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The Rod of an Almond Tree in God's Master Plan (Online Edition)

by Peter and Christie Michas with Robert Vander Maten

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Chapter 10

The Name of God Is Revealed in Pilate's Inscription

And Pilate wrote an inscription also, and put it on the cross [tree]. And it was written, "JESUS [YESHUA] THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS." Therefore this inscription many of the Jews read, for the place where Jesus [Yeshua] was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Latin, *and* in Greek (John 19:19-20).

In the early 1990s, Robert Vander Maten asked Peter Michas if it were possible to verify that the Name of God, YHVH, is in Pilate's Inscription. At that time, Robert had read the article "The Messiah: From a Jewish Believer's Point of View" in a publication called *News from Israel*, dated October 1987. No author or any reference to substantiate the Hebrew translation of Pilate's Inscription revealing the Name of God was provided in the article.

Peter went back to the original Greek of Pilate's Inscription to see if it were possible to reconstruct the Hebrew inscription from the Greek to determine if what was written in the article was accurate. Not until the mid-2000s did we discover the original source proposing the Name of God, YHVH, being revealed in the Hebrew of Pilate's Inscription: the Jewish scholar Shalom Ben-Chorin (see section "Shalom Ben-Chorin First Proposed YHVH in the Hebrew Inscription" below).

What follows is Peter's original study to verify the accurate translation of the Hebrew from the Greek inscription that does indeed reveal the Name of God, YHVH.

PILATE'S INSCRIPTION WRITTEN IN HEBREW, LATIN, AND GREEK

The apostle John's eyewitness account of the crucifixion tells us that Pilate had an inscription, written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek, placed on the crucifixion tree above Messiah Yeshua. As Passover was one of the three major pilgrimage festivals with millions of Jews from all over the ancient world coming to Jerusalem, and the crucifixion was done in a place of high visibility in the city, huge numbers of people would have read this inscription.

And Pilate wrote an INSCRIPTION [*TITLON*] also, and put it on the cross [tree]. And it was written, "JESUS [YESHUA] THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS." Therefore this inscription many of the Jews read, for the place where Jesus [Yeshua] was crucified was near the city; and it was written in HEBREW, LATIN, AND IN GREEK (John 19:19-20, emphasis added).

The Greek word translated "inscription" is *titlon* (Strong's #5102 *titlos*; Latin *titulus*), meaning "title" or inscription".¹ The religious leaders became greatly agitated and demanded that Pilate reword what he had written:

And so the chief priests of the Jews were saying to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews'; but that He said, 'I am King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered,

“What I have written I have written” (John 19:21-22).

Pilate’s refusal to change the inscription is noteworthy given that he had unwillingly submitted to the demand of the religious leaders to execute Yeshua. What was it about the inscription that so upset the chief priests?

TRANSLATING THE HEBREW FROM THE GREEK OF PILATE’S INSCRIPTION

In order to answer that question, we need to know the Hebrew translation of the inscription. Because the New Testament has been preserved in the Greek language, we must reconstruct the Hebrew words from the Greek text. The original Greek of Pilate’s inscription, as recorded in John 19:19, is:

ΙΗΣΟΥΣ Ο ΝΑΖΩΡΑΙΟΣ Ο ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΤΩΝ ΙΟΥΔΑΙΩΝ²

In the English translations, there are slight variations. Both the King James Version (KJV) and New International Version (NIV) translate:

JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS

The New American Standard Bible (NASB) and Amplified Bible (AB) versions translate:

JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS

Realizing that slight variations in the English (and Hebrew) translations may obscure profound meaning in the original language, it is necessary to determine the PRECISE Hebrew translation from the Greek text. For the purposes of our discussion, note that transliteration refers to converting the letters of one alphabet into the corresponding letters of another alphabet, while translation refers to converting from one language into another language. We will begin by

examining the inscription, word for word:

