The Lord Appeared

Jesus as YHWH in the Old Testament

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Introduction

THE PRIMARY PURPOSE OF this book is to argue that the Bible supports divine Christology. The word "divine" is quite vague, so allow me to be precise in what I mean by this. I use "divine Christology" to refer to the idea that Jesus of Nazareth is an eternally existing person, distinct from the Father, who was actively involved in the creation of the world. This person was known as YHWH in the Old Testament and was recognized as such in the New Testament. In arguing this, I wish to take as my theological opponents all Unitarians. This includes Arians, Socinians, Muslims, and anyone else who would understand Jesus as a created being.

Before beginning this endeavor, several preliminary points should be made. First, this book takes the biblical texts and their authority as a starting point. There is no doubt an important discussion to be had about the Bible, its accuracy, its authority, and its transmission through history. However, that discussion is not the focus of this book. This book is written for those who already feel that they need to take the biblical texts seriously when doing their theology. The contention of this book is simply that the Bible, as we have it, supports divine Christology.

Second, although I am a Trinitarian, this book is not intended to be a defense of the Trinity. Throughout this work, I will say very little about the Holy Spirit. My silence regarding the Holy Spirit should not be interpreted as a lack of interest or perceived unimportance. Rather, I am simply choosing to focus on the person of Jesus. This is done for several reasons. First, Jesus is the main focus of most interfaith debates and controversies. Most conversations between Trinitarians, Muslims, Jews, Jehovah's Witnesses, etc., have Jesus as the

centerpiece. Second, I do not have an endless amount of time or patience, and neither does my reader. If I were to include discussions of the Holy Spirit in this work, I would either need to greatly inflate the length of this book, or I would need to compromise the quality of my arguments regarding Jesus. I am not willing to do either.

This book will proceed in the following manner. In chapter 1, I will look at the Old Testament and extract several data points about how YHWH is described and presented. The most important piece of data for our purposes is how the Old Testament undeniably presents YHWH as visible and embodied in several passages. In chapter 2, we will look at some ancient non-canonical Jewish writings to see how the material discussed in chapter 1 was interpreted in the time leading up to Jesus's life. When we do this, we will see that many pre-Christian Jews understood the visible appearances of YHWH in the Old Testament to be the appearance of a unique intermediary figure who was not entirely distinct from YHWH. In chapter 3, we will look at the New Testament and see how the language used to describe Jesus connects with the ideas discussed in chapters 1 and 2. In doing this, we will see that the New Testament authors depict Jesus as being the intermediary figure discussed in previous chapters. In chapter 4, we will see how the New Testament's depiction of Jesus was likely grounded in Jesus's own self-conception. This will be done by observing several instances in which Jesus did things that would invite the interpretation described in chapter 3. In chapter 5, I will propose a theological model through which we can understand Jesus's relationship to YHWH. After doing this, objections to my proposed model will be addressed. In chapter 6, I will dedicate significant space to addressing various biblical objections to divine Christology. In chapter 7, I will conclude by offering several suggestions for how proponents of divine Christology can utilize this work in their apologetic endeavors. All Bible verses come from the ESV translation unless otherwise noted.

Chapter One

Old Testament Data about YHWH

The goal of this chapter is to survey data from the Old Testament that will be relevant to my discussion of divine Christology. In this chapter, I seek to demonstrate the following seven data points:

1. The Old Testament contains the idea of a visible, embodied YHWH.
2. The visible, embodied YHWH of the Old Testament is sometimes associated with the coming of the "Word of the Lord."
3. The visible, embodied YHWH of the Old Testament is sometimes associated with a figure referred to as the "angel of the Lord," who is depicted both as being YHWH and as being distinct from YHWH in some sense.
4. The appearances of a visible, embodied YHWH in the Old Testament were not originally understood as being an external agent or messenger of YHWH.
5. The appearances of a visible, embodied YHWH in the Old Testament were likely understood as partial manifestations of YHWH.
6. The Old Testament contains the idea that the fullness of YHWH

cannot be seen, but does not deny that YHWH can be seen in any way whatsoever.

7. YHWH is unique amongst the heavenly beings in specific ways.

These seven data points will accompany us throughout the rest of this book and will be central to understanding the New Testament in its cultural context. With that in mind, let us carefully examine each point.

Data Point 1: The Old Testament Contains the Idea of a Visible, Embodied YHWH

If anything is clear from the Old Testament, it is that the ancient Israelites believed their God could be seen by humans. Despite common objections to the contrary (which will be addressed shortly), the Old Testament repeatedly depicts YHWH as being present and active on earth in a visible way. In Genesis 3:8, we are told that Adam and Eve "heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day." If we take this verse at face value, without forcing it to fit any of our preexisting theological frameworks, we get the idea that God was walking in the Garden of Eden in such a way that he could be heard by his recently fallen creatures. This implies some type of embodied presence, which is an idea that is found repeatedly throughout the Book of Genesis. Another example of this comes from Genesis 17:1–3, which says, "When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless ...'" The word for "appear" here indicates something seen. This becomes even more explicit in Genesis 18:1–5, in which we are told:

> The LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet

> them and bowed himself to the earth and said, "O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, while I bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant."

Notice that Abraham lifted his eyes, he looked, he saw. Genesis describes the men as standing. When Abraham saw them, he ran to meet them. All of this language is used right after we are told that YHWH appeared to Abraham.

As this story continues, food is prepared for Abraham's guests, and water is brought for them to wash their feet. After their meal, we are told that YHWH speaks with Abraham. When the guests begin to leave, Abraham accompanies them to set them on their way. Right after two of the visitors depart, we are told that "Abraham still stood before the LORD," and that "Abraham drew near." No intellectually honest person can walk away from this text without the clear impression that YHWH was at least one (if not more) of the persons whom Abraham saw, greeted, fed, and stood near.

An even more explicit example comes in Genesis 32:24–31, in which we are told of an encounter that Jacob has with a mysterious figure:

> And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the name

> of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered." The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip.

In this story, Jacob wrestles with a mysterious figure who tells him that he has "striven with God." Esther Hamori notes that this statement cannot be disconnected from Jacob's new name, Yisra-*El*.[1] This potentially connects Jacob's nighttime encounter with El, which is the name of the highest god in Canaanite religion.[2] This connection should not surprise anybody, as El and YHWH are often equated in the Hebrew Bible.[3] As Michael Hundley notes:

> The non-P Pentateuch does little to distinguish between El and Yahweh and offers no polemic against El. Instead, it merges El into Yahweh, such that Yahweh absorbs all El's titles and characteristics. The peaceful takeover is so thorough that the interpreter cannot be sure that they ever applied to anyone other than Yahweh.[4]

Shortly after this encounter, Jacob names the place he is at as Peni-*El*. This name, like Yisra-*El,* is accompanied by an explanation, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered."

Hamori notes:

> Both of these -El names and their respective explanations concern an encounter with God in person. The name Peniel and its explanation reflect the immediacy of God's presence; the name Israel and its explanation reflect God's concrete presence ... The explanations, in turn, cannot be separated from the encounter with God in the story. All of these elements are linked, and tell of a physical encounter with God.[5]

Appearances of a visible YHWH are not confined to the Book of Genesis. We are told in Numbers 12:5–8 that Moses is set apart among the prophets precisely because he has beheld the form of God. Consider the following passage:

> The LORD came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the entrance of the tent and called Aaron and Miriam, and they both came forward. And he said, "Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?"

Notice the statement that Moses "beholds the form of God." God is exalting Moses above other prophets by emphasizing how directly and immediately available He is to Moses. When Moses beheld the form of God, it is explicitly contrasted with being in a mere dream or vision. This statement also cannot be parsed as Moses beholding a mere messenger. The entire point of this statement is that God is directly and immediately present to Moses in a manner that surpasses that of other prophets and goes beyond a mere dream or vision. It wouldn't make sense to say that Moses was merely beholding a heavenly messenger or agent that represented God, because that directly contradicts the contrastive statement that God is articulating. It makes no sense for YHWH to talk about how his intimacy with Moses goes beyond that of a dream if God is merely dispatching an agent to speak with Moses. In some way, Moses sees the form of God. Not a mere messenger, not an anthropomorphic depiction in a dream, but God's actual form. This theme continues in Exodus 24:9–11, where we are told:

> Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank.

