

THE DIVINE SON: EXPLORING THE MESSIAH'S DEITY IN HEBREWS 1 ⁽¹⁾ ⁽²⁾

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I have had some robust discussions with a very good friend of mine over doctrinal differences concerning the question of the Deity of Christ. He recently recommended that I read some of [David Wilber's](#) materials. Having followed [Wilber](#) for years, I guess my friend hoped this trinitarian apologist might convince me of the error of my ways!

[Wilber](#) is just one voice among the overwhelming majority of Bible expositors who hold that [Hebrews chapter 1](#) is one of the strongest statements for the Deity of Christ in all the New Testament (NT). I am going to suggest this popular belief really is a flawed mis-reading of the Biblical data.

However, before proceeding, I also need to say that in this critique I am not attacking [Wilber](#) personally, but only his interpretation. Now, I recognise, we all bring unexamined blind spots into our own reading of Scripture, so I will leave it to you to decide whether I present a reasonable case for the non-divinity of Christ in [Hebrews 1](#), or whether I myself am guilty of imposing my own ideas upon the text.

Also by way of introduction, I must also say that I have a certain respect for [Wilber](#). He is honest enough to acknowledge that the arguments of BU's are serious enough for him to engage. He even quotes three BU authors — [Sir Anthony Buzzard](#), [Kegan Chandler](#) and [Eric H.H. Chang](#). (Nor am I writing this critique because I think my BU friends need defending!)

[WILBER'S OPENING](#) reads:- [Is the Messiah God? The first chapter of Hebrews presents compelling evidence that he is. In this chapter, the author highlights the Son's role as the creator and sustainer of the universe, emphasizes the Son's divine essence, proclaims that the Son is worthy of the worship that belongs only to God, and explicitly identifies the Son as "God" and "Lord/YHWH." In order to demonstrate each of these points, this article conducts a detailed exegesis of Hebrews 1 and answers objections from unitarians.](#)

So, based on three criteria from the opening verses of [Hebrews 1: 1-4](#), [Wilber](#) asserts that the writer of Hebrews builds a "compelling case" for Messiah's Deity — that Jesus is "God" and "Lord/YHWH" — and therefore believes he successfully refutes unitarian objections:-

First, Jesus is the Co-Creator and "sustainer of the universe", i.e. God's agent in [Genesis one](#).
Second, Jesus the Son of God has the very same "divine essence" (nature) as Yahweh God.
Third, Jesus is worshipped with the kind of worship that "belongs only to God".

In this first article we only have space to barely start on point number 1, namely that:

¹ My article is a critique of [David Wilber's](#) article under this title on his web site at: davidwilber.com/articles

² Strictly speaking the adjective "divine" does not necessarily include the idea of "Deity". We believers are also said to be "divine". In [2 Peter 1: 4](#) believers may become partakers of the divine nature by living according to God's promises! In the Bible, the Deity by definition is divine, but it does not follow that being divine-like makes another person God!

THE SON IS THE AGENT OF THE GENESIS CREATION.

Wilber proceeds to build his case that the Messiah is Divine by saying this ...

The author of Hebrews begins his letter by announcing that God has appointed his Son as “the heir of all things,” emphasizing the Son’s role as the long-awaited Davidic king.[1] However, the author goes far beyond merely affirming the Son’s role as the Davidic king; he also proclaims that God created the world (τοῦς αἰῶνας) through the Son (Heb. 1:2).

Hang on a minute! This is not how the author of Hebrews “begins his letter”. In his rush to say that Jesus is God, Wilber conveniently skips over the very first key to unlocking the truth of the rest of the sentence ... and in the Greek it’s quite a long and detailed sentence which doesn’t stop till we get to the end of verse four in our English Bibles! Let’s carefully read how the writer of Hebrews *actually* introduces his opening sentence ...

God, Who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us in his Son ... (Heb. 1: 1-2a NKJV).

A GRAMMAR LESSON FIRST

As a writer myself, I realise that one is unable to cover all bases in a brief article. One must decide not only what to include, but what to leave out. However, in this instance Wilber omits the key to correctly interpreting this detailed sentence. For, before introducing the Son, another person is first introduced. Grammatically speaking, this ‘other person’ is the subject of this long sentence — “God”.

