompey but afterward were set free, and had built a synagogue at Jerusalem. Others understand “Libertines” as denoting the location of Libertum (A Jewish community in Africa) rather than a descriptive term.

However, the mention of Cilicia is interesting, as the apostle Paul was a citizen of Tarsus, which lies within the region of Cilicia (Acts 21:39; 22:3). Paul was born a Roman citizen (from a father who was a freedman? cf. Acts 22:28) and was a Hellenistic Jew. Paul was also closely involved in the dispute with Stephen and was present at his sentencing (Acts 8:1; 22:20). The tentative conclusion suggested here is that we are dealing with a singular synagogue in Jerusalem, home to well educated Hellenistic *Diaspora* Jews, who were Roman citizens by birth (like Paul). They resented the fact that Stephen cared for the Hellenistic widows (which they saw as their sphere of activity) and probably saw his concern as a drive to undermine the authority of their Synagogue. Moreover, they found that it was impossible to best Stephen in Scriptural proofs (even Saul of Tarsus?) demonstrating that Jesus Christ was the Messiah. It seems that the *Diaspora* Jews were more influential (and affluent) than we give them credit for and they wanted to stop the “contamination” of Christianity spreading beyond Jerusalem. Clearly the Sanhedrin was unable to halt the spread of the movement in Judea and therefore extreme measures were necessary to prevent dissemination to the *Diaspora* community.

**Eating and Drinking with the Drunken**

**(45)** Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? **(46)** Blessed *is* that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. **(47)** Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. **(48)** But if that evil servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming’, **(49)** and begins to beat *his* fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards (mequo,ntwn), **(50)** the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for *him* and at an hour that he is not aware of, **(51)** and will cut him in two and appoint *him* his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

If Stephen is the paradigm for the faithful and wise servant then who is the evil servant who abuses his fellows and eats and drinks with the drunken? The evil servant is the believer who loses faith in the return of Christ— “Where is the promise of His coming?” (2 Pet 3:4), expresses the same sentiment as Matt.24:48—“My master is delaying his coming”. During his trial Stephen pointed out that the Israelites had reacted the same way when Moses was in the presence of Yahweh on Mount Sinai; “we do not know what has become of him” (Acts 7:40). On that occasion the Israelites used the absence of Moses to make an idol (a copy of the calf-cherubim?) and “the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play” (Exod 32:6). The apostasy and the orgy were justified as a “feast to the Lord” (v. 5) and both the creation of the idol and the feast was (reluctantly?) supported by the priesthood.

In Hezekiah’s day the “drunkards” were an element among from the northern tribes who had sought a new life in Judah and Jerusalem. Some within the captial acted as a fifth column[[6]](#footnote-6) and betrayed Hezekiah by making an agreement with the Assyrians, which they celebrated with a feast. They were the “drunkards” of Ephraim –

Woe to the crown (cf. LXX:Ste,fanoj, *Stephen*) of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim... that are overcome with wine[[7]](#footnote-7)... Isa 28:1 (KJV)

The priest and the prophet erred through intoxicating drink (Isa 28:7). The revolt extended beyond the northerners[[8]](#footnote-8) as the traitors are described as “scornful men, Who rule this people who *are* in Jerusalem”(Isa 28:14). They boasted that they had made an agreement with death and hell (with the Assyrians) and therefore they were untouchable (Isa 28:15). The parallels with first century Judaism are obvious, as the rulers of Jerusalem (Jew and Gentile) agreed to crucify Christ (Acts 4:27). Moreover, the internal situation depicted by Isaiah during the Assyrian crisis is characterised by the factionalism, in-fighting and betrayal that occurred during the Roman crisis and siege of Jerusalem in 66-70 AD.

With Isaiah in mind, we can say that the evil servant in Jesus’ parable would be one who defected to the party of the “drunken” and abused his fellow servants (beats them). The warning in Matthew also recalls the woman who made the inhabitants of the earth, “drunken with the wine of her fornication” (Rev 17:2) and who was “drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus” (Rev 17:6). In Matthew 24:30-36 Jesus accused the authorities of being the sons of those who murdered the prophets (v. 31) and warned that they would murder and persecute the prophets, wise men and scribes that he sent to them (v. 34). Stephen levels the same accusation against the Sanhedrin;“Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers” (Acts 7:52).

**I will give the nations for your inheritance**

The trial of Stephen marked a turning point in the spread of the gospel. Instead of crushing the movement, the persecution contributed to the growth of the gospel to the *Diaspora* as Christians fled from Jerusalem. When the chief persecutor experienced his Damascus road conversion and became the apostle to the Gentiles, the growth-rate of Christianity increased exponentially. The trial of Stephen was therefore instrumental in a drastic change of direction:

**(55)** But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, **(56)** and said, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!”**(57)** Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord;**(58)** and they cast *him* out of the city and stoned *him.* And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. **(59)** And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on *God* and saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit”. **(60)** Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep. Acts 7:55-60 (NKJV)

Acts 7 juxtaposes the judgement of the earthly council (Sanhedrin) on Stephen with the judgement of the heavenly council on the Sanhedrin. In an allusion to Ps 82:8, Jesus is depicted as standing instead of sitting (cf. Ps 110:1); “Arise, O God, judge the earth; for You shall inherit all nations”. Significantly Psalm 82 is quoted by Jesus in his own dispute with the Sanhedrin (John 10:34-35) and the motif of inheriting all nations is also found in Psalm 2 which was extensively quoted by the apostles and applied to the rulers who had crucified Christ (Acts 4:25-29). Interestingly, Psalm 2 concludes with the following admonition;

**(10)** Now therefore, be wise, O kings; Be instructed, you judges of the earth. **(11)** Serve the Lord with fear, And rejoice with trembling. **(12)** Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, And you perish *in* the way, When His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed *are* all those who put their trust in Him. Ps 2:10-12 (NKJV)

Saul was one of the judges that required instruction, he almost perished on the way to Damascus but he “kissed the Son” and preached justification by faith (those who put their trust in Him) **to the Gentiles.** The request by Stephen “not charge them with this sin” was therefore answered by the conversion of Saul—the judgement against the Sanhedrin was that, henceforth, the message would go forth to the Gentiles (Rom 11:12).

**Conclusion**

We can now attempt to answer the questions that were posed at the beginning of this article. The wise and faithful servant who is appointed to give the household food in due season is Stephen. The “food” that Stephen supplied was both literal (organic food) and Spiritual (the Word of God). He was the perfect example of faith and works operating in unison. The party of the “drunken” are those who are guilty of the blood of the saints (of all ages), those that make covenants with enemies of the gospel in order to save their own skin—the “evil servant” is the one who defects to this party (and who no longer eats and drinks with Christ).