Several aspects of this verse deserve our attention. First, we are explicitly told "they saw the God of Israel," and in case the reader missed it, we are told again that "they beheld God." Second, notice that it says, "under his feet," which implies some type of embodied figure. Third, under those feet, they saw a "pavement of sapphire stone." This description is noteworthy as we turn our attention to Ezekiel 1:26–28, where it is stated that Ezekiel saw visions of God by the Chebar canal. After describing a heavenly scene with various creatures, Ezekiel says:

> And above the expanse over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness with a human appearance. And upward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were gleaming metal, like the appearance of fire enclosed all around. And downward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness around him. Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking.

Several aspects of this verse should catch our attention. First, notice that the "likeness of the glory of the Lord" is described as resembling a man, just as

we saw YHWH described in several of the passages we have already discussed. Second, notice the mention of a throne which had the appearance of sapphire; this is similar to the vision of God described in Exodus.

Throughout the Book of Ezekiel, the person to whom Ezekiel speaks is repeatedly referred to as the glory of the Lord. Ezekiel 3:23 says, "So I arose and went out into the valley, and behold, the glory of the LORD stood there, like the glory that I had seen by the Chebar canal, and I fell on my face." See also 11:23: "And the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain that is on the east side of the city." The crucial thing here is that the glory of the Lord is the person whom Ezekiel sees and who is described as looking like a man.

Data Point 2: The Visible, Embodied YHWH and the Coming of the Word of the Lord

When we see the phrase "the Word of the Lord" in our Bibles, many of us likely pass over this phrase without much notice. We might think it is merely a speech act comparable to "the king sends word." While there are certainly instances where this phrase is used in such a manner, this phrase is also used in the Old Testament in connection with the visible, embodied presence of YHWH. To see this, let us turn to Genesis 15, in which we are told that "the Word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision." Notice that it says the Word came in a *vision*. A vision is something that is seen. This is not merely a voice from the clouds. Other passages are even more explicit. In 1 Samuel 3, we are told: "The word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision." Again, the coming of the Word is associated with something visible. Of more significance is what comes after this statement. What follows is a story many of us likely recall from Sunday School.

YHWH calls to Samuel, but Samuel mistakes the voice for that of Eli. As a result, Samuel runs to Eli to ask him what he wants. Eli tells Samuel that he didn't call and to go back to bed. This happens a few times before Eli realizes what is happening. Eli then tells Samuel that the next time he hears the voice,

to say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears." Samuel goes back to bed, and we are told: "The LORD came and stood, calling as at other times." Notice that the Lord is described as standing, which is something that indicates embodied presence. It also says that the Lord was standing nearby when he called in the other instances. If the Lord is standing in the room with Samuel and speaking to him in an embodied form, then it makes sense why Samuel would think it was Eli calling to him. Samuel's mistake makes no sense if God is manifesting himself with some type of magnificent inner voice. Rather, this story makes sense if one understands that when the Word of the Lord comes to Samuel, it is through an embodied presence of YHWH. Of additional interest is that the chapter concludes by saying, "And the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD." The Word of the Lord is the means through which YHWH appears to people and reveals Himself.

Similar to the previous passage in Samuel, we are told in Jeremiah 1:1–9 that the Word of the Lord came to Jeremiah. We are then told that "the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth." Where did this hand come from? When did YHWH enter this scene? It comes from the Word of the Lord, which we were previously told came to Jeremiah. Just as the Word of the Lord can stand by Samuel, it can reach out its hand and touch Jeremiah. What is of importance in this verse is that unless one recognizes a connection between the Word of the Lord and an embodied presence of YHWH, YHWH is never mentioned as coming to Jeremiah before he is described as reaching out and touching him with his hand. We thus have several passages in the Old Testament which connect the appearance of a visible, embodied YHWH with the concept of YHWH's word. This is important to note, as this concept will get picked up and utilized by later Jewish writings.

Data Point 3: The Visible, Embodied YHWH and the Angel of the Lord

Just as YHWH's embodied visible presence is sometimes associated with the "Word of the Lord," it is also associated with a figure known as the "angel of the Lord." To illustrate this, we will begin by examining Exodus 3:1–2. I suspect most of my readers are familiar with the story of Moses and the burning bush; however, some elements of this story are often overlooked. Starting in Exodus 3:1–2, we read:

> Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed.

At this point in the story, we are told that the angel of the Lord has appeared to Moses in the burning bush. However, if we keep reading, we are told in verses 3–4:

> Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."

In these verses, it is YHWH who notices Moses, and it is God who calls to Moses from within the bush. Weren't we just told that the angel of the Lord was in the bush? Which one is it? It is starting to seem like this is an exceptionally crowded bush. If we keep reading through verses 5–6, we see the angel of the Lord tell Moses:

> "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Several key points are worth noting in this section. First, Moses is commanded to take off his sandals because he is standing on holy ground. Second, the figure in the bush speaks in the first person and claims to be the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Third, after the figure says this, we are told that Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God. After these verses, Moses is commissioned to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. When doing this, the figure in the bush tells Moses in verses 16–17:

> Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, "The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, 'I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt, and I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.'"

Notice in this verse that Moses is commanded to say to the people that it was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who appeared to him. Yet, we know from verse 2 that it was the angel of the Lord who appeared to Moses in the bush.

In light of the verses we have just read, we can draw several conclusions. First, we can conclude that the figure in the bush is YHWH. This is clear from several facts. First, the figure speaks in the first person, saying, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." The figure states this without any introduction or indication that he is speaking on

behalf of another. Second, the figure explicitly tells Moses to tell the elders of Israel that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has appeared to him. Third, we are told that God calls to Moses from the bush in verse 3. This explicitly situates God within the bush and as the speaker. Fourth, throughout the dialogue in Exodus 3, we are told that it is God who speaks to Moses, and Moses who speaks to God. Fifth, Moses believed that God was in the bush, as Moses was scared to look at God lest he should die. We can thus conclude with confidence that YHWH, the God of Israel, appeared and spoke to Moses in the bush.

Yet what about the angel of the Lord? We are told that he is present in the bush, yet nothing else is mentioned of him after the opening verses. Are there two people in the bush? Why would there need to be an angel present if God was going to be the one who did all the talking? Why does the text mention the angel only to immediately refer to the person in the bush as God? The answer to all of these questions is that the angel of the Lord mentioned in verse 2 is the God of Israel who speaks to Moses. The angel of the Lord identifies himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and this identification is maintained by the author of Exodus in the telling of the story.[6]

If this were the only instance in scripture in which this occurred, we might feel justified in disregarding it as a rare oddity. However, Exodus 3 is not the only section of scripture in which the angel of the Lord makes a mysterious appearance, and it's not the only passage where the lines between him and YHWH are blurred. In Genesis 28:12–15, we are told regarding Jacob:

> And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families

> of the earth be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

After having this dream, we are told in verses 18–22 that after Jacob awoke, he

> took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called the name of that place Bethel, but the name of the city was Luz at the first. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house. And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you."

The important aspect of this story is that Jacob met YHWH at Bethel and made a vow to Him there. With that in mind, consider the dream that Jacob describes in Genesis 31:10–13:

> In the breeding season of the flock I lifted up my eyes and saw in a dream that the goats that mated with the flock were striped, spotted, and mottled. Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, "Jacob," and I said, "Here I am!" And he said, "Lift up your eyes and see, all the goats that mate with the flock are striped, spotted, and mottled, for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you. I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and made a vow to me. Now arise, go out from this land and return to the land of your kindred."

Several things are of importance in this story. First, we are told that it is an angel who is speaking. Second, the angel speaks in the first person and says "I am the God of Bethel" and that "you anointed a pillar and made a vow to me." We know that the God of Bethel is YHWH, the God of Abraham and Isaac. It was to YHWH that Jacob made a vow at Bethel. When the angel claims to be the God of Bethel, the angel is claiming to be YHWH.

Earlier, we discussed how Jacob wrestled with God before receiving his new name. Is there any reason to connect that late-night encounter with this angel? According to Hosea, yes. When describing Jacob's midnight rumble, Hosea 12:3–4 says:

> In the womb he took his brother by the heel, and in his manhood he strove with God. He strove with the angel and prevailed; he wept and sought his favor. He met God at Bethel, and there God spoke with us—the LORD, the God of hosts, the LORD is his memorial name.