1. The name “Jesus” is the English transliteration of the Greek *Iesuos*. The Hebrew name, transliterated into English, is *Yeshua*, the shortened form of *Yehoshua* (*Joshua*), meaning “The LORD Is Salvation”. “Lord” stands for YHVH, the Name of God.
2. The word translated “Nazareth” in some English translations and “Nazarene” in others is accurately translated from the original Greek as *Nazarene*.³ In Hebrew, transliterated into English, the word is *HaNazri*, “the Nazarene”, with the prefix *ha-* meaning *the*.
3. The word translated “King”, transliterated from Hebrew to English, is *Melech*. In the English, “the King” is *HaMelech*, with the *ha-* prefix meaning *the*.
4. The last two Greek words in the inscription translate into English as “of the Jews.” In Hebrew, it is one word that transliterates into English as *HaYehudim*. *Yehudim* translates as “Jews”, with the *ha-* prefix meaning *the*.

“VEMELCH” IS THE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING WHAT UPSET THE PRIESTS

The key to understanding why the religious leadership was so upset comes from knowing the precise form of the Hebrew word *Melech* used in Pilate’s inscription. The answer to that question comes from understanding the ways the Greek letter *Omicron* (O) can be translated. Generally, the *Omicron* translates as “the.”⁴ However, there are other possible translations depending upon the context.⁵

The *Omicron* appears twice in the Greek inscription above: between *Yeshua* and *Nazarene*, and between *Nazarene* and *King*. Note the differences in how the *Omicron* is translated in the English translations. In the KJV and NIV, the first *Omicron* is translated **OF** and the second *Omicron* is translated **THE**.

JESUS OF NAZARETH, **THE** KING OF THE JEWS

In the NASB and AB, both the first and the second Omicron are translated **THE**.

JESUS **THE** NAZARENE, **THE** KING OF THE JEWS

We will show that judging by the reaction of the religious leaders, the translation of the second Omicron must have been *and*, with the correct English translation being:

JESUS THE NAZARENE **AND** KING OF THE JEWS

Translating the Omicron as *and* resulting in *AND King* (instead of *the King*) means that the Hebrew word is *VeMelech*, meaning “and King” (the prefix *ve-* translates *and*). This apparently minor change in both the English and Hebrew will in fact have profound implications in the meaning of the inscription.

For a detailed explanation confirming this translation of the Omicron, see section: “Correctly Translating the Omicron in Pilate’s Inscription” at the end of this chapter.

YHVH—THE NAME OF GOD—REVEALED IN PILATE’S INSCRIPTION

In order for the hidden meaning of the inscription to be revealed, it is essential to understand certain aspects of Hebrew writing and thought. In Hebrew study, speaking or writing the first and the last words of a written text can be used to refer to the entire text contained within the first and last words. A good example is shown in Yeshua’s last words during the crucifixion. If we do not understand this Hebraic concept, we miss the profound meaning of Yeshua’s words.

When Yeshua cried out “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”, He did not mean that God had forsaken Him, He was quoting Psalm 22:1. When He said “It is finished”, He was

referring to Psalm 22:31 (“He has performed it”). Yeshua was referring the Jewish witnesses of His crucifixion to Psalm 22, a detailed prophesy about the crucifixion.

In the same way, the first letters of a sequence of words can be combined in a meaningful way. According to this method of interpretation, the Hebrew of Pilate’s Inscription revealed something greatly disturbing to the chief priests, so much so that they demanded Pilate rewrite the inscription. Unless the Hebrew is correctly restored, this profound meaning is lost.

