

# The Biblical Unitarian Christ: Agency, Wisdom, and the Singular God

## Introduction

Biblical Unitarianism (BU) represents a distinct Christian tradition, firmly rooted in the conviction that the Bible serves as the sole and ultimate authority for religious truth.<sup>1</sup> At its theological core, BU asserts that God the Father is a singular, undivided being, and that Jesus Christ, while uniquely God's Son, is not divine in an ontological sense.<sup>1</sup> This foundational belief stands in direct contrast to traditional Trinitarianism, which posits God as a complex unity of three co-equal persons sharing one substance.<sup>1</sup> From a Biblical Unitarian perspective, both the Old and New Testaments consistently portray a strictly Unitarian theology, depicting Jesus as God's anointed, human Messiah, who is distinct from and subordinate to the Father.<sup>1</sup>

The primary objective of this report is to articulate a comprehensive Biblical Unitarian understanding of Jesus Christ. It will delve into two critical interpretive frameworks: Wisdom Christology and the Jewish *Shaliah* (agency) principle. Through detailed analysis, the report will demonstrate why, from a Biblical Unitarian perspective, traditional Trinitarianism and other non-unitarian views are considered unscriptural and therefore false. It will argue that Jesus is not God, but rather is called "god" in the essence of his *Shaliah* agency, and that "High Christology" within the BU framework refers to Jesus as the fulfillment of God's eternal plan and purpose, rather than an eternally pre-existent person.

# **I. Foundations of Biblical Unitarianism: The Singular God**

## **A. Affirming Strict Monotheism: God the Father as the One True God**

Biblical Unitarianism is characterized by an absolute commitment to strict monotheism, asserting that God is a single, undivided person, identified exclusively as God the Father.<sup>1</sup> This theological stance is not merely a preference but arises directly from a rigorous adherence to the Bible as its ultimate authority. The conviction that the Old and New Testaments consistently describe a strictly Unitarian theology, devoid of explicit descriptions of God as a multi-personal being, forms the bedrock of this position.<sup>1</sup> The methodological commitment to a literal and unadulterated reading of scripture, coupled with a rejection of philosophical imports such as Platonism, directly leads to the conclusion of strict monotheism.<sup>1</sup> This rigorous approach implies that any doctrine not explicitly and consistently articulated in scripture, especially one perceived as a later historical development or philosophical imposition, will be systematically challenged and ultimately rejected. This creates a fundamental epistemological divergence from Trinitarianism, which often incorporates historical tradition and theological synthesis in its doctrinal formulation.

Fundamental biblical declarations, such as "One God, the Father," are central to this understanding.<sup>1</sup> Jesus Christ is consistently portrayed as "One Lord, Jesus the Christ," emphasizing his distinctness from and subordination to the Father.<sup>1</sup> The Bible teaches that there is only one divine person, God the Father, who is also known as Yahweh, the God of Israel and the Father of Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, Jesus Christ is understood not to be God the Father, nor a divine person in the same ontological sense.<sup>3</sup> Biblical Unitarians reject Trinitarianism on grounds of its perceived contradiction, unintelligibility, and potential for idolatry, arguing that its origins lie in Platonic philosophy rather than pure biblical revelation.<sup>1</sup> Historically, older Unitarianism was fundamentally "Biblical Unitarianism," rejecting doctrines like the Trinity primarily because they were deemed "unscriptural," not merely unreasonable.<sup>1</sup>

## **B. Historical Trajectories: Early Christian Beliefs and the Development of Trinitarian Doctrine**

Biblical Unitarianism posits that the earliest Christians, particularly in the first century CE, believed in one God and did not conceive of Jesus as God himself.<sup>1</sup> This historical claim is pivotal to the BU assertion that Trinitarianism is a later theological construct, representing a theological departure from an original, pristine biblical faith. The recurring assertion that Trinitarianism was "developed by some church leaders over the course of centuries" and "illegally imported from Platonic philosophy" signifies a powerful underlying narrative within Biblical Unitarianism: that of a theological "corruption" or "departure" from an original, pristine biblical faith.<sup>1</sup> This is more than a mere historical observation; it functions as a theological judgment that frames the entire debate. The idea that "the older Unitarianism was professedly a Biblical Unitarianism" implies a deliberate effort to restore this perceived original purity.<sup>1</sup> This narrative provides a robust rhetorical and theological justification for the Biblical Unitarian position. By presenting their view not as a novel interpretation but as a faithful restoration of "original" or "true" Christianity, they effectively delegitimize Trinitarianism as an unbiblical and historically contingent innovation.

