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Obedient to Death

2: 5-8

Obedient to death DIG: Where do we find the pre-existence of the Messiah in the B'rit Chadashah? Where do we find the death of Messiah in the TaNaKh? What does having the same attitude or mind-set as Messiah Yeshua mean to you? What was a bond-servant? Which of the eight steps seem most important to you personally? What did Messiah give up during His incarnation? Why was death on the cross necessary?

REFLECT: Is there something a friend is facing that makes you uncomfortable? Someone searching for answers you don't have? Be there. Hold a hand, offer a shoulder to cry on, or child care, or even a meal. Give them what you have, which is Yeshua's love. In what ways did Yeshua serve others? How do you think this affected what Yeshua thought of Himself? What does His life teach us about demanding our rights?

That old rugged cross is now a tree of life.

Verses 2:5-11 represent a "Messianic Hymn" which tells of the coming of **the Messiah** into a world as **a servant, His death** on a Roman cross, and **His** exaltation to being **Lord** of all creation. The detailed structure of the hymn itself has been the subject of endless debate. But at a basic level the structure is actually rather clear. After the initial command to have the same attitude as **Yeshua (2:5)**, the first half of the hymn describes what **Messiah** did (**2:6-8**). This description is centered on three main verbs with **Yeshua** as the subject: (1) **He did not consider equality with God something to be used to be possessed by force (2:6b)**; (2) **Rather, He emptied Himself (2:7a)**; and (3) **He humbled Himself (2:8b)**.

The second half of the hymn describes what **ADONAI** did. (**to see link click [Aw - The Exalted Son](#)**). **He** highly exalted **Yeshua** and **gave Him the name above all other names (2:9)**. Their two-fold purpose is so that **every knee will bow (2:10)**, and **every tongue confesses that Yeshua Messiah is Lord (2:11a)**.

The ultimate result of all this is that **God the Father is glorified (2:11b)**. The two key texts from **Isaiah** form the background to this “Messianic Hymn.” The first is **Isaiah 45:14-25**, part of which **Paul** quotes in **2:10-11**. In its original context **Isaiah 45:14-25** emphasizes that salvation is found in **Yeshua**, who alone is the true **God**. By applying this language to **Messiah**, **Paul** boldly asserts that **Yeshua** is **YHVH** in the flesh, **God with us** (see the commentary on [Isaiah Cb – The LORD Himself Will Give You A Sign](#)). The second text is **Isaiah 52:13** to **53:12**, which describes **the Suffering Servant** (see below). Although **Paul** does not explicitly quote from this passage in **2:6-11**, he does allude to and echo its language and themes at several points.

Have this mindset among yourselves, which is yours in Messiah Yeshua (Philippians 2:5). **Paul** now builds a bridge between the exhortation of **2:1-4** (see [Au – To Model the Messiah](#)) and the Messianic hymn of **2:6-11** by repeating the same key verb: **have the same mindset** (Greek: *phroneo*) and connecting it with **the Person** and work of **Messiah Yeshua**. This **mindset** must be **among yourselves**, emphasizing the communal aspect of **the shared mindset in Yeshua Messiah** which **he** goes on to describe in **2:6-11**. From **Paul’s** perspective, it is possible for believers to have the mindset that was **in Messiah Yeshua** because **Messiah Yeshua Himself** dwells in believers. Therefore, the issue is not simply one of imitation, but imitation supported by imputation (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ Fr – Jesus the Bread of Life](#)) and indwelling.

As Paul taught of Yeshua’s flawless example of humility, he also recorded Messiah’s descent from heaven to earth, describing the exalted position that He had left, then presenting a series of eight downward steps from that glory and honor to ever-increasing indignity.

Who, being in the very form of God (Philippians 2:6a; also see Genesis 1:26-27; Second Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15). This verse begins the Messianic hymn that is one of the most well-known sections in the whole letter. The hymn begins with the clause: **Who, though He was in the form of God**, referring back to **Messiah Yeshua** in the previous verse. By saying **that He was in the very form of God**, **Paul** is indicating that **Messiah** did something unexpected. **His** point, then, is that **though** we might expect that someone who was **in the form of God** to think that he was **equal with God** . . . but **Yeshua** did not. Within Greco-Roman culture (as **the Philippian church** certainly was) and its prized status and the pursuit of honor, it would be surprising that one who **was in the very form of God** didn’t regard that status as an opportunity for selfish gain. Immersed in a