Actually, in the Greek text, it’s “the God” (ὁ θεὸς) — God with the masculine definite article. The definite article is highly significant because it’s not just any God who is the doer, or the prime mover, in the sentence. The subject is “the God” which, to our English ears sounds a little odd, but the Hebrew’s author is following standard procedure, for whenever the noun “God” is mentioned in the New Testament it is usually — i.e. overwhelmingly — preceded with the definite article.

It is a stunning fact that the God in the NT is mentioned 1317 times and refers to Yahweh who is now addressed in the NT as the Father. (³)

The God of the NT is “the God” of the Hebrew Scriptures — Who is none other than the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (the one and only true God of the Hebrews), the God of Israel’s unitarian monotheistic (i.e. non-trinitarian) confession whom all Jews confessed to be “YHWH is our God, YHWH is one” (Deut. 6: 4). Those four capitalised letters, which are called the Tetragrammaton, translate to the more familiar Yahweh. By NT times Jews did not dare to utter God’s personal Name but had substituted for it the impersonal title *Adonai*, or LORD!

When the scribe asked Jesus what the foremost of all the commandments is, Jesus said it was to love the one LORD God, with all of one’s powers. The scribe was delighted with Jesus’ unitary monotheistic reply and said to him, “Right, Teacher, well said! You have truly

³ Actually, to be more accurate, there are 10 times where “God” is plural in form “θεοὶ”, but these plurals all refer to false gods or to human beings. This article does not have space to deal with a few disputed texts which seem to call Jesus “God” (e.g. Rom. 9: 5; 2 Pet. 1:1). And that’s the point ... they are grammatically disputable!

stated that **He is one and there is no one else besides Him**” (Mark 12:28-30. This was Jesus’ unitarian monotheistic confession right up to his last recorded private prayer in **John 17: 3** that, **“You Father, are the only true God ...”**. Jesus was not a trinitarian!

And after God raised him from the dead, Jesus still called God **“the Father ... My Father ... and my God”** — as well as designating Him as our Father and our God (**Jn. 20: 17**). After his ascension, the exalted Lord Jesus *four times in one verse* still calls God **“My God”** (**Rev. 3:12**). Let this fact sink down into our ears: The risen Lord Jesus in heaven says he has a God!

Anybody who has a God above him cannot be the Almighty God himself! No wonder the NT designates **the LORD God** as **the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ** at least nine times in the other NT epistles! ^(4) Indeed, in this very first chapter of the book of **Hebrews** we are very clearly told that *the Son has a God* over him!

“ ... Therefore [the] God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness ... (Heb. 1: 9 quoting Psalm 45: 6-7). ^(5) ^(6)

Observe then: The one God of the Bible is always a singular “he”, i.e. one God the Father, and never a plural “we” or “they”! Indeed, the incontrovertible testimony of the Bible is that thousands of times God uses the first person personal pronouns “I”, “Me”, “Myself”, “Mine” when referring to Himself. And when others refer to this one God they use the third person personal singular pronouns, “He”, “Him”, “His”, “Himself”, never “they”, “them”, “themselves”! And when the second person pronoun is used of God, He is addressed as a singular “You”, or as it is in the old English “Thou”.

To ignore this overwhelming data about **the God** of the Bible promotes disinformation! God has no clearer way of telling us that He is a single Individual. ^(7)

And just to complete our little grammar refresher, when we read that, **[the] God spoke long ago**, the verb is singular to agree with its singular subject. If **Hebrews** introduces a trinitarian God of three co-equal and three eternal Persons, then the author forgot to use a plural verb for his singular subject! ^(8)

Therefore, **Hebrews 1: 1-4** teaches unequivocally that the God of the Bible is one singular Person, one “Self”, a “He”.

SO THEN, WHO IS GOD’S SON?

⁴ **Rom. 15: 6; 2 Cor. 1: 3; 2 Cor. 11: 31; Eph. 1: 3, 17; 1 Pet. 1: 3; Rev. 1:6; 3:2; 3:12** (X4 times in this last verse!). This list would be far more impressive if we included Jesus’ pre-resurrection statements that His God is “the God” or “my God”, such as **Matt. 27: 46; Mk. 15: 34**; and one post-resurrection statement not in the epistles in **John 20: 17**).

