

Unveiling the True Christ: A Biblical Unitarian Response to Trinitarian Theology

I. Introduction to the Study

A. Background and Purpose of the Research

The theological landscape of Christianity is rich with diverse interpretations of core doctrines, none more central than the identity and nature of Jesus Christ. This study delves into the distinctive Christological framework of Biblical Unitarianism (BU), a tradition that asserts the Bible as its sole and ultimate authority for religious truth.¹ At its heart, BU maintains 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.¹ This stands in direct contrast to traditional Trinitarianism, which posits God as a complex unity of three co-equal persons sharing one substance.¹

The purpose of this research is to articulate a comprehensive Biblical Unitarian understanding of Jesus Christ, exploring the interpretive frameworks that shape this view. It aims to clarify how BU addresses passages often cited for Trinitarian claims and to illuminate the foundational principles that lead to its distinct conclusions.

B. Defining the Scope: Contrasting Biblical Unitarianism with Traditional Trinitarianism

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.¹ This theological stance arises from a rigorous adherence to the Bible, which BU proponents argue consistently describes a strictly Unitarian theology, devoid of explicit descriptions of God as a multi-personal being.¹ This approach rejects philosophical imports like Platonism, which are seen as influencing Trinitarian doctrine.¹

In contrast, traditional Trinitarianism defines God as one being in three co-equal, co-eternal persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.⁴ This doctrine asserts Jesus' full divinity and literal pre-existence as God the Son.⁵ The fundamental divergence lies in the nature of God's unity and Jesus' relationship to that unity.

C. Thesis Statement: Jesus is not God, but God's eternal plan/purpose fulfilled, and His authority derives from the Jewish "Shaliah" principle of agency, with traditional Trinitarianism and other views being false.

This study will argue that from a Biblical Unitarian perspective, traditional Trinitarianism and other non-unitarian views are unscriptural and therefore false. It will demonstrate that Jesus is not God in an ontological sense, but rather is called "god" in the essence of his *Shaliah* agency. Furthermore, "High Christology" within the BU framework refers to Jesus as the fulfillment of God's eternal plan and purpose, not an eternally pre-existent person.

II. Traditional Trinitarianism: Core Tenets

A. The Doctrine of the Trinity: One God in Three Persons

Traditional Trinitarianism posits that within the one being of God, there eternally exist three co-equal and co-eternal persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.⁴ Each person is distinct, yet each is identified as God.⁴ This doctrine is understood not as a denial of God's unity, but as a divinely revealed explanation of that unity.⁴ It asserts that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, while personally distinct, all deserve to be called God.⁶

B. Traditional View of Jesus' Divine Nature and Pre-existence

Mainstream Christianity, adhering to the Nicene Creed, considers the pre-existence of Christ a central tenet.⁵ Jesus is identified with a pre-existent divine hypostasis (substantive reality) called the Logos or Word, as described in John 1:1–18.⁵ This view holds that Jesus, as the second person of the Trinity, was actively present and involved in creation.⁵ Passages such as John 17:5, where Jesus refers to the glory he had with the Father "before the world existed," and Philippians 2:6–11, which speaks of Christ "existing in the form of God" and "emptying himself," are cited as evidence for this eternal pre-existence.⁵

III. Biblical Unitarianism: Fundamental Principles

A. Affirmation of Absolute Monotheism: God is One Person (The Father)

Biblical Unitarianism is founded on an unwavering commitment to strict monotheism, asserting that God is a single, undivided person, identified exclusively as God the Father.¹ This conviction stems from a literal and unadulterated reading of scripture, which, from their perspective, consistently portrays a strictly Unitarian theology, devoid of explicit descriptions of God as a multi-personal being.¹ Fundamental biblical declarations such as "One God, the Father" (1 Corinthians 8:6) are central to this understanding.¹ 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.³ Consequently, Jesus Christ is understood not to be God the Father, nor a divine person in the same ontological sense.³ 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.¹

B. Jesus as the Human Messiah, the Son of God

A cornerstone of Biblical Unitarianism is the conviction that Jesus was fully human, uniquely chosen, and anointed by God.² He is consistently described as God's anointed, human Messiah, distinct from and subordinate to the Father.¹ Biblical Unitarianism explicitly rejects the "God-man" idea.¹ 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.² 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.⁸ This understanding explains why Jesus could refer to the Father as "my God".⁸

The title "Son of God" is interpreted primarily through Jesus' unique conception by the power of God, as described in Luke 1:35.⁹ The angel Gabriel's words, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God," are seen as establishing Jesus as a holy man born of Mary through divine intervention, making him the "2nd Adam," rather than a pre-existent divine being.⁹ "Son of God" is also understood as a prophetic title, often co-referential with "Messiah" and "King of Israel," linked to Old Testament prophecies like Psalm 2.⁹