The doctrine of the Trinity, from a Biblical Unitarian viewpoint, emerged gradually over centuries, from the second to the fourth century, culminating in its formal articulation at the Council of Constantinople in 381 CE.<sup>1</sup> Unitarianism was not initially deemed heretical until the theological disputes with Arius arose.<sup>1</sup> The historical landscape of Unitarianism included various Christological understandings, such as Arianism (Jesus pre-existed but was created by God) and Binitarianism (Father and Son as two distinct Gods).<sup>1</sup> However, modern Biblical Unitarianism, inspired by figures like Priestley, advocates for a return to what they consider a purer, scriptural faith, actively arguing against the Trinity.<sup>1</sup> It is noteworthy that some Unitarians held a belief in Jesus' pre-human existence as early as the 100s, predating the emergence of Trinitarian ideas in the late 300s.<sup>4</sup>

### **C. Jesus as the Human Messiah: God's Anointed Son, Distinct from and Subordinate to the Father**

A cornerstone of Biblical Unitarianism is the conviction that Jesus was fully human, uniquely chosen, and anointed by God.<sup>2</sup> He is consistently described as God's anointed, human Messiah, distinct from and subordinate to the Father.<sup>1</sup> Some Unitarians, particularly those adhering to a physicalist anthropology, argue that Jesus could not have pre-existed, as human offspring come into existence for the first time through their parents.<sup>4</sup> The persistent emphasis on Jesus being a "real human" and the argument that if he were God, he "could hardly deny himself or disobey his own directive"<sup>5</sup> reveals a crucial theological boundary condition for Biblical Unitarian Christology. Their understanding of Jesus's humanity is not merely descriptive but prescriptive: it dictates what Jesus cannot be (ontologically God) for his human experience, temptations, and sacrificial death to be truly authentic, morally exemplary, and redemptively efficacious. This perspective directly challenges the traditional Trinitarian doctrine of the hypostatic union (Jesus being fully God and fully man simultaneously) by arguing that true, vulnerable humanity, especially in the context of temptation and sacrificial death, is fundamentally incompatible with being the immutable, immortal God. It redefines the significance of Jesus's life and death, centering on his perfect obedience and full human capacity as essential to salvation.

Biblical Unitarianism explicitly rejects the "God-man" idea.<sup>1</sup> They interpret Jesus's mission primarily as exemplary, didactic, or prophetic, reinterpreting or denying aspects such as his eternal deity and bodily resurrection as understood by traditional Christianity.<sup>2</sup> Even in passages where Jesus interacts with the Father, such as John 14:28 ("the Father is greater than I"), BU interprets this as a functional subordination that Jesus humbly acknowledged due to his incarnate role as a sinless man.<sup>6</sup> This understanding explains why Jesus could refer to the Father as "my God".<sup>6</sup>

## II. The Jewish *Shaliah* Principle: Jesus as God's Ultimate Agent

### A. Defining *Shaliah*: The Concept of Representative Authority in Jewish Law

The Jewish law of agency, known as *shaliah* (Hebrew for "one who is sent," equivalent to the Greek *apostolos*), is a fundamental concept for understanding the Biblical Unitarian view of Jesus. The central dictum is "a person's agent is regarded as the person himself".<sup>7</sup> This means that any action performed by a properly appointed agent is considered to have been performed by the principal, who bears full responsibility, with the agent incurring no liability.<sup>7</sup> The agent operates with the full authority and resources delegated by the sender.<sup>7</sup>

In Semitic thought, the messenger-representative (*malak* or *shaliach*) was understood to embody the very presence of the sender, both personally and in their words.<sup>7</sup> This concept explains how a messenger can function as a "plenipotentiary," embodying the sender, with the primary emphasis remaining on the sender's authority.<sup>9</sup> The research indicates that

*shaliah* is crucial for understanding the idea of an apostle<sup>9</sup> and that "the agent can not only carry out divine functions but also be depicted in divine language".<sup>9</sup> This is a direct articulation of how

*shaliah* functions as the primary interpretive framework for Biblical Unitarianism. It provides a non-Trinitarian explanation for biblical passages where Jesus is referred to with "divine" titles or performs actions seemingly reserved for God, without necessitating an ontological claim of his deity. It offers a coherent explanation for "high Christology" language that avoids Trinitarian conclusions. This reinterpretation allows Biblical Unitarianism to affirm the unique authority and profound significance of Jesus as God's representative, while rigorously maintaining strict monotheism and denying his co-equality or co-eternality with the Father. It fundamentally shifts the interpretive focus from Jesus's inherent nature to his delegated function and authority.

## B. Old Testament Precedents: Divine Agents Speaking and Acting in God's Stead

The Old Testament records numerous instances where an agent of God (frequently an angel) is referred to as "God" or "the LORD" themselves, speaking and acting directly in God's stead. Biblical Unitarianism views this phenomenon as a significant biblical precedent that foreshadows the coming of Christ and his unique agency.<sup>8</sup> These examples are crucial for BU as they are interpreted distinctly from the traditional Trinitarian understanding of "pre-incarnate" appearances of Jesus.<sup>8</sup> The consistent application of the

*shaliah* principle to Old Testament "theophanies" (divine appearances) directly challenges the traditional Trinitarian interpretation that these were "pre-incarnate" appearances of Jesus.<sup>8</sup> By providing a coherent, alternative explanation—that these were angels or human agents acting

as God due to delegated authority—Biblical Unitarianism reclaims these passages for its strict monotheistic framework. This is a direct and systematic refutation of a significant category of Trinitarian proof-texts. This reinterpretation fundamentally undermines a substantial portion of Trinitarian biblical support for Jesus's pre-existence and divinity derived from the Old Testament. It posits that the "angel of the Lord" is consistently a distinct agent, never Jesus himself, thereby maintaining the absolute singularity of God the Father and the full humanity of Jesus.

