



Who is Yeshua the Messiah?

Part 8: An Early Jewish Perspective

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{NOTE: The actual oral sermon and video recording varies significantly and even materially from these notes, but this “transcript” gives you a general idea of the direction of the message.}

{Title slide} Shabbat shalom, brothers and sisters. Last week we explored Yeshua as the Word of God who became flesh, especially highlighting the prologue of John’s Gospel and some other inspired Apostolic writings that are aligned with the idea that the Word of God was God, is God, and always will be God. As followers of Yeshua, I believe we can rest on the Apostolic writings as inspired Scripture—God-breathed words written by first century Messianic Jews who knew Yeshua personally and witnessed everything that He accomplished. Indeed, these are the men we seek to emulate here at First Fruits Ministries; just as they explained how to follow our Messiah so we ought to follow Him. By the power of God’s Holy Spirit, these Apostles wrote down what they experienced as Jewish believers in One God as well as what they understood as men who trusted in the Holy Scriptures taught in their synagogues from their youth. Today, we rest on their testimony. On the contrary, if you were to ask an Orthodox Jew today about the Apostolic writings, which precede their own writings, they would tell you the idea of Yeshua—that He is “the Word of God who became flesh”—is entirely pagan. They would explain that our idea of God’s complex unity—that our One God exists eternally in three persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—has no basis in Jewish thought. But this Orthodox Jewish assertion is NOT historically accurate, and that’s what I intend to show you today by way of a few examples. Granted, even as we examine the Gospels, we can see that the Scribes and Pharisees denied Yeshua’s assertions that He and the Father are One—they often picked up stones to throw at Him for making statements like this, and ultimately they crucified Him for standing in this divine identity that He clearly explained. We’ll look at this testimony in another sermon. What you need to know for today is the history of

their continuing work against God. The Scribes and Pharisees of Yeshua's day would pass down their thoughts, and ultimately their students would write down assertions against Yeshua's identity much later on—hundreds of years after Yeshua rose from the dead. In fact, the Mishnah, the first written collection of oral traditions, some of which directly opposed the identity of Messiah Yeshua, wasn't fully written down until the beginning of the third century. The Apostolic writings, on the other hand, relied on a prevalent Jewish understanding of God during their day—it was an understanding taught in their synagogues even before Yeshua came on the scene. The idea that the Word of God was God and was in the beginning with God was not invented by John or later Christians on account of paganism, as Jews like to say, but was rather explained by various Jewish traditions well before the Gospels were recorded in the late first century. Just as Yeshua explained in John 14:26, the Helper, the Holy Spirit whom the Father would send in His name, would teach the Apostles ALL THINGS, and bring to remembrance ALL THINGS that He said to them. The Holy Spirit inspired John to teach the reality of Yeshua's divinity using contemporaneous Jewish concepts that were widely understood.

{New slide} The Rabbinical traditions, which Yeshua soundly rebuked, especially in Matthew 15 and 23, as well as Mark 7, ultimately gave birth to the Orthodox Judaism of today, which denies the earlier understandings of God's complex unity I intend to show you. I want you to recognize that it wasn't even until the middle ages when the Jewish sage Maimonides (1135-1204 AD) compiled what's known as the "Thirteen principles of Judaism" from his reading of the Mishnah Sanhedrin that a unified Judaism that is opposed to Yeshua fully emerged. Today's Rabbis rely on Maimonides' commentary to deny the ideas of God's complex unity. Yet, as we've explored in previous messages, Scripture explains God's nature—God is "echad (אחד)"—and this word "echad (אחד)" expresses agreement or unity among persons. God explained His nature directly in Deuteronomy 6:4, where we read: "Hear, O Israel! Yahweh our God, Yahweh is One"—that is: "Yahweh Echad (יהוה אחד).” This is the Scriptural testimony of the "sh'ma," which Yeshua called the "Greatest Commandment." On the other hand, Maimonides, and not Scripture, describes God as "yachid," which means numerically and exclusively the one and only. His second principle of Judaism asserts, in part, "God, may He be blessed—is one in a unity (yachid—יחיד) that has no unity (yachid—יחיד) like it. And this is the second principle." This second principle of Judaism was a direct attack against the complex unity of God and Yeshua's position as the Word of God who became flesh. And importantly, this second principle of Judaism does not reflect a universal Jewish understanding. To make it seem concrete, the sages had to