The Genesis story explicitly tells us that Jacob strove with God, which means we can understand the statement in Hosea about Jacob striving with God as a reference to the Genesis event. Yet, immediately after referencing this event, Hosea elaborates that Jacob wrestled with the angel and prevailed. Additionally, it asserts that Jacob met God at Bethel. If there is any doubt about who "God" is referencing here, it is removed by the statement that "The LORD, the God of hosts, the LORD is his memorial name." This statement conflates the angel and God, treating them as one person. What is perhaps most significant is that Jacob himself conflates the angel with God in this way. While on his deathbed in Genesis 48:15–16, Jacob prays for his children and says, "The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the boys." Jacob begins by calling on God, but he then switches and calls upon "the angel." One may be tempted to object that Jacob is asking two

separate entities to bless the boys. However, as Hebrew scholar Michael Heiser notes, the grammar of this passage rules out this possibility:

> In Hebrew, the verb "bless" in this passage is not grammatically plural, which would indicate two different persons are being asked to bless the boys. Rather, it is singular, thereby telegraphing a tight fusion of the two divine beings on the part of the author. In other words, the writer had a clear opportunity to distinguish the God of Israel from the angel, but instead merges their identities.[7]

So far, we have seen what the angel of the Lord has to say about himself and what others have to say about him. In both cases, we have seen data that blur the identity of this angel with the God of Israel.

Of even more significance is what God has to say about this angel. While speaking to Moses in Exodus 23:20–22, God references the angel of the Lord, saying:

> Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression, for my name is in him. But if you carefully obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.

Several aspects of this verse are worth highlighting. First, God is speaking about this angel as a distinct person from himself. Second, God says, "My name is in him." This concept of the name being in the angel might strike us as odd, but this phrase can begin to explain the data we have seen so far. In the Old Testament, God's name is not merely a collection of letters, nor is it necessarily

just a way of referencing God's authority. In the Old Testament, the name is a way of referring to God's own being, presence, or essence. To refer to the name is to refer to YHWH. Let us examine a few Old Testament passages that might illustrate this contention. Consider Isaiah 30:27–28:

> Behold, the name of the LORD comes from afar, burning with his anger, and in thick rising smoke; his lips are full of fury, and his tongue is like a devouring fire; his breath is like an overflowing stream that reaches up to the neck; to sift the nations with the sieve of destruction, and to place on the jaws of the peoples a bridle that leads astray.

This passage explicitly depicts the name of YHWH as a person coming in fury and bringing destruction. The name is also associated with protection in Psalm 20:1–7, where it is said, "May the name of the God of Jacob protect you!" When talking about where to make sacrifices, we see God say in Deuteronomy 12:4–5, "But you shall seek the place that the LORD your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there." Here we see the idea that where YHWH's name is, YHWH dwells. In 2 Samuel 6:1–2, we are told:

> David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. And David arose and went with all the people who were with him from Baale-judah to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the LORD of hosts.

Why is the Ark called the name? As Heiser notes, "That the ark could be called the name is understandable, since the ark was a place-holder for the very presence of Yhwh, who is the name."[8] Finally, consider Solomon's prayer at the inauguration of the temple in 1 Kings 8:27–29:

> But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built! Yet have regard to the prayer of your servant and to his plea, O Lord my God, listening to the cry and to the prayer that your servant prays before you this day, that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you have said, "My name shall be there," that you may listen to the prayer that your servant offers toward this place.

Where does Solomon get the idea that God will dwell on earth? Why does he even entertain the idea that the temple will contain YHWH? Because, as Solomon mentions in the prayer, God explicitly told Solomon that he would cause his name to dwell in the temple. Solomon understood what that meant.

With this understanding of name theology established, let us return to Exodus 23. We can agree with Darrel Hannah that "to say that God's Name dwells in this angel affirms the divine presence in a unique way."[9] We know that the angel who brought the people out of Egypt is the angel of the Lord, because we are told as much in several passages. In Judges 2:1, the angel of the Lord says, "I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers." However, we are told in multiple instances that it was God who brought the Israelites out of the land of Egypt (such as Exodus 13:8,18).

One might be tempted to suggest that this simply means God led the people out of the land of Egypt through the means of his angel. Just as a military leader might say he conquered an enemy because of what he ordered his troops to do, God can say he rescued the Israelites because of what he ordered the angel to do. However, this response won't work in this scenario. In Deuteronomy 4:37, we are told that YHWH brought the people out of Egypt "with his own presence, by his great power." YHWH does not bring the people out of Israel from a distance or by means of some heavenly soldier; he does so with his own presence. This idea is made explicit in a statement in Exodus 13:21–22, which says:

> And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.

The idea of YHWH residing in the pillar is repeated throughout the Book of Exodus. Consider Exodus 33:9–11, when Moses meets with God in the Tent of Meeting:

> When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the Lord would speak with Moses. And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship, each at his tent door. Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.

This language of YHWH being within a pillar of cloud is not confined to Exodus; we see also in Numbers 12:5, "And the Lord came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the entrance of the tent and called Aaron and Miriam, and they both came forward." Similarly, Numbers 14:14 says, "They will tell the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that you, O LORD, are in the midst of this people. For you, O LORD, are seen face to face, and your cloud stands over them and you go before them, in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night."

Other examples could be produced, but I will conclude this point by summarizing that God's presence with his people is often associated with a great pillar of cloud. Where the pillar is, that's where YHWH's presence is. With this in mind, consider the following passage in Exodus 14:19–20:

> Then the angel of God who was going before the host of Israel moved and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them, coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel. And there was the cloud and the darkness. And it lit up the night without one coming near the other all night.

This passage is highly significant because the movement of the angel is correlated with the movement of the pillar. When the angel moves to go behind the people, that's where the pillar goes. Why is there this association? Because the pillar of cloud is where the presence of YHWH is, and we know that the presence of YHWH is in the angel. We thus have in the angel of the Lord a person who can be described as YHWH's messenger, and who YHWH can talk about in the third person, yet who at the same time contains the very presence of YHWH, manifests YHWH's presence, and who can even be called YHWH. It is important not to overlook the fact that this figure is heard, seen, and sometimes touched by participants in the story, just as YHWH was heard, seen, and touched in the passages presented in our first data point.

It is also worth noting that we have good reason to believe this is one specific angel, rather than many different angels. In Exodus 23:21, God says his name is in the angel that will go with the people, which, as we have discussed, indicates the very presence of YHWH. It is because of the name residing in the angel that his movements are associated with the movements of the pillar of fire, and it is because of this that God is said to bring the people out of Egypt with his presence. This presence residing in the angel would make sense of why Jacob can exclaim that he has seen God, why Peniel and Bethel are renamed as such, why Jacob is renamed as Israel, why Moses is afraid to look at the bush, why the God of Abraham is said to appear to Moses, and why Moses is told he is standing on holy ground at the burning bush. Additionally, the angel that appears to Moses claims in the first person to be the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This provides us with grounds for connecting this speaker with the person who appeared to Jacob and claimed something similar. In Judges 2:1, the angel who

speaks to the people claims to be the one who led them out of Egypt, connecting him with the previously mentioned events.

Finally, I will note that the Bible makes it explicitly clear that there is one specific figure who is over the host of heaven, and this unique figure is thematically linked with the angel of the Lord. In Joshua 5:13–15, we are told:

> When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?" And he said, "No; but I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Now I have come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, "What does my lord say to his servant?" And the commander of the Lord's army said to Joshua, "Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy."

Several aspects of this figure are of particular interest. First, he tells Joshua to take off his sandals because he is on holy ground, which is what the angel of the Lord instructed Moses to do from the burning bush. Second, this figure is described as having a drawn sword in his hand, and as Michael Heiser notes, "The Hebrew phrase here occurs only two other times: Numbers 22:23 and 1 Chronicles 21:16. Both explicitly name the Angel of Yahweh as the one with 'drawn sword' in hand."[10] Of even more significance is that this figure identifies himself as the commander of the Lord's army. The Hebrew for this phrase is similar to what we see in Daniel 8:11 for the "Prince of the Host." We thus have reasonable grounds for connecting these two figures. This is significant, as several notable scholars have connected the Prince of the Host in Daniel 8 with the God of Israel. As Louis F. Hartman and Alexander A. Di Lella notes, "The 'Prince of the host' (8:11) is the true God of the Jews, who rules over the heavenly bodies as his creatures; he is 'the Prince of princes' (vs. 25) and 'the God of gods' (2:47)."[11] Similarly, John and Adela Collins remark, "In view of

the mention of the daily offering and 'his sanctuary,' there can be no doubt that the reference is to God."[12]

The figure in Joshua 5 is thus linked with both the angel of the Lord and the Prince of the Host. We have solid grounds for thinking that both the angel of the Lord and the Prince of the Host are none other than the God of Israel. With this in mind, we can confidently conclude that the God of Israel, the angel of the Lord, and the Prince of the Host all overlap.