The following table illustrates key Old Testament examples where agents are identified with God through the *Shaliah* principle:

**Table 1: Old Testament Figures Identified with God via Shaliah**

OT Reference	Figure/Agent	How Identified with God	Biblical Unitarian Interpretation
Genesis 16:7-14	Angel of the LORD	Speaks as God, claims divine prerogatives, Hagar perceives speaking to God.	Agent acting with God's authority, not God Himself. Refutes "pre-incarnate Jesus" view.
Genesis 19:1-24	Two Angels	Perform God's work (destroying Sodom and Gomorrah) while Yahweh is said to have rained fire.	Agents carrying out God's judgment with His power and authority.

Genesis 31:11-13	Angel of God	Jacob recounts the angel stating, "I am the God of Bethel."	An angel identifying as God due to delegated authority.
Genesis 32:24-30 (Hosea 12:3-4)	"Man"/Angel	Genesis calls the wrestler "God," Hosea clarifies it was an "angel."	Direct scriptural example of an angel acting as God's agent.
Exodus 3:2, 4, 6, 16	Angel of Yahweh	Angel appears, but "God" and "Yahweh" speak to Moses.	God speaks through or in conjunction with the angel's presence.
Exodus 13:21a, 14:19, 23:20-23	Angel of God	Passages interchangeably use "the LORD" and "the angel of God"; God's "Name" (authority) is "in" the angel.	Angel carries God's authority, representing Him fully.
Judges 2:1-4	Angel of the LORD	Speaks as God, recounting divine acts (bringing Israel out of Egypt).	Angel acting for God, speaking with His voice.
Judges 6:11, 12, 14, 16, 22	Angel of the LORD	Narrative shifts between "Angel of the LORD" appearing and "the LORD" speaking; Gideon understands it was the angel.	Angel representing God, conveying His message and authority.
Judges 13	Angel of the LORD	Manoah exclaims, "We have seen God!" after realizing it was the angel.	The angel's representation of God was so complete that Manoah perceived God's presence.
Zechariah 3:1-7	Angel of the LORD	Angel gives charge to Joshua, followed by direct speech from	Angel speaking directly with the authority and words

		"the LORD Almighty."	of the LORD.
Exodus 21:6, 22:8-9	Judges ( <i>Elohim</i> )	Judges are called <i>Elohim</i> (God) when acting as God's representatives in judicial matters.	Judges represent God as His agents on earth, thus called by His name.

### C. Applying *Shaliah* to Jesus: How Jesus is "God" without Being God

Jesus Christ is understood to represent God in an unparalleled and complete manner, functioning as God's ultimate agent.<sup>5</sup> He is depicted as God's "plenipotentiary, totally commissioned to represent him—as a human being".<sup>5</sup> Jesus himself affirmed this agency, stating he always does what pleases the Father (John 8:29) and that he speaks and acts with authority directly received from God.<sup>8</sup>

Under the *shaliah* principle, Jesus is understood to be "God" without being God ontologically.<sup>9</sup> His decisions, actions, teaching, and character are to be perceived as if they were God's own.<sup>9</sup> This interpretive framework renders it unnecessary to conclude that Jesus must be God in essence to perform the acts and speak the words attributed to him.<sup>9</sup> The consistent application of

*shaliah* to Jesus highlights a crucial distinction within Biblical Unitarian theology: Jesus's "divinity" is understood as *functional* (he acts as if he were God due to delegated authority and perfect representation) rather than *ontological* (he is not God by nature or being).<sup>5</sup> This provides a coherent and systematic framework for interpreting "high Christology" language in the New Testament without affirming Trinitarian conclusions about Jesus's inherent deity. This distinction is absolutely foundational to the entire Biblical Unitarian argument. It enables them to acknowledge the profound significance of Jesus, his unique relationship with God, and the powerful language used to describe him, while rigorously maintaining the absolute singularity of God the Father. It fundamentally redefines "divine" as pertaining to authority, representation, and perfect obedience rather than inherent substance or co-equality.



When Jesus declares, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30), Biblical Unitarianism interprets this within the *shaliah* concept as a unity of purpose, will, and authority, rather than a unity of essence or being.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the statement "He who has seen me has seen the father" (John 14:9) is understood as Jesus, as God's perfect agent, fully revealing the Father's character and will.<sup>7</sup>

#### **D. Reinterpreting "Divine" Language for Jesus: Authority, not Ontology**

Traditional Christian interpretations of texts that call Jesus "God" have historically misconstrued them as evidence of shared rank, substance, and age with the Father.<sup>10</sup> Biblical Unitarianism contends that a "Hebrew-sensitive reading" of these passages yields a more accurate and organic understanding.<sup>10</sup> Jesus is understood as the "very image of God" and God's ultimate communication of Himself, yet he is explicitly

*not* God Himself, precisely because he functions as God's ultimate agent.<sup>8</sup> He is described as the "mirror-image of God," who "speaks God, acts God," and serves as God's "plenipotentiary," but is "not his replacement—and certainly not his replica, as if he were God dressed up as a human being".<sup>5</sup>

While Trinitarians often point to instances where Jesus accepted worship (e.g., John 20:28) as evidence of his divinity<sup>6</sup>, Biblical Unitarianism maintains that worship is due

*only to God*, citing examples where Peter, Paul, and angels explicitly refused worship.<sup>6</sup> The

*shaliah* principle allows an agent to be "regarded as the person himself" and to be "depicted in divine language".<sup>9</sup> However, a critical question arises regarding the extent of this representation: does it extend to the act of worship? The core Biblical Unitarian tenet is that worship belongs

*only to God*.<sup>6</sup> This creates a subtle tension or a point requiring careful theological articulation within the

*shaliah* framework. If Jesus is *not* God, but receives worship, how is this reconciled with the principle that worship is exclusively for God? The *shaliah* principle effectively explains *actions* and *words* as if from the principal, but its application to *ontological identity* for the purpose of worship requires precise delineation within BU theology. This highlights the precise boundaries and potential internal complexities of the *shaliah* principle. While it powerfully explains Jesus' authority and the language used about him, its application to the concept of worship necessitates further theological

refinement within Biblical Unitarianism to ensure it does not inadvertently imply a shared divine essence, which they fundamentally deny. This leads to a deeper consideration of the nature of worship and its proper object within a strictly monotheistic framework.