Greco-Roman culture that cut its teeth on stories of the gods using their powers and privileges for their own selfish gain, the picture of one who was fully divine deliberately not acting in this manner – indeed, laying aside **His** divine privileges for the everlasting good of **His** creatures – would have been a startling contrast to what their native world view taught them.⁷¹

Step one: Even though **Messiah was in the very form of God, He didn't consider equality with God something to be used to be seized by force** (Greek: *harpagmos*, meaning *robbery*) (**Philippians 2:6b**). Why would **Paul** speak of robbery? It is surely because the attack on **the Messiah** had already begun. When the Church began, Satan attacked the divinity of **the Son of God** saying that **He's** just a man like every other man. But even the Jews understood **His** claim of divinity. That's exactly why they handed **Him** over to the Romans to be crucified. So, who are the real robbers here? They are those who rob **Messiah** of **His** true nature. **First John 4:3** tells us that **every spirit which does not acknowledge Yeshua is not from God; such a person is the spirit of the antichrist**. Nevertheless, from **His** exalted position as **God** in heaven, **Messiah's** first step downward was not to **consider equality with God something to be used to be seized by force**. Although **He** continued to fully exist as **God**, during **His** incarnation, **He** refused to hold on to **His** divine power and rights. **Equality with God** is synonymous with the preceding phrase **form of God**. In repeating the declaration of **Messiah's** true nature and essence, **Paul** emphasizes its absolute and incontestable reality. The term **equality** refers to exact equivalence. An isosceles triangle has two equal sides. In becoming **a man**, **Yeshua** did not forfeit or diminish **His** absolute equality **with God**.

During **His** earthly ministry, **Yeshua** never denied or minimized **His** deity. **He** was very clear in acknowledging **His** divine sonship and oneness with **the Father** (**John 5:17-18, 10:30 and 38, 14:9, 17:1, 21-22, and 20:28**), **His** authority over all **flesh** and the power to **give eternal life** (**John 17:2**), and **His** divine **glory which [He] had with [the Father] before the creation of the world** (**John 17:5**). Yet, **He** never used **His** power or authority for personal advantage, because such rights of **His** divinity were not **something to be seized by force**. That was the choice that set the Incarnation into motion. **He** willingly suffered the worst possible humiliation rather than demand the honor, privilege, and **glory** that were rightly **His**. Nor did **He** use the powers of **His** undiminished sovereign deity to oppose the purpose and will of **His Father** because the price was too high.⁷²

This pre-existence of **Messiah** was a familiar concept in rabbinic Judaism (see **The**

Life of Christ Af - The Memra of God), so it's unnecessary to resort to the idea that **Paul** is drawing on pagan notion of a "heavenly man" who descended and carried through a mission of redemption for mankind. The TaNaKh provides more than sufficient ground for this passage in its teaching about **Adam (Genesis 2:4 to 3:22)** and **the Suffering Servant of ADONAI** (see the commentary on **Isaiah Iy - The Death of the Suffering Servant**); there is also no need to resort to explanations that assume Hellenistic or Gnostic influence. More problematic for Judaism is **the Messiah's equality with God** (see **Aw - The Exalted Son**).⁷³

Step two: In the next step downward, **Yeshua** continued not to cling to **His** divine privileges. **Rather, He emptied Himself (Is 53:12)** like **the cup of redemption** at Passover (see **The Life of Christ Kk - The Third Cup of Redemption**), **by taking the very form of a servant (Phil 2:7a; Is 52:13-14 and 53:11)**. It must always be kept in mind that **Messiah emptied Himself of His** prerogatives of deity, not of **His** deity itself. **He** was never anything, and will never be anything, but fully and eternally **God**, as **Paul** was careful to state in the previous verse. All four Gospels make it abundantly clear that **He** did not abandon **His** divine power to perform miracles, to forgive sins, or to know the minds and hearts of people. Had **He** stopped being **God** (which is an impossibility), **He** could not have died for the sins of the world. **He** would have died on the cross and remained in the grave, with no power to conquer sin or **death**. **The Son of God** emptied **Himself** of five divine rights.

