

Monotheism and the Hierarchy of Divine Beings in Second Temple Judaism

The view that there was a hierarchy of divine beings, with the one God as the Most High accompanied by a principal divine agent second only in authority to God surrounded by a court of divine beings who serve in the Holy of Holies in the highest heaven was universal in Second Temple Judaism – the Judaism that gave rise to Christianity. The council of gods continued in this form throughout the period that gave rise to Christianity. Monotheism was not threatened by the view that there are numerous divine beings and even those who are called “gods” because it was understood that the Most High was the one God. Moreover, it was commonly believed that the divine glory could be shared by exalted humans. Indeed, it was a very common belief that humans could ascend to the throne of God and be transformed glory for glory into the same divine status as the heavenly beings by participating in the rites of washing, anointing and investiture preparatory to officiating as a priest and king in the heavenly Temple where God resides.

15.1 Jewish Views of the Hierarchy of Divine Beings. Was Second Temple Judaism characterized by the same view of God that was prominent in pre-exilic texts of a head God presiding in the council of the sons of God? On the one hand, there are those who maintain that Second Temple Judaism is characterized by the same view of God(s) that prevailed in the pre-exilic Israel and that I have argued continued even in Second Isaiah and the exile. Notwithstanding language that poetically exaggerates the difference between the gods and Yahweh by asserting that they are nothing and that Yahweh will not even recognize their existence, the notion of the council of Yahweh continued throughout this period. The point at which we leave Israelite monarchical monotheism is thus the very place where we can start to elucidate the beliefs of Second Temple Jews. Larry Hurtado summarizes the evidence regarding Second Temple “Jewish monotheism” as follows:

I propose that Jewish monotheism can be taken as constituting a distinctive version of the commonly-attested belief structure described by Nilsson as involving a "high god" who presides over other deities. The God of Israel presides over a court of heavenly beings who are likened to him (as is reflected in, e.g., the OT term for them "sons of God"). In pagan versions, too, the high god can be described as father and source of the other divine beings, and as utterly superior to them. In this sense, Jewish (and Christian) monotheism, whatever its distinctives, shows its historical links with the larger religious environment of the ancient world. There are distinctives of the Jewish version, however, both in beliefs and, even more emphatically in religious practice. As Nilsson has shown, in pagan versions often the high god is posited but not really known. Indeed, in some cases (particularly in Greek philosophical traditions), it is emphasized that the high god cannot be known. Accordingly, often one does not expect to relate directly to the high god or address this deity directly in worship or petition. In Greco-Roman Jewish belief, however, the high god is known as the God of Israel, whose ways and nature are revealed in the Scriptures of Israel.¹

¹ Larry Hurtado, “What Do We Mean by First Century Monotheism?” *Society of Biblical Literature 1993 Seminar Papers*, ed. E. H. Lovering (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), pp. 348-68; See, H. P. Nilsson, “The High God and the Mediator,” *Harvard Theological Review* 56 (1963), 101-20.

John Collins observed: “By nearly all accounts, at the end of the first century C.E. strict monotheism had long been one of the pillars of Judaism.” However, he quickly corrects this mis-perception: “Jewish monotheism, which gave birth to the Christian movement, was not as clear-cut and simple as is generally believed. Several kinds of quasi-divine figures appear in Jewish texts from the Hellenistic period that seem to call for some qualifications of the idea of monotheism.”² Peter Hayman reached a similar conclusion: “It is hardly ever appropriate to use the term monotheism to describe the Jewish idea of God. From the book of Daniel on, nearly every variety of Judaism maintained the pattern of the supreme God plus his vice-regent/vizier.... Needless to say, this situation left many Jews confused, especially about the identity of the number two in the hierarchy.”³ A similar view, which I propose to defend here, is elucidated by Adela Yarbro Collins. Collins maintains that there may have been some who in fact had a “strict” view of monotheism in Second Temple Judaism, but there was a good deal of diversity in thought. The view that there was only one God who had a fulness of divinity, but that there were also other beings who possessed divinity on a continuum of divinity, with some divine beings have a greater fulness of divinity and others less, was prominent in Second Temple Judaism. Adela Collins stated:

An abstract and strictly monotheistic theology was not, however, shared by all Jewish groups in the first century C.E.. Philo and the Wisdom of Solomon solved the philosophical problem, raised by Greek philosophy, of how a transcendent god could create and interact with the material world by positing an intermediary being, Wisdom or the *Logos*, whom Philo could describe as “a second god.” The Community of the Dead Sea Scrolls, a Palestinian Jewish ultra-observant group which favored the Hebrew language, could speak of a plurality of ‘gods’ (אלים - *'elim*). Not only that, but the biblical divine name ‘*Elohim*’, which is equivalent to the generic Hebrew word for ‘god’ (אל - *El*), is attributed to an angel in the fragmentary Melchizedek scroll. The evidence implies that the strict monotheism of the Deuteronomic literature had already been ‘stretched’ or even ignored in much of the literature of Second Temple Judaism. Many Jews of that period evidently did not conceive of God as absolutely unique in a metaphysical sense. Instead, they seem to have placed the deity at the top of a pyramid, so to speak, of divine beings who were the agents of God in creating, sustaining and interacting with all things.⁴

On the other hand, there are competent scholars of the literature of Second Temple Judaism that maintain that Jews during the Second Temple period monolithically adopted a strict monotheism that defined God as unique in terms of the ontological gulf inherent in the Creator/creature dichotomy. For example, Richard Bauckham maintains that Jewish monotheism is best elucidated in terms of the “unique identity” of

² John J. Collins, “Jewish Monotheism and Christian Theology,” in Hershel Shanks and Jack Meinhardt, eds., *Aspects of Monotheism: How God is One* (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1996), 81-82.

³ Hayman, 2, 11.

⁴ Adela Yarbro Collins, “The Worship of Jesus and the Imperial Cult,” in Gary C. Newman, James R. Davila and Gladys S. Lewis (eds.), *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins of the Worship of Jesus* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 236.

Yahweh, the God of Israel so that for the Jewish religious tradition

what is primary is not what God is, or what divinity is (divine nature or essence) but *who God is, who YHWH the God of Israel is*. In Jewish literature, YHWH is depicted as a unique personal agent, identified by his distinctive activities and personal characteristics Briefly, God is the only Creator of all things (the heavens, the earth, the sea and all that is in them) and God is the only sovereign Ruler of all things (all nature and history). Significantly, the phrase ‘all things’ is commonly used in these connections, as well as more elaborate ways of speaking of all creation. The point is that both of these features of the divine identity define an absolute distinction between God and all other reality. He alone is Creator; all else is created by him. He, alone, is supreme Ruler; all else is subject to his will. Even the most exalted of creatures is created and subject to God, while God is uncreated and subject to none. These two identifying features of the unique God constantly recur in non-polemical evocations of God’s absolute superiority to all creatures it is because he alone is Creator and Ruler of all that he alone is worthy of worship.⁵

Yet surely something has gone awry in Bauckham’s statement of his position, for no sooner does he state that what is important is *not what* God is, but *who* God is, than he defines God in terms of *what God is* – the creator and sovereign. However, Bauckham explains what he means by the remarkably ambiguous phrase “unique identity of YHWH” – since strictly speaking virtually every person has a unique identity with respect to “who” s/he is. God is not unique in the fact that he has a unique personal identity. He adds: “In the case of a human being, identity (who s/he) is composed of both species and identity (human nature, what each human being shares with others) and personal identity (which identifies human being as him/herself and no other). If YHWH were one god among others, he would have both species identity and personal identity; but in attempting to describe Second Temple Jewish monotheism, the distinction between species identity and personal identity is no longer useful.”⁶ Thus Bauckham intends to deny that Yahweh belongs to a species where there could be others of its kind. What Bauckham appears to mean is that *what* God is must be definitive of *who* God

⁵ Richard Bauckham, “The Throne of God and the Worship of Jesus,” in *The Jewish Roots*, 45-46. Bauckham is joined in adopting metaphysical monotheism as the monolithic view of Second Temple Judaism by P. M. Casey, “Christological Developments in the Pauline Churches,” *Ibid.*, 214-33; and Paul Rainbow, “Jewish Monotheism as the Matrix for New Testament Christology,” *Novum Testamentum* 33 (1991), 78-9’.. For a discussion of the various positions see, “Michael Mach, “Concepts of Jewish Monotheism in the Hellenistic Period,” in *The Jewish Roots*, 21-42. For those who adopt a “broader divinity” view see C. Rowland, *The Open Heaven* (London: SPCK, 1982), 94-113; A. Chester, “Jewish Messianic Expectations and Mediatorial Figures and Pauline Christology,” in M. Hengel and U. Heckel eds., *Paulus und antike Judentum* (Tubingen: Mohr, 191), 17-89; Margaret Barker, *the Great Angel: A Study of Israel’s Second God* (London: SPCK, 1992); C. A. Gieschen, *Angelmorphic Christology* (Leiden: Brill, 1998); J.D.G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making* (London: SCM Press, 1980); - “Was Christianity a Monotheistic Faith from the Beginning?,” *SJT* 35 (1982), 303-36; Alan F. Segal, *The Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports About Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1977); and Hurtado, *One Lord, One God*.

⁶ Bauckham, “The Throne of God and the Worship of Jesus,” 45 n. 4.

is since, necessarily, there is only one instance of its kind. Thus, the very referent “God” *essentially* entails that God is the only Creator and the sole sovereign. It follows that the use of the term “gods” is a type of category mistake if one accepts Bauckham’s view. However, he recognizes that there are indeed a number of texts that call others “gods” and attribute properties of divinity to others. Thus, he qualifies his view somewhat: “Notions of a species identity which YHWH shares with other heavenly beings survive *in vestigial forms* in some Second Temple Jewish literature, but they are rendered negligible by the absolute distinction which is drawn between YHWH as the sole Creator and sole Ruler of all things and any being created by him and subject to his rule.”⁷ Thus, Bauckham suggests that we can ignore so-called “vestigial forms” of the older “species identity” shared by Yahweh with others because there is an *a priori* rule of sole Creator and Ruler which is inconsistent with such species identity. Bauckham concludes: “What I will call YHWH’s unique identity is thus not the relative uniqueness of a member of a species, but the absolute uniqueness of the only Creator and Ruler of all.”⁸ Given such a position, the word “gods” is a contradiction. Indeed, even the notion of shared qualities of God becomes questionable because the properties of divinity are unique and superlative and thus in a class by themselves. The very notion of *theosis* is thus in tension with this view of the one God. Bauckham seems to suggest that the view that there were in fact “gods” is such a minority view (he maintains that it is virtually limited to Qumran) that it can be safely ignored when seeking a cultural and/or textual background for the Christian understanding of Christ in relation to the one God.