Data Point 4: Not a Mere Messenger, Not an Agent

So far in this chapter, I have demonstrated that the Old Testament contains the idea of a visible, embodied YHWH figure, and that the presence of an embodied YHWH figure is often associated with language about the Word of the Lord or the angel of the Lord. We must now ask how these appearances would have been understood in the ancient Near Eastern context. How would Moses have understood the appearance he saw in the bush? How would Abraham have understood the appearance of YHWH at the oaks of Mamre? How would Jacob have understood his late-night encounter?

First, we can begin by noting that it is highly implausible that these appearances would have been understood as the appearance of a mere agent or messenger. To illustrate this, consider again the instance of Moses and the burning bush. Moses is going about his business, when all of a sudden he comes across a miraculous sight in a bush. As he approaches the bush, he sees a figure in the bush that tells him to take off his sandals because the ground is holy. The figure in front of Moses then says, "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Shortly after saying this, the figure instructs Moses to inform others that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had appeared to him.

When Moses walks away from this encounter, why in the world would he conclude anything other than that he just saw the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? The figure explicitly identified himself as such, and his appearance was clearly that of a divine being. What data would Moses have from this story to

conclude that he didn't actually see YHWH? Based on the biblical description of this event, why would Moses ever infer that the person in front of him was speaking on behalf of another? The answer is that Moses has absolutely no reason to walk away from his experience thinking anything other than that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had appeared to him. Nor did Jacob, Abraham, or any other figure to whom the Lord appeared.

The absence of any data to indicate that this is an agent is especially damning in light of ancient Near Eastern messenger customs. As Hundley notes:

> Elsewhere in the ancient Near East, in both the human and divine spheres, and also in the Hebrew Bible in the human sphere, messengers speak their message on behalf of, rather than as, the sender. In the Bible, for example, human messengers or prophets often introduce their messages with 'thus says YHWH' ... In Gen. 32:4, Jacob sends messengers to Esau, prefaced with the messenger formula: 'thus you shall say to my lord Esau: "Thus says your servant Jacob."' Such formulations were standard throughout the ancient Near Eastern world. By contrast, with the exception of Gen. 22:15, the divine messenger uses no messenger formula in Genesis and Exodus. Instead, he speaks in the first person as if he is YHWH. The text occasionally even appears to set YHWH and his messenger in apposition, such that the two are seemingly equated (Exod. 3:2–3).[13]

Meier's remarks in the *Dictionary of Deities and Demons* are similar and worth quoting at length:

> It is frequently asserted that messengers, when delivering their messages, often did not distinguish between themselves, and the one who sent them. It is true that messengers do speak in

the first person as if they were the sender of the message, but it is crucial to note that such speech, in unequivocal messenger contexts, is always preceded by a prefatory comment along the lines of "PN [the sender] said to you" after which the message is provided; thus, a messenger always clearly identifies the words of the one who sent the message. A messenger would subvert the communication process were he or she to fail to identify the one who sent the messenger on his or her mission. In texts that are sufficiently well preserved, there is never a question as to who is speaking, whether it be the messenger or the one who sent the messenger (Meier 1992). There is therefore no evidence for the frequently made assertion that messengers need not make any distinction between themselves and the ones who sent them. In its extreme form, this argument will even claim that messengers could be called by the names of the ones who sent them (cf. David b. Kimchi on Zech 3:2). The only contexts in biblical and ancient Near Eastern literature where no distinction seems to be made between sender and messenger occur in the case of the "angel" (literally "messenger") of Yahweh" (*mal'ak* YHWH). It is precisely the lack of differentiation that occurs with this figure, and this figure alone among messengers, that raises the question as to whether this is even a messenger of God at all. Some see it as originally Yahweh himself, modified through the insertion of the word *mal'ak* into the text in order to distance God from interacting with humans (possible motivations including a reticence to associate God with certain activities, or a developing tendency toward God's transcendence). It must be underscored that the angel of YHWH in these perplexing biblical narratives does not behave like any other messenger known in the divine or human realm. Although the term "messenger" is present, the narrative itself omits the indispensable features of messenger activity and

> presents instead the activities which one associates with Yahweh or the other gods of the ancient Near East. "We can, omitting the word *mal'āḵ*, find in the J and E messenger stories exactly the same motifs and the same literary patterns as are common in all ancient Near Eastern literature pertaining to the gods themselves, not their messengers (Irvin 1978:103)."[14]

In light of these data, we can confidently conclude that Moses would not have walked away from his encounter at the bush thinking he had seen anything other than the deity that claimed to be before him. If Moses walked away from this encounter with the belief that he just saw YHWH, that is what he would have told the Israelites. The story that would have circulated in the ancient Israelite community, based on Moses's testimony, would have been that YHWH appeared. That means when a scribe (or Moses) sat down to write the text of Exodus 3, they would not have intended the reader to conclude that anybody other than YHWH appeared to Moses.

One might try and object to the above remarks by claiming that there are instances in which Moses speaks on behalf of God in the first person without explicitly stating that he is delivering a message from YHWH (such as Deuteronomy 29:6). However, this objection would fail, as these were instances in which Moses was already established and known in his community as the messenger and mouthpiece for YHWH. In these instances, there was no danger that those hearing Moses's message might think that Moses was claiming to be YHWH himself. In contrast, many of the appearances of the angel of the Lord we have discussed were moments of first contact between the angel and the person in question. For the angel not to identify himself and distinguish himself from his sender in these moments borders on identity fraud.

I will also note that one need not even appeal to the above issues to illustrate the failure of the mere messenger interpretation. If the angel is merely a messenger speaking in the first person on behalf of God, it makes no sense for the angel to tell Moses that the God of Abraham appeared to him. According to the mere messenger theory, the God of Abraham did no such thing. Similarly,

why on earth would Jacob be exclaiming that he saw God face to face after their wrestling match if all he saw was a mere messenger? It would likewise make no sense for Hosea to say that Jacob strove with God when he merely fought an errand boy. If Mike Tyson sends a messenger to deliver a message to me, and I beat up that messenger, it would be insane for me to go around bragging that I fought Mike Tyson and won. Yet, in a desperate attempt to deny the obvious, many claim this is perfectly reasonable when assessing biblical data. I will conclude our discussion of this data point by emphasizing that any interpretation of these theophanies that inserts some external agent or messenger in the place of YHWH is an interpretation that is ultimately motivated by a theological agenda and is not grounded in a faithful reading of the text itself.

Data Point 5: A Partial Manifestation of YHWH

In contrast to the messenger/agent interpretation, there is strong evidence that these appearances would have been interpreted as partial manifestations of YHWH. That is to say that Moses, Abraham, Jacob, and the audiences to whom these stories were written would have believed that YHWH actually appeared to these people, but they would not believe that all of YHWH appeared to them.

