

The Same Old Heresy

A Response to the “Greater & Lesser YHVH” Nonsense

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In our times, one is never surprised. We have ceased to be surprised at the most ludicrous teachings that emanate from untrained and unstudied minds, because we live in a world of misinformation, and worse, deceitful attempts to lead people astray. Even more, we are not surprised because we live in the world of “messianic stuff.” I don’t mean to imply by the term “messianic” that I somehow degrade the glory, wonder, and mystery of the Messiah, Yeshua of Nazareth. Far from it! If there ever were a time when His glory shines forth, it is in the darkest hour. It seems we’re approaching just such a time. But what I do mean to imply by the term “messianic stuff” is the sometimes shocking, and sometimes laughable attempts by so-called “messianics” to engage in “tickling of ears.” Our generation is often so ill-taught, and so unable to think critically, that people seem to fall for whatever is the most bizarre theological concoction of the hour. It’s the “mess” in “messianic” to which I’m referring.

Take, for instance, the heresy that’s floating around the internet these days, put forward by teachers who describe themselves as “rabbis,” that there exists a “greater and lesser YHVH” (where YHVH stands for the Divine Name composed of four Hebrew letters, *yod-hey-vav-hey*, and usually translated LORD in all capitals). This is their answer to the mystery of God, and particularly to the relationship of Yeshua and the Father. Of course, attempting to unravel a mystery as great as this inevitably leads to two things: a mess, and heresy. “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this Torah” (Deut 29:29). Trying to take what “belongs to the LORD our God” will inevitably bring problems. And so it has. The wisdom of this world is foolishness before God (1Cor 3:19).

So what do we do in the face of a teaching that diminishes Yeshua to a “lesser God”? We go back to the unchangeable and eternal word of God, our only sure source of truth about Him, and about what He desires for us. We place our feet firmly on the unmovable foundation of God’s eternal word.

The Scriptures: Source of the Truth

What does God’s word, the Bible, reveal to us about God’s essential nature? Who is YHVH, and what can we know about Him?

First, we discover throughout the Scriptures that YHVH is one (infinite in unity or oneness). By this is meant there are not two YHVHs! Consider the words of Moses:

Deut. 4:35 “To you it was shown that you might know that the LORD (YHVH), He is God (Elohim); there is no other besides Him.

Deut. 4:39 “Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, that the LORD (YHVH), He is God (Elohim) in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other.

From this we discern that YHVH and Elohim are one in the same. There is not one God called YHVH, and a “lesser God” called Elohim. This is true whether one is speaking about matters “in heaven” or “on the earth.” In all realms of the universe, there exists one and only one YHVH, known also as *Elohim* and by other Names as well. Anyone who claims something different is teaching error.

Or listen to the words of Isaiah:

Is. 45:5 “I am the LORD (YHVH), and there is no other; Besides Me there is no God (Elohim). I will gird you, though you have not known Me; 6 That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun that there is no one besides Me. I am the LORD (YHVH), and there is no other.

This means that all other gods of the nations, of the philosophers, and of the theologians, are nothing more than the fanciful imaginations of their depraved minds. Surely there are demonic forces who war against God and His people, and they do masquerade as “gods,” but they are not—they are impostors of the worse kind. In reality, all the gods of man are a vapor, less than dust in the scales of truth. Speaking of false gods, Isaiah writes:

Isaiah 41:29 “Behold, all of them are false; Their works are worthless, Their molten images are wind and emptiness.

So the Scriptures are clear: there are not two YHVHs. The eternal, Almighty One exists alone.

Secondly, the Scriptures declare that YHVH is eternal in both directions (infinite in time), meaning He had no beginning and He has no end. There never was a time when YHVH did not exist, nor was there ever a time when YHVH created another, “lesser YHVH.” Consider the Psalm of Moses:

Psalm 90:1 Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. 2 Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting (לְעוֹלָם עַד עוֹלָם), You are God.