I suggest that Bauckham’s position is not sustainable. The notion of “species” differentiation is simply unsustainable in a religion where the relation of father to a “first-born son” and to “sons” and “children of God” is the dominant image to express the relation. If calling others “sons” is not an expression of shared species or natural kind, what possibly would suffice to prove the point? Further, Bauckham appears to decide the issue by adopting an *a priori* rule that governs the interpretation of the texts. In asserting that the texts must conform to the basic commitment of “creational monotheism,” which he interprets as an absolute ontological distinction of necessary and contingent being, Bauckham seems blinded by this assumption to the fact that Christian texts are themselves instances of the view that the “divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4) is shared by many beings on a continuum ranging from “glory to glory” (1 Cor. 15:41; 2 Cor. 3:18) and from emptiness (Phil 2:7) to fullness of divinity (Col. 1:19; 2:9). Indeed, the preeminent instance of a divine figure subordinate to the one God is the resurrected Jesus Christ in Christian texts. Such an *a priori* control of the evidence can be seen in Bauckham’s refusal to give any weight to the fact that the chief heavenly agents are described in language that compares them to the glory of God:

I do not consider visible appearance a criterion of divine identity, and theories of divine bifurcation or binitarianism or angels as visible manifestations of God which depend on resemblances between visible descriptions of God and those of other heavenly beings.... The most that can be said of such descriptions is that, as a literary convention, they are a survival of the old notion of a species identity which YHWH shared with all heavenly beings (gods). All such beings have shining appearances, like the heavenly bodies that can be seen in the sky. But in Second Temple Judaism, in which YHWH has been exalted beyond species identity to

⁷ Ibid. For Bauckham’s other articles which present a similar view, see, “The Worship of Jesus in Philippians 2:9-11,” in R. P. Martin and B. J. Dodd, eds., *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 138-39; “Monotheism and Christology of John,” *forthcoming in Christological Monotheism* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark,).

⁸ Ibid.

an absolutely unique identity, such descriptions no longer function to indicate a common species to which he and other heavenly beings alike belong.⁹

However, it seems to me that Bauckham has decided that the appearance of beings who are described to be like God and to share his divine glory can be ignored as evidence of a continuum view of divinity only by first assuming that there must be a complete difference in kind. Otherwise, the very fact of such comparisons of heavenly beings with God in appearance is evidence that shows that the assumption of a strict ontological distinction is questionable. The “old notion of species identity” shared by God and gods that Bauckham refers to is found in the Old Testament texts that were formative of and foundational for Second Temple Judaism. One can ignore the view that there were other divine beings considered as such only by ignoring these foundational texts. As Bauckham himself recognizes, the Jewish exegetes were well aware that terms such as “gods,” “sons of God,” “divine beings,” and “holy ones in the divine assembly” were used for heavenly beings in the Hebrew Bible. We know from the Dead Sea Scrolls (“DSS”) and pseudepigraphic works that such use continued and was not uncommon at least among some Jews in the period of Second Temple Judaism. Thus, adopting “strict monotheism” as a controlling paradigm to interpret Christian texts assumes what must be demonstrated, i.e., that Christians did not adopt the same view of lesser divine beings or subordinate gods in the context of the devotion ultimately to the one God.

While I agree that the Most High God is viewed as incomparably great in Second Temple Judaism, the evidence simply refutes the view that metaphysical monotheism was the only belief or even the dominant view adopted during that period. There was in fact a diversity of views and the notion that there were other gods or divine beings besides the one true God was prominent not only in Judaism, but also allowed for the possibility that even humans could share in this divine nature. The view that there were other divine beings who shared in the divine glory allowed the first Christians to articulate the relation of Jesus Christ to the one God as having been exalted by God to share fully in the same monarchical and divine status. Ultimately, the belief system assumed in the honor and shame culture provided the categories of the divine king declaring Jesus as his Son and heir and as the sole mediator through whom all others must approach God the Father to receive the same recognition. Thus, honoring Christ as God’s Son and chosen Messiah also honored the Father and maintained the sole devotion demanded by monarchic monotheism.

15.2 The Council of Gods in the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Dead Sea Scrolls found at Qumran demonstrate that the belief in the head God who is surrounded by divine beings and sons of God continued among some Jews virtually unchanged into the era of Second Temple Judaism that gave rise to Christianity. For example, column 1 of fragment 11 of 4Q491 declares that the author has actually been exalted among the gods in the divine assembly. It is striking that the divine name El Elyon is used to refer to the Most High God. Moreover, this fragment is a perfect statement of monarchical monotheism. The singer joins the assembly of gods who are the King’s sons assembled to dispense justice and judgment as in Psalm 82:

El Elyon gave me a seat among those perfect forever,
a mighty throne in the congregation of the gods.
None of the kings of the east shall sit in it
and their nobles shall not [come near it].
No Edomite shall be like me in glory,
and none shall be exalted save me...

⁹ “The Throne of God and the Worship of Jesus,” 51.

I shall be reckoned with the gods
and established in the holy congregation...
In my legal judgment [none will stand against] me.
I shall be reckoned with the gods,
and my glory with [that of] the king's sons.¹⁰

The DSS also evince a belief in human deification or *theosis*, for the author expresses his conviction that he has been granted a seat in the council of El Elyon among the gods. He has been exalted to a divine glory that is shared by the gods in this council. However, such a view is not isolated among the scrolls. For example, 4Q427 provides a similar description of the deification of the entire Qumran community:

And he will not be able to compare with my glory.
As for me, my place is with the divinities,
[and glory or splend]our for myself I do not [buy them] with gold...
And he raises the poor from the dust [to an eternal height,]
and extols his stature up to the clouds
and cures him together with the divinities
in the congregation of the community.

The scrolls provide numerous references to the council of God among the gods. God is frequently called El as a proper name at Qumran where El is considered to be the God of gods:

[... And exalt his exaltation] to the heights,
gods [of the lofty divinities
and the divinity of his glory above] all the lofty] heights.
For he is God (El) of the gods of all the chi]efs of the heights,
and king [of kings of all the eternal councils... (4Q405 4-5, 1-3[4Q403 I, 33-36])

The next fragment reflects the praise to the High God that is given by the gods who are located in the Holy of Holies of the heavenly temple created by God:

Praise him divine spirits,
praising] for ever and ever the main vault of the heights,
[all its beams and walls, all its form, the work of its structure.]
The spirits of the holy ones (*qedushim*),
the living gods (*'elohim*), the spirits of [everlasting] holiness...
[above all the holy ones...]... wonderful sanctuary.
The spirits of God around the residence [...] in the holy of the ones... (4Q405 6, 1-11)

¹⁰ Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the Dead Sea Scrolls are from Wilfred G. E. Watson, trans., Florentino Garcia Martinez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated, The Qumran Texts in English*, 2nd ed. (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids: 1996). However, this particular passage is translated from Morton Smith, *Studies in the Cult of Yahweh*, ed. Shaye J. D. Cohen (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 2:74-75.

The next fragment indicates that the phrase “God of gods” is equivalent to the “King of gods” and shows that Qumran had expressly adopted a form of monarchical monotheism:

The gods will not shudder forever [...] for they are steady in the tasks of all, because the gods of the offering [...] his offering. The gods (*'elohim*) praise when they begin to rise, and all of the spirits of the pure vault rejoice in his glory... The fear of the King of gods (*malak elohim*) is dreadful for all the gods (*'elohim*) (4Q405 23 11-14)

The next fragment refers to the gods as being “eternal ones” and repeats a theme that is prominent at Qumran that God is a God of knowledge and the gods in the holy assembly also partake in the divine knowledge:

Praise [the God of gods...] you, the gods among the holy of holies; and in the divinity [of his kingdom, rejoice. Because he has established the holy of holies among the eternal holy ones, so that for him they can be priests [who approach the temple of kingship,] the servants of the Presence in the sanctuary of his glory. In the assembly of all the deities [of knowledge, and in the council of all the spirits] of God, he has engraved his ordinances for all spiritual works, and his [glorious] precepts [for those who establish] knowledge of the people of the intelligence of his glory, the gods (*'elohim*) who approach knowledge. Eternal [...] and from the holy source of the sanctuaries of the holy of [holies ...] priests who approach, to serve in the presence of the holy King of [the holy ones ...] of his glory. (4Q400 1, 1-21)

The next fragment known as the *Song of Sabbath Sacrifice* shows that the entire Qumran community joins the council of gods in a joint hymn of praise to God. This hymn extols the magnificence of God. However, the unified operation of the council of gods with the head God is most clearly expressed in this fragment. The holy ones' praises makes God holy and he makes them holy – and there is a kind of sharing of holiness and glory that is mutually exalting:

Praise the God of the lofty heights, you lofty ones among the divinities (*'elim*) of knowledge. May the holiest of the godlike ones (*'elohim*) sanctify the King of glory, who sanctifies by all his holy ones. O you chiefs of the praises of all godlike beings, praise the splendidly [p]raiseworthy God. For the splendor of the praises is the glory of his kingdom. From it (comes) the praises of all the godlike ones together with the splendor of all [his] maj[esty. And] exalt His exaltation to the exalted heaven, you gods (*'elohim*) of the lofty divinities (*'elim*),

and (exalt) his glorious divinity above all the lofty heights.
For H[e is the God of the gods], of all the chiefs of the heights,
and King of kings of all the eternal councils.
{By the intention} {of their knowledge}
At the words of his mouth come into being [all the lofty angels];
at the utterance of His lips all the eternal spirits;
[by the in]tention of His knowledge, all his creatures in their undertakings.
Sing with joy, you who rejoice [in His knowledge,
with] rejoicing among the wondrous godlike beings (*'elohim*). (4Q403 I 30-36)