I think it is rather obvious from the outset that Moses would not have walked away from the burning bush thinking that he had just seen all of YHWH. The plausibility of this is strengthened by observing how people in the ancient Near East thought about the divine presence. Jewish scholar Benjamen Sommer has surveyed ancient literature from areas such as Canaan, Egypt, Israel, and Mesopotamia, and concluded that we find in the ancient Near East "a peculiar understanding of divine selfhood, according to which a deity can produce many small-scale manifestations that enjoy some degree of independence without becoming separate deities."[15] Sommer refers to this understanding as a fluidity model, in which "gods could have multiple bodies and fluid selves."[16] Sommer states that "somehow, it was possible for various local and even heavenly manifestations of a single god to be effectively identical

with each other and also distinct from each other."[17] This is a type of fluidity that Sommer calls fragmentation, in which "divinities have a fluid self in the sense that there are several divinities with a single name who somehow are and are not the same deity."[18] Sommer also notes a type of fluidity which he refers to as overlap. Sommers describes overlap by saying, "Several Akkadian texts describe one god as an aspect of another god, and others refer to two gods as a single god even though the same texts also refer to each of these gods individually."[19]

Sommer argues that this type of fluidity is present in the Hebrew Bible and that the angel of the Lord is one of the strongest instances of it, stating that "the text seems self-contradictory only if one insists that an angel is a being separate from Yhwh. On the other hand, if one can understand an angel as a small-scale manifestation of God or even as a being with whom Yhwh's self overlaps, the text coheres perfectly well."[20] When YHWH says that the angel has his name in him, Sommer argues that YHWH is here indicating that "the angel carries something of Yhwh's own essence or self; it is not an entirely separate entity. But it clearly is not fully identical with Yhwh, either."[21] Sommer likewise states that "the malakh in these cases is not a being separate from Yhwh whom Yhwh sent on a mission; rather, it is a part of the deity that can act on its own."[22]

Sommer uses the concepts of divine fluidity and partial manifestation not only to understand the angel of the Lord, but also to understand the other (more explicit) bodily manifestations of YHWH. Consider, for instance, the appearance of YHWH to Abraham at the oaks of Mamre in Genesis 18. Regarding this appearance, Sommer states:

> It is clear that Yhwh appears in bodily form to Abraham in this passage; what is less clear is whether all three bodies were Yhwh's throughout, or whether all three were Yhwh's at the outset of the chapter but only one of them by its end, or whether the other two were merely servants (perhaps human, perhaps divine) who, for no clear reason, were accompanying Yhwh. In any event, the being who certainly was Yhwh was less than

> the deity's full manifestation. The visitor was not recognizable as God to Abraham at the outset, and he (He?) acts with a humility unbecoming a deity as h/He stands waiting before Abraham (at least according to what even traditionalist scholars regard as the original text of verse 22). Further, even though the visitor is clearly identified as Yhwh by the middle of the chapter and refers to God in the first person while speaking, h/He announces h/His intention to "come down" from heaven to observe Sodom and Gomorrah in verse 21—even though H/he is already down on earth at this point. This visitor clearly is and is not identical with Yhwh; more precisely, He is Yhwh, but is not all of Yhwh or the only manifestation of Yhwh; rather, He is an avatar, a "descent" of the heavenly God who does not encompass all of that God's substance. Either a localized and perhaps temporary manifestation of the deity (that is, the result of a fragmentation of the divine self) speaks with Abraham, or the deity partially overlaps with one or several messengers.[23]

This understanding of divine fluidity is not unique to Sommer; Hundley makes similar remarks when discussing divine presence in ancient Near Eastern temples and images. Hundley notes:

> While, on a local level, the statue could be the only access point and thus simply equated with the deity, understanding a deity and its multiple manifestations on a regional level raised additional issues. In some cases, multiple manifestations could be considered part of a single divine entity, while in other instances, each manifestation seems to have been treated as a (semi-) independent, self-propelled entity ... Rather than possessing a fixed amount of presence or power that had to be divided between manifestations (as the previous paragraph may suggest), ancient Near Eastern deities appear to have

> been divisible without diminishment, such that each could theoretically possess the full complement of divine powers. In Egypt, for example, it would seem that the divine ba and ka as immaterial substances could be divided or multiplied infinitely without losing any potency, such that the deity in heaven and in the cult image could each possess the full complement of divine potencies. Nonetheless, while each could be fully divine, each was not the fullness of the deity. Rather, the cult image was but one of a deity's many manifestations or aspects. Divine plenitude instead lay in the aggregate, the accumulation of a deity's multiple manifestations, names, and potencies. For example, Ishtar was not simply Ishtar as manifest in Nineveh; she was all of the manifestations of Ishtar throughout Mesopotamia and Anatolia, including the Ishtar described in mythology who dwelt in heaven, the planet Venus, the number 15, the semi-precious stone lapis lazuli, the mineral lead, and the embodiment of such qualities as love and war (Porter 2000b: 244).[24]

To summarize, based on data from the ancient Near East, the most likely way these appearances of YHWH would have been understood in their cultural context is as a partial manifestation of YHWH. These would not have been understood as a separate messenger or agent distinct from YHWH, but they also would not have been understood as being the entirety of the fullness of YHWH. Moses elsewhere says things which indicate that he knew there was more to YHWH than what he had previously seen (see data point 7).

My readers may have already recognized the implications that these data will have for Christological controversies. Sommer also recognizes such implications, stating:

> Some Jews regard Christianity's claim to be a monotheistic religion with grave suspicion, both because of the doctrine

> of the trinity (how can three equal one?) and because of Christianity's core belief that God took bodily form. What I have attempted to point out here is that biblical Israel knew very similar doctrines, and these doctrines did not disappear from Judaism after the biblical period. To be sure, Jews must repudiate many beliefs central to most forms of Christianity ... No Jew sensitive to Judaism's own classical sources, however, can fault the theological model Christianity employs when it avows belief in a God who has an earthly body as well as a Holy Spirit and a heavenly manifestation, for that model, we have seen, is a perfectly Jewish one. A religion whose scripture contains the fluidity traditions, whose teachings emphasize the multiplicity of the shekhinah, and whose thinkers speak of the sephirot does not differ in its theological essentials from a religion that adores the triune God. Note that the Christian beliefs that Judaism rejects are not specifically theological in nature.[25]

Sommer even goes so far as to say that "A Jewish understanding of God that does not reflect the fluidity tradition is a defective one."[26]

Objections to the Angel of the Lord

Before moving on to our next data point, I wish to briefly address a few lingering objections that a reader might have to the previously discussed material. Regarding the angel of the Lord, many have objected that this figure can't be YHWH because the text clearly refers to the person as an *angel*. YHWH is not an angel; thus, the case is closed. However, this objection fails to understand the meaning of the Hebrew word which is translated as "angel." The Hebrew word translated to "angel" is *mal'āk*, which means "messenger." This word is a description of a person's function, not a statement about the type of being they are. This term was used in the Old Testament to refer to both human messengers

and heavenly messengers. When the Hebrew text was translated into Greek, the corresponding Greek word *angelos* was used. This word also meant messenger, but over time, it came to be a catch-all term for referring to God's heavenly host. As Meier notes:

> It is only in later texts in the Old Testament, and everywhere in Apocryphal and NT texts, that the words *mal'āḵ*, and *angelos* become generic terms for any of God's supernatural assistants, whether they functioned as messengers or not. When English borrowed the term "angel" from Greek, it was not in its earlier sense 'messenger' but in its later significance of any supernatural being under God's authority.[27]

Hebrew scholar Michael Heiser argues likewise:

> The functional word "angel" (angelos) is by far the principal New Testament moniker for celestial beings in service to God. The label—effectively a job description ("messenger")—communicates assistance from heaven. Only 4 of the 175 occurrences of angelos point to fallen divine beings. For New Testament authors, angelos is a catchall term for the supernatural agents who faithfully attend God. The varied vocabulary of the Old Testament and Second Jewish literature is therefore largely conflated into angelos.[28]

For objectors to appeal to the label "angel" is for them to anachronistically import later use of these words into a time where this meaning had not yet arisen.

Some might object that it makes no sense for YHWH to be his own messenger. However, this objection assumes that the God of Israel is only one person. However, if the God of Israel is multiple persons, each of whom can

rightfully be called YHWH, and one of those persons sends another to deliver a message, then the person sent is both a messenger of YHWH and is themselves YHWH. There is no reason that one of the partial manifestations of YHWH could not be called a messenger based on its function. In referring to this partial manifestation as a messenger, one is not denying that the manifestation is the deity in question.

The final objection worth considering is the idea that the term "angel" is not original to the text. Many scholars recognize that the angel of the Lord is depicted as being YHWH, but they understand this depiction by positing that the texts in question were originally explicitly about YHWH, and only later was the "angel" added to preserve the idea of YHWH's transcendence and inaccessibility. A representative of the interpolation theory can be found in the work of Daniel McClellan. McClellan argues in favor of an interpolation for several reasons. First, McClellan notes that the angel of the Lord does not fit the typical ancient Near Eastern profile of a messenger but instead fits the profile of a deity.[29] He argues that in numerous passages, the person who witnesses the angel is concerned about their imminent death, and he correctly notes that death is a threat for seeing YHWH in the Old Testament.[30] In contrast, McClellan notes that no such threat is ever communicated regarding his messenger. As a result, McClellan reasons that the expression of fear is evidence that the story was originally about individuals witnessing the deity, and the angel was inserted later as a means of protecting the notion that the deity can't be seen.