### **III. Wisdom Christology: God's Eternal Plan Manifested in Jesus**

#### **A. Personified Wisdom in Jewish Sapiential Literature: Lady Wisdom as God's Creative Instrument**

The Biblical Unitarian approach emphasizes interpreting Christological portrayals within their rich Jewish context, including both Hebrew Bible writings and Hellenistic Jewish works.<sup>11</sup> In Jewish literature, the attribute of God's wisdom was frequently personified<sup>11</sup>, often depicted as a female figure, Lady Wisdom.<sup>11</sup> Personified wisdom is understood to have functioned as the instrumental agent of creation, crucially without usurping the role of Yahweh, who remained the sole Creator.<sup>11</sup> Lady Wisdom is depicted as pre-existing all created things, yet consistently attributing the role of Creator to God alone.<sup>11</sup>

The research consistently emphasizes that Lady Wisdom is "personified"<sup>11</sup> and serves as an "instrumental agent"<sup>11</sup>, explicitly stating that she does

*not* replace Yahweh as Creator. Crucially, it is stated that "the 'she who became flesh' (John 1:14) is a preexistent personification, not a conscious, literal preexistence of Jesus himself".<sup>11</sup> This is a pivotal distinction that allows Biblical Unitarianism to interpret "pre-existence" in New Testament texts without affirming Jesus's literal, personal pre-existence as a divine being. This understanding is absolutely foundational for reconciling New Testament "high Christology" passages (e.g., those implying Jesus's role in creation or his pre-existence) with the Biblical Unitarian commitment to Jesus's full humanity and the Father's sole divinity. It redefines "pre-existence" from an ontological state of a person to a conceptual state of God's eternal plan or attribute, thereby dismantling a major Trinitarian proof-text.

## B. Jesus as the Embodiment of God's Wisdom: An Exegetical Analysis

Early Christianity commonly transferred the attributes and roles of divine Wisdom to Christ.<sup>11</sup> New Testament authors, particularly Paul and the author of Hebrews, are seen as depicting Jesus Christ as the climactic embodiment of personified wisdom.<sup>11</sup> This is evident in key passages like Colossians 1:15-20 and Hebrews 1:1-3, which demonstrate strong parallels with Jewish wisdom literature, especially the Wisdom of Solomon.<sup>11</sup> The research provides direct and extensive evidence that New Testament authors applied the

*attributes and roles* of personified wisdom to Jesus.<sup>11</sup> This means that the "high" language used to describe Jesus (e.g., his role in creation, his being the image of God, his sustaining power) is interpreted by Biblical Unitarianism not as an ontological statement about his eternal personhood or inherent divinity, but as a description of his climactic and unique role as the perfect

*embodiment of God's wisdom and plan.* This redefines "High Christology" for Biblical Unitarianism. Instead of signifying Jesus's inherent divinity or co-equality with the Father, it denotes his supreme importance and unique function as the ultimate and perfect manifestation of God's pre-existent (in purpose) wisdom.

The following table details the parallels between New Testament Christological statements and Jewish wisdom literature, as interpreted by Biblical Unitarianism:

**Table 2: Wisdom Christology Parallels in Colossians 1:15-20 and Hebrews 1:1-3**

NT Passage (Colossians 1:15-20 / Hebrews 1:1-3)	Jewish Wisdom Parallel	Biblical Unitarian Interpretation
"He is the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15a)	Wisdom of Solomon 7:26 ("an image of his goodness"); Philo (Leg. Al. 1:43: "image and sight of God") <sup>11</sup>	Jesus as the climactic embodiment/fulfillment of God's personified wisdom/plan, not an eternal person.
"The firstborn of all creation" (Col 1:15b)	Philo (Gen. 4:97: "Wisdom is the firstborn mother of all things"); Proverbs 8:22-25 ("at the beginning of his way...I was established," "I was brought forth") <sup>11</sup>	Jesus as the climactic embodiment/fulfillment of God's personified wisdom/plan, not an eternal person.