If a form of “pure” monotheism arose in the writings of Second-Isaiah during the exile, it is evident that the notion that the Most High God was surrounded by a divine council of gods had been reconciled with such a form of monotheism by the end of the exile. The strongest evidence of this reconciliation is found in the Dead Sea Scrolls Hymns where Second-Isaiah is quoted, “there is no one beside me” in the same context as an affirmation of his reign over the council of gods. Indeed, this passage states precisely that even though the gods are called “nothings” and it is even asserted that no other than God exists, this verse makes it clear that the status as a “nothing,” or as a non-existent, is actually the High God’s judgment of gods in the divine assembly in comparison with the glory of God:

See, you are prince of gods and king of the glorious ones,
Lord of every spirit, owner of every creature.
Without your will nothing happens,
and nothing is known without your wish.
There is no one besides you,
no one matches your strength,
nothing, in contrast to your glory (1QH XVIII, 7-10)

These poetic songs of praise from Qumran demonstrate that the Israelite view of the Most High God presiding over a council of gods either continued through the exile or revived again after the exile in Second Temple Judaism that gave rise to Christianity. In this context, it was commonplace that the true God was not the only one of His kind because he is joined by the gods in the lofty council who officiate in the Holy of holies of the heavenly temple where the Most High God resides. Moreover, it was the lot of the Qumran saints to join the gods in this council to sing praises to God and to be exalted to the same godlike nature that these gods shared with God. The vast ontological gulf between humans and gods that characterized later Christian theology had not yet extinguished such possibilities.

Yet perhaps the most interesting expression of the council of gods is found in the Melchizedek scroll found in Cave 11 at Qumran (*11QMelchizedek*) that provides insights into understanding of several biblical passages as viewed by those at Qumran, including Psalm 82. The biblical Melchizedek was a priest of El Elyon who was sought out by Abraham. (Gen. 14:18-20) That is, Melchizedek was already a believer in El Elyon when Abraham came to him. El Elyon was the God of Abraham. At Qumran, Melchizedek was viewed as a human who has become one of the gods in the council of El Elyon. The gods who were judged in Psalm 82 are seen as fallen angels who combat the kingdom of God. These gods are judged in a trial where Melchizedek dispenses justice as a member of the council of gods. It also speaks of an anointed among the gods or spirits who is identified with the servant of Isaiah and thus provides essential background for the milieu in which Jesus was also seen as God beside or with the one true God:

4. [Its inter]pretation for the last days refers to the captives, about whom it is said: *Isa. 61:1*: ‘to proclaim liberty to the captives.’ And he will make
5. the rebels their prisoners [...] and of the inheritance of Melchizedek, for [...] and they are the inheri[tance of Melchizedek, who
6. will make them return. He will proclaim liberty for them, and free them from [the debt] of all their iniquities.
7. And this will [happen] in the first week of the jubilee which follows the ni[ne] jubilees. And the day [of atone]ment is the end of the tenth jubilee
8. in which atonement will be made for all the sons of [God and] for the men [of the l]ot of Melchizedek. [And on the heights] he will decla[re in their] favor according to their lots; for
9. it is the time of the ‘year of grace’ for Melchizedek, to exa[lt in the tri]al the holy ones of El through the rule of judgment, as it is written
10. about him in the songs of David, who said: *Ps 82:1* ‘Elohim will stand up in the assem[bly of El] in the midst of the *elohim* he judges.’ And about him he said: *Ps 7:8-9* “Above it
11. return to the heights, God will judge the peoples.’ As for what he sa[id *Ps 82:2* “How long will yo]u judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? Selah.’
12. Its interpretation concerns Beliel and the spirits of his lot, who were rebels [all of them] turning aside from the commandments of El [to commit evil].
13. But Melchizedek will carry out the vengeance of God’s judgments [on this day, and they shall be freed from the hands] of Beliel and from the hands of all the sp[irits of his lot].
14. To his aid (shall come) all ‘the gods (*kol ’eli*) of [justice,’ he] is the one [who will prevail on this Day over] all the sons of El (*bene ’el*) and he will pre[side over] this [assembly].....
24. ... ‘Your God’ is
25. [... Melchizedek, who will fr]ee [them] from the hand of Beliel].
(11QMechizedek 11Q13 II, 1-25)

As F. G. Martinez notes, Melchizedek becomes the leader of the council of the gods in battle with the rebellious gods. The rebellious gods are held captive by Beliel or one of the chief devils among the fallen gods. However, most striking is the fact that Melchizedek is called a god who leads the sons of God in the war against Beliel. Martinez observed:

The liberator, that is, the leader of the heavenly spirits (literally gods) is Melchizedek, identified with the archangel Michael and presented as the one who will judge the holy ones and lead them to participate in his heritage.... In this battle, Melchizedek not only is assisted by ‘all the gods’ [*kol ’eli*, line 14] and by the ‘sons of God’ [*bene ’el*, line 14] but is himself designated as ‘your God’ [elohym, line 25] ... and ‘your God’ is (Melchizedek, who) will save them from the hand of Beliel.’¹¹

The notion that there was a “strict monotheism” which prevailed universally in Second Temple Judaism, in the sense that no other beings could be conceived to be gods except the one God, Yahweh, is false. The Qumran saints called Melchizedek and the heavenly hosts “gods” and yet, with the same breath, proclaimed the incomparable majesty and oneness of God. It is incontestable that in first century Judaism there were groups of Jews who adopted monotheistic beliefs and yet held views that are incompatible with

¹¹ Florentino Garcia Martinez, *Qumran and Apocalyptic, Studies on the Aramaic Texts from Qumran* (E. J. Brill, New York: 1992) 176-177.

metaphysical monotheism. They adopted a monarchical monotheism rather than a metaphysical monotheism. The author of *11QMelchizedek* maintains that the agent of jubilee salvation is Melchizedek who was seen as a human being who has been exalted as a divine being. The author applies to Melchizedek not only the titles that are reserved for divine beings in the council of gods, *elohim*, but also the exalted titles reserved for God himself, El. In the author's citation of Isaiah 61:2 the name Melchizedek appears to have been substituted for the name of Yahweh.¹² In addition, Melchizedek is seen as atoning for the sins of the righteous and executing judgment upon the wicked, actions which are uniquely associated with God. The parallels with the mission of Jesus Christ are impressive. It appears to be quite evident that another in close proximity to God shared his authority, carried out divine prerogatives, and even shared the name of God and yet was not the one God. It is clear that Melchizedek is not simply identical to God El; rather, he is seen as God's vice-regent or agent acting at God's command and subject to God. He "carries out God's judgment." (11QMelch. Col. II, line 13) He is the general over the heavenly army.¹³

In the Dead Sea Scrolls, God is seen as a King who demands and is worthy of exclusive loyalty from his subjects. However, just as a king is not different in kind from his subjects even though he alone has ultimate power to rule and receive obeisance, God was not seen as a different "kind" in the sense that the divine nature is exclusively possessed by the one God. The gods share this divine nature and humans can participate in the divine nature to the extent they share God's holiness. However, just as a king demands that loyalty be given to no other kings, so the one God alone is worthy of worship and honor among gods. The relationship to God of his subjects is seen more as a continuum than a dichotomy, as a hierarchy of beings some of which are closer to God and some farther from him. The gods are literally what God is in kind because they share in His holiness and act pursuant to his authority in divine prerogatives such as governing, atoning, creating and bearing the divine name. However, they perform all of these divine actions only as agents or clients of the head God as incomparably great patron and king. God is at the top of the hierarchy and is incomparably great in the sense that no one else can occupy this supreme position or receive the honor that He does. God alone is worthy of worship because worship of any other being is contrary to monarchical monotheism just as loyalty to another king is a violation of the covenant relationship with the king. However, others can also be worshiped to the extent that they share in and manifest the glory of God's image.

The word "god" and the concept of "divinity" were more flexible and broader in meaning than the notion of metaphysical monotheism permits. There was no bright ontological line between God, the gods in the council of gods, divine heavenly agents and humans. The notion of an ontological gulf between the uncreated order and created beings is foreign to these texts and to the way they characterize the relationship with God and gods. In the first century both Jews and Christians did not believe in creation of out of nothing. God was believed to have created the heavens and the earth, the created order, but even this creation was out of "non-being." This "non-being" was understood as unformed, shapeless, chaotic matter. However, once again it is questionable whether the gods were seen as part of the created order or the heavens and earth. This view of creation was prevalent throughout the ancient world and in the ancient Near East through the period of Second Temple Judaism in particular. The evidence confirms that Jews and Christians did not begin to move away

¹² See Franco Manzi, *Melchizedek e l'angelologia nell'Epistola agli Ebrei e a Qumran*, *Analecta Biblica* 136 (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1997), 32-39; 96-101; Anders Aschim "Melchizedek and Jesus," in *The Jewish Roots*, 134-35.

¹³ Anders Aschim, "Melchizedek and Jesus: 11QMelchizedek and the Epistle to the Hebrews," in *The Jewish Roots*, 129-47.

from this view until about 180 of the common era. Nor is there any evidence that Jews and Christians had moved away from the Hebrew view of the world in which the realm of both the one God and gods is “above” the heavens and the earth and not included within the created order. 1 Enoch 14-36 shows that the same worldview that is presented in the Old Testament continued in Second Temple Judaism. It appears that there was a realm of gods who are designated in the New Testament as “principalities and powers” that shared governance of the world with God and at his sufferance.