Isaiah refers to the Almighty as “the High and lofty One, Who inhabits eternity (שֵׁכֵן עַד)” (Is 57:15), and this accords with the words of the Apostle:

1Tim. 1:17 Now to the King eternal (βασιλεῖ τῶν αἰώνων), immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Therefore, it is impossible that YHVH had a beginning. To suggest such a thing is, in the same breath, to deny that He is YHVH. It would be like someone proclaiming that he had discovered a triangle with four sides. As soon as he says “four sides,” it, by definition, ceases to be a triangle. Likewise, YHVH has revealed Himself (defined Himself) in the Scriptures as eternal, without beginning or end. This means that any one who postulates a “lesser YHVH,” a “YHVH” who had a beginning, has, by definition, excluded such a one as being YHVH. Anything less than eternal (without beginning or end) is infinitely less. If you diminish eternity by any amount it ceases to be eternal.

Thirdly, the Scriptures declare YHVH to be all powerful, meaning that He is infinite in His power. There is nothing which He cannot accomplish if He so wills.

Jer. 32:17 ‘Ah Lord GOD (YHVH)! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for You.

Yeshua Himself declared: “With God all things are possible” (Matt 19:26).

If YHVH is infinite in His power, than it is impossible to have a YHVH who is in any measure diminished from this infinite power. A “lesser YHVH” who is even slightly diminish in his power is not YHVH, any more than a “triangle” with four sides could be, in truth, a triangle. To diminish infinity by any measure is to make it finite.

Fourthly, the Scriptures declare YHVH to be all knowing (infinite in knowledge). This means He

never “learns” anything, for He knows all things from eternity.

Psalm 147: 5 Great is our Lord and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite (לְתַבִּינָתוֹ אֵין מִסְפָּר), literally, “regarding His understanding, it cannot be numbered”).

Acts 15:18 declares that God knows all things from eternity. It is impossible, then, to envision a “lesser YHVH” whose knowledge and understanding is in any way diminished. To diminish infinite knowledge by any degree would be to make it finite.

I think you get the picture: either YHVH is infinite in all His ways or He is not the YHVH of the Bible. And the Bible knows nothing of a “lesser YHVH” who exists in some relationship with the “Greater YHVH.” The only YHVH revealed in the Scriptures is the eternal, infinite Almighty, Who, by His mercy and grace, has revealed Himself in the finite language of mankind.

The Source of this Heresy

One does not have to look too far to discover the source of the heresy that there is “Greater and Lesser YHVH.” Ultimately, the source is man’s own finite intellect, prompted by the deceit of the enemy of our souls. If one looks into the history of this heresy, one is taken back to the beginning of the creation, when Satan persuaded Adam and Chavah that they could be equal with God, that somehow they could overcome their own finiteness and attain to the infinite stature of the Almighty. That is because Satan represented the Almighty as less the infinite in truth. He deceived Adam and Chavah into thinking that God had hidden His own finitude and had falsely presented Himself as the One and Only infinite One:

Gen 3:4 The serpent said to the woman, “You surely will not die! 5 “For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

Herein lies the heresy, based upon a lie, that God is not really as He has revealed Himself. Satan wants us to think that God is really hiding a deep, dark secret, namely, that He is not the only God, and that given the right opportunities, man can attain to His same level.

This lie has taken many shapes in the history of the world. The pagan religions all have this in common: they teach that man can control his gods. That is, man has the ability to be equal to, and even greater than, the gods he worships. This is the heart of idolatry, for carving an image is done in order to coerce the gods to pay attention to man, and even so that man can manipulate the gods to do his bidding.

The Hellenistic cults were no different. The fickle gods and goddesses could be “used” for one’s own power, if one simply knew how to “play the game.” And when Israel gave into her pagan overlords, she mixed this same notion into her own worship. The prophets are constantly judging Israel for having mixed idolatry into her worship of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

In the early centuries of the common era, a mixture of Hebraic thought was mingled with Hellenistic paganism to form some kind of Jewish Gnosticism (based upon the Greek word for “knowledge,” *gnosis*). Taking the Platonic idea that reality existed, not in the material world, but in the realm of thoughts, the Gnostics believed that escaping from the physical world into the world of spirits was the means for attaining truth (*gnosis*). For the Gnostics, the physical world had been created by a lesser god without the permission of the transcendent god. To counter the work of this lesser god, the greater god instilled in mankind a soul, a “spark of light,” which longs to escape the demise of the current world (the darkness), and ascend to the world of the “Kingdom of light.” The means of escaping the physical world were many, but they all were based upon the secret knowledge gained through various forms of meditation and study. The Gnostics speculated about the nature of reality, of God, and

of the world, and concluded that there were levels of consciousness by which a person could ascend through gaining special knowledge, given by special revelation to the leading Gnostics. Eventually, so they taught, one could attain to the highest level, and escape the confines of the physical world.