The correct Hebrew translation is:

ישוע הנצרי ומלך היהודים

The first letters of the four Hebrew words are:

יהוה

Hebrew is read from right to left. In order to clarify this aspect because we are accustomed to reading English from left to right, let’s look at the Hebrew transliterated into English:

YESHUA HANAZRI VEMELECH HAYEHUDIM⁶

The first letters of the four words are:

YHVH

YHVH is the Name of God! It is sometimes referred to as the ineffable Name of God, “ineffable” meaning “too awesome or sacred to be spoken”. Religious Jews consider the Name of God too sacred to be spoken. That is why the word “LORD” (*Adonai*) is substituted in its place

in the Hebrew Scriptures. Likewise, *HaShem*, meaning “The Name”, is used to refer to the Name of God. The correct pronunciation of YHVH is unknown although we believe *Yehovah* is likely. (Since Hebrew does not have *J* or *W* sounds, *Jehovah* and *Yaweh* cannot be correct.)

The four Hebrew letters—Yod, Hay, Vav, Hay—are the four letters of the Name of God, referred to as the Tetragrammaton, defined as:

The four consonants of the ancient Hebrew name for God (variously transliterated as JHVH, IHVH, JHWH, YHVH, YHWH) considered too sacred to be spoken aloud: the word *Adonai* (Lord) is substituted for this name in utterance, and the vowels of *Adonai* or *Elohim* (God) are inserted in Hebrew texts, so that the modern reconstructions are Yahweh, Jehovah, etc.*

GENESIS 22:8 “GOD WILL PROVIDE HIMSELF AS THE LAMB”

The Name of God—YHVH—was placed above Messiah Yeshua, The Lamb of God, Who took away the sin of the world.

The next day he [John the Baptist] saw Jesus [Yeshua] coming to him, and said, “BEHOLD, THE LAMB OF GOD WHO TAKES AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD! (John 1:29, emphasis added).

Out of the patriarch Abraham’s mouth came the prophecy concerning Messiah Yeshua, Who would be the substitutionary sacrifice for sin atonement:

“And Abraham said, “God will provide Himself AS the lamb for the burnt

* *Webster’s New World Dictionary*

offering, my son” (Genesis 22:8, translation by Phinehas Ben Zadok).*

“The lamb for the burnt offering” refers to a sin-sacrifice. Only the perfect Lamb of God, Messiah Yeshua, could be the perfect, sinless sacrifice for the sins of humankind. Only God is perfect, sinless. Only God’s grace can save. Only God can forgive sin. God provided the only way for the forgiveness of sin through His one and only Son, Who is God incarnate, the one and only Mediator between God and man of the New Covenant in His own blood.

For there is one God, *and* ONE MEDIATOR ALSO BETWEEN GOD AND MEN, *the* man Christ Jesus [MESSIAH YESHUA] (1 Timothy 2:5, emphasis added).

And for this reason He [MESSIAH YESHUA] IS THE MEDIATOR OF A NEW COVENANT, in order that since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were *committed* under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance (Hebrews 9:15, emphasis added).

Yeshua paid the price for all humanity’s sin once and for all time. The Name of God was a sign that Yeshua was not only the promised Messiah but also YHVH incarnate. Yeshua is the Lamb of God Who bears the Name of God as witness that He is the one and only true Messiah, the one and only true Son of God, and the one and only way of salvation.

Jesus [Yeshua] said to him, “I AM THE WAY, AND THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE; NO ONE COMES TO THE FATHER, BUT THROUGH ME (John 14:6, emphasis added).

* This alternative and equally valid translation from the Hebrew was proposed by Phineas Ben Zadok in his booklet, *Which Day Is the Passover*, p. 35 (Kibbutz Ir-Ovot, Israel: A Voice Crying in the Wilderness, 1988).

YHVH-YESHUA: REDEEMER AND SAVIOR OF THE WORLD

The Messiah's Hebrew name is *Yeshua*, the shortened form of *Yehoshua* (*Joshua*), meaning "YHVH Is Salvation". His name reveals His identity and His purpose in coming into the world:

"And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus [YESHUA], FOR IT IS HE WHO WILL SAVE HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS" (Matthew 1:21, emphasis added).

The prophet Isaiah prophesied that Yeshua would be "God with us":

"BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD, AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US" (Matthew 1:23, emphasis added).