move away from Scripture's own testimony. They had to use a different word—"yachid (יחיד)"—instead of Scripture's testimony—"echad (אחד)"—to separate from the authentic testimony of God. Thus, the Orthodox Rabbis of today literally turn their backs on the Word of God to establish their dogma. In doing this, they practice a religion rather than a relationship with the One True God. In our faith, we ought to seek to know God as He describes Himself, and in doing this we also seek to share the love we have for Yeshua with our Jewish brothers and sisters, because it is only by knowing and trusting in our Jewish Messiah that we can come to know God.

{New slide} Before we explore some of the evidence of Judaism's pluralism, I want to show you how this controversy that endures even to this day is one of the reasons we can trust that Yeshua is the true Jewish Messiah, one in being with the Father, and this is a very important point for you to grasp. In Isaiah 8:11-22, God explained: "...He will be a sanctuary, but a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel, and a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble..." The Word explains: "many shall stumble," and many have indeed stumbled upon Him—they have contrived a false religion for the purpose. At the same time, so many have turned to Yeshua as a sanctuary, for God's Word makes it abundantly clear that He alone is salvation. His name "Yeshua" literally means "salvation." When David wrote in Psalm 118, "...The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes...", we should expect the builders—those who led the Jewish people to follow a religion of their own making—to stumble against the cornerstone of God's own temple. We should also expect those who trust in the Messiah to flourish, for He has become a sanctuary, and each one of His followers is being built together into one Holy Habitation with Him for the indwelling Holy Spirit of God. Yeshua is the cornerstone Who holds the whole structure together. When God explained in Ezekiel 12:2, "Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, who have eyes to see, but see not, who have ears to hear, but hear not, for they are a rebellious house," we ought to expect those who rebel against God's Word to miss the literal incarnation of His Word, right? Yeshua explained throughout His ministry that those Jews who rebelled against Him would not understand His words nor profit from seeing His works—they would not understand His parables or the things that He did. They would miss the whole purpose of His Word. But those who trusted in Him would understand both His Word and His deeds, they would choose to follow Him because of it, and these would be eternally blessed through their faithfulness. The prophets of God explained that the Jewish Messiah would divide those who seek God from those who seek their own way—and Yeshua did that when He came and He still does that today. What's more: It makes no

difference whether our heritage is Jewish or not, what matters is which Jewish teachings we follow. If we follow the teachings of the men who rejected Yeshua, whether Jew or Gentile, we will stumble, but if we follow the teachings of Yeshua that were passed on by His followers, we will be built up with Him into a Holy Habitation where God will eternally dwell with us. The Apostle Paul explained this reality throughout his writings, but especially in Romans 10:12-13, where we read: “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same LORD over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For ‘whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.’” The glory of God’s visitation in the form of Yeshua the Messiah is that He made a way for God’s salvation not just for the Jews who would trust in Him, but to men and women of all the nations—everyone who trusts in God’s Word.

{New slide} And so, as this series moves forward and we continue to add to the testimony of Yeshua’s divinity, it’s important for us to dig just a little deeper into the idea of God’s Word that John wrote about in the prologue of his Gospel. Again we read in John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” As I explained last week, the Greek is unambiguous here. It reads “ho Logos ēn pros ton Theon kai Theos ēn ho Logos” (ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος), which literally means: “the Word was with the God and God was the Word.” This statement can’t be ignored. Those who want to deny Yeshua’s divinity have to literally interpolate words into the English translation to come up with a different understanding. There’s no way around John’s prologue, especially when you add verse 3, where we read: “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.” It’s clear that the creative force is “Him,” the One who made all things, and the grammar refers directly back to the Word, which was God and was also with God at the creation. God is God because He is the Creator who preexisted His creation; this is the primary attribute that defines Him. God explained through the prophet in Isaiah 45:18, “Thus says the LORD, who created the heavens, Who is God, Who formed the earth and made it ... I am the LORD, and there is no other.” Certainly from Isaiah’s perspective, Yahweh is the creator, and He is the only creator who made all things. From the Apostle John’s perspective, the Word is the creator, and the Word is Yahweh. Is Yahweh God or is the Word God? The answer is: “Yes.” The explanation is: “Hear, O Israel! Yahweh our God, Yahweh is One.” The writer explained in Psalm 33:6, “By the Word of the LORD the heavens were made, And all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.” The writer explained in Hebrews 11:3, “By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.” Was it the breath of God that made all things—was it a vapor alone? According to John, the answer is