⁵ The careful reader will again observe the definite article appearing each time before “God” ... **διὰ τοῦτο ἔχρισέν σε ὁ θεός ὁ θεός σου ἔλαιον**. This literally reads, **Therefore, the God, the God of you has anointed you....**

⁶ Then there’s the testimony of the apostle Paul that **there is one God and Father of all** (Eph. 4: 6) — also repeated in **1 Cor. 8: 6 ... for us there is only one God, the Father ...** and again that, **there is one God and one mediator between God and men, a man Messiah Jesus ...** (1 Tim. 2: 5).

⁷ The God of the Bible, note, has his own “preferred pronouns”!

⁸ There are only four possible exceptions to this overwhelming evidence — the **“Let us”** texts where Yahweh invites participation in His purposes and actions from the heavenly Council of the Sons of God. These “exceptions” do not disprove the rule. See my book **They Never Told Me This in Church!** For a more detailed exposition of these “Let us” verses on pages 94-99.

Now that we have established who the subject (the doer) in the sentence is (i.e. **the God**) we are now introduced to the object of this introductory sentence — the **Son**. And this Son is the one through whom God **in these last days** has spoken and, through whom God has been working to accomplish His eternal and redemptive purposes for this world.

God, Who at various times and in different ways spoke in the old times to the fathers through the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us in a Son ...

Note the contrast between the various ways in which God spoke to Israel's fathers **in the old times** and the ultimate way He has spoken **to us in his Son**.

Under the OT agreement, **God** spoke to Israel in a piecemeal fashion through many spokespersons called prophets, and by various methods of communication through them (such as by dreams, angels, parables, songs and psalms, judgements, audible conversations, through "types" and by many miracles and signs, such as in the tabernacle and the priesthood, etc.). The writer now aims to prove that the New Covenant promised by the OT prophets has finally arrived. The old economy is now redundant, superseded by the Son.

Israel's prophets knew Yahweh God was planning something big, but couldn't quite see the details. They only had the outlines, the tantalising shadows, and various pieces of their jigsaw puzzle. But we who live in these last days now see the big picture.

The point not to be missed then, is that **the Son did not speak in the Old Testament**. That is to say, the Son did **not** speak in the book of Genesis — so, the Son could **not** have spoken the Universe into existence! Nor did the Son speak as "the angel of the LORD" in Exodus. In fact, the Son did not speak to any of the prophets right up to the book of Malachi!

WHY WAS THE SON SILENT IN THE OT?

The reason for the Son's silence is simple: He wasn't there in those **old times** — except in God's predetermined future purpose. The Son was there only in the sense of God's prophetic promise to Eve in **Genesis 3: 15** and to Abraham, Isaac & Jacob, and to others like David. (⁹) In the OT the *promised* Son was always yet in the future. **God calls the things which do not [yet] exist as [already] existing (Rom.4: 17)! (¹⁰)**

Wilber however, wants to convince us that the Son personally spoke **long ago** in the Genesis creation. (He quotes the clause in **1: 2 "through whom He made the worlds"** in support of his contention, also **verses 10ff**. We will examine these verses in more detail in the next article. Sorry, but as my grandmother used to say, "Patience is a virtue ..."! (¹¹)

Thus, **Wilber** misses the obvious point here — **the Son uttered nothing until these last days**. Not a single word in the days of old because he did not yet personally exist — except, to repeat, in God's ideal, promised and foreknown future.

⁹ The Son did **not** speak as the Angel of the LORD because **Hebrews 1** goes to great lengths to prove that Jesus was **not** an angel. Nor did he speak as Melchizedek as some fancifully propose! See my article on this website titled [Mysterious Melchizedek](#).

¹⁰ Believers too, in the same sense, are said to have already been foreknown and predestined in the eternal purposes of God. It does not mean we were personally there with God in the beginning of time. (cf **1 Peter 1: 2 and 20**).

¹¹ The full quote is: "Patience is a virtue, possess it if you can; seldom found in woman, but never in a man!"

THE SON'S GENESIS

The NT speaks of “**the genesis of Jesus Christ**” (Matt. 1: 1, 18). (¹²)

This tells us Jesus the Messiah had an origin, a point at which he came to be. In Luke 1:35 Gabriel was very clear that Mary’s baby boy was to be **the Son of God for the precise reason that God was going to miraculously beget** him, i.e. *bring him into existence*.