First, **He** temporarily divested **Himself** of **His** divine glory. **He** forsook the worship of all believers and angels in heaven and submitted to misunderstanding, denials, unbelief, false accusations, and every sort of abuse and persecution by sinful men. It was not that **He** forfeited **His** divine glory, but rather that it was veiled, hidden in **His** humanity (**John 7:5 and 24; Second Corinthians 4:4-6**). Glimpses of it were seen in **His** many miracles, in **His** gracious words, in the humble attitude that **Paul** calls for **His** followers to emulate, and certainly in His ultimate sacrifice for sin on the cross. It was briefly and partially shown to **Peter, James, and John** (see **The Life of Christ Gb - Jesus went up a High Mountain and was Transfigured**). But it was not witnessed again until **His** resurrection and ascension, and then, only by those who belonged to **Him**.

Second, **Yeshua emptied Himself** of independent divine authority. The operation of the Trinity is, of course, a great mystery. Within **the Godhead** there is perfect harmony and agreement in every possible way. **Yeshua** clearly stated **His** full equality with **the Father** when **He** declared: **I and the Father are one (John**

10:30; cf. 17:11-12). However, **He** just as clearly affirmed during His incarnation that **I can do nothing on My own. I judge only as I hear, and My judgment is just, because I carry out the will of the One who sent Me, not My own will (John 5:30).** In the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of **His** betrayal and arrest, **He** pleaded three times: **My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me,** yet He followed each request with the submissive: **Yet not as I will, but as You will (Matthew 26:39-44).** The writer to the Hebrews notes that **although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered (Hebrews 5:8).**

Third, **the Son of God emptied Himself** of the voluntary exercise of some of **His** divine attributes, though not the essence of **His** deity. He did not stop being omniscient (all-knowing), omnipresent (ever-present), or immutable (unchangeable); yet, **He** chose not to exercise the full extent of those attributes during **His** earthly life and ministry. **He** did, however, exercise some of them selectively and partially. Without having met **him**, **Yeshua** knew what book **Nathanael** was meditating on when **He** said: **Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit** (see **The Life of Christ Bp - John's Disciples Follow Jesus**).

Fourth, **Messiah emptied Himself** of **His** eternal riches. **For your sake He became poor, Paul** explains, **so that through His poverty you might become rich (Second Corinthians 8:9).** Although many have interpreted **His** poverty as a reference to **His** earthly economic condition, it has nothing to do with that. The point is not that **Yeshua** gave up earthly riches, but that **He** gave up heaven's riches. As already noted, **He** forsook adoration, worship, and the service of angels and the redeemed in heaven, because **the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28).**

Fifth, **He** emptied **Himself** temporarily of **His** unique, intimate and face-to-face relationship with **His** heavenly **Father** – even to the point of being **forsaken** by **Him**. To fulfill the divine plan of redemption, **the Father made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (Second Corinthians 5:21).** That was **the Father's** will, which **Yeshua** came to fulfill and prayed would be done. But even the brief separation from **His Father** caused **Him** to cry out with a loud voice: **Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"** It was the horrible prospect of being alienated from **His Father** and bearing the sin of the world that had caused **Him** earlier **to sweat great drops of blood in great**

agony, being deeply grieved, to the point of death (Luke 22:44 and Matthew 27:46).

Just as **Yeshua** did not cease being **God** when **He** emptied **Himself**, neither do we cease being **His** children when we **empty** ourselves as **He** did (**Ephesians 5:1-2**). Just as **Messiah's** serving obedience made **Him** pleasing to the Father (**Matthew 3:17**), so does our serving obedience make us pleasing to **Him** (**Matthew 25:21-23**). We are obligated to follow our **Lord's** example by **emptying** ourselves of everything that would hinder our obedience and service to **Him**.

Step three: The next statement of **His** descent, as **He** further **emptied Himself**, **Yeshua forsook** the full rights of lordship by **taking the form of a bond-servant (Phil 2:7b; Is 49:7 and 53:11), the Suffering Servant of ADONAI**. Although **He** had the inherent **form of God (2:6)**, **He** willingly took upon **Himself the form of a bond-servant** (see **Exodus Dz - If You Buy a Hebrew Servant**). **He** didn't merely put on a slave's garment, so to speak; **He** actually became a slave in the fullest sense. A **bond-servant** (Greek: *doulos*) owned nothing. Not even the clothes on **His** back. Everything **He** had, including **His** life, belonged to **His Master**. **Yeshua** did own **His** own clothes, but **He** owned no house, no gold or jewels. **He** owned no business, no boat, and no horse. **He** had to borrow a donkey when **He** rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, borrow a room for the Last Supper, and was even buried in a borrowed tomb. **The King of kings and LORD of lords became a bond-servant.**