“no” It was the Word Who made all things, and the Word was God. We covered this extensively last week, and so the question for us to explore today is this: Did John’s assertion come from nowhere? Did he invent this concept? According to an honest analysis of the Jewish literature of the First Century, the answer is also “no.” John’s description of the “logos (λόγος)” being an instrument of creation was not new, and by using an existing Jewish concept of God’s Word to the table, he was doing his best to employ human language to explain a deeper revelation of God’s spiritual reality—specifically, that the Father and the Son are One. While God’s wisdom cannot be found, He has revealed Himself to us by His Word.

{New slide} When researching the finer details for this message, I found several resources that attempt to explain away the magnificent truth of God’s Word, and I want you to be aware of this when you go to do your own research. Just as the Scribes and Pharisees denied Yeshua when He came in the flesh, so too do today’s academics look to deny the more spiritual connections that I’m going to show you. The word used for “Word” in the Tanakh (Old Testament) is usually “davar (דָּבָר),” and scholars like to point out a strict literary meaning for the concept. “Davar” means “word,” “commandment,” or “speech,” according to Thayer’s Greek Lexicon, and these ideas refer specifically to the inspired and communicated instructions of God recorded in Scripture by the prophets. I don’t have a problem with this, as I’ve explained before, because God’s Word absolutely came forth through the prophets and was recorded in Scripture for our benefit, but, taking this basic understanding to a deeper level, Yeshua explained in Matthew 15:18, “Those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart....” In other words, the Word of God, even expressed as “davar,” comes from the wisdom that dwells within God’s heart. God’s Word is literally a part of Him—it comes out of Him as an expression of who He is at His core, and it comes forth to accomplish some objective according to God’s will, and then it returns to Him after achieving that objective. Relatedly, the Apostle Paul, writing about Yeshua, explained in Romans 3:21, “now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed.” In other words, the law of God, which is analogous with the Word, had now come forth in the form of Yeshua, who was demonstrating the law through His words and deeds, and then He returned to the Father after accomplishing His objective—namely, atonement for sin and redemption of souls through His death and resurrection. In other words, there is further revelation of God that has come through Yeshua that helps make the reality of God more relevant for you and me, whether we are Jews or not. I find it interesting that Joshua actually uses the word “davar” as a type of answered promise, just like Yeshua, toward the end of his life. In Joshua 23:14, the Jewish leader, who was a type for the future Messiah, told the Israelites who had now inherited the

Promised Land: “Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth. And you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spoke concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one Word of them has failed.” The LORD’s Word, which the people of Israel believed and acted upon, was fully realized, and it did not return to God void. Indeed, God’s Word, which was a promise to His people, was completely fulfilled. We can see here that the “Davar” takes on a more active role in God’s creation. It’s not just a promise of God that He gave through Moses or Joshua, but a realized victory in the lives of those who believed in it, just as Yeshua would later accomplish victory for those who put their trust in Him. Not coincidentally, the writer of Hebrews asked rhetorically in Hebrews 4:8, “if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day.” The Day that remained was the eternal rest that would be given through Yeshua, the Word of God who became flesh so that all flesh could be reconciled to God through Him. And so, the Word of God, the “davar,” has meaning that goes way beyond mere vapor, it goes well beyond the written record of God’s promises also. Indeed, the Word of God given to Israel would not be fully realized until the coming of Yeshua, the Word that became flesh.