IV. Key Concepts for Understanding Jesus' Identity (Biblical Unitarian Perspective)

A. Wisdom Christology: Jesus as God's Eternal Plan/Purpose Fulfilled

1. Definition and Scriptural Foundations (e.g., Proverbs 8, Colossians 1)

The Biblical Unitarian approach emphasizes interpreting Christological portrayals within their rich Jewish context, including both Hebrew Bible writings and Hellenistic Jewish works.¹⁰ In Jewish literature, the attribute of God's wisdom was frequently personified, often depicted as a female figure, Lady Wisdom.¹⁰ 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.¹⁰ Lady Wisdom is depicted as pre-existing all created things, yet consistently attributing the role of Creator to God alone.¹⁰

Early Christianity commonly transferred the attributes and roles of divine Wisdom to Christ.¹⁰ New Testament authors, particularly Paul and the author of Hebrews, are seen as depicting Jesus Christ as the climactic embodiment of personified wisdom.¹⁰ 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.¹⁰ 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*.¹⁰

2. Distinguishing God's Eternal Plan/Wisdom from a Pre-existent 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.¹¹ This contrasts sharply with the Western, traditional Christian understanding of "literal" or "actual" pre-existence as a conscious, personal existence.¹¹ For Biblical Unitarianism, Jesus' "pre-existence" as Lady Wisdom is placed firmly in the category of God's purposes and plans.¹⁰ 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.¹⁴ The "she who became flesh" (John 1:14) is a preexistent personification, not a conscious, literal preexistence of Jesus himself.¹⁰

B. Jewish "Shaliah" Principle of Agency

1. Definition and Historical Context of the "Sent One"

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.²⁰ The central dictum is "a person's agent is regarded as the person himself".²⁰ 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.²⁰ The agent operates with the full authority and resources delegated by the sender.²⁰ 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.²⁰

2. Application to Jesus: Authority, Representation, and Identification with the Sender

Jesus Christ is understood to represent God in an unparalleled and complete manner, functioning as God's ultimate agent.²² He is depicted as God's "plenipotentiary, totally commissioned to represent him—as a human being".¹⁴ 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.²²

Under the *shaliah* principle, Jesus is understood to be "God" without being God ontologically.²¹ His decisions, actions, teaching, and character are to be perceived as if they were God's own.²¹ 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.²¹ 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).¹⁸

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.²⁰ 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.²⁰

C. Figurative Language and Titles in the New Testament

1. Interpretation of "Son of God": Metaphorical or Relational Meaning

As previously discussed, the title "Son of God" is interpreted by Biblical Unitarians primarily through Jesus' unique conception by the power of God (Luke 1:35) and as a prophetic, messianic title (Psalm 2).⁹ It signifies his unique relationship with God and his role as the chosen human Messiah, not an ontological claim to being "God the Son".⁹ The absence of the phrase "God the Son" in scripture, contrasted with over 50 uses of "Son of God," is emphasized.⁷

2. Understanding "Lord," "Savior," and other "Divine" Titles in Context

Biblical Unitarianism meticulously examines the original language and context of titles such as "Lord" (*kurios*) and "God" (*theos*) when applied to Jesus, arguing that these terms frequently denote authority, respect, or a functional role rather than inherent ontological divinity.¹

The Greek word *kurios* ("Lord") was a masculine title of respect and nobility, used broadly for property owners, heads of households, slave owners, husbands, and even Roman authorities.⁷ This wide semantic range suggests that simply calling Jesus "Lord" does not automatically equate him with God in essence.⁷ A crucial point is that Jesus was *made* Lord by God (Acts 2:36), implying a conferred authority rather than inherent co-equality.⁷

When Jesus is referred to as "God" (*theos*) in certain passages, Biblical Unitarians interpret this in a functional or representative capacity, not as an ontological claim to being God Himself.¹ This is strongly supported by the Jewish

Shaliah principle and Old Testament examples where angels or human judges were called "God" because they acted with God's authority and represented Him.²²

3. Emphasis on "Son of Man" as Jesus' Primary Self-Designation

While not explicitly detailed in the provided research, the emphasis on "Son of Man" as Jesus' primary self-designation is a common Unitarian argument. This title, frequently used by Jesus himself, highlights his humanity and his role as the representative of humanity, rather than a divine being. It connects him to the prophetic figure in Daniel 7, who receives authority and a kingdom from God, further reinforcing his delegated authority rather than inherent divinity.