The Word of God shows us that YHVH, the LORD, is the Redeemer:

"Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel And his REDEEMER, the LORD of hosts: 'I AM THE FIRST AND I AM THE LAST, And there is no God besides Me (Isaiah 44:6, emphasis added).

"I AM THE ALPHA [ALEPH] AND THE OMEGA [TAV], THE FIRST AND THE LAST, the beginning and the end" (Revelation 22:13, emphasis added).

Yeshua, the Redeemer and King Messiah, came humbly to Jerusalem as the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53:

"And A REDEEMER WILL COME TO ZION [Jerusalem], And to those who turn from transgression in Jacob," declares the LORD (Isaiah 59:20, emphasis added).

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout *in triumph*, O daughter of Jerusalem! BEHOLD, YOUR KING IS COMING TO YOU; HE IS JUST AND ENDOWED WITH SALVATION, Humble, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey (Zechariah 9:9).

Messiah Yeshua is as a Husband to all who put their trust in Him for salvation, showing the depth of love and closeness of the personal relationship:

“For YOUR HUSBAND is your Maker, Whose name is the LORD of hosts; And YOUR REDEEMER IS THE HOLY ONE OF ISRAEL, Who is called the God of all the earth (Isaiah 54:5, emphasis added).

For I [the apostle Paul] am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to ONE HUSBAND, THAT TO CHRIST [MESSIAH] I might present you *as* a pure virgin (2 Corinthians 11:2, emphasis added).

That YHVH, the Creator, entered His own Creation is the most profound event in human history. How it is possible for the infinite God to enter His finite Creation is impossible for the human mind to fully comprehend. But just as the infinite God chose to dwell in the Tabernacle and Solomon’s Temple, the infinite God chose to dwell in human form in order to offer Himself a perfect, sinless sacrifice for humanity’s sins. In the Old Testament, we also see that God took on a substantial human form and wrestled with Jacob (Genesis 32:24-30).

MESSIAH YESHUA, “A BRANCH”, A DESCENDANT OF KING DAVID

The prophet Isaiah refers to “a branch” from the “roots” of Jesse:

Then a shoot will spring from the STEM OF JESSE, And A BRANCH [*NEZER*] from his roots will bear fruit (Isaiah 11:1).

The Hebrew word *nezer* (*neser* or *netser*, Strong’s #5342) means “a shoot”, “a descendant”, or “a

branch”. This Hebrew word and the Hebrew word *Nazri*, translated *Nazarene* in Pilate’s Inscription, have the same Hebrew root word (spelled in Hebrew letters: Nun-Tzadee-Resh), showing that they are closely related words. This is prophetically significant in regard to the Messiah. The apostle Matthew says that Yeshua being called a Nazarene fulfilled prophecy:

... And being warned *by God* in a dream, he [Joseph] departed for the regions of Galilee, and came and resided in a city called Nazareth, THAT WHAT WAS SPOKEN THROUGH THE PROPHETS MIGHT BE FULFILLED, “HE [YESHUA] SHALL BE CALLED A NAZARENE” (Matthew 2:22-23).

Yet there is no Old Testament prophecy that the Messiah would be called a Nazarene. However, the prophecy was indeed fulfilled in that the Hebrew root word translated “Nazarene” is the same Hebrew root word that Isaiah used to refer to the Messiah as “a branch” from the “stem of Jesse”.

With this understanding, we can see that Yeshua the Nazarene was the prophesied Messiah, the descendant of King David. That is why Yeshua was called the “son of David”:

And when he heard that it was Jesus [YESHUA] THE NAZARENE, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus [YESHUA], SON OF DAVID, have mercy on me!” (Mark 10:47, emphasis added).

God had made a promise (covenant) with King David that his house and kingdom would last forever through a descendant from his line.

“When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. ... And your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; and your throne shall be established forever” (2 Samuel 7:12, 16).

