

HAYACHID—THE UNIQUE MESSIAH

“Take now your son, your one and only son, whom you love.”
 (Genesis 22:2)

“God has sent his one and only Son into the world,
 that we might have life through him.”
 (1 John 4:9)

by Paul Sumner

Isaac and Yeshua are both called the “one and only” sons of their fathers. Isaac is Abraham’s **yachid**. Yeshua is God’s **monogenes** (Greek). Both words mean unique.

The link between the Hebrew Bible and the Greek New Testament is the Greek Bible, the Septuagint, a translation done by Jewish scholars living in Egypt before the time of Yeshua. [See Endnote]

The word **yachid** occurs 12x in the Hebrew Bible. This table lists how the Septuagint renders **yachid**.

Hebrew Yachid—יָחִיד		Greek Septuagint / LXX	
Genesis 22:2	your one and only son (Isaac)	ἀγαπητός agapetos	loved one
Genesis 22:12	your one and only son (Isaac)	ἀγαπητός agapetos	loved one
Genesis 22:16	your one and only son (Isaac)	ἀγαπητός agapetos	loved one
Judges 11:34	She was his one and only daughter [יָחִידָהּ yechidah, fem.]	μονογενής monogenes	only, unique
Jeremiah 6:26	Mourn as for an only son	ἀγαπητός agapetos	loved one
Amos 8:10	a time of mourning for an only son	ἀγαπητός agapetos	loved one
Zechariah 12:10	as one mourns for an only son	ἀγαπητός agapetos	loved one

Psalm 22:20	Deliver my . . . one and only [soul]	μονογενής monogenes	only, unique
Psalm 25:16	I am lonely [alone] and afflicted	μονογενής monogenes	only, unique
Psalm 35:17	Rescue my soul . . . my precious [only] life	μονογενής monogenes	only, unique
Psalm 68:6	God makes a home for the lonely [isolated, desolate]	μονοτρόπος monotropos	lonely
Proverbs 4:3	When I was . . . the only son in the sight of my mother	ἀγαπώμενος agapomenos	beloved

In the Greek New Testament, Yeshua is named **monogenes** five times.

John 1:14b

We beheld his glory, glory as of a one and only [son] from the Father. ^{*1*}

John 1:18

No one has seen God at any time, the one and only [Son] of God, who is in the bosom of the Father, That One has revealed him. ^{*2*}

John 3:16

God loved the world in this way: he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:18b

He who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God.

1 John 4:9

By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent his one and only Son into the world so that we might live through him.

Older English translations of these five passages read “only **begotten** Son.” This follows the 4th century Latin Vulgate which emphasizes “begetting” [**unigenitus**]. However, the Greek **mono** (one, singular) and **genes** (genus, kind) means “one of a kind, an only one, someone unique.” The Vulgate reflects a later theological turn of thought reimposed on the NT. ^{*3*}

See R. L. Roberts, “The Rendering of ‘Only Begotten’ in John 3:16,” *Restoration Quarterly*, Vol. 16 (1973): 2-22; *Dictionary of N.T. Theology*, 2:75-76, 725; Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich-Danker, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (2d ed.), 527; J. H. Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 417-18.

Notes

1) John 1:14 and 18 do not have the Greek noun “Son” [**huios**]. But the masculine form **monogenes** is understood to mean “one and only Son.”

2) Based on several old Greek manuscripts of John 1:18, many modern translations read “the only God” [**monogenes theos**] instead of the reading “the only one of God” [**monogenes theou**]. The difference in Greek is one letter. In my opinion, the older reading [the only, unique God] is a theological change introduced into the Greek text, in Egypt, and is not original.

The lexicographer Joseph Thayer believed **monogenes theos** to be “foreign to John’s mode of thought and speech . . . dissonant and harsh,” and “appears to owe its origin to a dogmatic zeal which broke out soon after the early days of the church” (*Greek-English Lexicon of the N.T.*, 418).