Gabriel does **not** say that the birth of Jesus Christ is a new phase, or a new experience, in the career of an already pre-existing Son. Not at all. He says **the Son of God** will begin his personal existence at conception. It’s not “the human nature of Jesus” coming into being, but **the Son of God**, who has his genesis, his very beginning — says none other than Gabriel **who stands in the presence of God** (Lk. 1: 19)!

This cannot be emphasised too much: **The Son of God, Gabriel** says, will begin to be (for that is the meaning of to **be begotten**) **in Mary**. In Matthew’s genealogy we have, by my count, thirty-eight (38) times when someone “becomes the father of a son” — making all the “**begats**” in the old KJV version more amenable to our modern ears! But for some strange reason translators overlook the same word for the begetting of Jesus on two other occasions ... **verses 16 and 20** ... making forty (40) “begets” in **Matthew chapter 1**!

The esteemed Bible scholar **Raymond E. Brown** sets the record straight: **The fact that Matthew can speak of Jesus as “begotten” (passive of *gennan*) in 1: 16, 20 suggests that for him the conception through the agency of the Holy Spirit is the becoming of God’s Son. (¹³)**

There should be no argument about this because the miraculous birth of **John the Baptist** is described by the very same word: **Many will rejoice at his birth (*γέννησις*)** (Luke 1:14). They will rejoice at John’s *engendering*, his procreation, his coming into existence.

So then, according to the archangel, the Son **begins** his personal existence in that specific moment of his conception in history. **The power of the Most High** would “overshadow” Mary and bring the miraculous procreation of the baby to pass (Lk.1:35). (¹⁴) The Virgin Birth then, was **the genesis of the Son of God —not his continuation in a different “incarnated” form!**

As **Wilber** quotes Professor Buzzard in his article, I think it appropriate to quote Buzzard at this point with some good Bible logic:

A begotten Son is ruled out once the Son is made to predate his begetting.

¹² **Γένεσις** is not the word for “genealogy” which most of our English translations use here. Although the human Messiah is reckoned genuine through his biological descent through the generations, Matthew’s opening verse says this is how Jesus Messiah had his beginning. Matthew repeats that the Son had his **Γένεσις**, his origin, when his personal existence began at conception in Mary in v. 18. Sadly, your English versions read this, **Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows ...**”

¹³ **Brown, Raymond E.** *The Birth of the Messiah; A Commentary of the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.* (Anchor1993,) p 140

¹⁴ **γεννώμενον** from the verb **γεννάω** meaning “to beget”, “to procreate”, “to engender”. In Matthew’s genealogy it’s the word used multiple times of a father who begets his son ... **To Abraham was begotten Isaac**, or, **Abraham was the father of Isaac.**

Therefore, up till this point, the Son in the Hebrew prophets was there in future prospect and promise (e.g 2 Sam. 7: 12f; Ps. 2; 89:3, 26f, etc.) We may be sure that just as the writer of the **Hebrews** works from his OT definition as to who God is, so he works in conformity with the OT definition as to who the Son is — the promised human Messiah who did not speak until the last days. Please read **Hebrews 1: 2** carefully ... it says God's **Son** did **not** speak in the OT! Putting it positively it says the **Son** said nothing until his appearance to usher in the dawning of the New Testament era.

THE SON IS THE HEIR OF ALL THINGS!

In fairness, it has to be said that **Wilber** does acknowledge that God **has appointed his Son** as “the heir of all things,” emphasizing the Son's role as the long-awaited Davidic king.[1] However, the author goes far beyond merely affirming the Son's role as the Davidic king ...

But is it true that **Hebrews** goes on to prove that the Son is more than **merely** David's greater son, that he is really God himself? Once again we must reign in **Wilber's** haste. In his rush to get to the Deity of Christ, he cruises right on past some more critical information here.

At least it's good that when speaking of the Son's inheriting all things **Wilber** uses the word “appointed”, for it's the exact word **Hebrews 1: 2** uses when it says God “appointed” His Son to cosmic inheritance. (¹⁵) This in itself is enough to show that the Son's position as heir is by appointment. The Son has *received his authority to rule* as the result of God's gracious gift. It's an appointment (indeed, the reward for the Son's obedience, **Heb. 5:9; Phil. 2: 9-10**) indicating his dependance upon and subordination to God.