15.3 Divine Beings in Second Temple Judaism. The primary mistake made by those who demand a “strict monotheism” in Second Temple Judaism(s) is that divinity is not seen as exclusively predicated of the one God, but as a relationship that can be shared in varying degrees. There are several heavenly figures who appear in Jewish writings of the Second Temple period that are called “gods” or “divine beings” and who appear to function as God’s chief agent. One significant figure, the exalted angel Yaoel, appears in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. Just as Jesus Christ is given the name of God that is above all other names in Philippians 2:7, so Yaoel bears the “ineffable divine name” of God and appears in the glory of God to Abraham. The divine name Yaoel is a combination of the terms used for God himself, Yahweh and El. The power of the name of God resides in Yaoel:

I heard the voice speaking, ‘Go, Yaoel of the same name, through the mediation of my ineffable name ... The angel he sent to me in the likeness of a man came ... [And he said to me]: I am sent to you to strengthen you and to bless you in the name of God, creator of heavenly and earthly things, who has loved you ... I am Yaoel and I was called so by him who causes those with me on the seventh expanse, on the firmament, to shake, a power through the medium of his ineffable name in me. (Apoc. Abr. 10:3-9)

The angel Yaoel is described in terms that are designed to evoke the image of God as he appears in visions throughout the Old Testament and the literature of Second Temple Judaism. The description of Yaoel is similar to descriptions of God in Ezekiel 1:26-28 where God appears on the throne/chariot; the vision of the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7:9; Enoch’s vision of God upon the throne/chariot who is surrounded by the “most holy ones,” (1 Enoch 14:18-25) and significantly the vision of Christ in Revelations 1:14. There can be little question, despite recent attempts to downplay the divine presentation of Yaoel, that he presents himself as divine by invoking the name of Yahweh and applying it to himself: “I am Yaoel” (Apoc. Abr. 10:8), especially in light of attributing the very same name to God in Apoc. Abr. 17:13. As Hurtado concluded: “we have here a creative attempt to portray the visual majesty accorded to the angel chosen by God as his chief agent.”¹⁴ The *Apocalypse of Abraham* describes the angel Yaoel:

The appearance of his body was like sapphire, and the aspect of his face was like chrysolite, and the hair of his head was like snow. And a kidaris [turban] was on his head, its look that of a rainbow, and the clothing of his garments (was) purple; and a golden staff (was) in his right hand. (Apoc. Abr. 11:2-4)

Similarly, Moses was seen as a “mediator for your people” and God’s chief agent or vizier in the Scrolls. (4Q374 7 2) The *Assumption of Moses* 11:16-17 and several fragments of the Dead Sea Scrolls

¹⁴ Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 88.

attribute to Moses the role of divine messenger as well as divine status in the council of the gods.¹⁵ In the *Life of Adam and Eve*, all of the angels in the council of God are commanded to worship Adam because he bears the image of God. While such worship maintains “monotheism” because the worship is directed ultimately to God as the source of the image; nevertheless, such a text shows that worship of beings other than God was conceivable in Second Temple Judaism and that such worship was possible precisely because the glory and image are derived from and thus shared with God.¹⁶

Further, in the context of the royal ideology underlying the royal Psalms, the Israelite king was addressed as “*Elohim*” or god in Ps 45:7. In the Greek version the divine name *Elohim* is translated as ὁ θεός (*ho theos*) meaning “God.” Even in Isaiah the king is greeted by the acclamation אֱלֹהֵי גִבּוֹר (El gebod) or “Mighty God.” (Isa. 9:5) There is no question that the messianic king is subordinate to Yahweh, but the king was near to God in divinity and could be called “God” as God’s earthly representative to whom the sovereign rule over the kingdom had been given.

There was also a tendency in Judaism to treat elements of God’s character such as Wisdom, and his Word or *Logos* as “virtually separate beings” who acts apart from him though expressing his will and performing the acts which he commands.¹⁷ The figure of the *Logos* in Philo’s thought which I will treat at some length in chapter 14 is a good example of such personified divine characteristics. God’s word functions as his reason in action and yet as a separate being who is called “a god” that acts as God’s agent in the creation of the world.¹⁸

In addition, the Son of Man (also called the Righteous One, the Elect One and Messiah) in the *Similitudes of Enoch* is worshiped as a divine being. (48:5; 62:6-9; and the worship of the Son of Man is assumed in 46:5 and 52:4) The Son of Man is a being described as endowed with the same glory as God. He

¹⁵ Jan Willem Van Henten, “Moses as Heavenly Messenger in *Assumptio Mosis* 10:2 and Qumran Passages,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* LIV, 2 (Autumn 2003), 216-27; M. Smith, “Ascent into the Heavens and Deification in 4QMa,” in L. H. Schiffman (ed.) *Archaeology and History in the Dead Sea Scrolls: the New York Conference in Memory of Yigal Yadin* (Sheffield: Sheffield Press, 1990)181-88; C. Louis-Fletcher, 4Q374: A Discourse on the Sinai Tradition: The Deification of Moses and Early Christology,” *DSD* 3 (1996), 236-52; J.R. Davila, “Heavenly Ascents in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” P.W. Flint and J.C. VanderKam (eds.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls After Fifty Years: A Comparative Assessment*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 461-85.

¹⁶ *Life of Adam and Eve*, 12-16; See, Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis, “The Worship of Divine Humanity as God’s Image,” in *The Jewish Roots*, 112-28, 114, 127-28; D. Steenburg, “The Worship of Adam and Christ as the Image of God,” *JSNT* 39 (1990), 95-109. Though the *Life of Adam and Eve* is a late text, it is based upon a very widespread tradition of *hagadah*. See Fletcher-Louis, *Luke-Acts*, 142-43 n 191 and 4Q381 Frag. Line 1: “all his hosts and [his] ange[ls] to seve mankind and to minister to them”

¹⁷ James R. Davila, “Of Methodology, Monotheism and Metraton,” in *The Roots of Jewish Monotheism*, 5.

¹⁸ For example, *Fug.* 95; *Som.* I.227-230; *QG* ii.62.

existed before the creation of the earth and was hidden by the Ancient One in the midst of the congregation of the holy ones. (1 Enoch 48:5-7) He was also given God's own name: "At that hour, that Son of Man was given a name, in the presence of the Lord of Spirits, the Before Time; even before the creation of the sun and the moon, before the creation of the stars, he was given a name in the presence of the Lord of Spirits ... all those who dwell on the earth fall and worship before him; they shall glorify, bless and sing the name of the Lord of Spirits. For this purpose he became the Chosen One; he was concealed in the presence of (the Lord of Spirits) prior to the creation of the world, and for eternity. And he has revealed the wisdom of the Lord of Spirits to the righteous and holy ones." (1 En. 48:2-7) Thus, the Son of Man is preexistent and receives the very name of God based upon which the holy ones worship him. Wisdom is embodied in the Son of Man/Elect One. (1 En. 49:3) He is described as having a face "like the appearance of a human being." (46:1) He exercises the divine prerogative of judgment on God's throne. (45:3; 55:4; 61:8) This text, reflecting the same imagery as the description of God in Ezekiel 1:26, identifies the Son of Man with the form of God and recognizes his divine status by placing him on the throne of Glory (51:3) which is identified as the throne of God (51:3; 62:2; 69:29). "For that Son of Man has appeared and seated himself upon the throne of his glory." (1 Enoch 69:29) The Son of Man also possesses the Name of God which endows him with God's very power. (69:12-29) Indeed, when the dead are resurrected the "Elect One shall sit upon my throne ... and the faces of all the angels in heaven shall glow with joy, because on that day the Elect One has arisen." (1 Enoch 51:3-5) Thus, it appears that the Son of Man is also resurrected and at the time of resurrection is seated on God's throne. Further, it is significant that the Son of Man is worshiped as he sits on God's throne of judgment by all the earthly rulers:

They shall be terrified and dejected; and pain shall seize them when they see the Son of Man sitting on the throne of his glory. (These) kings, governors, and all the landlords shall (try to) bless, glorify and extol him who rules over everything, him who has been concealed. For the Son of Man was concealed from the beginning, and the Most High One preserved him in the presence of his power; then he revealed him to the holy ones and the elect ones. The congregation of the holy ones shall be planted, and the elect ones shall stand before him. On that day, all the kings, the governors, and high officials, and those who rule the earth shall fall down before him on their faces, and worship and raise their hopes in that Son of Man. (1 Enoch 62:5-9)

It should also be noted that God, "the Lord of Spirits," is called the Most High One and he reigns even over the Son of Man. The Most High is surrounded by the "the congregation of the holy ones," the **קְהַל קְדוּשִׁים** *qahal qedushim* or council of gods of the Hebrew Bible. *1 Enoch* preserves the council of gods ruled over by the Most High God: "O holy ones of heaven, the souls of people are putting their case before you and pleading, 'Bring judgment before the Most High.' And they said to the Lord of the potentates, 'For he is the Lord of lords, and the God of gods, and the King of kings, and the seat of glory (stands) throughout all generations of the world.'" (1 Enoch 9:3-4) Are these heavenly beings, archangels and chief agents of God, such as the Son of Man, divine in nature? Larry Hurtado concluded that they are if

by 'divine nature' one means the creative, ruling, judging sovereignty of God, then it would be more precise to say that the principal angel, as God's chief agent or vizier, is made a major participant in the 'authority' or 'rule' of God, or in the exercise of God's power, indeed second only to God in some instances.¹⁹

¹⁹ Larry Hurtado, *One Lord, One God*, 86.

15.4 The Hierarchy of Holiness in the Heavenly Temple. The continuum of divine beings, forming a hierarchy with God as the Most High and a chief agent or vizier second only to God, together with a retinue of other divine beings also appears in both Jewish and Christian sources. The basis of this hierarchical view of divinity was undoubtedly the layout of the temple with outer courts open to all and becoming more restricted and more holy as the layout progressed toward the center where God dwells within the Holy of Holies. This notion became graphically presented in the spatial layout of the several heavens of Jewish-Christian apocalyptic as well. The notion of heavenly beings who reside in the various heavens that increase in holiness and likeness to God was the common view throughout the literature of Second Temple Judaism. The celestial temple was envisioned as a series of *hekhalot*, concentric chambers, which occupy various heavens. Therefore the journey through the various levels of heaven was described as a journey through increasingly holy rooms of the Temple to the holiest of the chambers found at the very center, the Holy of Holies. God is enthroned in the Holy of Holies and only those beings who approach or approximate his holiness can withstand his glory and presence. Therefore, a veil or cloud is often depicted as surrounding the throne to conceal God from direct view and to protect those who serve in his presence.