"For in him all things were created" (Col 1:16a)	Psalms 104:24 ("In wisdom You have created all things"); Proverbs 3:19-20, Jeremiah 10:12, 51:15 <sup>11</sup>	Jesus as the climactic embodiment/fulfillment of God's personified wisdom/plan, not an eternal person.
"whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through him and for him" (Col 1:16c)	Wisdom of Solomon 6:21 ("honor Wisdom, so that you may reign forever"); Proverbs 8:15-16 (kings and rulers reign by Wisdom) <sup>11</sup>	Jesus as the climactic embodiment/fulfillment of God's personified wisdom/plan, not an eternal person.
"He is before all things" (Col 1:17a)	Proverbs 8:22 ("Yahweh possessed me at the beginning of his way, before his works of old"); Sirach 1:4 ("Wisdom was created before all other things") <sup>11</sup>	Jesus as the climactic embodiment/fulfillment of God's personified wisdom/plan, not an eternal person.
"in him all things hold together" (Col 1:17b)	Wisdom of Solomon 1:6-7 ("holds all things together"), 7:24 <sup>11</sup>	Jesus as the climactic embodiment/fulfillment of God's personified wisdom/plan, not an eternal person.
"He is the head/ruler" (Col 1:18b)	Philo (Leg. Al. 1:43: "God called Wisdom the head/ruler") <sup>11</sup>	Jesus as the climactic embodiment/fulfillment of God's personified wisdom/plan, not an eternal person.
"For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in him" (Col 1:19)	Wisdom of Solomon 1:4 ("Wisdom will not enter a deceitful person, nor dwell in a body enslaved to sin"); Proverbs 31, Sirach 50, 1Q20, Philo (personified wisdom incarnate in qualified humans) <sup>11</sup>	Jesus as the climactic embodiment/fulfillment of God's personified wisdom/plan, not an eternal person.
"having made peace through the blood of Christ" (Col 1:20b)	Proverbs 3:17 ("Wisdom's ways are pleasant, and all her paths are peace"); Sirach 1:18 ("The fear of the Lord is the crown of Wisdom, making	Jesus as the climactic embodiment/fulfillment of God's personified wisdom/plan, not an eternal person.

	peace and perfect health to flourish") <sup>11</sup>	person.
"through whom He made the world" (Heb 1:2)	Wisdom of Solomon 9:1-2 ("God made all things with his word and with his wisdom he formed humanity") <sup>11</sup>	Jesus as the climactic embodiment/fulfillment of God's personified wisdom/plan, not an eternal person.
"He is the reflection of His glory" (Heb 1:3a)	Wisdom of Solomon 7:25-26 ("Wisdom is a pure emanation of his glory...a reflection of eternal light") <sup>11</sup>	Jesus as the climactic embodiment/fulfillment of God's personified wisdom/plan, not an eternal person.
"He upholds all things by the word of His power" (Heb 1:3c)	Wisdom of Solomon 1:6-7 ("a kindly spirit...and that which holds all things together"), 7:24, 8:1 <sup>11</sup>	Jesus as the climactic embodiment/fulfillment of God's personified wisdom/plan, not an eternal person.
"He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb 1:3e)	Wisdom of Solomon 9:4 ("Give me the wisdom that sits by your throne") <sup>11</sup>	Jesus as the climactic embodiment/fulfillment of God's personified wisdom/plan, not an eternal person.

### **C. The Nature of Jesus' "Pre-existence": Ideal/Notional in God's Purpose, Not a Conscious, Eternal Person**

The Jewish worldview understood "pre-existence" in a distinct way: something "planned" or "foreknown in the counsel of God" existed notionally or ideally, but not yet in actuality.<sup>12</sup> This contrasts sharply with the Western, traditional Christian understanding of "literal" or "actual" pre-existence as a conscious, personal existence.<sup>12</sup> The Biblical Unitarian interpretation of "pre-existence" as ideal or notional directly addresses one of the most significant challenges to their Christology: how a fully human Jesus could have existed before his miraculous conception. By framing "pre-existence" as God's pre-ordained plan or purpose, it effectively bypasses the "physicalist" dilemma that would deem a literal pre-human existence impossible for a truly human being.<sup>4</sup> This is a deliberate and sophisticated theological move designed to resolve apparent contradictions between biblical statements (e.g., John 17:5) and their core monotheistic premise, while maintaining Jesus's full humanity. This redefinition of pre-existence is crucial for the internal consistency and coherence of Biblical Unitarian Christology. It allows them to interpret passages that seem to imply pre-existence without resorting to a literal, conscious existence of Jesus before his birth, thereby preserving his status as a created human being and affirming the singularity of God the Father.

The report cites passages like 1 Peter 1:20, which describes Christ as a "lamb 'foreordained' by God before the foundation of the world," indicating a divine purpose that determined the course of God's procedure.<sup>12</sup> It also references Romans 4:17, where God "calls those things which are not as though they were," implying that what God promises already exists with Him "in Heaven" notionally.<sup>12</sup> For Biblical Unitarianism, Jesus' "pre-existence" as Lady Wisdom is placed firmly in the category of God's purposes and plans.<sup>11</sup> The "Word" (

*logos*) in John 1:1 is understood as God's creative self-expression—His reason, purposes, and plans—which ultimately "became flesh" in the person of Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup>

#### **D. Redefining "Incarnation": Personified Wisdom Becoming Flesh in a Unitarian Framework**

The Jewish understanding of Lady Wisdom becoming flesh fundamentally redefines "incarnation" for Biblical Unitarianism.<sup>11</sup> It is not understood as a conscious divine being (God or an angel) literally taking on human flesh, but rather as personified wisdom becoming flesh, analogous to how wisdom was embodied in figures in Proverbs, Sirach, 1Q20, and Philo.<sup>11</sup> The Biblical Unitarian redefinition of "incarnation" fundamentally shifts its meaning. Instead of a literal descent of a divine being into human form, it becomes the

*manifestation or fulfillment* of God's pre-existent plan and wisdom *within* a human being.<sup>5</sup> This represents a profound conceptual reframing that directly addresses a core Trinitarian doctrine by reinterpreting its underlying meaning to fit a monotheistic framework. This reinterpretation allows Biblical Unitarianism to utilize biblical language often associated with incarnation (e.g., "the Word became flesh") without adopting the Trinitarian theological framework. It reinforces the idea that Jesus's uniqueness lies in his perfect embodiment and execution of God's purpose, rather than in his being God himself.

