

The Right Hand of the Lord.

Literal or Metaphorical?

PAUL THOMAS

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INTRODUCTION

Many Christians believe that there is one God who exists as three persons in what they refer to as the Trinity. One of the main reasons for this belief is scriptures that seem to indicate a separation (or a distinction) between the Father and Jesus. A favourite argument of theirs goes something like this: “Since Jesus is sitting at the right hand of the Father, he must be sitting beside the Father literally in a geographical location to the right of the Father.” To their mind, this strengthens the case for the Trinity. A typical verse quoted in support of the above is Acts 7:56, 57.

Acts 7:55, 56: But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

What are we to make of this? We can either accept Stephen’s statement at face value – a literal reading – or we can explore the rest of the Bible to make sense of this rather strange expression. Often, when discussing such scriptures with those who support such a literal reading, questions

such as “If God is omnipresent (present everywhere), where is His right hand?” and “Where, then, does the Holy Spirit stand – on the left hand of the Father?” are not asked or addressed. A wiser course of action, we would all agree, is to search the scriptures diligently to arrive at a better understanding of this obscure expression. The prophet Isaiah calls precisely for such an effort:

Isaiah 34:16: Seek ye out of the book of the LORD, and read: no one of these shall fail, none shall want her mate: for my mouth it hath commanded, and his spirit it hath gathered them.

Armed with Isaiah’s exhortation, this booklet will explore this subject more closely. References to the right hand from the Old Testament will be assessed first, followed by New Testament passages. Hopefully, this little booklet will be read not only as a polemic against attempts to make a distinction in the Godhead, but a daily devotional which edifies. It is my prayer that the reader will also join me in this journey with an open, yet critical spirit similar to that displayed by the Jews whom the apostle Paul encountered at Berea:

Acts 17:11: These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

RIGHT HAND IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

1. The Lord is at the right hand of David

Psalm 16:8: I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

In the verse above, David plainly declares that the Lord is at his right hand. Obviously, this statement presents a challenge for anyone who understands right hand in a literal sense. In theological language, God is understood to be omnipresent – present everywhere and at the same time. God is a Spirit, said Jesus (John 4:24) as a gentle rebuke to the Samaritan woman who associated the presence of God with a mountain in Samaria. In other words, God must be thought of as filling every pocket of space in existence. Admittedly, this is hard for us finite humans to grasp. This explains why mankind has, since the beginning of civilization, attempted to fashion idols and images to access the ineffableness (i.e. difficult to describe and communicate) of God.

David, however, was fully aware of the omnipresence of God. Few have given us a more poignant description of the

impossibility of hiding from the presence of God then David.

***Psalms 7-12:** ⁷Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? ⁸If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. ⁹If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; ¹⁰Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. ¹¹If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. ¹²Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.*

In light of this knowledge, how, may we ask, could David confine the presence of God to his right hand? David, clearly, could not have been speaking of a literal right hand for this would – as has been shown – throw up some serious theological confusion. There can only be one other explanation: ***right hand refers to the place of power, strength, glory and authority.*** It conveys the idea of bestowing power, strength, glory, majesty, authority and a number of similar qualities upon a worthy individual. In fact, a brief study of the manner in which this Hebrew expression was used elsewhere in the Bible seems to support such a reading.

2. The right hand and the blessing of the firstborn

In ancient Israel it was an established spiritual custom to lay hands upon the head of the first-born and impart a blessing. The first-born, it must be remembered, enjoyed a number of privileges over the other brothers in the household. Amongst others they had authority over the rest of the household (Genesis 4:7), and inherited a double portion of the inheritance (Deuteronomy 21: 15-17). No wonder Joseph objected when his father, Jacob, determined to lay his right hand on the head of the younger of the two brothers, Ephraim, rather than Manasseh.

Genesis 48:17-20

¹⁷And when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand upon the head of Ephraim, it displeased him: and he held up his father's hand, to remove it from Ephraim's head unto Manasseh's head.

¹⁸And Joseph said unto his father, Not so, my father: for this is the firstborn; put thy right hand upon his head.

¹⁹And his father refused, and said, I know it, my son, I know it: he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great: but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations.

²⁰And he blessed them that day, saying, In thee shall Israel bless, saying, God make thee as Ephraim and as Manasseh: and he set Ephraim before Manasseh.

Earlier, in the same chapter (verse 10), we read that Jacob was almost blind because of his great age. Despite this, he knew what he was doing and refused to lay his right hand on the head of Manasseh, the elder brother. To these men of God, the laying on of the right hand to pronounce a blessing upon the firstborn was a very serious matter indeed. Joseph wanted to follow tradition, but Jacob understood that the Spirit of God guided his right hand skilfully towards the head of Ephraim. It was no longer an issue of following custom, but a matter of submitting the right hand to the leading and will of God. Jacob's right hand was, in this instance, a mere instrument in the hand of God. We can say that Jacob's right hand became the right hand of God.

So, once again, we can conclude that "right hand" (*yamin elohim* in Hebrew) is commonly used to denote blessing, authority, inheritance, power and a whole host of similar gifts which God imparts upon those whom He favours. Jacob's right hand is a metaphor meaning a figure of speech in which one object is used as an analogy for

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something else. As other examples in the Bible will show, the object is the right hand which stands for power, glory, majesty and similar qualities.

3. Bathsheba sits at the right hand of Solomon

1 Kings 2:19 Bathsheba therefore went unto king Solomon, to speak unto him for Adonijah. And the king rose up to meet her, and bowed himself unto her, and sat down on his throne, and caused a seat to be set for the king's mother; and she sat on his right hand.

Normally a king would never bow down to anyone in his kingdom. In the verse above, however, Solomon not only rose up to meet his mother, but bowed before sitting down upon his throne. This is a far cry from the current spirit of our age where parents are taken for granted, and often disrespected. Let us remember the commandment to honour our father and mother for it comes with a great reward:

Exodus 20:12 Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

Now, how did King Solomon honour his mother? He had her seated at his right hand. The message he sought to

convey was clear as day: his mother was to be held in the highest esteem and honoured by his subjects in the same way that he was honoured. Royalty has always been surrounded with symbolism, and none was more powerful than to be seated at the right hand of the King. In seating her to the right of his own throne, King Solomon extended to Bathsheba all that was associated with the throne – protection, honour, royal approval etc. This should help us understand his father David’s statement earlier:

Psalm 16:8: I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

With God at his right hand, David felt supremely assured of the protection and favour of the Almighty. No wonder he would not be moved. If Bathsheba felt safe and secure with her powerful son sitting beside her, David had every reason to feel the way he did. We, too, can proclaim with confidence, “The Lord is at my right hand, I shall not be moved”.