Through **His** provision of salvation, **Yeshua** served others more completely than any other **servant** or slave who has ever lived. But **He** was also an example of servanthood for **His** disciples. **He** reminded them that **a student is no greater than his rabbi, nor a slave is not greater than his master (Matthew 10:24)**. And that **if I, your Lord and Rabbi, have washed your feet, you should also wash each other's feet. For I have set an example, so that you may do as I have done to you. Yes, indeed! I tell you a slave is not greater than his master, nor is an apostle greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, you will be blessed for doing them (John 13:14-17)**. **He** declared: **The greatest among you shall be your servant (Matthew 23:11)**. Yet after **you have done everything you were told to do, you should be saying, "We're just ordinary slaves, we have only done our duty" (Luke 17:10b)**.

Step four: Continuing **His** move downward, **Yeshua** was **born in the likeness**

(Greek: *homoïama*) **of men (Philippians 2:7c; Isaiah 52:14 and 53:2).**

Likeness refers to that which is made to be like something else, not just appearance, but in reality. **Messiah** was not a clone, a disguised alien, or merely some reasonable facsimile of a man. **He** became exactly like all other human beings, having all the attributes of humanity, a genuine man among **men**. **He** was so obviously like other human beings that even **His** family and apostles would not have known of **His** deity had not **the angels (Matthew 1:20-21; Luke 1:26-35 and 2:9-11), God the Father (Matthew 3:17 and 17:5), and Yeshua Himself** revealed it to them. At the incarnation, **He** took upon **Himself** all the frailties, limitations, problems, and suffering there were a result of the Fall, enduring all its terrible earthly consequences. **He** became hungry and thirsty, suffered pain, and felt sadness. Like other **men**, **He** became tired and needed sleep, and although **He** was completely without personal sin, **Yeshua** nevertheless was **tempted in all things as we are (Hebrews 4:15; cf. Matthew 4:1-11).**

Because **Messiah** was **born in the likeness of men, He** was subject to physical **death**. In fact, it was only through **His death** that **He** could fulfill **His** divine purpose of redemption. Again, as the writer of **Hebrews** explains, **Yeshua had to be made like His brothers in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to ADONAI, to make propitiation** (the work of **Messiah** that satisfies every claim of **God's** holiness and justice so that **Ha'Shem** is free to act on behalf of sinners) **for the sins of the people (Hebrews 2:17). He** came to **die**.⁷⁴

Step five: And being found in appearance as a man (Philippians 2:8a; Isaiah 52:14 and 53:2-3) . . . except that He was without **sin (Romans 8:3; Hebrews 2:7 and 14), the Word became flesh and Tabernacled among us (John 1:14).** Apart from **His** miracles and the Transfiguration, **His** pre-incarnation glory (**John 17:5 and 24**) was **hidden**. As **Isaiah** had predicted some seven-hundred years earlier, **Messiah was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face, He was despised, and we did not esteem Him (Isaiah 53:3).** And **John** wrote: **He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, but the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and they did not receive Him (John 1:10-11).** Sadly, **not even His own brothers believed in Him (John 7:5).**⁷⁵ Then, because **Yeshua** did not believe in **the Oral Law** (see **the Life of Christ Ei - The Oral Law**), the Great Sanhedrin (see **the Life of Christ Lg - The Great Sanhedrin**), accused **Him** of being **demon posed** (see **the Life of Christ**

Gt - Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind) and handed **Him** over to the Romans to die a cruel and merciless **death**.

Step six: Continuing this profound description of **Messiah's** descent, **Paul** says that **Yeshua humbled Himself (Philippians 2:8b; Isaiah 53:3-4 and 7-8)**. The emphasis here moves from **Yeshua's** nature and form to that of **His** personal attitude. **He** was not merely humiliated by the nature and circumstances of **His** incarnation. **Humbled Himself** translates *tapeinoo*, which has the idea of *laying low*. **Messiah** not only lowered **Himself** relative to **God**, but also to other **men**. The most dramatic and agonizing time of **Yeshua's** self-abasement was during **His** arrest, trial, and crucifixion. **He** was mocked, falsely accused, spat upon, beaten with fists, scourged, and had part of his beard painfully plucked out. Yet, **He** was never defensive, never bitter, never demanding, never accusing. **He** refused to assert **His** rights as **God**, or even as a human being.