For example, in the Hebrew or *3 Enoch*, the heavens became compared to *hekhalot* or halls of the heavenly temple which became more restricted and holier as one ascended, with the Holy of Holies found in the highest heaven. God's glory dwells in the seventh heaven which is shrouded by a curtain or *pargod* which hangs as a veil before God's throne to shield those who approach from the full glory of God. Approaching God was like approaching a very hot fire – if one got too close without being shielded the heat of God's glory would burn and destroy flesh. The heavenly court of God was modeled on the image of the royal court of the emperor. God is the heavenly king who has a heavenly palace in which his throne is located. The angel Metraton (Enoch) is God's vizier or second only to the Most High God. Metraton is given the divine name and called both Yaho'el and "the Lesser Yahweh."²⁰ The various heavens are guarded by gatekeepers who protect the heavenly realm against invasion by unholy powers. However, *3 Enoch* is relatively late, though the traditions it preserves are undoubtedly much earlier.

The goal of the heavenly ascent was for the seer to look upon God's *kavod* or glory. God was almost always envisioned as a divine person having a human appearance except that it is attended by undescrivable light, glory and power.²¹ (Ez. 1:27-28; Isa. 6:1-4; Dan. 7:9-10) For the human seer the journey is a

²⁰ 3 Enoch 12:5; 48:1. The name Yaeol is of course also given to the chief angel in the Apocalypse of Abraham 10 together with a number of other documents, including Sepher Ha Razim 2:38; Margalioth 2:140; Ma'aseh Merkabah 20; 2 Enoch 32:1-3; Apocalypse of Moses 43:4.

²¹ The heavenly ascent has been the subject of numerous studies, including W. Bouset, "die Himmelsreise der Seele," *Archiv fur Religionswissenschaft* 4 (Freiburg: Mohr, 1901), 136-69; Georg Widengren, *The Ascension of the Apostle and the Heavenly Book* (Uppsala: Lundequistska bokhandeln, 1950), C. Colpe, "'Die Himmelsreise der Seele' ausserhalb und innerhalb der Gnosis," *Le Origini dello Gnosticismo, Colloquio di Messina*, U. Bianchi, ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 429-47; Erich Segal, "Heavenly Ascent in Hellenistic Judaism, Early Christianity, and their Environment," *ANRW* II.23.2: 1333-1394; M. Smith, "Ascent to the Heavens and the Beginning of Christianity," *Eranos* 50 (1981), 403-29; I. P. Culianu, "L'Ascension de l'ame dans les mystere et hor des mysteres," *La Soeriologia dei culti orientali*

transformation from mundane existence to divine glory. Generally the seer is transformed from human into angelic glory, including the seer's participation in the heavenly temple ordinances and his own enthronement. The literature of Second Temple Judaism shows that there was a very well established tradition of such heavenly ascension based primarily upon the visions found in Ezekiel 1 and Isaiah 6. For example, the vision in *1 Enoch* 14 is based largely on Ezekiel 1 and represents one of the earliest accounts of a seer ascending through a heavenly fire (14:10-14) to a holier place within (14:15-17) where the "Great Glory" dwells enthroned. (14:19-20) The depiction of the heavenly temple reflects a structure of three heavens, where Enoch passes into the courtyard of the temple, then to the Holy place and then into the Holy of Holies where he sees God seated on his throne.²² The throne of God is surrounded by angels who are priests who serve God "day and night." (14:22-23)²³

In the *Testament of Levi*, an angel appears to Levi and ushers him through seven heavens (there were probably three in the earliest version).²⁴ The lower heavens are dark (Test. Levi 3:2) but each succeeding heaven is "more lustrous" than the one before. (2:10) "Above them are the Holy Ones. In the uppermost heaven of all dwells the Great Glory in the Holy of Holies superior to all holiness. There are with him the archangels, who serve and offer propitiatory sacrifices to the Lord in behalf of all the sins of ignorance ... in the heaven below them are the messengers who carry the responses to the angels of the Lord's presence. There with him are thrones and authorities; there praises to God are offered eternally." (Test. Levi 3:4-8) Then the gates of heaven open and Levi "saw the Most High sitting on his throne." (Test. Levi 5:1) To prepare Levi to minister in the Holy of Holies as a priest, the angel takes Levi and anoints him with oil, washes him with water and gives him bread and wine reminiscent of Melchizedek's offering in Genesis 14:19. Levi is then dressed by seven angels in the priesthood robes and given the implements of the priesthood and kingship. The seven angels give him a wreath as a crown and diadem of royal authority as well. (Test. Levi 8:2-10) He is also given a new name "because from Judah a king will arise and shall found a new priesthood ... his presence is beloved, as a prophet of the Most High." (8:14-15) The process of robing Levi on the day of atonement is given in Leviticus 16:1-34.

nell'Impero Romano, U. Bianchi e M. J. Vermasere, eds., (Leiden: Brill, 1982), 276-302; M. Dean-Ottung, *Heavenly Journeys: A Study of the Motif in Hellenistic Jewish Literature* (Frankfurt: University Press of America, 1986); J. D. Abor, *Things Unutterable: Paul's Ascent to Paradise in its Greco-roman, Judaic and Early Christian Context* Lanham: University Press of America, 1986); M. Himmelfarb, "Apocalyptic Ascent and the Heavenly Temple," SBLSP 26 (1987), 210-17; – *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); C. R. Koester, *The Dwelling Place of God: The Tabernacle in the Old Testament, Intertestamental Jewish Literature and the New Testament* (Washington: CBA, 1989).

²² April De Conick, "Heavenly Temple Traditions and Valentian Worship," in *The Jewish Roots*, 311.

²³ Himmelfarb, *Ascent*, 20-23.

²⁴ See H. C. Kee, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983), 1.775-80 and 788-90; C. Rowland, *The Open Heaven* (London: SPCK, 1982), 81; Collins, "The Seven Heavens," 62-66.

A similar scene is presented in *2 Enoch* where Enoch ascends through seven heavens. As he ascends each heaven is more glorious. The sixth and seventh heavens represent a scene of Temple worship and the heavenly council in its deliberations. The seventh heaven represents the Holy of Holies where God dwells upon his throne. (2 En. 9:9-11) Enoch is brought before the throne of God and “I saw the face of the Lord,” and the throne is surrounded by the angelic choir that is always singing and the hosts of the armies of heaven. (22:1-3) Enoch falls to his face and does obeisance to the Lord. God then orders Michael, “the archistratig” or captain of the army of angels: “Let Enoch join in and stand in front of my face forever,” and the “glorious ones” responded: “Let Enoch yield in accordance with your word, O Lord!” (22:7) Then God commands Michael to “go and extract Enoch from [his] earthly clothing. And anoint him with my delightful oil, and put him into the clothes of my glory.” (22:9) So Michael anoints Enoch and clothes him and Enoch shines with “the greatest light” and he is transformed into the same glory as the “glorious ones.” (22:10) In effect, Enoch joins the heavenly assembly of “glorious ones” and becomes one of them. The investiture of Enoch is reminiscent of priestly consecrations and clothing in the robes of priesthood.

The *Apocalypse of Abraham* also presents a vision of the Holy of Holies in the seventh heaven surrounded by concentric circles of lesser holiness. Abraham acts as a priest by making sacrifices on an altar to God before ascending to heaven. (Apoc. Abr. 9) Such sacrifices likely recalled the altar outside the Jerusalem Temple. The exalted angel bearing the divine name, Yaeol, conducts Abraham on a heavenly journey through the seven heavens. When they reach the seventh heaven, Abraham sees the throne chariot and hears the voice of God like many waters coming from a brilliant fire. (Apoc. Abr. 1:1-3) Yaeol teaches Abraham the heavenly song and they both prostrate themselves before the throne of God and worship him. (Apoc. Abr. 17:5-21)

The Christian work known as the *Ascension of Isaiah* dates from the late first or early second century (about 90 to 125 A.D.) and provides a stunning glimpse into an early Christian view of the hierarchy of divine beings. Isaiah falls into a trance of vision and an angel appears to him who conducts him through the heavens. As he ascends through the seven heavens, the brightness and glory of those who inhabit each heaven increases. (Asc. Isa. 7:20, 27, 31, 37; 8:11; 9:6) As he enters each heaven there is a throne in the middle that is praised and worshiped by the angels, yet the throne represents the throne in the seventh heaven. In the second heaven, the angel informs Isaiah that there is a throne, robe and a crown *reserved in the seventh heaven for Isaiah*. (Asc. Isa. 7:22-23) The glory of the second heaven is so much greater than the first heaven that Isaiah fell to worship the throne, but the angel warns him: “worship neither throne nor angel from the six heavens, from where I was sent to lead you, before I tell you in the seventh heaven.” (Asc. Isa. 7:21-22) Isaiah rejoices that “those who loved the Most High and his Beloved will at their end go up there [to the seventh heaven] through the angel of the Holy Spirit.” (Asc. Isa. 7:23) As Isaiah ascends to the third heaven, he notices that “the glory of my face was being transformed as I went up from heaven to heaven.” (Asc. Isa. 7:25)

As Isaiah enters the sixth heaven, he comments to the angel: “What is this which I see, my lord?” However, the angel rebuffs Isaiah: “I am not your ‘lord,’ but your companion.” (Asc. Isa. 8:5) After this point Isaiah never again refers to the angel as “lord” but reserves that honorific title “my Lord” for the Beloved Jesus Christ and “Lord” for the Most High, the Father.²⁵ Christ is also called the “Chosen One,” the “Son,” and the “Beloved.” The Father is also called the “Glorious One,” the “Most High,” the “Great Glory,” the “Father of my Lord,” “primal Father,” and the “One-Not-Named.” The Holy Spirit is called “the angel of the Holy Spirit.”

²⁵ Loren t. Stuckenbruck, “Worship and Monotheism in the *Ascension of Isaiah*,” in *The Jewish Roots*, 83-84.