4. The right hand of Moses

Isaiah 63:12 That led them by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name?

In the verse above the right hand of Moses is spoken of as if representing the glorious arm of the Lord. In the case of Moses, it was the power of Jehovah which was infused, so to speak, into his right hand from which emanated the power and authority to command the Red Sea to part sideways and enable the children of Israel to walk on the dry sea bed (Exodus 14:16). Moses' right hand was, in that instance, the right hand of God in a manner similar to Jacob's right hand.

Our discussion so far leads us to conclude that right hand has no bearing whatsoever on the physical right hand of God, angels or humans, nor does it have anything to do with a specific concrete geographic location. Right hand always points to the exalted attributes (qualities or inherent characteristics) of God.

5. Left-handedness and Semitic cultures

Again, we are left to wonder why God chooses not to operate through the left hand. For the sake of argument someone may say that this is natural given that most humans are right-handed. There is something to be said for this argument. In fact, most humans are right-handed and, as such, it makes sense to refer to the right hand as the seat of strength and power. In an arm-wrestling contest one can assume that right-handed individuals would prefer to use their right hands to pin down their opponents. The right hand is not only stronger than the left hand, but much more skilful through years of use and practice. By way of illustration, a right handed person would not handle a fishing rod with his left hand as this requires some skill and endurance.

To the above one may reply, “Would that not mean that God depends upon our physical strengths and weaknesses?” We need a better explanation. Even more disturbing would be the unfair implication that left-handed individuals are abnormal. Having being born in Saudi Arabia, and somewhat familiar with Semitic (Middle Eastern) customs, I am aware of the socio-cultural stigma

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attached to left-handedness. Muslims, for example, discourage their children from using their left hands. This is because the left hand is considered unclean. Muslims are taught to use their left hands when washing themselves after a trip to the toilet, for example. I have only reproduced the exchange below from a Muslim website to demonstrate the importance of the use of the right hand in many Semitic cultures even today. One can only empathize with the question of the 12 year old student below:

***Question:** I am a 12 year old student, and I am left-handed. People have often reminded me not to eat or write with my left hand, because people who do so will not go to heaven; they will go to hell. I have tried to use my right hand for eating and writing, but I always feel that my right hand is weaker. I will be grateful for your advice.*

***Answer:** Let me tell you straight away that no one will go to hell for using his left hand for eating, drinking, writing or indeed for any other purpose. Anyone who suggests otherwise does not know and makes a huge assumption which he cannot substantiate. Indeed such a person betrays a degree of ignorance of God, His compassion and fairness. What we have to remember is that God knows every aspect of a person's abilities, motives and intentions. A left handed person does not choose to make his right hand the weaker hand. This is something that he is created with and cannot change just like [he cannot change] the color of his [skin,] eyes or his hair. So God will not ask anyone why he is left-handed, because it is He who has created him. Besides, using one's right hand for eating and*

most other purposes is recommended, or a sunnah¹. This means that it is not obligatory.

On the Day of Judgment, God will not ask any person why that person has not done something that is not obligatory. Nor will he punish anyone for not doing such a non-obligatory matter. He will look at what recommended practices we do in this life and reward us for them. But He will not punish us for omitting any of them. In the question of which hand to use for eating, God will reward those of us using their right hands only if they choose to do so in response to the Prophet's recommendations or to follow his example. In other words, His reward is not for the action itself but for intention behind the action. Hence, if a left-handed person trains himself patiently to eat and drink with his right hand until this becomes quite easy for him, and he does all that in order to follow the Prophet's example, he is sure to earn more reward than a person who does the same but does not have the added difficulty of being left-handed. I know some people who have done that. Their action is certainly commendable. The habit they acquired has become natural to them to the extent that they do practically everything with their left hands but when they eat they use their right hands. Perhaps you could do likewise and be patient until it comes naturally to you. You only need to be patient with yourself. But if you find it too difficult, then you should not bother about what people may say. You just explain that this is a natural difficulty and that it is God who created you so.

¹ *Sunnah* refers to the example of Muhammad whom Muslims consider to be an ideal example. Muslim men try to emulate Muhammad in every aspect – beard, clothes etc. This is not compulsory, but is supposed to bestow more blessings.

Obviously, most people would find the advice to “train patiently” to become right-handed to be discriminatory – and rightly so. However, the point is to draw attention to the manner in religion and culture has fused in the Middle East.

6. The right hand man

1 Chronicles 6:38-39

³⁸The son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, the son of Israel. ³⁹And his brother Asaph, who stood on his right hand, even Asaph the son of Berachiah, the son of Shimea.

Asaph is singled out in the above verse as he “who stood on his right hand”. A well-known and often used idiom in English is “he is the right-hand man of the boss”. Most people do not put much thought into the origin of this idiom, but maybe we should. If someone is described as the boss’ right-hand man, you can be sure he will get special treatment because no one wants to provoke the boss.

A quick look at any dictionary will give the meaning as the most valuable or indispensable assistant to the boss, for example. We know that this phrase has nothing to do with

the boss' right hand at all, but says something about the degree of trust the boss invests in this person. Thus even in everyday speech we use the phrase to convey a sense of the importance of someone rather than anything to do with the boss' right hand, or even the space to the right of the boss. Below is a relevant question I found in the Australian news service Fairfax:

***Question:** What is the origin of the term "right-hand man" and is there a left-hand man?*

***Answer:** In days of old, a nobleman could readily protect himself against an attacker approaching from the left. If the attacker approached from the right, he would be vulnerable. He would need to stand and turn to the right if he held his weapon in the right hand, whether it be a sword, dagger, pistol or fist. He would appoint his most trusted deputy as his "right-hand man" to protect his vulnerable side. A gentleman offers his left arm to his lady so his right is available for defence.*

Thus the old virtues of loyalty and gallantry in love and war had a role to play in coining the phrase "right-hand man". Asaph was the right hand man not only because he stood in that particular location, but chiefly because of the virtues it represented. Please note that no explanation was

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forwarded with regards to whether there is such a thing as a “left-handed man”.