{New slide} The Word of God becomes even more profound when we switch languages. For instance, the Hebrew “davar (דָּבָר)” takes on additional layers of meaning when translated to “logos (λόγος)” in the Greek, and not coincidentally, “logos” is the word used by translators about 90 percent of the time in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament. This is significant, because the Septuagint was translated in the third century before Messiah Yeshua came onto the scene. I believe God was setting the stage for His arrival. As an aside, please recall from past messages how the Hebraic understanding of reality considers action as a defining factor, while a “Hellenistic”—or Greco-Roman—understanding looks more to the essence of a thing. As I’ve previously explained, I believe we ought to look to the Hebraic understanding first when interpreting Scripture, but I don’t believe the “Hellenistic” understanding should be disregarded. It may be that God chose to preserve the Apostolic writings in Greek as well as the Septuagint in Greek so that we can search out His identity through both the Hebraic and Hellenistic perspective. Perhaps we have so many English translations of Scripture today as part of God’s continuing revelation? OK, we definitely need to be intellectually honest and use care when exploring God’s Word, but let’s also seek the LORD while He can be found, right? In any case, the word “logos (λόγος)” in the Greek can certainly refer to words, rational explanations, and discourse, just like “davar (דָּבָר),” but “logos” also takes on an ontological meaning as the rational element that pervades and controls all of the

universe. In other words, from a Hellenistic understanding, the “logos” becomes an expression of God. In the Apostolic writings, according to the HELPS Word-Studies resource, the word “logos (λόγος)” is used preeminently for Messiah, who expresses the thoughts of the Father through the Spirit as we’ve explored especially in John’s prologue. These ideas are consistent. Now, in doing further research, as I noted earlier, you may find Jewish critics who complain that the Apostolic writings are purely Hellenistic. Jews complain that New Testament writers abandoned the Hebraic understanding of God. While this is not accurate, we can see in Acts 6:1 at least one example of a clash between the Hebraic Messianic Jews and the Hellenistic Messianic Jews. Those who oppose Yeshua’s divinity, prompted by our spiritual enemy, are always going to take advantage of situations like this. Yeshua’s disciples settled the matter, which you will see if you keep reading passed verse 1, but for the time being I just want you to see that as “the number of the disciples [of Yeshua] was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists...” And I can show you other areas where the Hebrews complained against the Hellenists. It was a cultural clash, but God was looking to unite all people to Himself through Yeshua, and ultimately even this seemingly impossible promise will be successful.

{New slide} Over and over again, as a study of both Scripture and secular history will show, God has sifted His Jewish people through the nations, and His Word has been proven each time. In one relevant occasion, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had destroyed Solomon’s Temple and burned the city of Jerusalem, taking many of the Jews captive into Babylon. The Jews lived 70 years in captivity, picking up the Aramaic language of the Babylonian people, still longing to return home. The people were ultimately freed from captivity following the Persian conquest of Babylon and a decree from King Cyrus the Great allowing their return to Judah. With leadership from Nehemiah and Ezra, the people went to work reconstructing Jerusalem’s city walls, the Temple, and the written practices of God’s Holy Word. There is Scriptural evidence in Nehemiah 8 that suggests many of the returning Jews no longer understood their native Hebrew language, and I want to show this to you first before we continue. We read in Nehemiah 8, verses 2-3, “So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who could hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. Then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.” Then in verses 7-8, we read this: “Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law; and the people stood in their place.

So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading.” This understanding of God’s Word certainly could be theological. After all, it was the priests duty to teach the people the difference between the holy and the profane. While I’m sure this meaning is intended here, I also believe the understanding given had to do with the language barrier that had developed during the 70 years of captivity. The people spoke and understood Aramaic, while the Torah—the book of the law—was written in Hebrew. Those who understood Hebrew were surely translating and explaining the book in Aramaic so the people who had returned from Babylon could understand what they were hearing. And so, even before the Greek Septuagint was translated for the Jews who were later Hellenized, there was a series of translations of the Hebrew Bible into Aramaic, and these translations, called “Targums,” are still available for us to read and study today. As it pertains to our study today, the Aramaic word “memra {em-row’},” sometimes rendered “miltha,” which also means word, commandment, or speech, took on a meaning in the Targums that may have even informed later Scribes who used the Greek “logos” to translate the same “word.” It is highly likely, in fact, that the Apostle John would have heard these Targums read and studied in the synagogues of his day, and this is the place where I wanted to land. It’s important to note that we don’t have any written copies of the Targums from before the First Century, but it’s also important to note that Scribes often discarded older versions of text when they made new copies. Some scholars believe the Aramaic translations were given orally and then later written down. Either way, the copies we have that have since been translated from Aramaic to English are arguably from the First Century. The Gospel of John, according to the most reliable records, was also written down in the late First Century. The Targums that we have, then, are reliable records of the types of readings John and the other apostles would have heard read in the synagogues during their lives. And while the Targums are not Scripture, but rather translations of it that add interpretation to the text as well, those interpretations are what I want to show you.