Isaiah is informed that the no one knows the name of “the One who is not named” because he is alone. (Asc. Isa. 8:8)

In the sixth heaven Isaiah joins the angels of the presence to sing praises to God: “And they all named the primal Father and his Beloved, Christ, and the Holy Spirit with one voice.” (8:18) Isaiah is then informed that the righteous will all receive robes, thrones and crowns if they accept the Son when he appears in human form. As the angel leads Isaiah to the seventh heaven, they hear a voice saying, “how far is he who dwells among aliens to go up?” A voice then declares that Isaiah is permitted to enter the seventh heaven, “for his robe is here.” The angel then instructs Isaiah that the voice that prevented him from going further was the chief angel in charge of praises in the seventh heaven, and the voice of the one who authorized Isaiah to proceed was “your Lord, the Lord, the Lord Christ, who is to be called in the world Jesus, but you cannot hear his name until you have come up from this body.” (8:1-5) The name “Lord Christ” is emphasized by repeating it three times because “Lord” is his substitute name. It is not too difficult to see that the real name behind “the Lord” is “Yahweh,” the name shared by both the Father and the Son. However, the divine name is never spoken because, as the angel informs Isaiah, none of the heavens can learn it. (8:8)

Upon entering the seventh heaven, Isaiah sees Abel and Enoch “and they were like the angels who stand there in great glory.” (8:9) They had received their robes, but they could not receive their crowns and thrones until after the Son becomes mortal. (8:10-12) Isaiah sees “one standing whose appearance surpassed that of all and his glory was great and wonderful ... and all the righteous worshiped him ... and then all the angels approached, and worshiped and sang praises.” (9:28-29) And then the angel tells Isaiah, “worship this one ... this is the Lord of all the praise which you have seen.” (9:32) Then Isaiah sees the angel of the Holy Spirit:

I saw another glorious (person) who was like him [Christ], and the righteous approached him, and worshiped, and sang praises, and I also sang praises with them; but his glory was not transformed to accord with their form. And then the angels approached and worshiped him. And I saw the Lord and the second angel, and they were standing, and the second one whom I saw (was) on the left of my Lord. And I asked the angel who led me and I said to him, ‘who is this one?’ And he said to me, ‘Worship him, for this is the angel of the Holy Spirit who has spoken in you and also in the other righteous. (Asc. Isa. 8:33_36)

Then Isaiah “saw the Great Glory,” and he was blinded by the light. And then Isaiah saw “how my Lord and the angel of the Holy Spirit worshiped and both together praised the Lord. And then all the righteous approached and worshiped, and all the angels sang praises.” (Asc. Isa. 8:40-42) Then the angel who was with Isaiah said: “this is the Most High of the high ones, who dwells in the holy world, who rests among the holy ones, who will be called by the Holy Spirit in the mouth of the righteous the Father of the Lord.” (8:6) Then Christ receives his commission as the sent one: “I heard the voice of the Most High, the Father of my Lord, as he said to my Lord Christ, who will be called Jesus, ‘Go out and descend through all the heavens ... This command I heard the Great Glory give to my Lord.’” (8:7-16)

Isaiah then sees the vision of the Beloved who descends through the heavens disguised as an angel so that he will not be recognized in the lower heavens. As Christ descends through the heavens he conceals his divine glory so that his glory corresponds to the degree of glory manifested in each heaven. As Christ descends through the heavens he gives the password to the angels stationed there at the gates of each heaven. After Christ fulfills his mortal commission, he again ascends through the heavens and the hierarchy of worship that is established is of great importance:

I saw him when he ascended into the sixth heaven, that they worshiped him and praised him; but in all the heavens the praise grew louder. And I saw how he ascended into the seventh heaven, and all the righteous and all the angels praised him. And then I saw that he sat down at the right hand of the Great Glory, whose glory I told you I could not behold. And I also saw that the angel of the Holy Spirit sat on the left. (11:31-33)

The hierarchy of the heavenly world in the Holy of Holies among the “glorious and holy ones” is fairly clear in the Ascension of Isaiah. The angel of the Holy Spirit is subordinate to both Christ and the Father as indicated by his placement on the left of the Most High. In addition, while Christ and the Father are mentioned together without the Holy Spirit, the Spirit is never mentioned in relation to the Father without Christ also being mentioned. In addition, the angel of the Holy Spirit is designated as a “second angel.” (9:35-36) Nevertheless, the angel of the Holy Spirit is seen as worthy of worship even on his own. The angel of the Holy Spirit is clearly superior to the other angels, including the chief angel Michael, because the angels worship him and no other angels are worshiped. As Larry Hurtado noted:

The affirmation of monotheism (albeit the novel version characteristic of early Christianity) is perhaps most clearly dramatized in the extended scene of triadic worship in 9.27-42 (of the Asc. of Isa.). The fully divine status of the Beloved (‘the Lord of all the praise which you have seen’) and the Holy Spirit is expressed in their being worshiped by all the company of the beings in the highest heaven. The portrayal of these two in turn joining the worship of ‘the Great Glory’ must surely signal the author’s intention to avoid the idea that there are three gods. This liturgical subordination of the Beloved and the Holy Spirit to God, which could be characterized as ‘monarchical monotheism,’ represents an effort to affirm a fundamental singularity behind the plurality.²⁶

However, Hurtado has failed to do justice to the truly hierarchical plurality of the three clearly distinct divine beings. The Beloved One, Christ who is the “my Lord” who is addressed by “the Lord” (referring to in Psalm 110:1), is enthroned at the right hand of the Most High, showing that he is second in rank and authority only to the Father. The Holy Spirit is subordinate to the Father and the Son. The fact that the angel refused to receive worship reinforces the commitment that such worship is not appropriate for angels of a certain rank; but in the *Ascension of Isaiah* the sphere of those worthy of worship includes three quite distinct divine beings who form a hierarchy. It appears that two of these divine beings, the Beloved and the angel of the holy Spirit have the status of angels who act in the capacity as the Most High’s unique agents and emissaries. The Most High is, as his title declares, the highest. Christ is seen as having the highest status among the angels and superlatively greater.

It is also important to note that the *Ascension of Isaiah* distinguishes between the glory of the pre-existent Lord before his mortal mission and the glory and worship attending his exaltation and enthronement. Prior to Christ’s mortality, the holy ones cannot receive their crowns and thrones. However, they can be exalted as kings and priests just as Christ is after he ascends. Prior to his mortality, Christ is worshiped only by the angels in the sixth and seventh heavens. He is not recognized as Lord as he descends. However, all of the angels recognize him as the Lord after his resurrection. After his mortality all of the angels in all of the heavens worship him. Prior to his mortality, Christ *stands* near the throne of God and after his exaltation he sits enthroned at the right hand of God. Just as he is exalted and enthroned, so his disciples are also exalted and

²⁶ Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 600.

enthroned.

It must also be kept in mind that the heavenly beings designated as the “glorious ones” or the “holy ones” reside only in the Holy of Holies of the seventh heaven. The heavenly beings are also distinguished in rank and hierarchy on a continuum marked by the various degrees of glory expressed in the degrees of praise manifested in the heavens that they inhabit. Such a view reflects a belief very close to Paul’s statement that: “All of us, gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as from the Lord who is the Spirit.” (2 Cor. 3:18) However, the very cosmology assumed throughout the literature of Second Temple Judaism manifests the belief that divinity is a matter of degree. Those closer to God in the Holy of Holies manifest greater likeness and holiness and share in greater glory. Those who attend to God in the Holy of Holies are called the “holy ones,” the attendants of the divine court. While they do not merit worship, they share in the divine prerogatives of receiving robes of the priesthood, crowns of kingship and thrones and glory indicative of shared divinity. However, the status of all beings in heaven, including that of the Son and the Holy Ghost, is derived from God, the Most High.

Lest it be thought that these visions were only literary inventions, it must be remembered that at Qumran the “Latter-day Saints” believed that they entered into the Holy of Holies to join the heavenly hosts of “gods” to sing praises to the Most High. They believed that they were among the *elim* or divine beings and ministered to God as his true priesthood. Because they believed that the cultus of the temple in Jerusalem had been defiled by unworthy and illegitimate priests, they sought to create a worship based upon the heavenly temple. In the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, the Qumran covenantors joined the divine beings in the divine council who serve as priests in the Holy of Holies where the throne of God is located. The songs present a progression through the outer areas of the temple courts and proceed toward the Holy of Holies as a means of joining the worship of the divine beings before God’s throne.²⁷ The Qumran covenantors evince their conviction that they enter into the presence of God’s throne and they actually join the assembly of the divine beings or gods. (1QH 6:13f; 3:2ff; 11:10ff; 1QS 11.5-10). Such a practice is the ultimate expression of belief in deification or becoming like God through ritual means. The covenantors apparently practiced a form of ascent through the heavenly temple by means of their liturgical hymns.²⁸ As the Hymns of the Initiates provide: “He has given them an inheritance / in the lot of the Holy Beings, / and joined them in communion with the Sons of Heaven, / to form a congregation, / one single communion, / a fabric of holiness.” (1QS 11:10)

The Jews in Christ’s time universally believed in a hierarchy of several heavens which increase in glory and light as they ascend to the throne of God. It was inherent in this basic cosmology of the heavens that the heavenly beings who inhabited them also reflected the glory of the heaven in which they had been placed. This heavenly cosmology adopted the view that divinity is a continuum of glory from one heaven to another, from

²⁷ Newsom, “Merkavah Exegesis in the Qumran Sabbath Shirot,” *JSJ* 38 (1987), 11-30; J. Strugnell, “The Angelic Liturgy at Qumran,” *Vetus Testamentum Supplement* 7 (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 318-45; C. R. A. Morray-Jones, “The Temple Within: The Embodiment of Divine Image and its Worship in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Early Jewish and Christian Sources,” *SBLSP* 37 (1998), 400-31.