7. Salvation, power and the right hand

Exodus 15:6 Thy right hand, O LORD, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O LORD, hath dashed in pieces the enemy.

Psalm 17:7 Shew thy marvellous loving-kindness, O thou that savest by thy right hand them which put their trust in thee from those that rise up against them.

Psalm 20:6 Now know I that the LORD saveth his anointed; he will hear him from his holy heaven with the saving strength of his right hand.

To the Israelites, God’s saving power was associated with His right hand. By now the reader cannot fail to see a consistent pattern emerging: the Bible writers ascribed glory to the right hand of God as a figure of speech in the liturgy (customary public worship). Why does the Psalmist not glorify the left hand of God also? That is a question which those who hold to a literal understanding (e.g. Trinitarians) must answer, but this question does not even arise if one is content with the interpretation given in this study. Significantly, the verses above actually equate the right hand of God with God Himself. This is so because

only God can effectuate salvation – it is His prerogative alone. God, for example, declares in Hosea:

***Hosea 13:14** I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes.*

In light of this verse, a link is established between the right hand of God, salvation and God Himself. They are interchangeable. This can be summarised in the proposition:

- a) The right hand of God saves.
- b) Only God has the power to save.
- c) Therefore, the right hand of God is God Himself.

Let us not forget that Jesus means “Jehovah has become our salvation”. Let us put to the test what we have learned so far: if Jesus is God who saves, then we should find utterances that establish a link between Him and the right hand of God. We find precisely such a bold declaration from the mouth of Jesus but, sadly, many have misunderstood it:

***Matthew 26:64** Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye*

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see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

What is Jesus talking about here? Most Trinitarians will conjure up a mental picture of Jesus sitting beside the Father. Jesus makes no such declaration – He will be seen sitting at the right hand of *power*. Power is a force and not necessarily a person. It would not make sense for Jesus to address the Father as *power* – it sounds abstract and impersonal like the God of the stoic philosophers². I will later return to the wonderful meaning behind Jesus' statement in section II which grapples with expressions about the right hand in the New Testament.

8. Right ear, right thumb and right toe

Exodus 29:20 Then shalt thou kill the ram, and take of his blood, and put it upon the tip of the right ear of Aaron, and upon the tip of the right ear of his sons, and upon the thumb of their right hand, and upon the great toe of their right foot, and sprinkle the blood upon the altar round about.

² Stoic philosophers, mentioned in Acts 17:18 believed that God was not a person who loved and cared for his creation in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Rather, God was an it – an impersonal force. For them, it was vital to live according to *logos* – the universal law, or wisdom which guided the universe.

God commanded Moses to sanctify the children of Israel in a rather peculiar way. The shed blood was applied only to the right ear, right thumb and right toe of Aaron. For us gentiles, uninitiated in Jewish customs and symbolism, there is the risk of missing out on the wonderful meaning behind this verse.

The Priest was expected to hear the word from the Lord and share it with the people of God, and hear the requests and needs of the people and take it to God. Touching the tip of his right ear with blood signified the sanctification of his hearing faculty. Again, the right side denotes the place of strength and blessing. Similarly, his right hand and right toe were also anointed with the blood thus sanctifying his faculties of action in the course of performing his duties. Now, it could be said that God stood on the right hand of Aaron while he went about interceding for the people. Aaron now had new-found power with God.

Anyone who approaches the Bible without the interpreting aid of the Holy Spirit will find it to be opaque – even foolish, according to the apostle Paul (I Corinthians 2:14). Sometimes it takes unbelievers to point this error out to Bible-believers:ⁱⁱⁱ

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Indeed, the same process of literal interpretation, applied elsewhere in the Bible, allows us to conclude quite a lot about God's anatomy. He is plainly right-handed, for instance, and has a particularly strong right arm which he uses for creation, attack and defence: "Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power - your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy," is one example (Foster, 2009:124).

9. When Satan stands on the right hand

***Zechariah 3:1** And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him.*

In the introduction I shared how David experienced a sense of peace and stability because the Lord was on his right hand (Psalm 16:8). The prophet Zechariah, on the other hand, saw Satan standing on the right hand of the high priest, Joshua. He was, no doubt, filled with horror. The Lord should have occupied this very strategic position because the high priest was supposed to be an intercessor on behalf of the children of Israel. Satan occupied the right hand from where he could easily resist Joshua's prayer and service on behalf of Israel. Clearly, Satan desires to neutralize the leaders of God by occupying the much

coveted right hand. There is a parallel here with Moses: as long as Aaron and Hur held up his hands, Israel prevailed against Amalek at Rephidim, but the moment his hands fell, Amalek gained the upper hand (Exodus 17:8-12). In Joshua's case, this was a battle that was going horribly wrong.

God did not deal directly with Israel because His holiness would not permit sinful men to approach His presence. It was the duty of the high priest to come sanctified before the Lord in the innermost chamber of the Tabernacle and make atonement for Israel every year. The fact that Zechariah saw the high priest with Satan standing on his right hand explained much of the recent spiritual crisis of Israel. It is quite evident that the right of Joshua was an expression, consistent with the other analyses so far, highlighting the place of power, glory majesty, honour, inheritance and similar qualities and attributes. The Bible commentator, ^{iv}Matthew Henry, has this to say about Satan standing on the right hand of Joshua:

A violent opposition is made to him. Satan stands at his right hand to resist him to be a Satan to him, a law-adversary. He stands at his right hand, as the prosecutor, or witness, at the right hand of the prisoner... He stood to resist him, that is, to oppose the service he was doing for the public good. He

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stood at his right hand, the hand of action, to discourage him, and raise difficulties in his way
(Matthew Henry, commentary on Zechariah 3).

In summary, the right hand can be conceived of as an invisible spiritual space where a fierce battle rages between God and Satan. It can be usefully compared to an army which, after some ferocious fighting, triumphantly ascends a strategic hill where they plant their flag and gain a tremendous advantage over the forces of the enemy. May the Lord Jesus Christ stand on your right hand!