Gnosticism found its way into early Christianity, and was combated by the major centers of the Church, especially the Alexandrian leadership. But even before the emergence of the Christian Church, Gnostic tendencies were creeping into the synagogues of The Way. It seems clear that the apostles of Yeshua, including Paul, were at times combating Gnostic teachings as they wrote their epistles.

As you can imagine, Gnosticism had a very difficult time with the matter of the incarnation. How could the transcendent God partake of the darkness of this physical world? So out of Gnosticism came all manner of heresies, trying to explain the mystery of Yeshua: He was only partially divine; His body was of a different substance than the material world; only His spirit was divine—His body was evil like all other physical things; and so on. Of course, none of these “explanations” solved the mystery—they only made matters worse. In trying to explain the secret things that belong to God, philosophers and theologians had muddied the waters of even the things that were revealed.

The Judaisms of the early centuries were not exempt from this Hellenistic trend. The early kabbalistic and merkavah texts evidence a willing collusion with Gnosticism. Whereas the Tanach clearly teaches both the transcendence and nearness of God with Israel, the kabbalists developed a view of God (which they designate as *Ein Sof*, literally “no end” or “infinity”) which made Him entirely transcendent and thus, unknowable. They taught that if God were to reveal Himself, He would, in that revelation, diminish Himself, and that would be impossible. Thus, He sends emanations of Himself to the lower world, and these emanations are the imperfect revelation of His being. But these emanations are secret. One must “ascend” the circles of knowledge in order to attain the revelation they offer. And ultimately, only when man escapes the physical world and enters the world of infinity can he truly know God. This underlies the “chariot texts” (Merkavah) which describe the imagined journeys of Sages into the presence of the *Ein Sof*. The parallels to Gnostic thought and philosophy are apparent.

And how does one come to know the hidden emanations of the kabbalists? Through delving into secret knowledge, reading the “inner meaning” of the words of Torah, and listening to the mystical teachers share their “special” revelation of the secrets, contained not in the divine revelation of Messiah, but in the letters and spaces of the Torah, sometimes read backwards, sometimes read in code, and always read in a way not apparent in the words themselves. Does this sound familiar? In fact, kabbalism at its heart is Gnosticism. Don’t be confused by those who claim differently.¹ The basic tenants of kabbalistic thought find their counterpart in the earlier Gnosticism of the 2nd and 3rd Centuries CE. And it is just as errant and off the mark. Some might point out that the kabbalistic writers contain many things that are true, and with this I might agree. But tell me: what is more dangerous, a bottle of arsenic with skull and cross-bones labeling it as poison, or a pitcher of ice tea with just a pinch of arsenic? Even Satan quoted the Torah when He tempted our Master.

It is on the tray of kabbalism that the current heresy has been served up to unsuspecting messianics. Centering on the verses in the Gospels (e.g., John 14:28; 20:17) where the role of Yeshua as Servant of Adonai is construed as meaning He is a “lesser YHVH,” these false teachers confuse *rôle* with *essential nature*. When Yeshua came as the Servant of Adonai, He willingly submitted to the Father to carry out the plan of salvation. He states this Himself:

John 17:4 “I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do. 5
“Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

To submit Himself to the rôle of Servant does not diminish His essential nature, any more than one who submits to authorities in this world is essentially less than those to whom he submits. When a wife submits to her husband, she is no less created in the image of God than he is, nor is her humanity diminished at all. Yeshua taught that one who is servant is greatest in the kingdom.

Yet I fully confess that the incarnation of Yeshua is, indeed, a great mystery—a mystery that I am neither able nor willing to attempt to unravel. Paul states this directly:

1Tim. 3:16 By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh,
Was vindicated in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world,
Taken up in glory.

Granted, the attempts of the 3rd and 4th Century Christian Church to unravel the mystery of Yeshua's divinity and humanity resulted in similar blunders. But it does no good to attempt yet another explanation to an unexplainable mystery, by resorting to kabbalism and seeking to understand the infinite through mystical philosophy. The best approach is that of the Prophets and Apostles themselves: to state the truth, replete with all of its seeming contradictions, and confess our finite inability to plumb the depths of the miracle of the incarnation. Yeshua is divine and He is human. How that is possible is beyond me, but it is true, nonetheless.