I will begin by noting that I agree with McClellan that the stories in question were originally appearances of YHWH and were understood as such. However, rather than viewing the angel language as a later addition that subverted the intentions of the original author, I view the angel language as one of several labels that ancient Israelites could use to refer to YHWH's visible manifestation. The distinction between McClellan's position and my own is thus whether the language of the angel is original or a later interpolation. I find McClellan's argument in favor of an interpolation as described above to be flawed, for several reasons. First, the fear of the individuals is understandable if the individuals

in the story understood the messenger to be a partial manifestation of the deity. They can reasonably be afraid because they have witnessed the angel of YHWH, who they know holds the very presence of YHWH. If the individual is aware of the connection between death and seeing YHWH (which McClellan seems to assume), then their response would make sense without positing an interpolation.

McClellan would likely press his argument by noting that "it entirely undermines the function of a divine messenger for direct communication to be deadly."[31] This is true, but it's evident from the text that direct communication with the messenger wasn't actually deadly. The fear of death is articulated but never realized in these instances. These expressions of fear would only support McClellan's argument if the text indicated that the individuals simultaneously believed that the angel was a mere messenger while also believing that contact with a mere messenger was deadly. However, if the individuals understood the messenger to be YHWH, and they understood that seeing YHWH was associated with death, then it is no surprise that we see them expressing fear when they realize they have seen the messenger.

On this topic, Sommer notes, "The expression of God's presence known as the mal'akh is accessible precisely because it does not encompass God's entirety."[32] In response to Sommer, McClellan retorts:

> We cannot reason that in all instances the individuals simply mistakenly thought they were looking at the deity's entirety, since the omniscient narrator states in Judg 13:21 that Manoah, "realized [yd'] it was the messenger of YHWH [mal'ak YHWH]," and immediately afterwards in verse 22 has Manoah express fear of death for seeing ʿĕlōhîm.[33]

However, we don't need to assume that each individual thought they were seeing the fullness of the deity to make sense of the passage. If they thought they had seen the deity in some way, and they knew that seeing the deity was associated with death, it is not terribly surprising that they would express fear.

In fact, it seems to me that McClellan has not thought through the implications of his argument, for his objection on this point would cut against his own position. To see this, suppose we grant that McClellan is correct and that the story of Manoah meeting the angel of the Lord was originally explicitly about Manoah meeting YHWH. Does McClellan think that at that moment, Manoah would have believed he was seeing the fullness of the deity? Surely not, for the very fact that it took Manoah time to realize he had seen the deity is evidence that the deity had concealed aspects of itself, which Manoah would surely have realized. Yet, if Manoah didn't believe that he saw the fullness of the deity, according to McClellan, we shouldn't expect him to express fear! If the individuals have to mistakenly assume that they are seeing the fullness of the deity for their fear to be justified, then McClellan's explanation is no better than how the text stands at present. In both McClellan's reading and the actual reading, the person in question expresses fear even though they knew they didn't see the fullness of the deity. This means that fear of death was present even if the deity was seen only in some partial sense. If the angel of the Lord is a small-scale manifestation of YHWH, as Sommer suggests, that seems to fit the bill. Thus, McClellan's argument on this point falls short.

McClellan also argues for an interpolation from the presence of discrepancies in ancient translations. Consider the following:

> A famous example is YHWH's confrontation with Moses in Exod 4:24, which in the Hebrew reads, "And when YHWH met him [wayyipgəšēhû YHWH], he sought to kill him." In the Septuagint, however, the passage differs slightly: "a messenger of the Lord met him [syntēntēsen auto angelos kyriou] and sought to kill him." The messenger was interpolated, either by the translator or by a scribe responsible for their source text, to obscure the deity's physical interaction with Moses, and likely also their attempted murder.[34]

McClellan assumes that the reason for this difference is some type of theological tampering on the part of the scribe/translators. However, we should not be so quick to make such assumptions. McClellan seems to forget that interpretation is a central part of the translational process. The goal of the translator is to render the message of the text into the new language, and sometimes translators must make interpretive decisions in order to adequately convey the message in a new language. Differences between translations can be explained through this interpretative process. If one doubts this, one need only look at modern English translations of the Bible as an example. Modern English translations will often differ on how to translate a passage, and this difference may exist for a variety of reasons. It may be that the translators differ on the proper interpretation of the passage, or it may be that the translators have different translational philosophies. It would be outlandish and improper to accuse every difference in an English translation as arising because of some theological agenda on the part of the translator. Moreover, it would be downright silly to point to differences in an English translation and use those differences as grounds for cutting out sections from the original text.

Just as the interpretative framework of English translators can affect how they translate a passage, the interpretative framework of ancient translators can affect how they translate a passage. If the translator of the Septuagint lived in a theological community in which all appearances of YHWH to humans were understood to be through a mediator (a topic we will discuss shortly), it is not surprising that we would find the translators incorporating that framework into their translation. If the angel of the Lord passages are original to the text, and he was the mediator through whom the translator's community believed God worked, that would explain why the translator of the Septuagint felt comfortable mentioning the angel in a text where he was not otherwise mentioned. The originality of the text and the conception of the messenger as YHWH is the best explanation for why a scribe might refer to YHWH's earthly manifestation as a messenger in the first place.

McClellan notes that interpolative practices flourished in the Aramaic targums, and on this matter, he is certainly correct.[35] We will discuss the

targums shortly, but for now, I will just note that we must ask whether the interpolative practices found in the targums spring out of nothing or if they arise from previously existing theological conceptions in the community. If the interpolations arise from previously existing conceptions in the community (which seems most plausible), we must then ask where those ideas came from. As we will see shortly, many of the interpolations found in the targums seem to spring from conceptions found in the Hebrew Bible. I will summarize the issues with McClellan's appeal to ancient translations by noting that differences in ancient translations do not by themselves give us ground for postulating a change to the Hebrew text. Differences in translations can be explained by the difficulty of the text or by differences within a theological community in how to understand the text. Neither of these requires us to posit a textual alteration to the Hebrew from which the translations arose.

Finally, McClellan argues for an interpolation by noting that simply removing the word "angel" from these texts solves all the complications.[36] This is correct, but it's also trivial. Of course, one can solve the difficulties in a text by just ignoring all the words that make the text difficult! In simply removing all of the words that render a text difficult, McClellan has not actually explained the text in question. Rather, he has invented a text that would be easier and demanded that we all play pretend with him. For those of us who actually want to understand the text that we have before us, and not the text we wish we had before us, we must not resort to the scribal knife so quickly. I will conclude my discussion of this objection by noting that the angel of the Lord being an interpolation would not significantly affect the strength of this book's argument. Thus, if my reader is still convinced that the interpolation theory is warranted, they are more than welcome to maintain that position.

Data Point 6: The Fullness of YHWH Cannot Be Seen

The Old Testament, despite all its depictions of a visible YHWH, also indicates that the fullness of God cannot be seen by a human. The Torah contains the

idea that partial manifestations of YHWH may be seen, but not the fullness of YHWH's being. The most obvious and well-known example of such a motif comes in Exodus 33:18–22. This verse is often brought up as grounds to attack divine Christology and the idea of a visible YHWH, but when carefully examined, it actually strengthens my case.

Let us begin by reading the passage in question. Before this passage, Moses has been in a conversation with God. The subject of that conversation was whether God's presence would accompany them on their journey. God had threatened not to go with the Israelites because of their sin, but Moses was not giving up without a fight. After continued pressure from Moses, God agrees to accompany them as requested. It is after this that Moses makes a bold request:

> Moses said, "Please show me your glory." And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." And the LORD said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen."

The crucial part of this passage for our present concerns is the statement by God that "man shall not see me and live." Doesn't this contradict everything I have said so far? Doesn't this completely undercut all the passages we looked at, which depict YHWH as being seen? For many, the answer is yes. Many exegetes will often take this verse out of context and use it as a club to beat down the numerous instances of a visible YHWH that we have discussed so far. This verse is exalted above all others and then used to smite any passage that dares lift its head in resistance. No matter how explicitly we are told that YHWH has been

seen, objectors demand that we reinterpret those passages to conform to their understanding of Exodus 33.

I like to call this interpretative strategy the "my Bible verse can beat up your Bible verse" strategy. The general idea of this strategy is that you pick a Bible verse X that seems, at first glance, to fit your view. Then, you demand that any alternative verse Y be reinterpreted to fit X. All other verses must be twisted, contorted, allegorized, spiritualized, or dismissed so that they don't conflict with the desired interpretation of X. To be fair, it is not just opponents of divine Christology who engage in this strategy. Trained theologians across the ideological spectrum do this on a variety of topics.