3) The following modern versions abandoned the incorrect “only begotten Son” and usually render **monogenes** as “only Son” or “one and only Son” – RSV, NRSV, NIV, TNIV, James Moffat, Richard Weymouth, The Message, New Living Translation, English Standard Version, Contemporary English Version, New Century Version, 21st Century King James Version, Holman Christian Standard Bible, New International Reader’s Version.

These Modern Hebrew translations have (**ben**) **yachid** at John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9 – Delitzsch, Salkinson, Israel Bible Society. The Aramaic Peshitta New Covenant has **yechidaya**. David Stern uses “only” and “only and unique” in his *Jewish New Testament*.

Monogenes is used elsewhere for others besides Yeshua: Luke 7:12, 8:42, 9:38; Hebrews 11:17 (for Isaac).

The Loved One

In addition to being God’s **monogenes**, Yeshua is also his **agapetos**: his only-beloved one. ^{*1*}

Matthew 3:17 [allusion to Isa 42:1; Ps 2:7]

Behold, a voice out of heaven saying,
“This is my Son, the Beloved, in whom I am well pleased.”

Matthew 12:18 [quoting Isa 42:1]

“Behold, my Servant whom I have chosen;
My Beloved in whom my soul is well-pleased.”

Matthew 17:5 [see Deut 18:15; Isa 42:1; Ps 2:7]

“This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well-pleased; hear him!”

Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22 [see Isa 42:1; Ps 2:7]

“You are my Son, the Beloved, in you I am well-pleased.”

Mark 9:7 [see Deut 18:15; Isa 42:1; Ps 2:7]

A voice came out of the cloud,
“This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him!”

Luke 9:35 [see Deut 18:15; Isa 42:1; Ps 2:7]

A voice came out of the cloud, saying,
 “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!”
 [Some Grk mss. read: “my Son, the Chosen”]

2 Peter 1:17 [see Isa 42:1; Ps 2:7]

An utterance . . . was made to him by the Majestic Glory,
 “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well-pleased.”

Note

1) The phrase “my Son, the Beloved” is normally translated “my Beloved Son.” I follow the Greek word order to emphasize that **agapetos** is actually a noun in these verses, not merely an adjective (though it functions as an adjectival noun, as the modifier “Holy” often does in the phrase “the Holy Spirit”).

The Hebraic Link to Yeshua

Let’s put together our findings to show that Yeshua’s two designations—**monogenes** (“one and only”) and **agapetos** (“beloved”)—reflect the one Hebrew term **yachid**.

Hebrew Bible	Greek Bible/ Septuagint	Greek NT
yachid	monogenes ← agapetos	monogenes ← agapetos

Love is an aspect of **yachid**. We see this clearly in Genesis 22:2. “Take now your son, your one and only [**yachid**] (son), whom you *love*, Isaac.” Isaac was the offspring of Abraham, but he was not Abraham’s only biological son. Ishmael was his first-born son. Yet Isaac is described as the patriarch’s special, unique and only-loved son.

When referring to Yeshua’s status as a son, the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke use “beloved” (**agapetos**). This term is used for dear children in the Septuagint. In his gospel account, John chose the term “unique” (**monogenes**) for Yeshua, which also referred to precious children in Jewish circles. John’s intent merges with that of the others. All four gospel writers lead our attention back to the Hebrew word **yachid**.

Unique Son, Unique Messiah

The Hebrew Scriptures refer to God’s various “sons.” They include **angels** (messengers) [Gen 6:2; Deut 32:8 LXX, DSS; Ps 29:1; 82:6; 89:6; Job 1:6, 2:1; 38:7]; the nation **Israel** [Exod 4:22; Deut 14:1; Jer 31:9; Hosea 11:1]; and King **David** and his descendants [2 Sam 7:14; Ps 89:26-27].