Jesus' exaltation to God's right hand proves he is the **long-awaited Davidic king** ... In his Footnote [1] **Wilber** quotes another writer's remark at this point ... “The Son's inheritance of ‘all things’ through his resurrection and exaltation points to the fulfillment of God's promise that the heir of David's throne would receive the nations as his ‘inheritance’ (Ps 2:8; cf. 89:27; Rom 4:13).” Precisely! Jesus is the heir via resurrection.

LISTEN TO GABRIEL AGAIN!

Gabriel tells Mary that the son to be miraculously conceived in her womb will be named Jesus and that, “**He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the LORD God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and his kingdom will have no end** (Lk 1:32-33).

Let's note the congruence between the theology of **Gabriel** the archangel and **Hebrews 1** ...

a). The LORD God — the Most High — is the One who is the Prime Doer in the whole drama of salvation. **Gabriel** agrees with **Hebrews 1:1**! Or I should say **Hebrews 1: 1** agrees with **Gabriel**! The subject of both sentences is [the] God.

b). Mary's baby boy is the long-promised son of David because he is going to be **given** an everlasting throne. The Son will sit as Lord Messiah over both the house of Jacob and over the nations forever. **Gabriel** agrees with **Hebrews 1:1**! Or, I should say, **Hebrews 1: 1-4**

¹⁵ ἔθηκεν (aorist active indicative 3 person singular) of τίθημι which may be translated also as to set, to fix, to ordain or to establish.

agrees with **Gabriel!** The object of both sentences is the Son who is bequeathed a Kingdom!

On many occasions when he walked this earth people addressed Jesus by his royal title, “**the Son of David**” (e.g. **Matt. 9: 27; 12: 23; 15: 22; 20: 30-31; 21: 9**, etc.) All these people confessed the OT understanding that **the Son of David** would be the royal human descendant from the tribe of David (Judah).

No serious Bible reader thinks for example, that when the blind man cried out, “**Have mercy on me, Son of David!**” that he believed Jesus was “God in the flesh”. No. He was expressing his belief that Jesus was the promised Davidic King. Jesus understood himself to be David’s promised greater son because David under the inspiration of the holy Spirit called his future descendant, “**the Christ who is Lord**”, i.e. the Lord Messiah (**Matt. 22: 42-45**).

The apostle Paul goes so far as to define the true Gospel as that which **remembers Jesus the Messiah, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel (2 Tim. 2: 8)**. And right to the end of Scripture Jesus qualifies as the *bona fide* Messianic Lord because he is **the shoot of Jesse and the offspring of David (Rev. 22: 16)**. (¹⁶)

To confess faith in the Jesus of the Bible is thus to believe in the Son of David whom God has raised to immortality and who therefore is the accredited heir of God’s promised Kingdom! This is the glory of God’s purpose for the ages.

Look! Behold! Finally God has revealed to us a Son. In these last days God has raised to His own right hand, in fulfilment of all the prophets predicted, a true human being descended from David who is destined to rule the Universe in the Age to come!

SON = HEIR. SON DOES NOT = GOD

It ought to be evident that God cannot be called the heir of all things. God does not inherit anything. He is the one who gives the Kingdom to His chosen heir.

Jesus told the parable of the wicked tenant farmers in **Matthew 21: 33ff**. Those wicked men beat, stone and even kill some of the emissaries the owner of the farm sends to collect his rent. Finally, the landowner says, “**I will send my son. They will respect my son.**” But those wicked tenant farmers, upon seeing the son approaching, plot together saying, “**This is the heir! Come on, let’s kill him so we can take the inheritance!**” It is evident Jesus was referring to himself as “**the son**” and “**the heir**”.

Observe how in the same vein, the writer to the Hebrews connects sonship to heirship. *His concern is the exalted status of the eschatological Son* — **not** metaphysical questions about the inner nature of being (i.e. ontology). To this point then, **Hebrews** has not said a word about the alleged Deity of Messiah. All that the writer has said so far is that God’s Son has been elevated to the position of being God’s cosmic heir ...

Wilber would interject here, “not yet, but he soon enough does!” So, let’s continue this discussion in the next article. (Hmm. What was that lesson my grandmother tried to teach me? Something about “Patience is a virtue ...”!) Stay tuned!

¹⁶ This is a better translation of **ρίζα** which can mean a root, but in this instance it is better to say a shoot or a sprout.