The apostle Paul encountered a deliberate attempt to infiltrate the early church and turn believers back to Judaism. This included forged epistles and character assassination with the situation worsening to such an extent that Paul complained that “all those in Asia have turned away from me”(2 Tim 1:15). Paul may have had a particular individual in mind when he warned the Corinthians about “deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ” (2 Cor. 11:13). In any case, the danger of defecting back to Judaism was very real—“But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: “A dog returns to his own vomit” and “a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire” (2 Pet 2:22[[9]](#footnote-9)).

Jesus warned that he would come unexpectedly and “will cut him (the evil servant) in two and appoint *him* his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt 24:51). The cutting in two (dicotome,w) is a reference to the land-covenant of Gen 15:10 which went into abeyance in AD 70. Those who had “gnashed their teeth (in anger)” at Stephen (Acts 7:54) would come to gnash their teeth in sorrow and weeping (Matt 24:51) when the nation was judged and scattered.

**The *Shema* of Deut 6:4**

**J W Adey**

**Abstract**

Hebrew: dx'(a, hw"ïhy> WnyheÞl{a/ hw"ïhy>

Transliteration: YHWH ´élöhênû YHWH ´eHäd

Word-for-word translation: Yahweh God of us, Yahweh one

King James’ Version: The LORD our God *is* one LORD

*Aim:*Is *´eHäd* in this text about ‘unity’ or numerical ‘one’? I argue that *´eHäd*, an adjective qualifying ‘Yahweh’, is performing its normal quantitative role as the cardinal numeral ‘one’, and thus (the) ‘unity’ (of Yahweh) is not its intended sense. This presentation should also affirm that Scriptural revelation insists Yahweh is one, not a unity. That He, (with singular pronouns), is indivisible, the sole occupant of the category ‘God’.

**Introduction**

Deut 6:4’s *´eHäd*, Trinitarians claim, is ‘one’ of ‘unity’, specifically “compound unity”. However, they also cite Jesus’ usage to insist that the numerical sense of ‘one’ applies:

And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he... Mark 12:32 (KJV)

For Trinitarians, Deut 6:4 is a gift proof text. It features, for example, in ‘Article I: “I Believe in One God’” of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1999), where “God is unique; there is only one God.”[[10]](#footnote-10) Maintaining this sense of ‘one’, having “faith in God, the only one”,[[11]](#footnote-11) aligns with Scriptural (unitarian) language about God, and thus the Shema text can be cited as if their creed were *totally* faithful to it.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Yet, mention of ‘one’ facilitates talk of ‘[tri]-unity’. Presupposing a ‘tri-une’ God, *´eHäd* is read as *more-than-one-as-one*; whence, “compound unity”. A Hebrew abstract noun for ‘unity’, different in form from *´eHäd*, but a cognate of ‘one’, does not occur in the Hebrew Bible.[[13]](#footnote-13) Had a term like *´aHdût* been used in Deut 6:4, then not only would ‘unity’ be the statement’s sense, ‘one’ singular would not have been possible.

Conceptual clarification is necessary, here. Whilst ‘one’ can be transposed in sense (in the relevant usage and context) as the metaphoric ‘one’ = unity (‘oneness’); the term ‘unity’ cannot be deconstructed (back) to ‘one’; the composition of ‘unity’ requires *more than one*. So, on these terms, if ‘unity’ were the sense of *´eHäd* (though it is not the Hebrew for ‘unity’), then numerical ‘one’ which Trinitarians rightly insist on, and Scripture’s own commentary confirms, would not be a possible feature of this Deuteronomy text.

So, Deut 6:4, used in the Trinitarian’s dual way, serves their purposes. But it should not be overlooked that the text is used by them to insist that *´eHäd* numbers a singular ‘one (thing)’ lest they should be charged with ‘tri-theism’ (that they believe in three Gods); thus *God as one being* means (their) monotheism is upheld. However, ‘one’ is being subtly used in two different ways, as is also the case with respect to (what it is to be) ‘God’.

It is clear from the New Testament (NT) and Jesus’ usage, that talk about ‘Yahweh’ qualified by *´eHäd* in Deut 6:4, is about the same referent as either ‘God’ or ‘the Lord’. (Not for subordinationist reasons, but to avoid confounding the “three divine persons”, Trinitarians distinguish Jesus as Lord from his Father as Lord). In the NT it is ‘Lord’ in the place of Old Testament (OT) ‘Yahweh’ that is qualified by ‘one’:

And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord. Mark 12:29 (KJV)

Jesus maintained that “Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35), so these next two (eschatological) texts will share the same theological viewpoint about Yahweh/Lord as Jesus’ use of Deut 6:4. None of the cited statements suggests ‘unity’ but rather ‘one (thing)’, as also intended in the limiting sense of ‘alone’[[14]](#footnote-14):

And Yahweh shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be **one** Yahweh, and his name **one**. Zech 14:9

That men may know that thou, whose name **alone** is Yahweh, art the most high over all the earth. Ps 83:18. [My bold text.]

I adduce these texts and others in this article to show what ‘one Yahweh’ conceptualises for ancient Israel, about their relation to God by His name, for their Godly observance (Deut 12:29-32), and to prevent polytheistic compromise or confusion. Moreover, modern Christadelphian unitarians are conditioned by the same ‘one’ that associates with the Father only being God: “To us there is but one God, the Father” (1 Cor 8:6, cf. Mal 3:10). How could ‘unity’ apply to the self-complete, perfect, one-person, unchangeable God of the Bible? How important ‘one’ is (instead) to the doctrine of God as Yahweh.

I do not deny that unity *associates* with God or His name; Jesus’ authority in John 17 teaches that. Indeed, *´élöhênû*―‘our God’―in Deut 6:4 presents a relational God, one to whom the approved ‘us’ (Israel/saints) are united (cf. Exod 3:6, 12, 14-15; 6:7; Num 16:5; Rev 21:3, 7; 1 Cor 15:28). Even if ‘Yahweh’ is a class-name for the set of the redeemed (Rev 14:1), those kept in God’s name (John 17:11-12) are not Yahweh; He remains Himself.