Step seven: In **His** stepping downward, **Messiah** was willing to suffer humiliation and degradation **by becoming obedient to death (Philippians 2:8c; Isaiah 53:7-8 and 12)**. His obedience and its impact on redemption is the theme of **Romans 5:12-19**, where the key thought is **through the obedience of the One of the many will be made righteous** (see the commentary on **Romans Bo - The Comparison to Adam**). Long before **His** arrest **Yeshua** had declared: **For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again (John 10:17)**. Because **Yeshua's** mind was set entirely on **God's** interests, not **man's** or **His** own, **He** will willingly and gladly become **obedient to death. While we were still helpless, at the right time, Messiah died for the ungodly (Romans 5:6)**.

The Father did not force **death** upon **the Son**. It was **the Son's** will always to perfectly obey **the Father**. **Yeshua** had a free choice. Had **He** not had a choice, **He** could not have been **obedient. No one has taken [My life] away from Me, He** declared, **but I lay it down of my own free will, and I have the power to take it up again. This is what My Father commanded Me to do (John 10:18)**. **He** was commanded by **the Father**, but not compelled. As **love** personified, **He** became the perfect example of the truth **He Himself** had declared: **Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends (John 15:13)**.



Step eight: In the final feature of **His** descent and degradation, **Yeshua** submitted **even [to] death on a cross (Phil 2:8d; Is 52:14 and 53:3-8)**! There are many ways by which **He** could have been killed. **He** could have been beheaded, such as John the Baptist was, or stoned or hanged. But **He** was destined not for just any kind of **death**, but for **death on a cross**. Crucifixion is perhaps the cruelest, excruciatingly painful and shameful form of execution ever conceived (see **The Life of Christ Ls - Then They Brought Jesus to Golgotha, the Place of the Skull**). It was reserved for slaves, the lowest of criminals, and enemies of the state. No Roman citizen could be crucified, no matter how egregious his crime.⁷⁶

The Jews considered crucifixion to be a form of **hanging** and those who were hung to be **cursed by God**. The Torah demanded that **a man's corpse shall not hang all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is cursed by God), so that you do not defile your land which ADONAI your God is giving you to inherit (Deuteronomy 21:23)**. **However, the rabbis recognized the many similarities between Joseph and Yeshua. They believe that Genesis 46:28-29a teaches that there will be two Messiahs. They teach that Joseph would receive the Kingdom before Judah, because Joseph was in Egypt before Judah. They believe that a descendant of Joseph will be the first Messiah, or the suffering Messiah (Isaiah 53), and the second Messiah, a descendant of Judah, and then David, will be the kingly Messiah (Psalm 72)**. For more details on this Jewish concept, see **The Life of Christ Mv - The Jewish Concept of Two Messiah's**.⁷⁷

But in **God's** perfect plan, the crucifixion of **His Son** not only was acceptable, but mandatory. As **Peter** declares: **He Himself bore our sins in His body on the**

cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed spiritually (First Peter 2:24). In the infinite wisdom of **ADONAI, death on a cross** was the only way of redemption for fallen, sinful, and condemned mankind. Crucifixion was bloody, as were the Levitical sacrifices that prefigured it. Priests in the service of the Temple were butchers, blood-spattered in their duty. **The Lamb of God** would also die a bloody **death**.⁷⁸

*Dear heavenly **Father**, praise **Your** awesome love that planned for **Your** only **Son, Messiah Yeshua**, to die a painful **death** on the cross. **His death** was not an afterthought, for **You** had planned it from before the creation of the world (**First Peter 1:19b-20**). Thank **You** that it was in **Your** perfect plan the crucifixion of **Messiah**. It was not only acceptable, but mandatory so that sin's payment of death (**Romans 3:23** and **6:23**) would be fully paid. **Your** grace (**Ephesians 2:8-9**) offered **Messiah's righteousness** in place of mankind's **filthy rags** of sin (**Isaiah 64:6**). He made the **One who knew no sin to become a sin offering on our behalf, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (Second Corinthians 5:21)**. How wonderful that **Your Presence** always abides within those who trust in **You**. **You** are right there with me to help, guide and to comfort me. No matter how hard the world tries to push against me, **Your** presence gives me strength no matter the situation. You are such an awesome **Father!** In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and the power of **His** resurrection. Amen*