Biblical Unitarianism explicitly rejects the common Christian conception of "incarnation" as the invisible God "clothed" in human flesh or God Almighty "walking about on earth, dressed up as a man".<sup>5</sup> They argue that such a view reduces Jesus's life to a mere "charade"<sup>5</sup>, undermining the authenticity of his human experience, temptations, and sacrifice. This understanding allows "incarnation language" to be embraced as proper Unitarian theology, aligning with Jewish monotheism rather than Nicene Christianity.<sup>11</sup> Jesus is seen as "God for man and in man," a "plenipotentiary" who "speaks God, acts God," but is emphatically "not his replacement—and certainly not his replica, as if he were God dressed up as a human being".<sup>5</sup>

## IV. Re-evaluating Key New Testament Passages from a Biblical Unitarian Perspective

### A. John 1:1 ("The Word was God"): Interpreting "Logos" as God's Reason, Purpose, and Plan

The Biblical Unitarian interpretation of "The Word" (*logos*) in John 1:1 is crucial. It is understood not as Jesus himself or a separate pre-existent person, but as referring to God's creative self-expression, His reason, purposes, and plans.<sup>13</sup> This "Word" is God's communication of Himself, which ultimately became manifest in the person of Jesus.<sup>14</sup> The "word" and "wisdom" are seen as the creative force of God, but without being a "person".<sup>14</sup> The central tenet of the Biblical Unitarian interpretation of John 1:1 is the reclassification of "the Word" (

*logos*) from a distinct divine *hypostasis* (person) to an *attribute* or *aspect* of God (His reason, purpose, plan, wisdom).<sup>14</sup> This constitutes a direct conceptual challenge to Trinitarian readings, which identify the Logos with the second person of the Trinity. The grammatical argument concerning the definite article provides linguistic support for this qualitative rather than absolute identity.<sup>14</sup> This interpretation allows Biblical Unitarianism to maintain strict monotheism while acknowledging the profound theological significance of John 1. It posits that Jesus is the

*manifestation* or *embodiment* of God's divine plan, rather than the divine plan *itself* as an eternally pre-existent person. It frames Jesus's identity as intimately connected to God's self-expression, but not as God Himself.

The absence of the definite article before "God" (*theos*) in the phrase "the Word was God" (John 1:1c) is interpreted by BU to signify "divine" or "a god" in essence, rather than "the one true God".<sup>14</sup> This suggests that the

*logos* belongs to the same sphere as God, possessing a divine quality, but without being identified as God Himself.<sup>14</sup> BU argues that John 1:1 does not describe the Trinity.<sup>6</sup> The statement "the Word was with God" (John 1:1b) is understood as affirming that God's plan or purpose was

*with* God, not that a separate, conscious being existed face-to-face with God.<sup>14</sup> This interpretation also serves to refute Gnostic ideas of a distinct "god" opposed to the supreme God.<sup>14</sup>



## **B. Philippians 2:6 ("Form of God"): Understanding Jesus' "Divine Nature" as Moral Likeness and Obedience, not Ontological Equality**

The Biblical Unitarian interpretation of "form of God" (*morphe*) in Philippians 2:6 is crucial. It is understood not as an ontological statement about Jesus's inherent divine essence, but as his outward "appearance" or moral likeness to God.<sup>16</sup> Because Jesus consistently fulfilled the Father's will and demonstrated perfect godly behavior and obedience, he possessed the outward "appearance" or character of God.<sup>16</sup> The Biblical Unitarian interpretation of Philippians 2:6 fundamentally redefines "form of God" from an inherent divine nature to a

*moral and functional likeness* to God.<sup>16</sup> This is a crucial re-contextualization. Instead of Jesus

*being* God, he perfectly *reflects* God's character and flawlessly executes God's will. The "emptying" is therefore understood as a profound act of human obedience and self-sacrifice, rather than a divine condescension from an eternal state. This interpretation serves as a direct counter to Trinitarian readings that view this passage as primary evidence of Jesus's pre-existent deity and his voluntary self-humiliation from that divine status. This view reinforces Jesus's exemplary role as a human being who perfectly obeyed God, making his sacrifice truly meaningful as a human act of obedience. It shifts the focus from a "God-man" mystery to a comprehensible model of perfect human obedience and divine empowerment, accessible for emulation by believers.