However, I take it that ‘unity’ presupposes the uniting or harmonious relation of at the least two parts or parties. Eve made for Adam has been expressed thus: “Each for the other―a unity in two”.[[15]](#footnote-15) In Biblical cases, as with our first parental pair, the sense of ‘one’ as unity is usually apparent. Man and woman are and typify “a communion of persons”[[16]](#footnote-16); “they two shall be one flesh” (Matt 19:5-6) cites what the original Divine joining facilitated (Gen 2:24; a type for Rev 21:2-10).[[17]](#footnote-17) Divine joining is the presupposition in these cases, too: “I and my Father, we are one” (John 10:30),[[18]](#footnote-18) or “that they may be one as we *are* one” (John 17:11, 21-22; 1 Cor 15:28).

These instances use the number ‘one’ to present ‘one-ness’. This is not the concrete counting of objects as ‘one (thing)’ but a bonding measured by ‘one’ as a single qualitative property. ‘Oneness’, or the unity of a “multitude which no man can number” (Rev 7:9)[[19]](#footnote-19), is transcendental, on a scale reckonable only by Yahweh who’s “understanding is infinite” (Ps 147:5).[[20]](#footnote-20)

In what follows, as my treatment’s exposition is partly for apologetic purposes, I occasionally cite non-Biblical sources.

**[1] Terms of Reference**

On YHWH and ´élöhênû

My prime focus is how the use of the term *´eHäd* in the Hebrew Bible (HB) can inform us of its meaning in the *Shema* of Deut 6:4. I develop this in section [2] and connect with the New Testament (NT) ‘one’ in relation to God. The KJV’s italicised ‘*is*’, in ‘*is* one’, notes the absence of a verb. *YHWH ´eHäd* can be ‘one Yahweh’ as in Zech 14:9 (KJV), which also has “and his name one” (*ûšümô ´eHäd* ).

On YHWH

* The two KJV English non-name renderings ‘The LORD’ and ‘LORD’ are not representing the original Hebrew which has two instances of God’s name ‘Yahweh’.
* There are ‘lord’ terms in the HB, but the Holy Spirit has not used them in Deut 6:4.
* So, *´eHäd* is not qualifying a ‘Lord’ form in Deut 6:4 but the Divine name.[[21]](#footnote-21)
* Of course, the capitalised ‘LORD’ device perpetuates the Jewish practice of avoiding reading or pronouncing the 6828 instances of the Divine name in the HB.[[22]](#footnote-22)
* In Mark 12:29-34, compliant with the NT’s *mode of presentation*, the citation of this Deut 6:4 text is given with the Greek ‘Lord’ ku,rioj/kurios.
* It is anachronistic to treat the OT as if it were the NT, or to cite NT’s *kurios* quotational replacement for OT ‘Yahweh’ to justify ‘Lord’ (or other) replacements of ‘Yahweh’ back in the OT.[[23]](#footnote-23)
* God speaks solely to His son in rare moments in the NT, but there is no use of ‘Yahweh’ or His ‘I’-speak as in the OT. This theological difference is marked by Jesus using His Father’s ‘I’ (e.g., John’s “I am” – egō eimi) and manifesting God’s name.[[24]](#footnote-24)
* The prophetic focus on God’s name being again made known is presented in Ezek 38:23; 39:6-7 (cf. 48:35), as well as Zech 14:9 already cited (a text clearly linked to Deut 6:4), to be realised theophanically by Jesus’ as he intimated: “And I have declared unto them thy name, and **will declare** *it*” (John 17:26).

On ´élöhênû

I only draw attention, here, to the grammatical and semantic features of *´élöhênû*. I do not expound its meaning from comparative usage, as ‘one Yahweh’ is my focus. However, the relational ‘God of us’ or ‘our God’ (cf. *´élöhîm*) is about the kind of God ‘one Yahweh’ is.

* ‘Our God’, *´élöhênû*, is the plural *´élöhîm* shortened to (the genitive) *´élöhê*: ‘God of’.
* This form has the suffix *nû* meaning ‘our(s)’ or ‘us’ (cf. *nû* in ‘Imma**nu**el’).
* So, *´élöhênû* stated in English is: ‘God of us’ or “our God”.
* The plural *´élöhîm*, rather than the singular terms for ‘God’ *´él* and *´élôªh*, is used for the relating, through theophanic extending, of God to others.
* It is this functional differentiation (a ‘*value-addedness’*) between plural *´élöhîm* and the singular ‘God’ terms, that in Deut 6:4 conditions, or reciprocally is conditioned by, “Yahweh *is* one”.

**[2] Term for ‘One’**

On ´eHäd and ‘one’

a) Compound unity versus counting

Trinitarians claim that the Hebrew word*´eHäd* translated ‘one’ in Deut 6:4, denotes a compound unity, not a simple unity. So, ‘unity’ is what ‘one’ means for them in this text. However, their idea of Divine ‘unity’ as “compound unity” is an interpretation regulated by preconception. It would help if there was a Biblical Hebrew term, a cognate of ‘one’ especially, which was the abstract noun ‘unity’.[[25]](#footnote-25)

An example of ‘compound unity’ often given is where ‘one’ is applied to ‘day’ (lit. ‘day one’) in Gen 1:5 (*yôm ´eHäd*: KJV “first day”), because ‘day’ is made-up of parts: morning and evening, or day and night. However, in Zech 14:7, mention is made of a future ‘one day’ which does not have, or is denied (such day and night) parts; another is Joshua’s ‘day’. This makes clear, as in ‘day one of the first month’ (Ezra 10:17), that the role of ‘one’ qualifying ‘day’ is simply numbering, or time-marking in Gen 1:5. ‘Compound unity’ is not a relevant functional feature of ‘day one’. No explicit or implied consideration of the *uniting* of parts (two or more to make ‘one’) is taking place.

In Genesis 1, following use of the cardinal ‘one’ in v. 5, subsequent numbering of days use ordinal numbers (‘second’ 1:8, ‘third’ 13, etc.). In Gen 2:10-14, this same sequential pattern, starting with ‘one’ (KJV “the first” *hä´eHäd*), then continuing with ‘second . . . fourth’ is repeated in relation to the four rivers. Taking *´eHäd* or ‘one’ to be about ‘unity’ is governed by the notion of a compound that is ‘three-in-one’: unity as tri-unity. There are three related or united persons in their one God(head). The *Catholic Catechism* affirms,

* The Trinity is One (para 253).
* We do not confess three Gods but one God in three persons, the ‘consubstantial Trinity’ (para 253).
* The Divine Unity is Triune (para 254).
* God is onebut not solitary (para 254).[[26]](#footnote-26) (My underlining.)

b) *‘*Unity’ is special pleading

The analysis that follows shows “for ‘one’ read ‘unity’”, of the kind stated in the *Catechism*, above, is special pleading. Biblical proof is needed to show that *´eHäd* should become ‘unity’ as a different order of ‘one’. Of course, even if *´eHäd* in Deut 6:4 were to do with ‘unity’, that does not of itself mean a unity comprised of three (‘Gods’). Indeed, two human persons, or an innumerable redeemed “many becoming ‘one’” (in Christ and in God, his Father) aligns with Biblical precedents. By contrast, 1 John 5:7’s ‘three are one’ is notorious as a spurious trinitarian interpolation.