10. A right hand of falsehood?

Psalm 144:11 Rid me, and deliver me from the hand of strange children, whose mouth speaketh vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood:

How can someone's right hand be a right hand of falsehood? It is evident that the Psalmist attributes moral qualities to the right hand. Our study so far demonstrates quite convincingly that right hand was associated with every upright and laudable virtue in Hebrew thought. The right hand was a metaphor which symbolized honesty, uprightness and integrity of character and word. The Psalmist above, however, had clearly encountered

hypocrites who appeared on the surface to be upright, but were full of falsehood.

Note again that right hand does not need to refer to a person at all, but is often used – as in this case – to speak about good or bad qualities in a person. This will present further difficulties for the proponents of the doctrine of the Trinity since they always assume sitting/standing on the right hand of the Father to mean a literal *person* physically sitting/standing in that geographical position. Coming back to Psalm 144:11 and the right hand of falsehood, an Old Testament illustration will further shed light on this idiom:

***Ecclesiastes 10: 2** A wise man's heart is at his right hand; but a fool's heart at his left.*

Again the usage of right and left is crystal clear: In Jewish estimation (and other Semitic cultures) right hand connoted dexterity, cunning and similar qualities, while left hand symbolized awkwardness. Note the words of the Psalmist:

***Psalm 137:5** If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.*

Such was the love the Psalmist had for Jerusalem that he wishes his right hand to forget its skill if he ever forgets

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this great holy city. Here a disclaimer must be issued: we are not saying that left-handed people are awkward or abnormal (remember the young Muslim child who struggled with left-handedness?). Indeed, the very thought of discriminating left-handed individuals is an assault on our modern sensibilities. The response to the Muslim child mentioned earlier leaves much to be desired. Being left-handed has not impeded anyone from achieving their dreams. President Obama, for example, is left-handed.

Perhaps, if the majority in this world were left-handed, maybe the Bible would have used the expression “left-hand of God”. It is beyond the scope of this Bible study to explain why God made the majority of human beings right-handed. All I am pointing out is that for someone who is right-handed, trying to do chores with the left hand would be cumbersome. He would no doubt come across as very clumsy and take much longer to accomplish simple tasks. The same can be applied in reverse to left-handed individuals. Trying to perform chores and tasks with their right hands would be quite unnatural. It is in this sense that the Bible writers, I believe, employ the phrase right hand. We may add, tongue-in-cheek, that political correctness was not high on their list as in our modern era.

11. Sit thou art my right hand

Psalm 110:1 The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.

This Scripture, by far, is the one most often quoted by Trinitarians to justify the contention that Jesus is distinct from the Father, and sits at a real physical location to the right of the Father in heaven. This understanding will be shown to be inaccurate. I have deliberately waited until this moment before expounding on this verse in order to flesh out the meaning of “right hand” as a Hebrew expression in the Old Testament. To recapitulate, we have seen how that each time “right hand” has been used in the Bible, it refers to the place of ultimate power, authority, majesty, glory, honour and eminence. It is this understanding which must guide our discussion of Psalm 110:1.

First of all, this verse is a prophetic utterance spoken by David roughly 1000 years before God was manifested in the flesh (I Timothy 3:16). Contrary to what some people believe, God was not having a conversation with the second member of the Trinity in heaven. As the I AM, God

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transcends the limitations of time and space, which is why He speaks as if the distant future has been fast-forwarded to the present moment. In God's lens, all dimensions of time are crunched together and addressed as one singular moment. Speaking of this ability, Paul writes:

Romans 4:17 (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, **and calleth those things which be not as though they were.**

In other words, when God inspired David to utter the words in Psalm 110:1, He was projecting forward to the time when Jesus would rule over the nations of the earth as prophesied by Isaiah (9:6,7), Zechariah (14:9) and many other prophets. This was not a conversation between two co-equal Gods – as many Christians believe – but the indivisible One God declaring prophetically what would transpire in His foreordained plan. *It is correct to believe that the one speaking and the one being spoken to are the same.* The Bible actually abounds with similar examples:

Zechariah 12:10 And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only

son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.

Significantly, 3 different time-scales are coalesced together in the verse above. The first is God speaking “live” through Zechariah (ca. 500 BC); secondly, that God would come in flesh is implicit because the children of Israel *shall look upon me whom they have pierced* and, finally, the period of the second coming in the future is the prophetic scene in which this occurs. With this exegesis (critical examination of a text) in mind, it becomes clear that the right hand of the Father in Psalm 110:1 has nothing to do with one God inviting another to be seated at His right hand. The right hand is the place of pre-eminence.

Bible students know that Jesus, after having accomplished His work on earth, is now seated upon the throne of heaven (the right hand) from where He will witness every enemy gradually subdued. The Book of Revelation (Revelation 19, 20) portrays in vivid detail how every enemy – sin, the Antichrist and even death will ultimately be vanquished by Jesus. In this manner, the prophecy *Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool* will be fulfilled.

12. Jesus, David and Psalm 110:1

Matthew 22 ⁴¹While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, ⁴²Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The son of David. ⁴³He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, ⁴⁴The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? ⁴⁵If David then call him Lord, how is he his son? ⁴⁶And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions.

Actually, anyone interested in the true meaning behind Psalm 110:1 ought also to consider Matthew 22:41-46 in parallel. The Pharisees were men of learning and very knowledgeable in the Word of God. Why then did Jesus' question silence them not only at that moment, but *from that day forth*?

To begin with, Jesus understands David to be referring to God Himself with the words *...my Lord...* (v.44). This was something which was generally accepted, even among the Pharisees. However, Jesus' question posed a huge theological problem for the Pharisees because, if the Messiah was the son of David, and David calls Him Lord, are there then two Gods featured in Psalm 110:1? The

Pharisees realized that the only answer they could give was that the Messiah must be God since David cannot have two Gods. They chose to be silent because they were not willing to concede that Jesus, as the son of David, is none other than the God of David.

How many Gods did the Jews believe in? The answer is one. The *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4) was interpreted by a Jewish scribe as speaking of one *singular* God, and not a Trinitarian oneness:

Mark 12:32 And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but **he**:

Following the above to its logical conclusion, one God alone cannot be standing at His own right hand, if by that we mean a literal location. This is why the Pharisees were silent; not because Jesus was introducing the idea of a second member of a Trinity – a preposterous idea to the Jewish mind – but because they plainly understood David to be referring to the Messiah as the Lord who stands at the right hand of God (the place of power and pre-eminence).