That promise was fulfilled in Messiah Yeshua:

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee, called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the DESCENDANTS OF DAVID; and the virgin's name was Mary [Miriam]. And coming in, he said to her, "Hail, favored one! The Lord *is* with you." But she was greatly troubled at *this* statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus [Yeshua]. He will be great, and will be called THE SON OF THE MOST HIGH; AND THE LORD GOD WILL GIVE HIM THE THRONE OF HIS FATHER DAVID; AND HE WILL REIGN OVER THE HOUSE OF JACOB FOREVER; AND HIS KINGDOM WILL HAVE NO END." And Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God (Luke 1:26-35).

When He first came, Yeshua fulfilled the prophecy of the Messiah as the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53:

Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? FOR HE GREW UP BEFORE HIM LIKE A TENDER SHOOT, AND LIKE A ROOT OUT OF PARCHED GROUND; He has no *stately* form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. He 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. Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. BUT HE WAS PIERCED THROUGH FOR OUR TRANSGRESSIONS, HE WAS CRUSHED FOR OUR INIQUITIES; The chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed.

All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; LIKE A LAMB THAT IS LED TO SLAUGHTER, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth. By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered That He was cut off out of the land of the living, For the transgression of my people to whom the stroke *was due*? His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth. But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting *Him* to grief; If HE WOULD RENDER HIMSELF AS A GUILT OFFERING, He will see *His* offspring, He will prolong *His* days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see *it* and be satisfied; By His knowledge THE RIGHTEOUS ONE, MY SERVANT, WILL JUSTIFY THE MANY, AS HE WILL BEAR THEIR INIQUITIES. Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; BECAUSE HE Poured OUT HIMSELF TO DEATH, AND WAS NUMBERED WITH THE TRANSGRESSORS; YET HE HIMSELF BORE THE SIN OF MANY, AND INTERCEDED FOR THE TRANSGRESSORS (Isaiah 53:1-12, emphasis added).

When Messiah Yeshua returns, He will be revealed as Yeshua ben David (Yeshua son of David) to the Jewish people and fulfill His role as King Messiah who establishes the Kingdom of God on Earth with His Throne in Jerusalem.

YHVH-YESHUA: CREATOR, REDEEMER, PROTECTOR AND KEEPER OF ISRAEL

As explained above, *nazri* (*Nazarene*) and *nezer* (*branch, descendant*) share the same Hebrew root word (spelled Nun-Tzadee-Resh). *Nezer* (*neser or netser*, Strong's #5342) is derived from *nazar* (*nasar or natsar*, Strong's #5341), meaning "to watch, to guard, to keep, to protect" and by extension to "keeper or watchman".⁷

nasar generally indicates the action of carefully watching over a particular object so that the object is preserved or protected. It may be translated “to keep, guard, watch, protect”. God is the “watcher” of all people (Job 7:20), but he “watches over” his vineyard (i.e. Israel) in a special way to protect it from harm (Isa. 27:3a, c).*

Here again we see prophetic significance regarding Messiah Yeshua. The Lord (YHVH) is the Keeper of Israel, His vineyard, and the Protector of Jerusalem:

In that day, “A vineyard of wine, sing of it! I, THE LORD, AM ITS KEEPER; I water it every moment. Lest anyone damage it, I guard it night and day” (Isaiah 27:2-3, emphasis added).

Like flying birds so THE LORD OF HOSTS WILL PROTECT JERUSALEM. He will protect and deliver *it*; He will pass over and rescue *it* (Isaiah 31:5, emphasis added)

The Lord (YHVH) Yeshua is the One Who keeps and protects all who put their trust in Him.

The LORD is your keeper ... The LORD will protect you from all evil; He will keep your soul (Psalm 121:5, 7).

But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil *one* (2 Thessalonians 3:3).

Indeed, as Creator, YHVH-Yeshua is the Keeper and Sustainer of all Creation:

* *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words*, p. 777.

And He [Yeshua] is the image of the invisible God, the first-born* of all creation. For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and IN HIM ALL THINGS HOLD TOGETHER (Colossians 1:15-17, emphasis added).