* In Hebrew idiom, as in Gen 11:6, whether masculine *´eHäd* [of ‘people’], or feminine *´aHat* [of ‘language’], ‘one’ always follows the noun it quantifies, whereas subsequent cardinal numbers (two, three, four, etc.) precede the noun to which they apply.
* Whatever the semantic or conceptual role of ‘one’/*´eHäd* in this Deut 6:4 formulation, it is positioned in the normal way so any *emphasis* or *nuance* is not obvious.[[27]](#footnote-27)
* Similarly, in Mal 2:10, both ‘father’ and ‘God’ (the singular form *´ēl*) are qualified by *´eHäd*: “Have we not all **one** father? Hath not **one** God created us?”

To sum up, what we have regarding Israel’s God and *´eHäd* / ‘one’ in the OT is a pattern of usage as follows,

‘One Yahweh’ (‘Yahweh *is* one’) in Deut 6:4 and Zech 14:9.

‘One Father’ and ‘one God’ in Mal 2:10.[[28]](#footnote-28)

‘One name’ (‘name one’) in Zech 14:9.

c) Greek NT ‘one’ corresponding to HB/OT ´eHäd in statements about God

We have already seen that Jesus cites Deut 6:4 in reply to a question in Mark 12:29:

And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments *is*, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord. (KJV) (NIV: …the Lord our God, the Lord is one).

ku,rioj o` qeo.j h`mw/n ku,rioj **ei-j** evstin

Lord the God of us Lord **one** (he/there) is

‘One’ (thing), as in a numbering sense, is explicit in Mark 12:32:

And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for **one** [STE God] there is; and not there is (an)other but he.

o[ti **ei-j** [STE Qeo.j[[29]](#footnote-29)] vestin kai. ouvk e;stin a;lloj plh.n auvtou/.

There are other NT texts that qualify God, or the Father, by ‘one’ (Gk. ei-j):

John 8:41 We have one Father, God.

1 Cor 8:4 An idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one.

1 Cor 8:6 But to us, one God, the Father, out of whom are all things.

Gal 3:20 Now a mediator is not of one, but God is one.

Eph 4:6 One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

1 Tim 2:5 For *there is* one God, and one mediator of God and of men, the man Christ Jesus.

Jas 2:19 You believe that there is one God; you do well.

In 1 Tim 2:5, ‘men’ and ‘God’ are distinct contrasting categories. ‘Men’ (avnqrw,pwn) is the plural of ‘man’ (a;nqrwpoj) which is used of Christ Jesus. God is one, and Jesus, who was a mediator of God[[30]](#footnote-30) and of men as the messenger of the covenant in his ministry, is also one individual. God and his son act in concert or complementarily, but ‘one’ used of the mediator Christ Jesus is not a ‘one’ of ‘unity’; this not the issue, here, although ‘making one’ was what his role achieved.[[31]](#footnote-31) Likewise, ‘one’ is used of God because He is the sole occupant of the set ‘(Most High; Only Wise) God’.

It is of particular note that ‘idol’ in 1 Cor 8:4, a category-term for polytheism, is contrasted with there being only one (who is) God. In the Deuteronomy context, the ‘one’ qualifying ‘Yahweh’ would be a witness against any tendency to go after other named neighbouring gods. God’s name, the vehicle by which He *made Himself known* (Exod 6:3) to His people, is identified in His acts the one who alone is Yahweh, the *´ēl*/God with(in) Isra**el**.

Elsewhere Jesus confirms his words to the scribe about the exclusive singularity (utter uniqueness) of God:

Matt 19:17; cf. Mark 10:18

Why me callest thou good? there is none good but **one**, that is, God.[[32]](#footnote-32)

BYZ: Ti, me le,geij avgaqo,nÈ Ouvdei.j avgaqo,j( eiv mh. **ei-j**( o` qeo,jÅ

UBS 3/4: Ti, me evrwta/|j peri. tou/ avgaqou/È ei-j evstin o` avgaqo,j [[33]](#footnote-33)

This “**one**that is God”, who alone is good, is Jesus’ God, his Father, to whom he prayed (Matt 26:39, 42, 53; 27:46; Mark 15:34), and ascended after his passion (John 14:28; 20:17. Cf. Rev 3:21).

d) NT quoting an OT text that connects with Jesus’ words about God and ‘good’

In Ps 14:2, Yahweh (God/*´élöhîm* in the Ps 53:2[3]-3[4] parallel) “looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God.” In Ps 14:3, Yahweh/*´élöhîm* observes:

*´ên `ö|SË-†ôb ´ên Gam-´eHäd*

there isnot *one* doing good, there isnot *one* even one.

So, here is a case of ‘one’(*´eHäd ↔* e`no,j cf. ei-j), where that amount is denied. *Not one* of the children of men could be found doing good, or by implication *not one* sought God (*´élöhîm*). This is quoted in Rom 3:12:

not there is (the) doing good, not there is as far as/even/ much as one.

BYZ: ouvk e;stin poiw/n crhsto,thta( ouvk e;stin e[wj e`no,j

UBS 3/4: ouvk e;stin o` poiw/n crhsto,thta( Îouvk e;stinÐ e[wj e`no,j

The OT and NT read that a count of the number ‘doing good’ gets nowhere, as not even one can be found. Also, why there is “not one doing good” is explained in Ps 14:3 by use of ‘all’ in the contrast: “They are all gone aside, they are *all* together (*yaHDäw*)[[34]](#footnote-34) become filthy.”

This use of Hebrew *´eHäd* and its Greek counterpart ei-jor e`no,j is about God’s own numbering use of ‘one’, which cannot be ignored when we look at God’s usage of *´eHäd* in Deut 6:4. Here, in this quoted Psalm text, God’s heavenly observation leads Him to (a quantitative) denial of ‘one’. ‘Not one (thing)’ is equal to zero; an empty set.