What is most egregious, however, is the manner in which some so-called messianic rabbis try to tell us that their kabbalistic notion of a “greater and lesser YHVH” was the stock and trade of the early rabbis! I challenge you, if you hear such a claim, to check the references carefully. For instance, one author equates Yeshua with the rabbinic Metatron, a name applied to the *Memra* (Aramaic meaning “word”) of God by the Targumists who wanted to distance the activity of God in the created world from His position of transcendence in the heavenlies. This author boldly states: “In Jewish literature the understanding was that the Word of YHWH, who we know to be Yahshua, was known as the Lesser YHWH or YHWH HaQatan.”² The author gives a footnote to substantiate this claim, which reads: “Messiah, Volume Three, p. 392.” He’s referring to the book *Messiah*, Vol. 3 by Avi ben Mordechai (self-published). Checking this reference, one finds the sub-heading, “יהוה HaQaton,” (the lesser YHVH) and a reference to b.*Sanhedrin* 38b, where R. Idith is commenting on Ex 24:1, ‘And to Moses He (YHVH) said, “Come up unto יהוה . . .”’ R. Idith determines that it was Metatron (the *Memra* of God) who called to Moses. From this reference, Avi b. Mordechai jumps to a reference in a *Karaite* author by the name of *Kirkisani*, in which his copy of this tractate added, “This is Metatron, who is the Lesser יהוה.” But Avi b. Mordechai does not give any reference to where this *Kairite* work might be found. He simply states that this was contained in a research paper by Dr. James Trimm, but again, without any reference as to where this research paper might be consulted. So one obscure (undocumented) page in a *Karaite* copy of the Talmud is sufficient for the claim that the “Lesser YHWH” is found throughout Jewish Literature?!³ In fact, not one time in the Mishnah, Midrash Rabbah, Bavli, Yerushalami, or the Zohar does one find the term “lesser YHVH” (יהוה הקטן). It is true that the Zohar contains a reference to *Elohim* as lower than YHVH (e.g., vol. 1, 20a), but even the Zohar could not envision two YHVHs. If such a teaching were so prevalent in the Sages, it certainly would not be difficult to produce examples. The fact that there are none speaks for itself.

Don't be fooled. This was not the teaching of the ancient Sages. And in fact, when kabbalism began to rise in favor with the Jewish communities, many Sages denounced it as heretical. They likewise recognized that trying to unravel the mystery of the Infinite via mystical philosophy would produce all manner of heresies. They were right.

Rather, the life of faithfulness is a life lived in accordance with God's written Torah, delivered to Moses, and passed on to the faithful throughout the generations, being preserved by God's divine hand. To the Torah was added the Prophets, the Writings, and the Apostles, all bearing the mark of divine inspiration and self-authentication by the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit). The Scriptures are the light to our path. It is their revelation of YHVH we must seek, and when we do, we see a consistent, incontrovertible testimony: God is One, and that is an unexplainable mystery that we must confess to be true, even though it is well beyond our ability to explain it.

Commit yourself to the study of God's word, and to the careful and faithful obedience to Him

which they enjoy. This is the life of shalom and blessing.

End Notes

1. Such as Avi ben Mordachai in his third volume of *Messiah*, cf. p. 69f. It is telling that the author begins (p. 21) with a disclaimer that the book is not “a book about, or in support of, Masonry or any of the doctrines of the Masonic Secret Societies, Mormonism, the Church of Satan, Witchcraft, Eastern Meditation, Yoga, New-Age Philosophy, humanistic Pop Psychology, religions involving Rainbows and Crystal Balls, Necromancy, Channeling, Swamis and Gurus” Why the need for the disclaimer? Because if one reads the book at face value, it would be easy to conclude it was of the same stripe and color as those cults he names and disavows. “If it looks like a duck, quacks like a duck, waddles like a duck, it’s a duck!”
2. Moshe Yoseph Koniuchowsky, “The Greater and Lesser YHWH,” available at: www.yourarmstoisrael.com.
3. This kind of “shoddy scholarship” should be decried by all who seek for the truth.