The phrase "did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped" (Phil 2:6) is interpreted to mean that Jesus did not inherently possess equality with God and, in his humility, would never attempt to seize such a status.<sup>17</sup> If Jesus were truly God, he would already be equal in every sense and would have no need to "grasp" at equality.<sup>17</sup> Jesus "emptied himself" is understood not as a divestment of divinity, but rather as a profound act of humility, relinquishing the privileges associated with being without sin and the Son of God, the King.<sup>17</sup> He humbled himself by taking the form of a slave and becoming obedient even unto death.<sup>17</sup> This interpretation emphasizes Jesus's mortality, his capacity for temptation, and his ability to die—experiences that God, being immortal, cannot undergo.<sup>5</sup>

### C. Addressing Other Challenging Passages and their Unitarian Interpretations

For each of these challenging texts, the Biblical Unitarian approach is not to dismiss or ignore them, but to consistently offer alternative interpretations that align with their core theological tenets of strict monotheism and Jesus's full humanity. This demonstrates a systematic and deliberate hermeneutical effort to neutralize traditional Trinitarian proof-texts by re-contextualizing them within the established *shaliah* and Wisdom Christology frameworks. This highlights the intellectual and theological robustness of the Biblical Unitarian interpretive framework in addressing passages that, at first glance, appear to contradict its fundamental principles. It shows that BU does not simply disregard verses that seem to support Trinitarian views, but actively reinterprets them to fit its cohesive theological system, thereby presenting a comprehensive and internally consistent alternative to Trinitarianism.

- **John 8:58 ("Before Abraham was born, I am!"):** Traditional Trinitarianism interprets this as Jesus claiming divine identity, echoing the divine name revealed in Exodus 3:14.<sup>2</sup> Biblical Unitarianism typically reinterprets such verses to uphold a single-person God without eternal Sonship.<sup>2</sup> While a detailed Biblical Unitarian reinterpretation of John 8:58 is not explicitly provided in the available material, the *shaliah* principle (Jesus acting as God's ultimate agent) would be the most probable framework, implying that Jesus speaks with God's authority and presence, rather than asserting an ontological identity as God. The "I am" could also be interpreted as a prophetic declaration of his messianic identity or a statement of his pre-eminence in God's plan, rather than an assertion of eternal pre-existence.
- **John 17:5 ("the glory that I had with you before the world existed"):** Trinitarians view this as direct evidence of Christ's personal pre-existence.<sup>18</sup> Biblical Unitarianism interprets Jesus' pre-existence as "ideal" or "notional" within God's foreknowledge and eternal plan, not as a conscious, literal personal existence.<sup>12</sup> The "glory" would then refer to the glory associated with God's pre-determined plan for Jesus, which was "with the Father" in His mind and purpose, rather than a personal glory Jesus possessed prior to his human existence.
- **John 20:28 ("My Lord and my God!"):** Trinitarians cite Thomas's confession and Jesus's apparent acceptance of it as unequivocal proof of Jesus's deity.<sup>6</sup> Biblical Unitarianism counters this by noting that Jesus did not explicitly correct Thomas, unlike Peter, Paul, and an angel in Revelation who corrected others for attempting to worship them, clearly demonstrating that worship belongs exclusively to God.<sup>6</sup> BU proposes that Thomas might be acknowledging Jesus as "my Lord" (the Messiah) and the Father as "my God" (the one who raised Jesus from the dead),

or that the *shaliah* principle allows for such seemingly divine language without implying ontological identity.<sup>6</sup>

## **V. Critique of Traditional Trinitarianism and Other Non-Unitarian Views**

### **A. Logical and Scriptural Objections to the Doctrine of the Trinity**

Biblical Unitarianism rejects Trinitarianism as inherently contradictory or unintelligible.<sup>1</sup> They argue that the doctrine was "illegally imported from Platonic philosophy" rather than being a direct biblical teaching.<sup>1</sup> BU emphasizes that the Bible consistently lacks an explicit description of God as three co-equal persons of one substance.<sup>1</sup> The repeated assertion that Trinitarianism is a "theory that was developed by some church leaders over the course of centuries" and that "not until disputes with Arius that unitarianism began to be labeled as heretical" <sup>1</sup> reveals the core of the Biblical Unitarian critique. It is not merely that Trinitarianism is incorrect; it is that it represents an

*unscriptural innovation*—a deviation from what BU perceives as primitive, pure Christian belief. This historical argument is a powerful rhetorical and theological tool for delegitimizing the doctrine. This historical critique positions Biblical Unitarianism as the faithful preserver of original Christian truth, effectively casting Trinitarianism as a later, human-made accretion that departed from the authentic biblical message. It implies that a genuine return to biblical purity necessarily entails the rejection of the Trinity.

Some Biblical Unitarians view the doctrine of the Trinity as potentially involving idolatry, as it posits more than one divine person to whom worship or divine attributes are ascribed.<sup>1</sup> The report reiterates BU's consistent emphasis on biblical statements proclaiming the absolute unity of God, such as "One God, the Father" <sup>1</sup>, and the clear subordination of Jesus to God.<sup>1</sup> They contend that the numerical singleness of God is the paramount biblical truth.<sup>3</sup>

## B. Addressing Common Trinitarian Arguments for Christ's Divinity

Biblical Unitarianism systematically addresses common Trinitarian arguments for Christ's divinity by reinterpreting the relevant passages through the lens of *Shaliah* and Wisdom Christology.