SHALOM BEN-CHORIN FIRST PROPOSED YHVH IN THE HEBREW INSCRIPTION

At the time of the previous editions of this book, we did not know who first proposed the “VeMelech” (“and King”) clue to solving the mystery why the religious leaders were so upset by Pilate’s inscription. All we had to go on was an article titled “The Messiah: From a Jewish Believer’s Point of View” from a publication called *News from Israel*, dated October 1987. There was no author given for the article or source for the correct Hebrew inscription but we credited the article at the time.

Not long after the publication of the 2001 edition of this book, Christie Michas happened to find the answer to the question of who had first proposed the YHVH in the inscription in Carsten Peter Theide and Matthew d’Ancona’s book, *The Quest for the True Cross*, published in 2002:

It is, at any rate, possible to advance a sensible theory about the nature of the Hebrew line [of the inscription]. ... A fascinating solution was suggested by a **Jewish scholar** who ... worked on the basis of the Greek text in John 19:19. **Shalom Ben-Chorin** surmised that the following was the Hebrew line ... *Yeshu[a] HaNozri V_eMelek HaYehudim* [Schalom Ben-Chorin, *Bruder Jesus. Der Nazarener in judischer Sicht*, Munich, 1977, p. 180. In his German transliteration, Ben-Chorin had written ‘*Jeschu Hanozri W(u)melech Hajehudim*’]. Translated, this means: Jesus the Nazorean **AND King** of the Jews

* The Greek word *prototokos* refers to Yeshua’s “priority to, and preeminence over, creation, not in the sense of being the first to be born” (*Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Vol. 2, p. 104).

(pp. 105-106, emphasis in bold added).

Ben-Chorin recognized that the initial letters of the words in the Hebrew inscription spelled the Name of God when the Hebrew word for “king” was translated “VeMelech” (“and King”), not “HaMelech” (“the King”). He understood this translation revealing the Name of God, YHVH, explained why the chief priests protested to Pilate to change the inscription. This great German Jewish scholar died at the age of 85 in Jerusalem in 1999. We are grateful that we can now give credit to Shalom Ben-Chorin for his insight into the correct Hebrew inscription so that its hidden meaning could be revealed to us today.

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

CORRECTLY TRANSLATING THE OMICRON IN PILATE’S INSCRIPTION

The key to determine what form of the Hebrew word for “King” was used in the original Hebrew of Pilate’s inscription comes from understanding the correct usage of the Greek letter, *Omicron* (o). As stated above, the Omicron is generally translated “the.” However, there are other possible translations depending upon the context. The study done by Peter A. Michas indicates that in Pilate’s inscription, the second Omicron is properly translated “and.” Accordingly, the English translation is “and King”. In Hebrew, this transliterates as *VeMelech*, meaning “and king” (the *ve-* prefix translates as “and”; *melech* translates as “king”).

In order to verify the correct usage of the Omicron in this case, Peter contacted a scholar of Greek, Professor Paul A. Miller, Executive Director of The GRAMCORD Institute.* The authors gratefully acknowledge Professor Miller’s kind and most knowledgeable assistance in providing an excellent explanation that helps to understand the translation of the Omicron in Pilate’s Inscription.

The explanation that follows includes a reference to an inscription to the Greek god Zeus for

comparison since the Greek of this particular inscription parallels the Greek of Pilate's inscription.

The inscription refers to Zeus, the chief Greek god, as god and king: *Zeus o theos o basilios*. The English translation of this inscription is: "Zeus, the god and king." The question in particular concerns the appropriate translation of the second Omicron (o). The first Omicron translates as "the," whereas the second Omicron translates as "and." To understand why this is a valid translation, the following explanation by Professor Miller is excerpted and paraphrased from an e-mail correspondence dated May 25, 1998:

An "interlinear" rendering might appear as: "Zeus, the god, the king." That would indeed be *overly* literal because the article (in this case, the masculine singular nominative form) is not *exactly* the same as "the" in English. (Some linguists prefer to call it a *determiner* rather than an *article*.) You may also think of it as a "connector" of sorts because it definitely "ties" *god* and *king* to the name *Zeus*; all three nouns and the two articles "store and share" the masculine singular nominative "information" by means of their related forms and endings.