So, Jesus says there is ‘none good’, which agrees with his Father’s observation in the Ps 14:2-3 about the sons of Adam (*Bünê-´ädäm*), and adds by contrast that only **one** is good, his Father, that is God (see the NT texts cited in (c) above). Jesus’ understanding draws on Scripture; his followers do the same.

God’s being in the category of ‘one’ respecting ‘good’, or His own just use of ‘one’ to deny that ‘there is one’ on earth who is good, encourages us to relate this quantifying sense of ‘one’ to God’s revelation that ‘Yahweh *is* one’ in Deut 6:4.

(e) YHWH ´élöhênû YHWH lö´ ´eHäd: ‘Yahweh our God, Yahweh is not one’

Here is a test of whether ‘one’ can be ‘unity’. I have inserted *lö´*the Hebrew for ‘not’[[35]](#footnote-35) in the Shema, thus negating *´eHäd*. What this does, as examples below show, is to make ‘unity’ irrelevant, and the only sense to be inferred for ‘one’ from *´eHäd* is a restricting or quantitative marking.

*A few examples of ‘not one’ using lö´ ´eHäd in the HB[[36]](#footnote-36):*

Job 14:4Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? **not one.**

Exod 9:6[but of the cattle of the children of Israel] died **not one**.

Exod 8:31 there remained **not one.**

Exod 10:19there remained **not one** locust.

Exod 14:28there remained **not** among them even **one**.

*Observations*

* The above texts show how ‘not one’ is expressed using *´eHäd* negated by *lö´.*
* This negation of *´eHäd* denies ‘one’ is there, or that that much can be counted.
* ‘Yahweh *is* not one’ or ‘not one Yahweh’ is the logical opposite (negation) of ‘Yahweh one’.
* This shows that dx'(a, /*´eHäd* is not about ‘unity’ but a marker of ‘one’ (thing).
* Therefore, ‘unity’, in this hypothetical formulation, is not denied but ‘one’ is.
* This case of binary opposition is important for establishing the actual semantics of the non-negative form, as in Deut 6:4.

**[3]** **Conclusion**

Deut 6:4 is a foundational formula for the Israel of God, in which ‘one’ is the measure by which to recognise and differentiate (the wholly otherness of) Yahweh.

Biblical terms like ‘alone’ and ‘solitary’, or ‘only’ going in the direction of ‘unique’, ‘without equal’, ‘incomparable’, ‘most high’, etc., are true of God as they are of no other being. They complement or share some semantic symmetry with ‘one’. The sense of ‘unity’ is not hidden within them.

When the Hebrew term *´eHäd* comes into its NT equivalent ei-jit does so as ‘one’ and not as ‘unity’.

Ephesians 4:3 and 13 are the only places in the NT where the word ‘unity’ is used. Paul speaks of the need to strive for unity; it is the end of a perfecting process in Christ. This defines a context for talk of ‘unity’ and the relevance of employing a word with that meaning, e`no,thta, a developed form of ‘one’ (but not usable for the number or quantity ‘one’).

When Jesus cites Deut 6:4 in reply to a question in Mark 12:29, and the scribe attests to the truth of what Jesus said, the discussion of ‘one’ limits God to a single indivisible being, the Father only, as in 1 Cor 8:6 and elsewhere. Neither Jesus nor the scribe use ‘one’ to talk about (the) ‘unity’ of God as the Lord.

Deut 6:4’s ‘one Yahweh’ or ‘Yahweh one’ corresponds to “one Yahweh and His name one” in Zech 14:9.

‘One’ of Yahweh should serve as a check against ecumenical infidelity, to go after other gods which are not God, or to pluralise the Deity in any way. After all there is no other God but the one with the exclusive name, as identifyingly self-referenced in these texts:

That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that *there is* none beside me. I *am* Yahweh, and *there is* none else (Isa 45:6).

For thus saith Yahweh that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; He hath established it, He created it not in vain, He formed it to be inhabited: I *am* Yahweh; and there is none else (Isa 45:18).

**Marginal Notes**

**John 17:5 – P. Heavyside**

And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. John 17:5 (KJV)

The following points may be noted,

* “glorify [something]”, an imperative expression used for appealing to God , is found only three times in scripture: John 12:28; 17:1, 5; so in his prayer Jesus is clearly, twice, referring back five days to something he said then;
* Jesus said then, “father, glorify your name” (John 12:28), language which clearly connects with Jesus’ prayer, not only because of the expression “glorify” but also “father” and “name” (John 17:1, 6);
* in John 12’s context, glorifying the father’s name is presented as fulfilled in “the judgment of this world” and the Lord’s being **lifted up**, signifying what death he should die (John 12:31-33);
* this is confirmed by John’s later explanation that the things of which he spoke related to Isaiah’s prophecy which he spoke “when he saw his glory and spoke of him” (John 12:41) – this speaks of Isaiah’s vision of “the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and **lifted up**” (Isa 6:1);
* this set of connections shows that the “glory” (John 17:5) of which Jesus speaks in his prayer is the “glory” (John 12:41) which Isaiah saw in his vision;
* the same set of connections show that the “world” (John 17:5) before which the Lord had glory with the father was the “world” (John 12:31) which was to be judged and whose prince was to be cast out by the crucifixion of our Lord; that is, this world was that which was framed by distortions of the law of Moses through the traditions of the elders;
* thus, the glory which the Lord had with the father before the world was is typified by his glory prophetically portrayed in visions such as those seen in Isaiah 6;
* this is part of a comprehensive theme in John’s gospel (and other scriptures such as Hebrews) that portrays Jesus’ foreordination by the figures and prophetic visions of the Hebrew scriptures.

The following correspondences between Jesus’ prayer and Genesis 22 support this approach:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **John 17** | **Genesis 22** |
| lifted up his eyes v. 1 | lifted up his eyes vv. 4, 13 |
| father vv. 1, 21, 24  holy father v. 11  righteous father v. 25 | my father v. 7 |
| the hour is come v. 1 | they came to the place v. 9 |
| your son v. 1 | your son vv. 2, 12, 16 |
| with your own self v. 5 | by myself v. 16 |
| I have manifested your name v. 6 | Yahweh-yireh...it[[37]](#footnote-37) shall be seen v. 14 |
| one as we v. 11  even as we are one v. 22 | together vv. 6, 8 |
| as you have loved me v. 23  you loved me v. 24  the love wherewith you have loved me v. 26 | whom you love v. 2 |
| they may behold my glory v. 24 | saw the place afar off v. 4 |

The “seeing” theme of Genesis 22, expounded in John 8:56-58, relates also to the glory which Isaiah “saw” (John 12:41; Isa 6:1). Another correspondence is found between John 12 and Genesis 22, reinforcing the themes that are being shared here: the “voice from heaven” (John 12:28) which some ascribed to “an angel” (John 12:29) relates to the angel of the Lord twice calling from heaven (Gen 22:11, 15).