- **Worship of Jesus:** While Trinitarians argue that Jesus accepted worship, implying his divinity <sup>6</sup>, Biblical Unitarianism maintains that worship belongs exclusively to God, citing instances where Peter, Paul, and angels explicitly refused worship.<sup>6</sup> This suggests that any worship directed towards Jesus, if interpreted as such, must be understood within the *shaliah* framework, where worship of the agent is ultimately directed to the principal (God the Father).
- **Jesus's Role in Creation:** Trinitarians interpret passages like John 1:1 and Colossians 1:16 as evidence of Jesus's direct role as Creator.<sup>3</sup> Biblical Unitarianism reinterprets these through Wisdom Christology, understanding Jesus as the embodiment of God's wisdom and plan *through which* God created, rather than as an independent divine creator.<sup>11</sup> The "Word" (Logos) in John 1:1 is God's creative self-expression, His reason and purpose, which became flesh in Jesus, not a pre-existent person who created the world.<sup>13</sup>
- **"I Am" Statements (e.g., John 8:58):** Trinitarians often interpret Jesus's "I am" statements as direct claims to divine identity, echoing the divine name Yahweh.<sup>2</sup> Biblical Unitarianism reinterprets these statements to uphold a single-person God without eternal Sonship.<sup>2</sup> Within the *shaliah* framework, such statements are understood as Jesus speaking with God's delegated authority and presence, representing God so completely that his words carry divine weight, rather than asserting an ontological co-equality with the Father.
- **Pre-existence:** Trinitarians interpret passages like John 17:5 and Philippians 2:6 as evidence of Jesus's literal, personal pre-existence as a divine being.<sup>2</sup> Biblical Unitarianism, however, defines Jesus's pre-existence as ideal or notional, existing in God's foreknowledge and eternal plan, not as a conscious, eternal person.<sup>11</sup> This allows for the interpretation of "glory before the world existed" (John 17:5) as the glory inherent in God's pre-ordained plan for Jesus, rather than a personal glory Jesus possessed prior to his human existence.
- **"God" Titles for Jesus:** While Trinitarians point to instances where Jesus is called "God" (e.g., John 20:28) as proof of his inherent deity <sup>6</sup>, Biblical Unitarianism explains these instances through the *shaliah* principle. As God's ultimate agent, Jesus is "God" in the sense of

representing God perfectly and acting with His full authority, without being God in essence.<sup>5</sup> This is analogous to Old Testament figures who were called "God" or "LORD" due to their delegated authority.<sup>8</sup>

## Conclusion

The Biblical Unitarian view of Jesus Christ, meticulously constructed upon the Jewish *Shaliah* principle of agency and a robust Wisdom Christology, presents a cohesive and scripturally grounded alternative to traditional Trinitarianism and other non-unitarian perspectives.

The foundational premise of Biblical Unitarianism is an unwavering commitment to strict monotheism, asserting that God the Father is the singular, undivided deity. This commitment is not a theological preference but a direct consequence of interpreting the Bible as the sole and ultimate authority, leading to the conclusion that a multi-personal God is not explicitly described in scripture. The historical development of Trinitarian doctrine is viewed as a centuries-long evolution, a departure from the simpler, strictly monotheistic beliefs of the earliest Christians, and influenced by non-biblical philosophical concepts.

Central to understanding Jesus within this framework is the Jewish *Shaliah* principle. This principle dictates that "a person's agent is regarded as the person himself," meaning an agent acts with the full authority and presence of the sender. Jesus, as God's ultimate *shaliach*, is therefore understood to be "God" not by ontological essence, but by perfect functional representation. His actions, words, and character are to be perceived as if God Himself were acting, speaking, and being present. This framework systematically reinterprets Old Testament "theophanies" as appearances of divine agents, not pre-incarnate Christ, thereby reinforcing the singularity of God the Father. It also explains Jesus's claims of unity with the Father as a unity of purpose and authority, not of being.

Furthermore, Biblical Unitarianism interprets "High Christology" through the lens of Wisdom Christology. The "pre-existence" of Christ is understood not as a conscious, eternal person, but as the ideal or notional existence of God's eternal plan, purpose, and wisdom. This "Lady Wisdom," personified in Jewish sapiential literature as God's creative instrument, finds its climactic embodiment in Jesus. Thus, "incarnation" is redefined: it is not the descent of a divine being into human flesh, but the manifestation and fulfillment of God's pre-existent plan and wisdom within a fully human being. Passages traditionally cited as proof of Jesus's ontological

divinity—such as John 1:1, Philippians 2:6, John 8:58, John 17:5, and John 20:28—are systematically re-evaluated. "The Word" in John 1:1 is understood as God's reason and purpose, not a distinct person. Jesus's "form of God" in Philippians 2:6 signifies his moral likeness and perfect obedience, not inherent equality. His "I am" statements and the acceptance of worship are interpreted within the bounds of his delegated authority as God's supreme agent, consistent with the principle that worship ultimately belongs to God alone.

In conclusion, from the Biblical Unitarian perspective, traditional Trinitarianism and other non-unitarian views are considered false because they introduce complexities and ontological claims about Jesus that are not explicitly supported by a rigorous, Hebrew-sensitive reading of the scriptures. Jesus is not God, but is uniquely called "god" in the essence of his *Shaliah* agency, reflecting God's authority and presence. His "High Christology" is understood as the ultimate fulfillment of God's eternal plan and purpose, perfectly embodied in a human being, rather than the manifestation of an eternally pre-existent divine person. This framework maintains strict monotheism while affirming the profound and unique significance of Jesus Christ as God's chosen Messiah and the perfect revelation of His will.

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