Therefore, rather than "Zeus, the god, *the* king," the English translation appeared as "Zeus, O god *and* king. The translator is communicating several things here:

1.) He/she considers the inscription as an "invocation" being spoken to Zeus in a "worshipful" way: "Zeus, O God and King" ... whereas the overly-literal rendering sounds like a simple declarative statement, rather like: "Zeus is god and king."

2.) This also brings over to English a more "poetic sounding" phrase, which is appropriate to do when handling Greek inscriptions.

Put in another way, when a series of article/noun pairs appear following a noun, and they all agree in case, number, and gender, the article is being used to link and "build upon" the first noun. An example of this in English would be a flowery introduction for royalty:

“His Highness, Ferdinand the Great [one], Sovereign of the Commonwealth, Protector of the Peoples, Judge of all Law, Ruler of the Isles.”

In English, you would understand how each title or descriptor builds upon your understanding of Ferdinand. However, in Greek one would expect each title or descriptor to be introduced by an article with the same gender/number/case as Ferdinand.

Of course, you could add a “the” before each noun phrase descriptor in my English example and the meaning would be essentially unchanged:

“His Royal Highness, Ferdinand the Great [one], the Sovereign of the Commonwealth, the Protector of the Peoples, the Judge of all Law, the Ruler of the Isles.”

Now, let’s “flesh out” the sequence even further by adding appropriate *and*’s and pronouns to make the connections more “flowing,” and add *he is* as implied in connecting each noun phrase back to Ferdinand:

“His Royal Highness, Ferdinand the Great [one]; [he is] the Sovereign of the Commonwealth, and [he is] the Protector of the Peoples, and [he is] the Judge of all the Law, and [he is] the Ruler of the Isles.”

The above reading is certainly long and windy yet it basically communicates the same ideas as the original example—it is merely made more unmistakable. Of course, a translator always has to decide how far he/she will go in conveying the meaning. A translator, then, often has many possible renderings to choose from. (He/she can keep adding words so as to make everything unmistakable, but the result may then sound very wordy, stiff, and unnatural.)

The English example used above helps to see how “the” can actually imply “and” when used in a series of “descriptors.” Neither the *the*’s or the *and*’s are required in the English example, but they are implied in a sense, and both take on a similar function in helping the reader know that each phrase builds upon Ferdinand. So, in that regard, “the” and “and” are very related words.

Therefore, the Greek inscription, *Zeus o theos o basilios*, literally translates “Zeus, the god, the king,” but is also “Zeus, the god and the king.” But if the context or phrasing is considered an invocation, it translates “Zeus, O god and king.” The article “the” in Greek is in a sense often a “connector” that can be left out in translation because it often doesn’t denote the “full force” of our English article “the.” Furthermore, the noun phrases in Greek often work in ways not expected in English.

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NOTES

1. Henry G. Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 1799.
2. Alfred Marshall, *The Interlinear KJV-NIV Parallel New Testament in Greek and English*, p. 333.
3. Merrill C. Tenney, Editor, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. 4, pp. 387-388.
4. George C. Divry, *Divry’s Modern English-Greek and Greek-English Desk Dictionary*, p. 611.
5. Liddell and Scott, pp. 1193-1195.
6. The authors wish to acknowledge the article, “The Messiah: From a Jewish Believer’s Point of View,” in a publication called *News from Israel*, October 1987, for providing the “*VeMelech*” (*and King*) clue. The author of the article could not be confirmed, nor any possible reference to substantiate this particular translation.
7. R. Laird Harris and others, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Vol. 2, pp. 594-595.