{New slide} With that, let me give you some examples of the types of interpretations John and the other Apostles would have been hearing in the synagogues of his day, and these first two verses are going to sound familiar for you, because we’ve been covering them a lot. In each of these examples, the first verse I’m going to show you is going to be from the New King James Version, which is the English translation I prefer translated from the original Hebrew. The original Hebrew version used for the NKJV and all of our modern Bibles is known as the Masoretic text, which is the authoritative text of the standard Hebrew Bible. The second verse is going to be from one of the various Aramaic Targums, and in these versions the Aramaic “Memra” will be used

instead of the English “Word,” but you can substitute one for the other. Genesis 1:1 in the NKJV reads, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” In the Targum Neofiti, Genesis 1:1 reads, “From the beginning with wisdom the Memra of the LORD created and perfected the heavens and the earth.” This sounds a lot like John 1:1-3, doesn’t it? As a reminder, He wrote, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.” John, who had an authentic experience with Messiah Yeshua both before and after His death and resurrection, was likely applying what he learned in the synagogue about the Word to his understanding of Yeshua, who he later called “the Word” who “became flesh.” Similarly, as we’ve been covering in Genesis 1:3, when God said “Let there be light, and there was light,” we have to read between the lines that it was His Word that spoke “let there be light.” In the Targum Neofiti, God’s Word is personified. We read: “And the Memra of the LORD said: “Let there be light”; and there was light according to the decree of his Memra.” Now, it’s not just the spoken word itself that brought forth light, but the Word of the LORD Himself, who was with God and who was God, who brought forth light from within Himself. The light came forth on account of His commandment.

{New slide} Let’s jump ahead to Genesis 1:27, where God said, according to the NKJV: “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness. ...” Before I get into the comparison, I want you to see the plural of majesty. God, the creator, is making man in “Our image, according to Our likeness.” We’ve discussed this piece before. This isn’t just a majestic expression of God, but an authentic expression of His complex nature for us to see right from the beginning. It shouldn’t surprise us then that Yeshua Himself uses similar language to explain God’s nature in John 14:15-18, and this is Yeshua speaking here. We read: “If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.” Again, Yeshua is the one speaking here. It’s clear that both the Holy Spirit and the Son are identified as One in this passage. Yeshua explained the Holy Spirit will “dwell with you and be in you,” but then He adds, “I will come to you.” But it’s not just the Spirit and the Son, who are one, but also the Father, for Yeshua also explained that we ought to keep His commandments. As the Word of God who became flesh, is He the one who gave these commandments? Yes, and I’ll show you even more detail concerning this in a few moments. That being said, it is also the Father who gave the commandments, for we have One God. As the passage

continues in verses 21-23, this reality becomes even more clear. There, Yeshua continues speaking, where we read: “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.” Now Judas not Iscariot has an important question that follows, and you may be wondering the same thing that he asks by this point. We read: “Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?” Well, “Yeshua answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.” Did you catch that? “WE will come to him and make OUR home with him.” This is a plural of majesty. The Father and the Son are One, and they will come to dwell within the man or woman who keeps the commandments as the Holy Spirit. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one God. We don’t have three gods, we have One God who manifests Himself in three ways.

{New slide} I wanted to show you how Yeshua stepped right into the mysticism of God’s nature before showing you the Aramaic Targum Neofiti version of Genesis 1:27, where we can observe a very similar structure. I have the NKJV up on the top of the screen as a comparison, but I want to draw your attention to the Targum version below. We read: “And the LORD said: “Let us create man in our likeness, similar to ourselves, and let them rule over the fishes of the sea and over the birds of the heavens, and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” And the Memra of the LORD created the man in his (own) likeness; in a likeness from before the LORD he created him; male and his partner he created them.” This grammar is not a mistake. It’s meant to show the nature of God. And it’s clear, the Word of the LORD created man in His own likeness; in a likeness from before the LORD He created him. Do you see John 1:1: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”? He was before the LORD, and He created in His own likeness. The Father and the Son are One.