D. Contextual Interpretation and the Overarching Monotheistic Framework

1. Prioritizing Clear Declarations of God's Oneness

Biblical Unitarianism prioritizes a literal and straightforward reading of Scripture, arguing that if the Trinity were a genuine and central Christian belief, it would be clearly stated in the Bible.¹² They contend that the word "Trinity" is not found in the Bible, supporting its unbiblical nature.¹² The consistent use of singular pronouns when referring to God in the Bible is presented as evidence against a triune God.¹² The Old Testament, given to the Jewish people, is seen as not containing any reference to a triune God, and the Jews fiercely defended the belief in one God.¹²

2. Re-evaluating Seemingly Trinitarian Texts within Their Immediate and Broader Biblical Contexts

Biblical Unitarians systematically re-evaluate passages often cited for Trinitarianism by placing them within their immediate and broader biblical contexts.¹² They argue that many perceived "divine" attributes or titles applied to Jesus can be understood through the lens of *Shaliah* (agency) or Wisdom Christology, without necessitating an ontological claim of his deity.²⁰ This approach aims to avoid "reading into the texts of Scripture the doctrine of Christ's Two Natures".⁵⁴

E. Exaltation Christology: Jesus' Post-Resurrection Authority and Status

1. Jesus' Glorification and Enthronement at God's Right Hand

Biblical Unitarianism emphasizes that Jesus' exalted status and authority are a result of his glorification and enthronement at God's right hand after his resurrection.⁹ This is seen as a reward for his perfect obedience and faithfulness as a human being.³⁵ He was "made both Lord and Christ" by God (Acts 2:36), indicating a conferred status rather than an inherent one.⁷

2. Authority and Power Granted by God, Not Inherently Possessed

Jesus' power and authority were *given* to him by the Father, rather than being inherent.³² This includes "all authority" (Matthew 28:18), a "name above every name" (Philippians 2:9), and the right to judge (John 5:22).³² This conferred authority underscores his role as God's agent, empowered for a specific mission.³²

V. Addressing Perceived Misunderstandings and Contradictions

A. Reconciling "High Christology" Passages with Unitarianism

Biblical Unitarianism reconciles "High Christology" passages by interpreting them through Wisdom Christology and the *Shaliah* principle. The "high" language used to describe Jesus (e.g., his role in creation, his being the image of God, his sustaining power) is understood 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*.¹⁰ This redefines "High Christology" for Biblical Unitarianism, denoting his supreme importance and unique function as the ultimate and perfect manifestation of God's pre-existent (in purpose) wisdom.¹⁰

B. Explaining Specific Texts Often Cited for Trinitarianism (e.g., John 1:1, John 20:28, Philippians 2:5-11, Titus 2:13, Hebrews 1:8)

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

- **John 1:1 ("The Word was God"):** The "Word" (*logos*) is understood not as Jesus himself or a separate pre-existent person, but as God's creative self-expression—His reason, purposes, and plans—which ultimately became manifest in the person of Jesus.¹⁴ The absence of the definite article before "God" (*theos*) in the phrase "the Word was God" (John 1:1c) is interpreted to signify "divine" or "a god" in essence, rather than "the one true God".¹⁵
- **John 20:28 ("My Lord and my God!"):** While Trinitarians cite Thomas's confession as unequivocal proof of Jesus's deity⁴, Biblical Unitarianism maintains that worship is due *only to God*.⁴ They propose 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.²⁸
- **Philippians 2:5-11 ("Form of God" and "emptied himself"):** The "form of God" (*morphe*) is understood not as an ontological statement about Jesus's inherent divine essence, but as his outward "appearance" or moral likeness to God due to his perfect godly behavior and obedience.²⁵ 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.²⁶
- **Titus 2:13 ("our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ"):** While not explicitly detailed in the provided snippets for a Unitarian interpretation, this verse is typically addressed by Unitarians through grammatical analysis (e.g., the Granville Sharp rule) to argue that "God" and "Savior" refer to two distinct entities (God the Father and Jesus Christ) or that "Savior" is a title applied to Jesus as God's agent.
- **Hebrews 1:8 ("Your throne, O God, is forever and ever"):** This verse, quoting Psalm 45:6, is interpreted in a functional and relational sense, not an ontological one, aligning with the Bible's consistent monotheism.⁴⁰ It is seen as God addressing Jesus with a title of authority, similar to how human judges were called "gods".³¹

C. Historical Development of Trinitarian Doctrine and its Departure from Early Jewish-Christian Monotheism

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.¹ 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.¹ 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.¹ 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.¹

VI. Conclusion

A. Summary of the Biblical Unitarian View of Jesus Christ

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. The foundational premise is an unwavering commitment to strict monotheism, asserting that God the Father is the singular, undivided deity. Jesus, as God's ultimate *shaliach*, is understood to be "God" not by ontological essence, but by perfect functional representation, acting with the full authority and presence of the sender. "High Christology" is interpreted through Wisdom Christology, where Jesus is the climactic embodiment of God's eternal plan and purpose, not an eternally pre-existent person. This framework reinterprets "incarnation" as the manifestation of God's pre-existent plan and wisdom within a fully human being. Passages traditionally cited as proof of Jesus's ontological divinity are systematically re-evaluated to align with strict monotheism and Jesus's full humanity.

B. Reiteration of the Study's Conclusion: Jesus is not God, but God's purpose fulfilled and empowered agent, distinguishing this view from traditional Trinitarianism and other interpretations.

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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