The problem with this strategy is that the decision to exalt one verse over another is almost always subjective. Bob might demand that we reinterpret verse Y to fit with verse X, but Sally can just turn the tables and demand that we reinterpret verse X to fit with verse Y. Both Bob and Sally can declare that their favorite verse is the bigger, meaner verse that gets to beat up all the others! Both Bob and Sally can demand that any other verse can't possibly mean what it appears to mean, because then it contradicts their favorite verse.

It should be obvious that the "my Bible verse can beat up your Bible verse" strategy gets us nowhere meaningful. The proper exegetical method is not to exalt one verse and use it as a club to beat down all the others. The proper exegetical method is to place both verses on the same level and attempt to understand what they are actually saying. Ideally, we can do this and find an interpretation that does not require doing violence to either verse.

With that said, let's return to our passage in Exodus 33 and see what this verse actually says when read carefully. Several things are worth noting regarding this passage. First, let us recall that by this point in the story of Israel, God has already been seen multiple times, and pretty much everybody already knew it. Imagine that you are Moses, and you are about to have the conversation with YHWH that is described in Exodus 33. You are walking out to the tent where you meet with God. In that moment, as you are walking out to that tent, you have already heard all the stories about Jacob wrestling with God and being renamed because of it. You have already heard the stories of Abraham haggling with YHWH on

behalf of Sodom. As you walk up to the tent, you have already seen a figure in a burning bush point blank tell you that they are YHWH, the God of Israel. All these stories are well-known to almost everyone in your community. They are part of the identity of your people. We must keep the context of Exodus 33 in mind when approaching this passage. If we take the story of Israel as it has been provided to us, and we bring no theological agenda to the table, at this point in the story, there is no question about whether YHWH has been seen.

This is crucial for the second notable thing about this verse, which is that Moses does not ask to see God. People often seem to skip over this important point. God's statement about not being able to see his face does not come after a request by Moses to see him in just any old sense. Moses specifically requested to see God's *glory*. The Hebrew word used here, *kavod,* can have a range of meanings, such as weightiness and honor.[37] When used in connection with YHWH, it often has the meaning of brilliance and splendor. Moses does not request to see God in just any old way, as William Propp notes: "Probably Moses is asking to see Yahweh in his *kingly splendor.*"[38] If we take the patriarchal narratives that preceded this encounter seriously and recognize that Moses was familiar with the stories of Abraham and Jacob, then we can infer that Moses understood that YHWH could veil His splendor in His encounters with humanity.

Moses, upon concluding his argument with God, asks to see God as he truly is, without the veil. It is in response to this request that God says Moses may not see his face. Why does God say Moses can't see his face? When did Moses ever mention seeing God's face? Is God just dodging questions that were never asked? The answer comes when we recognize that the word for "face" can also mean "presence." Propp remarks: "In context, 'Face' must be the same as 'Glory' and 'splendor.'"[39] John Durham makes similar remarks,[40] while Nahum Sarna translates verse 18 as a request to see God's presence.[41]

Unlike many modern readers, God understood what Moses was asking. In response to Moses's request to see God unveiled in all his splendor, YHWH responds that Moses cannot see this and live. Yet, YHWH does not leave Moses's bold request wanting. YHWH says that Moses will be allowed to see God's back

as he passes by. This is an interesting concession on God's part. What does it mean for God to say that Moses will see his back? Regarding the Hebrew word for "back," Laird Harris notes:

> In no other place is the word used for the back of a person's anatomy ... The word *'āḥôr* means "back" in the sense of direction. Joab saw the battle before and behind him (II Chr 13:14). Ezekiel saw the apostate twenty-five leaders facing the east with their backs toward the temple, i.e. it was behind them (Ezk 8:16). Is it not therefore probable that in the theophany of Ex 33:23 the emphasis is not on an extreme anthropomorphism saying that Moses could see God's back but not his face? Rather, it was meant that Moses could see the glory and afterglow behind the Lord as he passed by, but his very presence could not be seen. Of course the anthropomorphism is possible and not even objectionable, but a semi-physical distinction between face and back is apparently not the strict meaning of the words.[42]

The idea that "back" is a reference to the traces of YHWH's presence or the afterglow as he passes by is maintained by Sarna.[43] Rebecca Idestrom summarizes this passage nicely:

> I think that "my face" in 33:20 may have a different connotation than that of simply "my presence." Moses and the Israelites have seen evidence of YHWH's presence in the divine glory and they have survived and not perished. Thus, 33:20 might be better understood as "you cannot see me directly," or fully, or completely, or in all of my fullness. This interpretation is supported by the contrast made between seeing the Lord from behind, after the glory has passed by, rather than from the front (face versus back, before versus after, in front versus from

> behind), and as well as Moses's need for divine protection to experience the glory. The Lord will cover Moses while his glory passes directly before him but once the Lord has passed by, Moses will be able to look at the Lord from behind. He will catch a glimpse of the afterglow, the traces left behind, or the outline or contours of the Lord. In other words, he will not see the Lord directly in all his fullness or splendor, but Moses will still experience his glory in part, in a limited way, as much as humanly possible without perishing. The Lord himself will make sure Moses is protected.[44]

With all of this in mind, we can draw the following conclusions from this passage. First, Exodus 33 does not contain a blanket prohibition against seeing YHWH in any way. Those who run to this passage to avoid visible manifestations of YHWH will find no solace. Rather, this passage contains a prohibition against seeing God's fullness, his unmitigated presence, his unveiled holy splendor. We can thus affirm that YHWH was seen partially in the Old Testament (as demonstrated in data points 1–4), but that YHWH's fullness was never seen.

Data Point 7: YHWH Is Completely Unique Among the Heavenly Beings

Most of our data points thus far have related to the idea of YHWH being visible and embodied in the Old Testament. However, there is one last piece of Old Testament data which I wish to set on the table before proceeding any further, and that is YHWH's uniqueness amongst the heavenly beings. The Old Testament makes it clear that YHWH is not alone in the heavens; there are other beings, often referred to as *elohim* in the Old Testament, which exist and have been given authority by YHWH. In the Old Testament, we are repeatedly met with the idea that no one amongst the heavenly host can compare to YHWH. Consider the following examples:

- Exodus 15:11: "Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?"
- Exodus 18:11: "Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods, because in this affair they dealt arrogantly with the people."
- Deuteronomy 3:24: "O Lord GOD, you have only begun to show your servant your greatness and your mighty hand. For what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do such works and mighty acts as yours?"
- Psalm 33:6: "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host."
- Psalm 86:8: "There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours."

The most famous examples of such statements likely come from the book of Isaiah, in which we see YHWH say in 40:25–26:

> To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name; by the greatness of his might and because he is strong in power, not one is missing.

Similarly, YHWH says in 44:6–8:

> Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: "I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. Who is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and set it before me, since I appointed an ancient people.

> Let them declare what is to come and what will happen. Fear not, nor be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? And you are my witnesses! Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any."

Not only do we get testimony about YHWH's uniqueness, we get testimony about the specific ways that YHWH is unique. For instance, in Isaiah 44:24, we are told that it is YHWH alone who creates the heavens and the earth. In Psalm 89:5–8, the Psalmist asks who else is as mighty as YHWH, with the clear implication being that there is none as mighty as YHWH. In 1 Kings 8:39, we see the idea that only YHWH knows the hearts of the children of mankind. There appears to be an emphatic testimony throughout the Old Testament that no one in the heavens is comparable to YHWH.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we established seven data points from the Old Testament that will be valuable for our investigation into the person of Jesus. We observed that God is portrayed as being visible and active throughout Israelite history, and that the presence of YHWH is sometimes linked to language about a messenger or "word" of the Lord. In the next chapter, we will see how Jewish writers leading up to the time of Jesus incorporated these data into their understanding of God's actions with the world.

Chapter Two

The Visible YHWH in Pre-Christian Jewish Thought

In the previous chapter, I examined seven key points regarding the Old Testament's portrayal of YHWH. In this chapter, I will examine how the Jewish community leading up to the time of Christ interpreted these data. First, we will examine the Aramaic targums to see how they developed the "Word of the Lord" motif discussed in the previous chapter. Second, we will examine the works of Philo of Alexandria and explore how he merges the Word of the Lord with the angel of the Lord. In doing this, we will get a feel for how a first-century Jew might have conceptualized YHWH's self-revelation to humanity.