²⁸ April De Conick, “Heavenly Temple Traditions and Valentian Worship,” 317; Morton Smith, “Two Ascended Into Heaven – Jesus and the Author of 4Q491,” *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, James H. Charlesworth, ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 290-301.

glory to glory. All of the divine beings who inhabit the heavens are subordinate to the Most High God, including the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. In the *Ascension of Isaiah*, Christ is the chief agent or vizier who is second in glory and power only to the Most High. The Spirit is subordinate to them both and serves them as one who witnesses of them. The angels in the seventh heaven are of the same kind in the sense that they are called “holy ones,” “high ones,” and “glorious ones” to show that they share in the divine glory and holiness. They are holy as God is holy. As his agents, they are authorized to carry out divine prerogatives in his own name by which he empowers them. Ultimately the view that divinity is a continuum of glory or a hierarchy of authority is reflected in the earthly temple that is patterned after the heavenly temple. It is sanctified and set apart by means of increasing sacredness and power as one journeys from the outer courts of the temple toward its center where God is seated on his throne represented by the ark of the covenant and the cherubim.

Those who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls adopted a very widely held belief that the seers like Enoch and Isaiah were transformed into glorious beings identical to the glory of the most holy of the angels in the council of God, the “high ones” who serve God in the Holy of Holies in the heavenly Temple. They did not hesitate to adopt the Old Testament designations for such beings as “gods” and “divine beings.” However, for them participation in the divine nature was a present reality, one made real by their ritual participation in the songs and ordinances of heaven after which the rites on earth had been patterned. Similarly, Christians believed that because Christ had overcome death and been exalted in the highest heaven on the right hand of God, the door to the Holy of Holies had been opened to them and the righteous shall be similarly exalted to receive robes, crowns and thrones as shown in the book of *Revelations*. Divinity is shared by the Most High God not only with the inhabitants of the heavens, but also with the saints and seers some of whom have been and others who will be transformed to reflect his glory through his grace and their righteousness.

The *Odes of Solomon*, a very early Jewish-Christian hymnal probably written in Antioch that dates from about 100 A.D., reflects a very similar view to that expressed in the *Dead Sea Scrolls* that also has significant contacts with the *Ascension of Isaiah*. The *Odes* were probably written by a priest converted to Christianity from the Dead Sea sect before the end of the first century.²⁹ The author was very likely a part of or familiar with the community that gave us the gospel of John.³⁰ The *Odes* constitute an early Christian collection of hymns. Like the *Ascension of Isaiah*, the *Odes* frequently call the Father “the Most High,” and refer to Christ as “the Son of the Most High,” “the Lord,” “the Lord’s Messiah,” and especially “the Beloved.”

It appears that the *Odes* are intimately related to the same experience of investiture as a priest of God and ascending to the Holy of Holies where God dwells. The Odist expressly states that he is a priest of the Lord: “I am a priest of the Lord, / and to him I serve as a priest.”(20:1) It is also very clear that the believers are washed, anointed, clothed and officiate in the ordinances of the Holy of Holies and join the holy ones in heaven in singing praises to the Most High God. The holy place of the heavenly Temple is referred to in Ode 4:1-2: “No man can pervert your holy place, O my God; / nor can he change it, and put it in another place. / Because (he has) no power over; for your sanctuary you designed before you made special places.” The waters that run from beneath the Temple to create a stream of “living water” that grants eternal life when drunk is

²⁹ J. H. Charlesworth, “The Odes of Solomon and the Johannine Tradition,” *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 2 (1988), 49-69; R. A. Culpepper, “The Odes of Solomon and the Gospel of John,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 35 (1973), 298-322.

³⁰ Ibid.

referred in Ode 6:8-18. It is fairly clear that the Odes deal with the same type of ascension experiences reflected in *1 Enoch*, *2 Enoch*, the *Testament of Levi*, the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and especially the *Ascension of Isaiah*. Ode 4:10 refers to washings: “Sprinkle upon us your sprinklings, / and open your bountiful springs which abundantly supply us with milk and honey.” Ode 20:9 refers to the anointing: “you will be anointed in truth with the praise of his holiness.” There are numerous references to putting on a celestial clothing of light and symbolically “putting on” the Son throughout the *Odes*. “He became like me, that I might receive him. / In form he was considered like me, that I might put him on.” (7:4) “And the Lord renewed me in his garment, / and possessed me by his light.”(11:11) “And I stripped off darkness and put on light.” (21:3) (These verse involve a play one words in Hebrew for “garment” and “light” which are essentially the same word) “I was covered with the covering of your spirit, / and I removed from me my garments of skin.” (25:8)

There are also numerous references to receiving a crown: “The Lord is on my head like a crown, / and I shall never be without him.” (1:1) “And he is a crown upon my head, / and I shall not be disturbed.” (5:12) Thus, there is a sense of complete “Christification” where the believer becomes identified with the Son through putting him on and being glorified with his glory. As Ode 13:1-3 states so beautifully, Christ is the one whom the disciples see when they look in the mirror : “Behold, the Lord is our mirror. / Open (your) eyes and see them in him. / And learn the manner of your face, / then announce the praises to his Spirit. / And wipe the paint from your face, / and love his holiness and put it on.” Similarly, Ode 9:9 states the joyous refrain: “Put on the crown in the true covenant of the Lord, / and all those who have conquered will be inscribed in his book.” As Ode 16:1 exclaimed: “Then I was crowned by my God, / and my crown was living.” The purpose of the ordinances referred to the in the *Odes* appears to have been to exalt the disciples as kings and priests among the holy ones in the heavenly Temple. To perform that service, the Odist must be properly consecrated by the washings, anointings and royal investiture.

Thus, the *Odes* deal with ordinances of priestly investiture and heavenly ascension. The Odist says that he was raised to stand before the Lord in the highest heaven: “I extended my hands in the ascent of myself, / and I directed myself near the Most High, / and I was saved near him.” (35:7) The most extensive presentation of the Odist’s ascension to the high heaven to stand before the face of God is found in Ode 36:1-2. The Odist is raised by the Spirit to stand before the face of God where he praises Him by composing the Odes:

I rested on the spirit of the Lord,
and she raised me up to heaven;
And caused me to stand on my feet in the Lord’s high place,
before his perfection and his glory,
where I continued praising (him) by the composition of his odes. (Odes 36:1-2)

As the Odist stands before the Lord and praises him, he is transformed. In a magnificent expression of the “Christification” of believers, the account of the Odist’s ascension to stand before the Lord in his high place in heaven then shifts to the Odist speaking in the first person as if he were Christ himself:

(The Spirit) brought me forth before the Lord’s face,
and because I was the Son of Man,
I was named the Light, the Son of God;
Because I was most praised among the praised,
and greatest among the great ones,
For according to the greatness of the Most High, so he made me;
and according to his newness he renewed me.

And he anointed me with his perfection;
and I became one of those who are near him. (Ode 36:3-6)

The next Ode makes a reference to the chariot that carries the Lord: "I went up into the light of Truth as into a chariot, / and the Truth led me and caused me to come." (38:1) The entire congregation of the author of the Odes joins in the heavenly choir to give praise to God: "And his praise he gave us on account of his name; / our spirits praise his Holy Spirit." (Ode 6:7) It is fairly evident that we are dealing here with the same ascension motif as found in the *Ascension of Isaiah*. The Beloved is accorded the honorific status as the preeminent angel who nevertheless surpasses the angels because he receives praise from them. It is union with the Son of God that allows the Odist to stand before the Most High because he has put him on as a garment. The Odist thus stands before God dressed in the appearance of the Son of God as one of the sons of God. He stands as one who is anointed and thus as a Messiah. Having been washed in the water of life, the Odist stands before the Most High renewed in the renewal of the Son. He stands before God in the highest place possessing the name of the Son. The basis for the Odist's identification with the Son is thus the ordinances he has received that are designed to symbolically present him before God as if he were the Beloved who is worthy to stand in God's presence.

Here we see the Son as "the most praised among the praised" and the "greatest among the great ones." There is a continuity in kind between the Son and the holy ones who praise him although he is preeminent among them. The Son is also called the Son of Man who is named the Son of God. The moment reflected in these Odes is the exaltation of the Messiah who is declared to be the Son of God. For example, Ode 7:15-16 exalts the Son: "for by him he was served, / and he was pleased by his Son, / and because of his salvation he will possess everything. / And the Most High will be known by his holy ones." Ode 10:3 also refers to the exaltation of the Son: "I took courage and became strong and captured the world, / and it became mine for the glory of the Most High, and of God my Father." However, those who sing the hymns also become sons of God. The singer is identified with the Son and shares his glory completely. Indeed, one of the most arresting themes throughout the *Odes* is that the singer becomes a son because he loves the Son: "I have been united (to him), because the lover has found the Beloved, / because I have loved him that is the Son, I shall become a son." (3:7) Similarly, Ode 31:4 states: "then he raised his voice toward the Most High, / and offered to him those that had become sons through him."

There is also an emphasis upon the believer receiving the name of "the Lord" upon the forehead, just as the turban of the High Priest bore the name of Yahweh.³¹ (See Ex. 28:36-38) The divine Name that was placed on the High Priest's head was seen as being especially important to protect him as he came into the presence of Yahweh on the Day of Atonement. (Wisdom of Sol. 18:22-25) Ode 8 is a particularly fine statement of the name: "And before they existed, I recognized them and imprinted a seal on their faces ... they will not be deprived of my Name, for it is with them ... you shall be found uncorrupted in all ages, on account of the Name of your Father." Ode 42:20 recalls the scene of Christ as he is resurrected and those who escape from death and Sheol with him are marked as the Lord's property by the mark on their forehead: "And I placed my name on their head, / because they are free and they are mine." Ode 25:11 attests: "and I became the Lord's by the name of the Lord." The seal of the Lord's name on the forehead functioned much in the way of a brand burned into the hide of an animal to show ownership. The name is signed or sealed and it is the same name that is possessed by the archangels: "Because your seal is known; and your creatures are known to it. / And your hosts possess it, and the elect archangels are clothed with it." (Ode 4:7-8) This Ode is also a vivid reminder

³¹ Charles A. Gieschen, "Baptismal Praxis in the Book of Revelation," *forthcoming*.

that when these passages refer to something “before it exists,” the reference is not to existence absolutely, but to existence in this life. It is quite impossible to mark the face of one that does not exist in any sense. “The name” has particular significance in the Odes. It functions as divine empowerment and a means of salvation. As Ode 33:13 declared: “My elect ones have walked with me, / and my ways I shall make known to them who seek me; / and I shall promise them my name.” The name is also expressed in a fairly clear “trinitarian” formula: “And the name of the Father was upon it; / and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, to rule forever and ever.” (Ode 23:22)