Consideration of this and other themes shows the marvellous depths of meaning involved, and the burden borne, in our Lord’s obedience to “the volume of the book” (Heb 10:7; Ps 40:7).

Worthy is the lamb that was slain [from the foundation of the world (13:8)] to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing… Rev 5:12

**Reviews**

**P. Pullman, The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ*,* Edinburgh: Canongate, 2010. 245pp. (TG)**

“This is a story”. The words emblazoned across the back cover that attempt to pre-empt and placate any of the expected religious fervour. It is true that this is a work of fiction and, in one sense, makes no claims to historical veracity at all. However, in another sense this book is very much about history and how history in interpreted – in the words of the blurb “this book is about how stories become stories”.

Pullman’s central literary device is the idea that Mary bore twins; a proposition with no historical credentials but handy for explaining away that inconvenient resurrection story. The lives of these two sons are delineated along the familiar paradigm of the so-called “historical Jesus” and the “Christ of faith”. The “Jesus” character is an ordinary child, who gets into mischief and shows no particular signs of greatness until, inspired by the teaching of John the Baptist, he becomes a wandering teacher preaching the coming of the Kingdom. The “Christ” character is an obsequious child, who studies in the synagogue, and who also responds to the teaching of John but with a vision of a worldwide church. “Christ” is visited on several occasions by a stranger who encourages his vision and instructs him to write down the sayings of Jesus, being careful not to confuse history with “the truth beyond time” (i.e. the truth that better serves the church). It is this stranger that persuades “Christ” to betray “Jesus” to the High Priest and later to stage the resurrection by pretending to be “Jesus” thereby providing a “miracle” that will inspire men. Pullman’s agenda is clear.

Though the book is not intended as a historical study, it is clear that Pullman is attempting to present a “rationalist” view of the life of Jesus and his fairly amateurish attempt flags up some of the problems with this approach. Pullman’s approach to the sources in eclectic and uncritical, drawing on the four canonical gospels and some apocryphal material. At some points, such the Sermon of the Mount, he pretty much paraphrases the gospel accounts; other instances, which do not suit his purposes, are reworked or omitted. The problem for Pullman is he wants to take some of the words of gospel accounts at face value and some as later fabrications but his only criteria for distinguishing between the two is what fits his conception of who Jesus was. This is a microcosm of the attempts of critical scholars to discover the “historical” Jesus; often their efforts, though steeped in academic language, amount to no more than Pullman’s arbitrary methodology.

The events of Jesus’ life are treated in a similar way. Miracles are created out of coincidence and rumour; the sick hear “Jesus” speak and feel better, the five thousand had some food really and “Jesus” encourages them to share, the wedding runs out of wine because the chief steward keeps back some to sell and “Jesus” shames him into bringing it out. Yet Pullman never attempts to explain why “Jesus” does not contradict the miracle-stories or turn away those seeking to be healed but instead seems to accept the fame that the miracle-stories bring. Pullman’s explanation of the resurrection is a good example of this clumsy revisionism. The body of “Jesus” is stolen but Pullman never reveals who stole it – not the disciples who are surprised by the empty tomb. Mary, the mother of Jesus, present at the crucifixion, conveniently returns to Nazareth before the resurrection morn, and presumably is never consulted about her two sons. “Christ” makes a few appearances and then leaves for a new town to lead a quiet life; we are left to presume that the disciples just let him go without question. The book is full of apologetic phrases about “Christ”, such as “he had the sort of face that few people remember” (!), in an effort to make the twin story stick. Even with the free-hand of artistic license, Pullman cannot create a plausible alternative to the resurrection event.

Viewed as a work of fiction, the book has few merits. It follows the gospel accounts rather slavishly. The characterisation of “Jesus” is poor; he is overlooked in favour of “Christ”, whose character is also under-developed. The story struggles to get going and has no real drive impelling the reader forward. Perhaps the most interesting sections are where Pullman’s own angst comes through clearest, particularly in Gethsemane where we find “Jesus” in prayer. Rather than “let this cup pass from me”, we find “Jesus” complaining about God’s absenteeism, espousing existentialist attitudes and predicting the corruption of the Catholic Church.

In sum, this book is neither a great literary work nor a significant challenge to Christianity.

**The Great Trinity Debate  
Dave Burke**

In November 2009, Robert M. Bowman proposed a debate on the Trinity between himself and any non-Trinitarian challenger at his blogsite ([www.reclaimingthemind.org/blog](http://www.reclaimingthemind.org/blog)). Bowman is a well known evangelical author in the USA who specialises in Christology and has written a number of books on the Trinity and the deity of Christ. He provided a list of criteria that all applicants were required to meet and said if more than one suitable candidate emerged, a vote would be held to determine his opponent. After a few weeks, readers were asked to vote for one of five candidates: myself, Anthony Buzzard (Unitarian), Michael Richardson (Mormon), David Barron (Seventh Day Adventist), and Kermit Zarley (Unitarian). In the poll which followed, I won the most votes and was selected to debate Bowman.  
  
Brother Bill Farrar generously donated two reference books that I needed for research purposes, and purchased several others on my behalf. Brethren Jonathan Burke (my identical twin), Steve Cox, Andrew Perry and Steve Snobelen acted as my support team, proof-reading my arguments before they went online. Each of them spent many hours checking my work for errors, making suggestions, and discussing the progress of the debate. They also provided additional resources (such as commentaries, journal articles and word definitions) when required. I am deeply indebted to these brethren for the wealth of experience, expertise and academic resources they brought to the debate.

Two days before the debate began, Bowman attempted to change the rules, stating that philosophical and historical arguments would not be allowed on the grounds that they were “irrelevant”. He also claimed that I had agreed to these restrictions. I challenged him on this and advised that I would be using both forms of argument regardless of whether or not he considered them to be relevant. Ultimately this proved to be a moot point, since Bowman himself ended up arguing from philosophy and history in response to my arguments.  
  
The debate covered six weeks, with each week devoted to a specific subject:

* Week 1: God
* Week 2: Jesus Christ
* Week 3: Jesus Christ
* Week 4: Holy Spirit
* Week 5: Father, Son and Holy Spirit
* Week 6: Summary and conclusion

Readers were able to post general comments and criticisms throughout the debate, and at the end of Week 6 they were invited to pose questions directly to myself and Bowman.