13. The right hand in creation

Isaiah 48:13 Mine hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand hath spanned the heavens: when I call unto them, they stand up together.

Isaiah attributes the monumental work of creation itself as something accomplished by the right hand of God. We could just as well substitute *power* for *right hand* because that is precisely the sense that is conveyed in the verse above. By now we must acknowledge that it would make no sense whatsoever to conceptualise a real, literal right hand.

In theological jargon, the word anthropomorphism is used when speaking of God in human terms. The Bible is filled with countless anthropomorphisms. God is said to divide the Red Sea by the *blast of thy nostrils* (Exodus 15:8); *ride* a cherub (Psalm 18:10) and His Word is said to *run* swiftly on the earth (Psalm 147:15), among others. That *my right hand hath spanned the heavens* is an anthropomorphism intending to convey the idea that the right hand of God is His seat of creative power.

Again, we can rightly ponder why the left hand of God seems to be inactive or just ignored in almost every

instance where praise, honour and majesty are showered on the right hand of God. We cannot escape the only plausible explanation, however repetitive it may sound: right hand has nothing to do with a literal, physical location. It refers to creative power in Isaiah 48:13.

The observant Bible student will note that the majority of references to the right hand of God are found in the Psalms. There are about 24 references to the right hand of God. This does not come as a surprise at all as the Book of Psalms is a compilation of hymns or songs which abound with poetic metaphors not to be taken literally. An example is Psalm 114.

Psalm 114 ¹*When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language;* ²*Judah was his sanctuary, and Israel his dominion.* ³*The sea saw it, and fled: Jordan was driven back.* ⁴*The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs.* ⁵*What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest? thou Jordan, that thou wast driven back?* ⁶*Ye mountains, that ye skipped like rams; and ye little hills, like lambs?*

14. The Law issues from God's right hand

Deuteronomy 33:2 And he said, The LORD came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints: from his right hand went a fiery law for them.

Once more we read a scripture which would not make sense at all to most gentiles unless one has some familiarity with the Hebrew expression *right hand*. As mentioned earlier, the right hand of God is associated with moral authority in addition to power, majesty and other similar qualities. Given this association, Moses declares that the Law went out from God's right hand understood as the place of righteousness and moral authority.

There is an additional aspect to the scripture above. Jews have always considered the Law to be divine. The Word of God was equated with God. The apostle John declared that the Word was God (John 1:1). Now, keeping this in mind, we can see a beautiful connection between the Word of God which is said to issue forth from God's right hand, and Jesus – the right hand of God. Jesus is the Word of God, and to state that He is on the right hand of the Father is to

maintain that He is the Law and the place of preeminent power Himself. Despite the clear evidence in the Bible, many still isolate one or two verses like the one below and assign a separate individuality to Jesus:

1 Peter 3:22 Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.

It is quite puzzling that these same people contend that Jesus pre-existed as God the Son, and sat at the right hand of the Father prior to His entrance into the world after which He returned to the right hand of the Father^v. What about other scriptures which seem to place the host of heaven at the right hand of the Father?

1 Kings 22:19 And he said, Hear thou therefore the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left (emphasis mine).

RIGHT HAND OF GOD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Introduction

The expression “right hand of God” is used on a number of occasions in the New Testament also. Godly men and women, steeped in the language and spirit of the Old Testament, found it appropriate to continue employing the idiom “right hand” as a literary tool readily understood by Jews familiar with the history and application of the phrase.

In fact, it will become quite clear that a failure to appreciate the profound meaning inherent in the phrase will deprive us of some important theological truths in the Word of God. It must be reiterated once again that the issue of understanding the precise meaning of “right hand” is not a peripheral matter. This entire booklet has been dedicated to exploring this topic for one reason: *at stake is whether God is indivisibly one or not.*

Two camps are in mind here: those who believe that right hand is a metaphor denoting the power, majesty, pre-eminence, honour and strength of the one God with no distinctions, and those who hold that it refers to Jesus standing in a physical location to the right hand of God and,

therefore, supporting the Trinitarian assertion that Jesus is distinct from the Father. Put another way, at stake is whether “right hand” bolsters the case for the Trinity doctrine or the belief that God is one with no plurality or distinctions of any sort. It is our conviction, supported by a host of Biblical evidence, that right hand revolves around the latter proposition.

Someone once asked me, “Why doesn’t God ensure that the intended meaning of His own Word is passed on faithfully given that the many have misunderstood or misconstrued important truths?” I am reminded that even in the early days of the Apostolic Age, while the New Testament was taking shape, some had failed to understand the epistles (letters) of the apostle Paul. Our duty is to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3).

***2 Peter 3:15, 16:** ¹⁵And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; ¹⁶As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.*

1. The offending right eye and right hand

Matthew 5: 29-30: ²⁹And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. ³⁰And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

What are we to make of Jesus' command to pluck out the offending right eye and cut off the offending right hand? If the offending right eye is plucked out and thrown away, would that mean the remaining left eye is not susceptible to lust, for example? No one would bet on that. Surely, there are plenty of one-eyed adulterers. Secondly, would cutting off the right hand ensure that the remaining left hand will not offend? Where there is sin there's a way. King David had no shortage of wives, but the insatiableness of lust led him to commit adultery with Bathsheba also.

What then does Jesus mean? Is He really asking us to dismember a literal right eye and right hand? In his *Ecclesiastical History* the church historian, Eusebius (AD 263-339), writes that Origen of Alexandria (AD 185-254) rashly castrated himself:

By all accounts Origen lived an extremely ascetic life - he had changed little from the impulsive youth who was more than willing to suffer for the sake of Christ. Famously, his great zeal even caused him to castrate himself. It seems his primary motive was to avoid any possible scandal due to his private instruction of women. He also seems to have literally interpreted Matthew 19:12, "There are those who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven." Eusebius comments that this drastic measure was "proof of an inexperienced and youthful heart but also of faith and self control."^{vi}

Indeed, we can agree with Eusebius that Origen was inexperienced. Sadly, gentile unfamiliarity with Hebrew expression coupled with blind zeal can have unfortunate consequences. What Origen and other literalists fail to understand is that the right hand represents the epicentre and source of an individual's strength. The right eye is the seat of spiritual sight while the right hand is the seat of moral action. If this moral foundation – or right eye/hand – is corrupt, then it should be mortified, according to Jesus. This mortification is not accomplished with the aid of surgical tools, but disciplines like fasting and prayer. This will ensure that, rather than have a right hand of falsehood, we can have a right hand of righteousness (Psalm 144:11).