The *Mashiach* in Psalm 2:7 is also called God’s “Son” [**beni atah**]. Therefore, to identify Yeshua of Nazareth as God’s only, unique, beloved son should be seen against this background of all his other sons, or children.

Discerning Messiahs

The NT says there are, and will be, false or anti-Messiahs (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7). Given their reality, it behooves people to know how to distinguish one messiah from another. From the NT’s point of view, of course, Yeshua is the only true anointed one sent by and from God. The NT would argue that people need to know what exactly a “messiah” is and does.

In the Hebrew Bible, there are many messiahs (“anointed ones”). These are **priests** (Lev 4:3; 6:15), **kings** (1 Sam 2:10; 2 Sam 22:51), and **prophets** (Isa 61:1; Ps 105:15). Each one sets down a pattern of character and activity for future generations to note and remember how God himself—the one who established these messiahs—defines the term “Messiah/Mashiach.”

Why is This Messiah Different From All Others?

To his disciples, Yeshua of Nazareth was different from all other Jewish leaders. His truthfulness and righteousness threatened and unmade them, thrilled them and gave them a taste of new life.

Yet his uniqueness was not proven merely by calling him One and Only. The NT writers penned their portraits of Yeshua so that people in other times and lands—who did not know him personally—could see and hear for themselves that their declaration of his uniqueness before God was true.

The multitudes were amazed at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one having authority, not as their scribes. (Matthew 7:28-29)

They became astonished. (Matthew 13:54)

Never did a man speak the way this man speaks. (John 7:46)

These Jewish authors knew there was no messiah like him, nor any son cherished more by God. And they hoped that others would believe that Yeshua is to God what Isaac was to Abraham—**haBen haYachid**, the Unique Son—through whom all the “families of earth” will be “blessed” (Gen 12:3; 26:24).

The Unique God

The *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4) testifies to the uniqueness of Israel’s God.

Hear, O Israel!
The LORD our God
The LORD is unique.

The Hebrew word for “unique” is the numeral **echad**, which often denotes singular uniqueness (2 Sam 7:23; Zech 14:7; Song 6:9). In the ancient world, into which Israel was about to enter, they needed to know that their God was the One and Only deity who loved them, the one to whom they owed their love because he redeemed them from Egyptian slavery and led them to a new life. The *Shema* gave them a banner of faith and an obligation.

This one, unique God is said – in the NT – to be the Father of Yeshua (Acts 3:13; 5:30; Hebrews 1:1-2).

See the full article [Echad in the Shema](#).

The Unique Two

Taken together, the Hebrew Bible and the NT Gospels witness to the fact that God and Messiah are both unique. None is like them as Father or Son. In John 17:3 are words of Yeshua that may intend to combine ancient Hebrew with New Testament theology into a kind of *Messianic Shema*:

This is eternal life, that they may know you the only true God,
and Yeshua Messiah whom you have sent.

- [Paul Sumner](#)

www.hebrew-streams.org/works/ntstudies/yachid.pdf

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Endnote

Not long after the conquests of Alexander the Great, his native Greek became the international language in the Mediterranean area by the 3rd century BCE. Most Jews living outside geographical Israel had learned to speak it. In fact, many had lost their working knowledge of Hebrew and Aramaic, and needed a modern-language Bible translation. The Jewish community in the grand metropolis Alexandria, Egypt, commissioned a team of scholars to translate the five books of Torah into Greek around 250 BCE. In time, the other books of the Tanakh were translated. The whole Greek Bible came to be known as the Septuagint, the version of the “Seventy” (scholars).

The Septuagint forms a bridge between the Tanakh and the New Testament. For the NT documents, as we have them, are also written in the so-called “Common or Koine Greek” of the turn of the Era.

In the Septuagint are Hebrew concepts and expressions crystallized in Greek. The NT is also a collection of writings by Jews about Hebrew religion in the same Hellenistic tongue. If we compare the Greek in both books we can ultimately bring the NT face to face with the ideas in the Hebrew Bible and look for similarities.

References

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