The Son possessed exalted preexistence status. For example, the Word is the agent of creation just as in the gospel of John:

For the Word of the Lord investigates that which is invisible, / and perceives his thought ...
It is he who spread out the earth, / and placed the waters in the sea. / He expanded the heaven,
and set the stars. / And he set creation and aroused it, / then he rested from his works For
he made the sun for the day so that it will be light; / but night brings darkness over the face
of the earth ... And there is nothing outside the Lord, / because he was before anything came
to be. / And the worlds are by his Word, and by the thought of his heart. (Ode 16:8-19)

The Son is the highest among the heavenly beings, but he is subordinate to the Father. The subordination of the Son is also clearly expressed by calling him “the Lord’s Messiah,” and thus he belongs to the Most High just as the disciples belong to the Son. The subordination is marked in several different ways. For example, the Word is viewed as having been created by the uncreated and received strength from the Most High: “And the Word from the truth who is self-originate, / because he has been strengthened / by the holy power of the Most High. “ (Ode 32:2-3) The Most High also created wisdom: “The Father of knowledge / is the Word of knowledge. / He who created wisdom / is wiser than his works.” (7:7-8) Further, when the Son appears in his humbled state it is because “He has allowed him to appear to them that are his own.” (7:12) Thus, the Son acts pursuant to the permission of the Father. The justification of those who “become sons through him,” is a gift that is given “because thus his Holy Father had given to him.” (Ode 31:4) Though the Son “became strong and captured the world,” nevertheless the Son has overcome the world “for the glory of the Most High, and of God my Father.” (10:4) When the Son is glorified through worship, the glory is ultimately given to the Most High through the Son. Though Christ is the “the head” of the holy ones, he is nevertheless, the “the Son of Truth from the Most High Father.” (23:18) Ode 29:6 explains that even though the Son is the “Lord,” still he is known as “the Lord’s Messiah.” The perfection that is derived from the Son is really the perfection of the Father as Ode 43 so beautifully expresses:

And the Word is with us in all our way, / the Savior who gives life and does not reject us. /
the Man who humbled himself, / but was raised because of his own righteousness. / The Son
of the Most High appeared / in the perfection of his Father. / And light dawned from the Word
that was before time in him. / The Messiah in truth is one. / And he was known before the
foundation of the world, / that he might give life to persons forever by the truth of his name.
(Ode 43:11-15)

The subordination of the Son to the Most High Father in the *Odes* is very similar to the view depicted graphically in the *Ascension of Isaiah*. The Son is subordinate to the Father; yet he is the greatest among the heavenly hosts. The Son has been exalted by the Father for his obedience; yet the Word was with God as the agent of creation even before the world was. The Word is created but spoken before all else exists in creation by the Father. The Son opens the doors for the disciples to enter into the Holy of Holies in the heavenly temple

to sing praises to the Most High. Like the Son, they are exalted by “putting him on” as a garment and becoming exalted just as he is.

In any event, the *Odes* and the *Ascension of Isaiah* vividly demonstrate the influence upon Christianity of the Jewish view of the hierarchical heavens and the hierarchy of authority among the heavenly beings who inhabit them. The Odist has ascended to the stand before the face of God and when he does he is transformed into the image of Christ. Like the Jewish apocalypses and the Christian *Ascension of Isaiah*, the *Odes of Solomon* demonstrate a belief that the righteous are glorified in a ritual of priesthood consecration of kingship preparatory to entering into the presence of the Lord. The *Odes of Solomon* take us into the earliest Christian community that produced the gospel of John and demonstrate in beautiful language glorification of the disciples among the holy ones in the Holy of Holies. They demonstrate a belief that the righteous as a community of elect believers are transformed by ritual means to stand before the Lord, join the heavenly choir and share in the divine glory of those who serve the Lord in the Holy of Holies of the heavenly Temple.

The intense identification of the Odist with the Son is marked by a reversal of humility and exaltation. The Odist notes that the Son of God takes on his human form when he becomes humbled, just as the Odist becomes identified with Christ in his exaltation. This reversal of humility and exaltation is expressed most clearly in Ode 7:

He became like me, that I might receive him,
In form he was considered like me, that I might put him on.
And I trembled not when I saw him,
because he was gracious to me.
Like my nature he became, that I might understand him.
And like my form, that I might not turn away from him.

On account of this he was gracious to me in his abundant grace,
and allowed me to seek from him and to benefit from his sacrifice. (Ode 7:4-10)

These same themes of ascension and investiture appear in the *Book of Revelations* which states repeatedly that the Name of God is written on the foreheads of the saints who become priests officiating in the Heavenly Temple: “He who conquers, I will make a pillar in the temple of my God; never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and ... my own new name.” (Rev. 3:12; see 7:2-3) “On Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads.” (Rev.14:1) “They shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads.” (Rev. 22:4) Revelations explains that the significance of the Name of Christ is that it is unknown: “His eyes were like blazing fire, and on his head were many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows, but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dripped in blood and his name is the Word of God.” (Rev. 19:12-13) The saints are dressed in white garments (Rev. 3:4-5, 18; 4:4; 16:15; 19:3, 16) or “robes.” (6:11; 7:9, 13-14; 22:14) Christ has made the saints kings and priests to the Most High God. (Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6) The saints sit on God’s own throne through the invitation of Christ: “I will give the victor the right to sit on my throne, as I myself first won the victory and sit with my Father on his throne.” (Rev. 3:21; c.f., 4:4; 20:4, 6)

These texts all adopt the view of a Most High God and a vice-regent or chief heavenly agent. Ultimately the trajectory of a subordinate “God” found its way also into the writings of Justin Martyr in his *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* which was written around 160 A.D., although it purports to reflect a dialogue

that Justin Martyr had around 135 A.D.³² Justin argues that there is a second figure in heaven next to God who is also called *God* and *Lord*.³³ Justin argued that the angel who appears to Abraham on the plains of Mamre may be called “God,” but he is not truly the one God but a “distinct God.” Justin argued: “Then I replied, ‘Reverting to the Scriptures, I shall endeavor to persuade you, that He who is said to have appeared to Abraham, and to Jacob, and to Moses, and who is called God, is distinct from Him who made all things,—numerically, I mean, not [distinct] in will. For I affirm that He has never at any time done anything which He who made the world—above whom there is no other God—has not wished Him both to do and to engage Himself with’.”³⁴ Justin presents the Jew Trypho as having quickly arrived at the same conclusion that there must be distinct divine beings, both of which are called *God* and *Lord*: “Since it has been previously proved that He who is called God and Lord, and appeared to Abraham, received from the Lord, who is in the heavens, that which He inflicted on the land of Sodom, even although an angel had accompanied the God who appeared to Moses, we shall perceive that the God who communed with Moses from the bush was not the Maker of all things, but He who has been shown to have manifested Himself to Abraham and to Isaac and to Jacob; who also is called and is perceived to be the Angel of God the Maker of all things, because He publishes to men the commands of the Father and Maker of all things.”³⁵ Thus, it was actually Christ who appeared in visions in the Old Testament bearing the name “the Lord” as the agent of the Father. He also emphasized that Genesis 1:27-27 is a genuine dialogue between two truly “numerically distinct” (αριθμῶ ἕτερον ἐστί) divine beings who address each other as an “other.”³⁶

Justin Martyr also explained carefully how the exegesis of Psalms 110:1 and 45:7-8 was used to show that there must be two divine beings, one of which is called “Lord” (the Father) and one of which is called “my Lord” (the Son). Although such reasoning is articulated several decades after the New Testament was written, the same interpretation is implicit in the way that Psalm 110:1 was used by the earliest Christians in the scriptural writings. Justin argued that:

It must be admitted absolutely that some other one is called Lord by the Holy Spirit besides Him who is considered Maker of all things; not solely [for what is said] by Moses, but also [for what is said] by David. For there is written by him: *Ps. 110:1* ‘The Lord says to my Lord, Sit on My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool,’ as I have already quoted. And again, in other words: *Ps. 45:7-8* ‘Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever. A scepter of equity is the scepter of Thy kingdom: Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity: therefore God, even Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows.’ If, therefore, you assert that the Holy Spirit calls some other one God and Lord, besides the Father of all things and His Christ, answer me; for I undertake to prove to you from Scriptures themselves, that He whom the Scripture calls Lord is not one of the two angels that went to Sodom, but

³² Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (London: Penguin, 1993), 75.

³³ *Dialogue*, 56.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Dialogue*, 60.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.11; 62.2; 128.4; 129.1, 4.

He who was with them, and is called God, that appeared to Abraham.³⁷

What is important in this dialogue is that there is not hint of a concern that the belief that there was a distinct divine being who is called “God” and “Lord” in addition to the one God somehow compromised monotheism. Indeed, monotheism was not threatened precisely because the second God was viewed as subordinate to the one God. As Justin’s exegesis of the Old Testament shows, Christians sought out scriptures that referred to two divine beings to attest to the divinity of Jesus Christ alongside the one God, the Father. Although he believed that Christ was fully God and would return in glory to judge the living and the dead, Justin Martyr placed Jesus Christ in a lower position than God the Father. Two very clear and specific passages in his *First Apology* attest to this fact, the first stating that “they proclaim our madness to consist in this, that we give to a crucified man a place second to the unchangeable and eternal God, the Creator.” Prior to this, he explains that “we reasonably worship Him, having learned that He is the Son of the true God Himself, and holding Him in the second place, and the prophetic Spirit in the third.”³⁸ Justin presented the same hierarchy of divine beings reflected in the *Ascension of Isaiah*. However, he is also very clear that they are distinct in number, but they are one in will. Justin emphasizes that the Logos is truly distinct from God the Father and not merely a divine attribute of power belonging to or emanation from the Father.³⁹

³⁷ Ibid., 56.

³⁸ *I Apologia* 13.

³⁹ *Dialogue* 61-62; 128.