The format of the debate required us to post a positive argument on each subject, and respond to the opposing argument in the form of rebuttal. Thus, on the first day of the first week, we both presented an opening argument which articulated our respective understanding of God (His identity, characteristics, etc.) and then posted rebuttals throughout the rest of the week. Bowman had originally proposed a limit of 10,000 words for each opening argument but changed this to 5,000 words at my request. There was no word limit for rebuttal. It was agreed that a vote would be held at the end of the debate, to determine a winner.

Bowman's arguments consisted almost entirely of material copy/pasted from his book (*Putting Jesus In His Place*). Having purchased a copy of this book in preparation for the debate, I was able to predict his approach to various passages and anticipate the nature of his responses.

The debate was followed by a number of bloggers, most notably Scott Lencke, a pastor at Cornerstone International Church[[38]](#footnote-38) and Dale Tuggy, associate professor of philosophy at SUNY Fredonia.[[39]](#footnote-39) Lencke criticized my arguments from an evangelical perspective, while Tuggy (who confesses a Unitarian Christology) provided a weekly commentary on both sides of the debate and concluded with an analysis of the final outcome (.[[40]](#footnote-40) At the Kingdom Ready website, participants offered commentary, discussion and counter-argument in equal measure.[[41]](#footnote-41)

Responses to the debate at the Parchment & Pen blogsite were very encouraging. Despite a strong and persistent Trinitarian presence, a majority of readers came out in support of the Unitarian position. Some were Unitarians already; some said they were moving from a pro-Trinitarian view to a Unitarian Christology; others said they had no specific Christology prior to the debate, but now favoured Unitarianism over the alternatives. Several people expressed an interest in joining or studying with the Christadelphian community. I was touched by the robust support I received from Unitarians of various backgrounds, including Sir Anthony Buzzard *(The Doctrine of the Trinity: Christianity's Self-Inflicted Wound*, 1998*),* Patrick Navas *(Divine Truth or Human Tradition?,* 2006) and Kermit Zarley *(The Restitution of Jesus Christ*, 2008)*.*  
  
The debate ended abruptly when Bowman locked all the threads without warning or consultation while I was still composing my last counter-rebuttal. He also removed my ability to post new threads or edit my posts, which prevented me from responding to his final arguments. When someone asked if readers would still be invited to vote for a winner, Bowman gave an oblique reply and closed the discussion. At the present writing (14.07.10) there has been no vote and no explanation.

I have now commenced writing a book on the Trinity, which will incorporate the material I used in the debate and further develop the arguments from reason, Scripture and history. Readers are welcome to contact me via email ([evangelion@thechristadelphians.org](mailto:evangelion@thechristadelphians.org)) to discuss the debate and/or my upcoming work. I will be grateful for all submissions.

**Postscript**

**Andrew Perry**

Is there a distinctive Christadelphian method of interpretation? More broadly, is there a distinctive method of interpretation shared by groups that have a similar unitarian and Abrahamic centred faith? This second question partly answers the question: a unitarian and Abrahamic faith is a distinctive characterization of a method of interpretation. We should therefore expect different results to other methods of interpretation practised in the churches.

There are other aspects of such a method, such as a belief in inspiration and integrity of Scripture, and a harmonic approach to the resolving of apparent conflicts in and with the text. These aspects are shared by other churches, as is recognition of typological patterns and a dense intertextual weave. Is there anything else that is distinctive to Christadelphian interpretation?

The unitarian and Abrahamic faith produces (in some) an independent approach to the text. Because this faith is distinctive and isolated, shunned by the churches, its adherents often reciprocate and are open to independent thinking about Scripture, willing to support and develop original approaches to the text. But there is more to be said on what is distinctive about the method of interpretation within this faith.

The practice of reading should and has led to a **perception** of how Scripture interprets Scripture; this perception has thus issued in an expositional method that mirrors how Scripture interprets itself. This is best seen in the original exposition that the faith has produced; exposition that has no counterpart in the writings of the churches. If we follow the best practise of the faith, we may hold fast to the faith.