{New slide} Now, it’s not just in Genesis where we see God’s Word take on a visible form that acts within the world. In one of the most famous passages of the Bible, we read in Exodus 20:1-3, “And God spoke all these words, saying: ‘I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me.’” Now all of the commandments of God are important for us to know, but doesn’t this one reflect the core idea of today’s message? God is One and He commands us that we ought not worship any other God before Him. And yet, in the Jerusalem Targum, we read an excerpt of this section as follows: “And the Memra of the LORD spake all the excellency of these words saying: ... Then he cried

out and said, “My people, house of Israel, <you shall have no other God besides me>.” The Memra cannot be a different God than Yahweh, and the Memra cannot be just a vapor, for the text does not allow for it. We have One invisible God who manifests Himself in the world as His Word, and as John explained in John 1:14, “the Word [logos (λόγος)] became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” If the Word wasn’t a being, this Targum would not make any sense. But the Aramaic translators understood the Word to be a person, just as John explained in His Gospel. This Word that became flesh is the same Yeshua who said in John 14:15, “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” He was the One speaking on Mt. Sinai to Moses, and He is the One who came to demonstrate the Word that He spoke.

{New slide} In Deuteronomy 18, 17-19, a passage that speaks directly to Moses’s prophecy of the coming Messiah, we can see that those who do not listen to the words of the Prophet, which He speaks in the name of Yahweh, will be destroyed. The Targum Neofiti presents the passage this way: “And the LORD said to me,”—said Moses— “Behold, all that they have spoken is right and proper. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from the midst of their brethren and I shall set his words in his mouth and he shall speak to them all that I shall command him. And the man who does not listen to his words which he will speak in the name of my Memra, I in my Memra will be avenged of him.” The prophet is speaking His own words in the name of God’s Word, and yet those who don’t listen to His words will be destroyed. After reading the New Testament, we know that the prophet Moses spoke about is Yeshua, and all will be destroyed who don’t listen to Him. In John 12:48, Yeshua said exactly the same thing. We read: “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.” It’s not just about rejecting what Yeshua said, but also rejecting who He is. We have to receive Him—He has to become a part of us—we have to invite the LORD to come and live inside of us to direct our lives according to His will. We will be destroyed if we do not accept Yeshua as our LORD and savior, one in being with the Father.

{New slide} In Deuteronomy 31, verses 3-6, the Targum presents an amazing image of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit interacting with Moses, Joshua and all of Israel. In one of His last speeches to the people, the Targum Neofiti presents the passage like this: “The LORD your God, the Glory of whose Shekinah leads before you, he will blot out these nations before you and you shall dispossess them. Joshua is the one who crosses over before you, as the Lord has spoken. And the Memra of the Lord will do to them as he has done to Sihon and to Og, the kings of the Amorites, and

to their land, blotting them out. And the Lord shall deliver them up before you, and you shall do to them according to all the precepts which I have commanded you. Be strong and of good courage; you shall not fear and you shall not be shaken before them, because the LORD your God, the Glory of whose Shekinah is leading before you, shall not leave you on your own and shall not forsake you.” According to the Schaff-Herzog encyclopedia of religious knowledge, the concept of the Shekinah arose among the Palestinian and Babylonian Jews, who stressed the immanent activity of God in the world. The expressions of “shekinah of Yahweh,” the “glory of Yahweh,” and the “Word of Yahweh” become synonymous in the text, and they are often interpreted as designations of Yahweh Himself. More specifically, though, the Shekinah is God’s “abiding divine presence” that dwells among His people. Within this passage, we can see that the people of Israel are delivered and led by the Shekinah of God. The Memra will fight for Israel and defeat her enemies. This reminds me of Isaiah 45:17, where we read: “But Israel shall be saved by the LORD With an everlasting salvation; You shall not be ashamed or disgraced Forever and ever.” The Shekinah of the LORD, the Memra of the LORD and the LORD Himself are acting together to save and redeem His people, just as we see the Apostolic writers often express.