2. Sheep on the right hand, goats on the left

Matthew 25: 33, 34 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

As mentioned earlier in the case of Jacob laying his right hand on the head of Ephraim, the right hand is associated with the blessing of inheritance. In Matthew 25: 33, 34 we witness once again the consistency of this interpretation. The sheep, who inherit the Kingdom of the Father, are invited to stand on the right hand side of Jesus.

God is a God of order and consistency. Every symbolic act of His has profound meaning. We have seen, in our study so far, the consistency of interpreting the right hand as the place of power, pre-eminence, blessing, honour and similar attributes. On the day of judgement, Jesus will, once again, make a distinction between the left and right hand - and what a terrible distinction it will be for some. If separation of the good from the evil is accomplished by positioning the one on the right and the other on the left, we can safely conclude that – in spiritual terms – the left hand is associated with the opposite of the meaning invested in the

right hand. Notice I said “in spiritual terms”. This has nothing to do whatsoever with being left or right-handed in this world.

Those on the left hand who will be condemned to hell are symbolically referred to as goats by Jesus. Significantly, the Bible portrays the Antichrist as a figure who descends from ancient kings represented by a goat with a horn.

Daniel 8: 21-23 And the rough goat is the king of Grecia: and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king. Now that being broken, whereas four stood up for it, four kingdoms shall stand up out of the nation, but not in his power. And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors are come to the full, a king of fierce countenance, and understanding dark sentences, shall stand up.

It appears, then, that the left hand where the goats are confined is the abode and bastion of sin. Just as God made a division between day and night, sea and land, working days and the Sabbath, clean and unclean and holy and unholy, He has also determined that the righteous occupy His right hand while sinners are placed on His left, spiritually speaking.

3. Discerning between the right and left hand

Allow me to develop further the point about distinguishing between right and left hand in spiritual terms. A scripture from the Old Testament will serve our purpose well:

Jonah 4: 11 And should I not spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?

In his great mercy, God condescended to explain to Jonah (who was behaving like a spoilt child) that the people of Nineveh were numerous and could not discern between their right and left hand. By this is clearly meant that they were spiritually ignorant. God was aware that they were committing the terrible sins He hated because they didn't know any better. Had a preacher come and warned them, they would no doubt repent – which is what occurred. How did God convey this morally bankrupt status of the Ninevites? He employed the symbolic use of the right and left hand. We can conclude that a person adept at discerning between the right and left hand is one who is spiritually mature; that such a person knows something

about the machinations of evil associated with the left hand, and the way to keep it in check.

Those on Christ's left hand were accused of neglecting the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked and the prisoner (Matthew 25:35, 36). They responded with some surprise. They were fully aware of their evil deeds, but they had no idea that Christ Himself would take offense at their selfishness. Unlike the Ninevites, they fully well knew the evil of their actions and had no excuse. Before I conclude this segment, it will be worth our while to take a look at one more verse:

Matthew 6: 3 *But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth:*

Notice the order of the *knowing*, if you will. It was the *left hand* which was to be kept ignorant of the doings of the right hand, and not the other way round. This is interesting, given what we have understood about the right and left hand so far. If the left hand is associated with the carnal nature of the flesh, then it would make sense that Jesus wishes it to remain ignorant of the righteous actions of the right hand. Obviously, there is no benefit to be had by sharing our good deeds with the depraved and fallen carnal

nature. May the good Lord help us be the people of the right hand!

4. Right hand of God or right hand of the power of God?

Hebrews 10:12 But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God.

Luke 22: 69 Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God.

Please look at these two verses carefully. On the surface, they are not saying the same thing. The discrepancy can be formulated as a question: is Jesus sitting on the right hand of God or the right hand of the *power* of God. This is not about hair-splitting but to challenge those who literally hold that Jesus will occupy a physical location to the right of the Father. These same proponents also justify the doctrine of the Trinity on the basis of such an interpretation. Indeed, some individuals who look for errors and contradictions in the Bible cleverly point to such scriptures to question the integrity of the Bible text itself. How are we to answer them?

If one were to look carefully at Luke 22:69, we would have to say that God sits on the throne in heaven, then an entity called *power* sits immediately next to Him and, finally, Jesus sits on the right side of power. This raises a host of questions: Who is this power? Is it a force separate from God or an attribute of God? Why does this power appear between God and Jesus, while no mention is made of Holy Spirit at all? Why doesn't Jesus sit immediately to the right of God?

All these questions would not arise at all if we stick to the line of reasoning all along – Jesus will sit as God Almighty upon the one throne in heaven. He will exercise all the power of the Father because *He is the Father manifested in flesh* (Isaiah 9:6; John 14:9; I Timothy 3:16). Notice that when Jesus said He would sit on the right hand of the power of God, the High Priest and his accomplices accused Him of blasphemy.

Matthew 26:65 *Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy.*

The Law actually forbade the high priest from tearing his clothes (Leviticus 21:10). Why then did he do this? It was because Jesus' words, understood properly, meant that He

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was claiming to be the Almighty God Himself, and not a co-member of a diffuse Godhead called the Trinity. This doctrine, even the Trinitarians will admit, was completely unknown to anyone at this stage. Church historians agree that the Trinity was not even conceived of this early by anyone. Tertullian invented the word *Trinitas* around the year AD 210.

Amid all the controversy, Tertullian fashioned much of the language which Latin Christians were destined to use to discuss the perplexities of their faith...Oneness in divinity was somehow reflected in threeness – indeed, one would need a word to express that idea of threeness. It is to be found for the first time in Tertullian's writings, although he probably did not invent it: *Trinitas* (MacCulloch, 2010:145).

5. Sitting on the left hand of Jesus

Matthew 20:23 And he said unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father.