**END**

1. [ED. AP]: The argument in favour of ‘eagle’ is the seeing from a far distance; eagles have excellent eyesight. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The bestowal of the Spirit upon Jesus at Jordan is not an anointing as a king. Jesus was the Davidic king by dint of his birth; he did not need to be anointed as a king—such anointings take place in the purpose of God when there is a change of dynasty. The birth narratives identify the basis of Jesus’ claims to the dynastic succession. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See A. Perry, *Isaiah 40-48* (Sunderland: Willow Publications, 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The declaration is not an “adoption” of Jesus as God’s son at this time, but a characterization of his “anointing” as God’s messiah of deliverance. There is only one literal sense in which Jesus is God’s son, and this is described in the birth narratives. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Although there is no scholarship cited in this article, it does engage a popular scholarly view of the last forty years in Lucan scholarship. Not citing scholars allows the textual reasoning to stand by itself (or not), and as such it is not tied to the passing and fading of scholars. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. [Ed AP: They are possibly by now (some twenty years after the sack of Samaria) an established group in the political ruling class]. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The drunken are not necessarily intoxicated with wine but possibly just with exercising power (as suggested by the LXX interpretation). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. [Ed AP: It is also possible that the reference “drunkards of Ephraim” is sarcastic and used of southerners acting like the Ephraimites before the demise of Samaria]. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Peter did not just have Gentile converts in mind as 2 Peter 3 warns of the coming judgement on Judaism. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London: Geoffrey Chapman 1999): 49, paras 199-202. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *Catechism*, 54-55, paras 222-227. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Indeed, Deut 6:4//Mk 12:29ff. is cited in the *Catechism*,55, para 227, with Tertullian’s testimony: ‘The supreme being must be unique, without equal...If God is not one, he is not God’. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The KJV of Ps 133:1 has the only instance of the English word ‘unity’ in the OT. However, they give a three-word paraphrase of the (*´eHäd* – related) single word dx;y") / *yäHad* - ‘together’ as “together in unity”. ‘Together’ does not, of itself, *require* an intimate togetherness like ‘union’ or ideal ‘unity’ suggests. The use of *yäHad* can simply mark unity of purpose, or expedient collaboration, as in Ps 2:2, “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel **together**, against Yahweh, and against his anointed.” The Greek of the Apostles’ citation of Ps 2:2 in Acts 4:26 uses the idiom evpi. to. auvto.―lit. ‘upon the same’―which also features in how the ecclesia should “come together” (Acts 1:15; 2:1, 44, 47; 4:26; 1 Cor 7:5; 11:20; 14:23; the KJV wrongly renders this idiom ‘into one place’ in 1 Cor 11:20; 14:23). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The use of ‘alone’ (HebrewdB; *bad*) of Yahweh complements the restricting use of ‘one’ (cf. Deut 32:12; Neh 9:6; Isa 2:11, 17). ‘Alone’ marks the incomparable wholly other being that is Yahweh; He is in a set of one. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Cf. ‘III. “Male and female Created He them”.’ *Catechism*, 84, paras 369-372. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. ‘III. “Male and female Created He them”.’ *Catechism*, 84, para 372. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The NT reuse of Gen 2:24 inserts ‘the two’: kai. e;sontaioi` du,o eivj sa,rka mi,anÅ And (they) shall be the two into flesh one. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Since “God was in Christ reconciling the world” (2 Cor 5:19), and He made His willing son strong for Himself (Ps 80:15 [HB 16]-17 [HB 18]), as previewed in Genesis 22, both ‘Father and son went **together**’ (used 3x in Gen 22:6, 8, 19) in this act of reconciliation. This (‘parabolic’: Heb 11:19) sacrificial context of Abraham and Isaac contains both the Hebrew adverb ‘together’ (wD"çx.y: *yaHDäw*) and the related adjective “only *son*” or ‘only one’ (dyxiy" *yäHîD*) also used three times (Gen 22:2, 12, 16). These two terms are related to both ‘one’ (*´eHäd*) and the verb ‘unite’ or ‘join’ (dx;y" *yäHaD* : Genesis 49:6; Ps 86:11; Isa 14:20). So, with 2 Cor 5:19, this OT background explains, or cannot be denied as relevant to, “I and my Father are one” in John 10:30.  [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Cf. J. W. Adey, ‘Accounting for Abraham’ (1), *The Testimony* Vol. 72. No. 855, March 2002: 71-73; ‘Accounting for Abraham’ (2), Vol. 72. No. 856, April 2002: 108-112. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. ‘Infinite’ is from the Hebrew *´ên misPär*, lit. ‘without number’. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. This mode of presentation matches Joshua’s conquest list in Jos 12. Each king and his place is given, followed by ‘one’: e.g., “king of Jericho one” ―*melek yürîHô ´eHäd*―dx'\_a, AxßyrIy> %l,m,î (Jos 12:9). See n. 2 on p. 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. From October 2010, the new *Holman Christian Standard Bible* (HCSB), a study Bible, will be available: <http://www.hcsb.org/>. Like the *Jerusalem Bible* (1966), and its updated version the *New Jerusalem Bible* (1985), the HCSB also drops the ‘LORD’ device and returns to God’s name ‘[Yahweh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yahweh)’ of the Hebrew text. They support this with the fact that names crossover into other languages, as within the Bible, by transliteration. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. In the OT God never says: ‘I *am* the Lord’, where that would be solely to combine ‘I’ and ‘Lord’ (some form of *´adon*) in Hebrew. So, to versions with “I *am* the LORD: that is my name” (Isa 42:8), or to those that have not yet realised that ‘LORD’ (or ‘Lord’) is not a name, a just challenge would be: “Yea, hath God said?” However, God utters ‘I *am* \_\_\_ [*´ël*, *´ël šaDDay* and *Yahweh*]’ many times in the HB (mostly: ‘I *am* Yahweh’, His only name, with or without something added, 220 times). “I am the Lord GOD” uses ‘Lord’ but it is followed by God’s name: *´ny* *´Dny yhwh* (in Ezek 13:9; 23:49; 24:24; 28:24; 29:16). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Jesus’ composite theophoric name (cf. ‘Joshua’), with a ‘Yah’ or ‘Yeho[shua`]’ prefix, is to the NT what God’s name ‘Yahweh’ is to the OT. Although there is no Graecised or transliterated ‘YHWH’/‘Yahweh’ in the NT, ‘Yah’ occurs in ‘Allelu**ia**’ (Rev 19:1, 3-4), ready to be revealed in the last time. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Ezek 37:17 repeats ‘one’ to describe a uniting of each one, but a Hebrew term for ‘unity’ is not used (which would be, e.g., *´aHdût*): And join (Heb *qrb*) them one to one into one stick for yourself; and they shall become one (literally or grammatically: ‘ones’- *´áHädîm*) in your hand. Cf. n. 4 on p. 34 above. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. *Catechism*, 60-63. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. If the point being made is ‘one of (something)’, like ~['h' dx;Ûa; / *´aHad hä`äm* : ‘one of the people’ (Gen 26:10), then ‘one’ precedes the noun (‘the people’). See n. 1 on p. 36 above. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Mal 2:10 is reflected in 1 Cor 8:6. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Stephanos’ Greek text, i.e. the same text as the Textus Receptus, includes Qeo.j. The Majority Text and UBS/GNT agree in excluding the word. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. I make the genitive (or relational semantics) explicit with ‘of God’ and ‘of men’, as in ‘of one’ of Gal 3:20. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Cf. n. 4 on p. 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good.” (ESV) [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the differences between the Majority Text (BYZ) and the critical text (UBS 3/4). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Cf. nn. 1, p. 32 and 9, p. 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. In section 2(d) the negation ‘there is not’, used twice in Ps 14:3, was the Hebrew !yae /*´ên*, not *lö´* as in my hypothetical insertion into Deut 6:4. The NT citation of Ps 14:3 has just ‘not’ (ouvk) with ‘there is’ (e;stin). The term *lö´*, as ‘not’, will be familiar from English versions that transliterate the names in Hos 1**:**6 ‘**Lo**ruhamah’ (***lö´*** *ruHämâ*), and in v. 9 ‘**Lo**ammi’ (***lö´*** *`ammî*). They deny, respectively, both God’s mercy and Israel as His people. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. ‘Not one’ *lö´ ´eHäd* / dx'a, al{ in Hebrew is close in sense to ‘there is not even one’ in Ps 14:3―dx'(a,-~G: !yae /*´ên Gam-´eHäd*. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. [Ed. JWA]: or ‘he shall be seen’. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. prodigalthought.net [Cited 14/7/2010]. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. trinities.org/blog [Cited 14/7/2010]. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. trinities.org/blog/archives/2046 [Cited 14/7/2010]. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. kingdomready.org/blog/2010/02/02/another-trinitymonotheism-debate [Cited 14/7/2010]. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)