{New slide} There’s one more example I want to share with you for now from the Targums, and it is awesome, and the regular New King James Version is great on its own. On Jacob’s way out of town, when he was heading toward Paddan-Aram to take a wife from the daughter’s of Laban, he had a dream where the angels of God were ascending and descending into Heaven from the spot where he lay. When he awoke, we read the following in Genesis 28, verses 20-21: “Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father’s house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God.” All Jacob asked for was food, clothing and shalom, the basic needs that the LORD will assuredly provide to those who serve Him. When we look at the Targum Onqelos for this passage, an amazing interpretation emerges for Jacob’s vow, and his vow takes on a whole new meaning. We read there: “Then Jacob made a vow, as follows, “If the Memra of the LORD will be at my support and protect me on this journey that I am going, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, and I return peacefully to my father’s house—then the Memra of the LORD shall be my God.” In his first epistle, chapter 4, verse 15, John wrote the following verse: “Whoever confesses that Yeshua is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.” Likewise, and I don’t have this up on the screen, Paul wrote in Romans 10:9, “if you confess with your mouth the LORD Yeshua and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” In Genesis 28, according to Targum

Onqelos, Jacob confessed with His mouth that the Word of the LORD is His God—He vowed to follow Yeshua, even before He came into the world.

{New slide} What did John say in John 1, verse 1? He said, the Word was God. If I haven't made the point yet, let me make it clearly now, the Jewish literature of the First Century supported the Word's equivalence with God as a personified being, and John was simply revealing the next level of this truth to a Jewish audience that would have been ready to accept it; specifically, that the Word was made flesh to dwell among them in the form of Yeshua the Messiah. Many Jews surrendered their lives to Yeshua in the First Century, and many of them didn't, just as many surrender their lives to Him today and many don't. Each person alive has a choice to make. Yeshua explained in Matthew 10:24-38, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.' He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me." Yeshua also said, "seek first the kingdom of God and all its righteousness," and everything we need will be added to us. That's food and clothing, according to the context of Luke 12:22-34. Yeshua said: "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on." This is precisely what Jacob confessed. He vowed to worship Yeshua, the Word of Yahweh, if He would only provide food and clothing for him. What else do we need in this life, for if we have Yeshua, we will have peace that surpasses all understanding.

{New slide} Before we close today, I want to show you another context where a Jewish author in the early First Century expressed the truths about God's complex unity, including the deity of His Word. Philo of Alexandria lived from 20 BC to 50 AD, and time will not allow me to even scratch the surface of who this man is, but I will attempt to give you an overview to get you started. Philo was a Jewish scholar who studied the Greek philosophers and attempted to explain the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in a context that a Hellenistic audience would understand. Philo used "logos," the Greek word for "word," more than 1300 times in his writing, and he used it in the same context as John. He said God's Word should not be taken at face value, because the depth of the meaning of "logos" cannot be fully explored. God's Word is "unsearchable," and yet the LORD has exhorted us, saying, "seek and you shall find." Though Philo's exact wording is not always perfect, and his writing is not Scripture, I'm bringing his writing to the table to show you that Jewish thought saw something in the

Word that was bigger than just breath or vapor. Like John, Philo saw the Word as a second expression of Deity.

{New slide} In Genesis 9, when God was speaking to Noah in the first person, suddenly the point of view changes from the first person to the third person, and Philo picked up on this, identifying the Father and the Son working together. First of all, let's read verses 3-6, and this is Elohim speaking here: "I have given you all things, even as the green herbs. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man." Again, these are not grammatical errors, but purposeful sentence structures that are meant to communicate deep meaning. Here's how Philo explained it: "(62) Why is it that he speaks as if of some other god, saying that he made man after the image of God, and not that he made him after his own image? (Genesis 9:6). Very appropriately and without any falsehood was this oracular sentence uttered by God, for no mortal thing could have been formed on the similitude of the supreme Father of the universe, but only after the pattern of the second deity, who is the Word of the supreme Being;" (Yonge, Charles Duke with Philo of Alexandria. 1995. The works of Philo: complete and unabridged. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson). Just as you and I are called to wrestle with God and reconcile the Truth from what we don't understand, so too was Philo, a Jew in the First Century, wrestling with how to reconcile His monotheistic God with what He was reading in the text. The Word is not just breath, but rather He is the visible form of the invisible God, who created the Heavens and the Earth and everything in them. The world was made through Yeshua, and for Yeshua—that's for His Glory!