For those who champion a literal reading of right and left positions around the throne of God, a serious challenge is

presented by Matthew 20:23. Mrs Zebedee, the mother of John and James, was very ambitious for her children. Seeing that they had given up everything dear in this world to follow Jesus, she wanted to secure a good deal for her sons. She was just doing what all good mothers would do. Apparently, she had discussed this with her sons beforehand because when Jesus asked them if they were willing to share in His suffering they responded yes in chorus. The Lord, ever loving and patient with our misguided ambitions and pride, gave them a diplomatic answer. However, notice that Jesus said:

...but to sit on my right hand and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father.

Obviously, taken literally, this would mean some people (Jesus uses the plural *them*) will be sitting on His right and left hand. Now if some people will occupy the physical location to the left of Jesus, then *they will be the ones sitting on the right hand of God and not Jesus*. Of course, even our Trinitarian friends will not accept such an interpretation but, if they are consistent all the way, this is what they would be forced to conclude. Needless to say, this form of reasoning is absurd, and this kind of literalist

reading distorts the Word of God. Again, we can only challenge Trinitarian and other like-minded Bible-readers to understand the true meaning of the right hand of God. It actually means Jesus is God Himself and occupies the most preeminent position (right hand) which only God is worthy enough to occupy.

6. Right hands of fellowship

Galatians 2: 9 And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.

Saul of Tarsus, as we all know, had a fearsome reputation on account of the severe persecution he inflicted upon the church before his conversion. Even after his conversion, many were still sceptical of him not knowing whether this was a subtle strategy to gain better access to the Christian community. It took the gentle-natured Barnabas to act as intermediary between Saul (now named Paul) and the apostles. Thanks to Barnabas' efforts, Paul was gradually embraced without reservation by the apostles.

Relevant to our study is the metaphor Paul employs to describe this wholehearted acceptance by the apostles in Jerusalem, particularly Peter, James and John. He states that they gave him *the right hands of fellowship*. Paul, we must not forget, was a Jew immersed in the mindset and culture of the Jewish world. Although writing to gentiles in Galatia (modern Turkey), he speaks employing Jewish religious expressions. To our modern ears, the expression sounds a bit odd. That is because every language has its set of idioms and phrases which make sense only in that cultural context. Right hand is one such phrase.

In the context above, Paul uses the expression to convey the idea of complete trust. Every barrier of suspicion had fallen down and they now saw eye to eye as equals and fellow-ministers. This interpretation is supported by the next sentence: *that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision*. Paul was promoted in the eyes of the apostles. As the apostles now deemed him their equal, they strategized making him and Barnabas in charge of proselytizing the heathen. In effect, Paul and Barnabas were officially appointed the first ever foreign division superintendents. Once again, right hand carries the connotation of *power, honour, prestige* and similar attributes. At the risk of beating a dead horse, it has

absolutely nothing to do with a literal physical location. Perhaps, just as it took years of consistent indoctrination for many Christians to accept a literal and distinct right location, it would also require some prolonged and persistent teaching to erase this doctrine from many minds. The truth, no doubt, shall prevail.

7. Sitting at the right hand is to overcome the world

Hebrews 12: 2 Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

For those who believe in a pre-existent God the Son (meaning Jesus existed with a body from eternity before He entered the world), was Jesus sitting on the left or the right side of the throne in heaven? If you respond that Jesus was sitting on the right hand side before he entered the world, then it makes no sense for the writer of Hebrews to say that He is *set down at the right hand of the throne of God*. What has He gained then? Clearly, there seems to be something unique and new about this statement which is used often in the letters (Epistles) of the New Testament. In other words,

why are we told specifically now that Jesus is *set down at the right hand of the throne of God*? Where was He sitting before? A wrong understanding of this important phrase will engender a welter of questions.

Firstly, Jesus did not pre-exist as “God the Son”. This brief study cannot dwell at length on this topic which would require another book or booklet; however, a man called Origen (3rd century AD) from Alexandria, Egypt, invented this false doctrine. Origen attempted to reconcile a serious theological problem: if Jesus is the Son of God, He must have had a beginning since a son necessarily has a birthday. How then can He be the eternal God? Origen responded that Jesus was begotten of the Father from eternity in a process that actually never had a beginning or end – the doctrine of the “eternally begotten Son”. If you are just as confused as I am, you are in good company. Theologians like Louis Berkhoff and countless others have struggled to explain to us what this means, with little luck. Thankfully, we are told by other scholars that^{vii}:

As we shall see, his [Origen’s] theological work contains statements of extraordinary boldness, though often presented simply as theoretical suggestions for solving a particular problem. So radical were some of these that a whole group of his ideas were labelled “origenism” and condemned at

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a council at Alexandria a century and a half after his death, in 400 (MacCulloch, 2009:150).

In summary, there is no such thing as an eternal son. All sons, by definition, have a birthday - and so did Jesus (although it was not 25 December). The Bible is clear that “the Word was made flesh” (John 1:14). The Greek word for “Word” is *logos* and not *huios* (son). Jesus did exist prior to His birth in Bethlehem, but as the eternal Father – the One and only indivisible God. Notice God’s own witness of His deity:

Isaiah 44: 8 *Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? Ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? Yea, there is no God. I know not any*

So there is no room in the Bible for believing in a pre-existent “God the Son” who is the second member of the Trinity. Such a phrase does not even occur in the Bible. Coming back to the issue of the right hand of God, what, then, does it mean in Hebrews 12:2? This phrase simply means that Jesus overcame and was exalted. Notice the phrase that precedes His sitting down at the right hand of God - *endured the cross, despising the shame*. In biblical terms, this phrase is often used in relation to people who overcame great hardship and opposition. We have seen in

our study, particularly in the Old Testament, that the phrase was used in precisely such precarious circumstances. For example:

- David overcame his fear when he saw God at his right hand (Psalm 16:8).
- God overcame Pharaoh in the Red Sea using the right hand of Moses (Isaiah 63:12).
- God saves (overcomes) with His right hand (Psalm 20:6).