{New slide} In a beautiful second reference, Philo spoke about the Holy Spirit in terms that may sound very familiar to us as well, and in doing so, He made it very clear that the logos, the Word of God, was one in being with this Holy Spirit and with God. Philo explained: "for God gives to the soul a seal, a very beautiful gift, to show that he has invested with shape the essence of all things which was previously devoid of shape, and has stamped with a particular character that which previously had no character, and has endowed with form that which had previously no distinctive form, and having perfected the entire world, he has impressed upon it an image and appearance, namely, his own word." (Yonge, Charles Duke with Philo of Alexandria. 1995. The works of Philo: complete and unabridged. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.)

{New slide} Consider then how the Apostle Paul uses identical language in two of his epistles to refer to the Holy Spirit of God and relate the Spirit's unity with Yeshua as well as with the Father. In 2nd Corinthians 1:21, we read: "Now He who establishes us with you in Messiah and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee." Just as Philo explained, Paul also referred to the Holy Spirit as a seal of promise from the Father, who also establishes us in Messiah Yeshua, the Word of God. Ephesians 1, verses 13-14 are even more clear for uniting the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in a word picture that explains the complex unity of our God. There we read: "In Him [Yeshua] you also trusted, after you heard the Word of Truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory." We trust in Yeshua because we have read and understand the Word of God that prophesied His coming, and also because we embrace the Gospel of salvation that He taught us and and believe in the promises He gave us, and therefore God has given us the Holy Spirit as a seal promising our inheritance in His heavenly Kingdom, and our endurance in faith will lead to the glory of God. In one other reference from Ephesians 4:30, Paul warns: "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." We grieve the Holy Spirit by rebelling against God's Word, whether in the form of His commandments or the form of His Son Yeshua, who came in the flesh and dwelt among us. We inherit life by believing in Him, that He is One with the Father, that He came to teach us how to live according to God's Word, that He died so that we could be redeemed by His blood, that He rose from the dead so we could follow Him into God's Kingdom, and that He has given us His Holy Spirit to help us endure until He comes. These ideas are not foreign to Judaism—they are very Jewish ideas that had been discussed and taught for many years. The Apostle John and the Apostle Paul, among others, simply picked up on what they had heard in their synagogue and pointed to the One who fulfilled every promise.

{New slide} These ideas are complex. They're spiritually deep. They're mystical. Your head might be hurting. Maybe I've lost you. I hope not. I've attempted to share the Word of God with you as well as some commentary that aligns with it and helps us to understand it better. The point is this: The idea that God is the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, and the Word became flesh to dwell among us to bring glory to God, and that the Father and the Son dwell in us as the Holy Spirit, these are Jewish concepts and they are not foreign to the Sh'ma, that the LORD our God, the LORD is One. Even in Proverbs 30, the words of Agur the son of Jakeh, that he declared to Ithiel and Ithiel to Ucal bring light to our understanding concerning

God's complex unity. We read there: "Surely I am more stupid than any man, And do not have the understanding of a man. I neither learned wisdom Nor have knowledge of the Holy One." He's simply saying here that God's ways are unsearchable. His complex unity is beyond our understanding, and yet with the Word of God the Father tries to express His multidimensional unity. The writer continues: "Who has ascended into heaven, or descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has bound the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name, and what is His Son's name, If you know? Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. Do not add to His words, Lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar. ..." God forbid we add to the Word of God or take away from it, for the law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple, we read in Psalm 19:7. And in Psalm 18:30, we read, "As for God, His way is perfect; the Word of the LORD is proven; He is a shield to all who trust in Him." Yes, "every Word of God is pure, and He indeed is a shield to those who put their trust in Him." Yeshua, our LORD and our God, said that He would never leave us nor forsake us, even to the end of the age. He said He and the Father would come to dwell in us, to teach us what we need to know. He said His Holy Spirit would be in us to help us. These are Hebraic expressions, and they help explain everything we covered today. God's goal is to dwell with His people forever. In Exodus 25:8, the purpose of the Tabernacle was so God could dwell with His people. In John 1:14, the Word came to pitch His tent among us, so that God could dwell with His people forever. He is Immanuel: God with us. I do hope and pray that our faith in Him will never fail, so that we can dwell with Him in His eternal Kingdom for His glory. Shabbat shalom.