So Jesus *endured the cross, despising the shame* on account of which He *sits at the right hand of God*. In point 6, I showed that Paul was only offered the right hand of fellowship after he had been tried and proved by the other apostles. There was something to be *overcome*. Right hand, therefore, indicates promotion. Jesus was promoted, *not in His deity*, but for accomplishing the monumental task of overcoming sin, Satan and the grave. This speaks of exaltation - not in terms of Godhood or identity – for God never changes (Malachi 3:6), but in terms of fulfilling the role of the suffering servant so beautifully prophesied about in the iconic chapter of Isaiah 53.

Isaiah 53: 11 *He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.*

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Isaiah 53:12 Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bear the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

In conclusion, it is the *work* that Christ accomplished which is the object of the phrase *sitting at the right hand of God*, and not His deity which is addressed. A King is still a King although he may have won new wars and achieved greater glory. Jesus Christ is always the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8) but He, as the One True God, conquered new territory and deserves greater honour – hence He *now* sits at the right hand of God. Indeed, Jesus deserves abundantly to sit at the right hand of the throne of God – the highest form of exaltation imaginable.

8. Jesus sits in the Father's throne in heaven

Revelation 3:21 To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

Finally, we are invited to heaven by Jesus Himself to see how *right hand of God* works in practice. Note once again that the phrase *To him that overcometh* precedes *sit with me in my throne*. As mentioned in point 7, right hand of God is best understood as an act of divine reward – a divine promotion after overwhelming odds are encountered and overcome for the cause of Jesus. Now, how can one explain that Jesus is sitting down *with my Father in his throne*? This plainly contradicts the literal understanding of the Trinitarians which says that Jesus is currently sitting *at a geographical location to the right of the Father*? In Revelation 3:21, Jesus begs to differ; He claims to be seated in the same throne as the Father. To reconcile the *prima facie* contradiction we will need to consider one more verse 3 verses later:

Revelation 4:2 *And immediately I was in the Spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.*

Revelation 4:3 *And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.*

John was invited to heaven and what did he see? ***One*** throne and ***he*** that sat...That is it! This should decisively

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settle any debate about how many thrones there are in heaven and whether Jesus sits on the right or left side of the Father's throne. John *saw* this with his own eyes and lived to write about it in the Book of Revelation, of which Jesus Himself says:

Revelation 1: 19 Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.

Concluding remarks

We have seen, in this Bible study, that right hand of God is a figurative expression which denotes attributes such as power, glory, honour, majesty, pre-eminence, salvation, uprightness and righteousness among others. I have argued, using scriptural evidence to show that the literal reading – widely accepted among mainstream Christians – is erroneous. One of the most compelling scriptures supporting this assertion is Psalm 16:8.

Psalm 16:8: I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

I might add that many Christians are aware that right hand cannot refer to a literal location to the right hand of the throne of God, but they are constrained by the dictates of Trinitarian doctrine to promote such an understanding. On the contrary, I have tried to show that the “right hand of God” has its source in a particular Hebrew poetic form of expression common in the cultures of the Middle East even today, and has no bearing at all on a geographical direction. The Bible, especially the Book of Psalms, supports such a reading:

Psalm 17:7 Shew thy marvellous loving-kindness, O thou that savest by thy right hand them which put their trust in thee from those that rise up against them.

What this study actually serves to reinforce is that a proper understanding of the doctrine of the One True God is desperately needed before one can attempt to understand such expressions in the Bible. In brief, God is one in a mathematical sense. In Him are no divisions or a compound unity such as defined by the doctrine of the Trinity. God was and is a Spirit (John 4:24). For our salvation, it was necessary that this same One God manifest Himself in flesh (I Timothy 3:16). God, who was Spirit alone, is now Spirit, flesh and blood. His name is Jesus, and in Him dwells the

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fullness of the Godhead bodily (Colossians 2:9). As such, this One True God, who's saving name is Jesus, cannot sit beside Himself in the same manner that you cannot sit beside yourself. If you believe this, God commands you to be baptized in the name of Jesus to remove the corrupt Adamic body which we have all inherited as human flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God (I Corinthians 15:50). Finally, Jesus loves us so much, He desires to fill us with His blessed Holy Spirit sealing us for the day of His return, which all who love Him eagerly anticipate. May the Lord Jesus who sits on the one throne in heaven bless you abundantly!

Notes

ⁱ <http://www.islamicity.com/dialogue/q325.htm> Accessed July, 2011. It is of interest that, although by no means looked upon as abnormal, or something to be remedied, the term for left-handed in Norwegian is *skjev-hendt*. A rough translation would be “crooked-handed”. I still recoil from using it but, as far as I am aware, even left-handed people there use this expression. An etymological study may perhaps reveal an unpleasant past.

ⁱⁱ <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2004/04/30/1083224569549.html?from=storyrhs> Accessed July, 2010. I once asked an elderly Englishman in London why Britons drive on the left hand side of the road. Apparently, in the old days before the advent of automobiles, those mounted on horses were required to ride on the left hand side of the road so their right hands would be free to wield the sword when confronted with highwaymen (robbers). Most people were right-handed so this made sense, he said. The tradition continued into the automobile age. This story needs confirmation.

ⁱⁱⁱ Charles Foster (2009). *The Selfless Gene – Living with God and Darwin*. Hodder: London.

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^{iv}http://www.blueletterbible.org/commentaries/comm_view.cfm?AuthorID=4&contentID=1578&commInfo=5&topic=Zechariah&ar=Zec_3_1 Accessed July, 2011.

^v See *Let Us Reason Ministries*, for example. <http://www.letusreason.org/onen10.htm> At the Right Hand of the Father. Accessed July, 2011.

^{vi} Origen of Alexandria. <http://www.religionfacts.com/christianity/people/origen.htm> Accessed July, 2011.

^{vii} MacCulloch, D. 2009. *A History of Christianity*. London: Penguin Books.

Further reading on the One God doctrine

- Gezahagne, T. (2007) *Acts of God in Ethiopia*. Missouri: Apostolic Experience Publishing.
- Gezahagne, T. (2007) *Bible Writer's Theology*. Missouri: Apostolic Experience Publishing.
- Gezahagne, T (2010) *The Identity of Jesus Christ* (Revised Edition). Addis Ababa.
- Thomas, P. (2010) *Who are you, Lord? A Somali encounters Christ*. Scotland: Spiderwize.
- For more on the Apostolic Articles of Faith visit our website www.apostolicinternational.org
- All correspondence with the author:
hpaulsilas@hotmail.com

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