The Aramaic Targums

While the Old Testament was primarily written in Hebrew, it began to be translated into other languages, such as Greek and Aramaic. Translations of the Old Testament into Aramaic are often referred to as the targum. However, referring to them as a translation is a bit misleading. The targums do not seek to provide a strict, unbiased translation; they are more like a combination of a translation and a commentary. The authors of the targums would often explain or interpret the text instead of translating it strictly from the Hebrew. These

translations were used in synagogue services, as well as the Jewish educational system.[45] While the writing of the targums does not predate the time of Christ, these works are often believed to preserve pre-Christian traditions and understanding.[46] On this topic, targum scholar Martin McNamara notes:

> The inference from all this evidence seems to be that the tradition enshrined in the Palestinian Targums was formed at an early date, and even in pre-Christian times; that this targum was known in early times among Palestinian rabbis; and that certain written targumic texts existed, texts which probably carried the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch more or less as we now know it.[47]

It is important at this point to note that there are different targums. Some scholars have become increasingly interested in what has been called the Palestinian Targum, as it is believed to more accurately reflect what would be found in first-century (or earlier) Palestine. This is in contrast to something like Targum Onkelos, which became the official targum of Judaism and is believed to reflect revision and suppression of concepts and motifs that were utilized by Christians.[48] Because the Palestinian Targum is believed to reflect a more ancient and less censored tradition, I will focus on Targum Neofiti, as it is one of the major extant sources of the Palestinian Targum.[49]

When we look at these ancient Aramaic translations, we find something rather peculiar. In many passages in which YHWH is described as doing something, the targums will instead say that the Word (*Memra* in Aramaic) of YHWH did the action. To illustrate this point, let us consider some examples.

In Genesis 3:8, we are told that Adam and Eve "heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden." However, in the targum, we see "they heard the sound of the Memra of the Lord God walking within the garden."[50] In Genesis 24:1, we are told: "The Lord had blessed Abraham in all things." While in the targum, we see: "The Memra of the Lord had blessed Abraham in everything."[51] In Genesis 24:3, Abraham instructs his servant to swear by YHWH, whereas in

the targum of this passage, Abraham says, "I will make you swear in the name of the Memra of the Lord." Jacob says in Genesis 31:5 that the God of his fathers has been with him, but the targum reads: "The Memra of the God of my father has been at my aid."[52] In Genesis 15:1, it is God who is Abraham's shield. Yet, in the targum, we see: "My Memra will be a shield for you."[53] In Exodus 17:6, God says, "Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb." Yet in the targum we see: "Behold, my Memra shall stand in readiness on the rock."[54] In Deuteronomy 33:7, Moses prays to the Lord on behalf of Israel, yet in the targum, Moses addresses God's Word, saying, "Hear, O Memra (of the Lord) the voice of the prayer of Judah."[55] In Deuteronomy 32:39, God says, "See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me." In the targum, we find: "See now that I, I in my Memra, am he, and there is no other god beside me."[56] In Deuteronomy 26:17–19, we are told that the people of Israel chose to make YHWH their king, yet in the targum we see:

> You have made the Memra of the Lord king over you so that he may be for you a Redeemer God, (promising) to walk in ways that are right before him, and to observe his statutes, his precepts, and his judicial ordinances, and that you may obey the voice of his Memra. And the Memra of the Lord has made you kings this day to be for the Name a people of beloved ones as a special possession.[57]

In Deuteronomy 4:7, the people exclaim: "For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him?" Yet in the targum we see: "For what nation and kingdom, has a god as near to it as the Memra of the Lord our God is to us?"[58] In Deuteronomy 5:5, Moses says, "I stood between the Lord and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the Lord." Yet in the targum we see: "I, then, was standing between the Memra of the Lord and you."[59] In Deuteronomy 10:10, it is the Lord who listens to Moses, yet in the targum we see: "The Memra of the Lord listened to the voice of

my prayer."[60] The following targum passage from Deuteronomy is particularly interesting:

> And when you heard the voice of the Memra from the midst of the darkness, and the mountain was burning with fire, and you came near to me, all the heads of your tribes and your wise men. And you said: "Behold, the Memra of the Lord our God has shown us his glory and his power, and we have heard the voice of his Memra from the midst of the flames of fire. This day we have seen that the Memra of the Lord can speak with a son of man and he can (still) live. And now, why should we die? For this great fire will consume us. If we hear again the voice of the Memra of the Lord our God we shall die. For who is there of all flesh who heard the voice of the Memra of the living God speaking from the midst of the flames of fire, like us, and has lived?" You go near and hear all that the Lord our God will say, and you shall speak with us all that the Lord your God will speak with you, and we will hear and do. And the Memra of the Lord heard the voice of your words at the time you spoke with me, and the Memra of the Lord said to me.[61]

In the previous chapter, we saw that it was the angel of the Lord who called out to Moses from the burning bush. Yet in the targum we see: "And it was manifest before the Lord that Moses had turned aside to see, and the Memra of the Lord called to him from the midst of the thorn bush."[62]

The examples thus far have all come from Targum Neofiti, though similar interesting remarks occur in the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan. Consider the following passages from Pseudo-Jonathan's treatment of Deuteronomy, and remember that all of these passages were originally about YHWH:

- Deuteronomy 1:30: "It is the Memra of the Lord, your God, who goes before you; it is he who will fight for you according to all that he did

for you in Egypt in your sight."[63]

- Deuteronomy 2:21: "The Memra of the Lord destroyed them from before them and drove them out and they lived in their place until the time of this day."[64]

- Deuteronomy 3:22: "Do not fear them for the Memra of the Lord your God is fighting for you."[65]

- Deuteronomy 4:17: "But the Memra of the Lord sits on his throne high and lifted up, and he hears our prayer every time when we pray before him and he fulfills our petitions."[66]

- Deuteronomy 28:63: "And it shall be just as the Memra of the Lord rejoiced over you doing good to you and multiplying you, so the Memra of the Lord will rejoice (in sending) foreign nations against you to cause you to perish and to destroy you; and you shall be uprooted from upon the land that you are entering to possess."[67]

- Deuteronomy 31:8: "So the Memra of the Lord, his Shekinah is marching before you and his Memra will be your support. He will not forsake you nor will he be far from you. Do not fear or be alarmed."[68]

When *Memra* (Word) is inserted into the text in this way, there is no underlying Hebrew term that justifies this inclusion. These comments about the Memra are interpretive or theological decisions on the part of the author. This phenomenon occurs hundreds of times and typically corresponds to instances in which God is depicted in an anthropomorphic manner, or when God is depicted as acting on earth.

Why do the writers of the targums do this? What does Memra refer to? One option is to view the Memra as an individual agent that is, in some sense, distinct from YHWH. This would be similar to what we saw with the angel of the Lord. Just as God spoke about his name being in the angel, God speaks about being

in his Memra. This language seems to suggest that God is in some sense distinct from his Memra.

Additionally, the Memra is clearly referred to as if it were a person. The Memra is described as walking in the garden, standing on the rock at Horeb, having a voice, receiving worship, listening to the people, being a God to the people, being a king to the people, marching out in front of the people, sitting on a throne, fighting for the people, etc. These are all instances that were originally directly referencing YHWH, which further supports viewing the Memra as a person and not some mere poetic personification. The fact that the Memra is depicted in this way, and that the Memra is invoked in instances in which God is depicted as interacting with humans on earth, seems to support the conclusion that the Memra, like the angel of the Lord, is a way of referring to a special agent through which God is present and communicates. I would also point out the conceptual overlap between the concept of a messenger and the concept of a "word," both of which relate to communication and speech.

Despite the above data, viewing the Memra as a distinct person (or hypostasis) has fallen out of favor with many scholars. Instead, many scholars posit that the Memra of the Lord is just another way of referring to YHWH. These scholars maintain that when a targum says, "The Word of the Lord did X," that is just another way of saying "The Lord did X." Why, then, is the additional "Word" added? Supposedly, this serves merely as a buffer word to avoid depicting YHWH in anthropomorphic ways. The ancient authors supposedly did not want to violate God's transcendence, so they plugged in this word as a buffer to avoid saying that God did the things in question. However, not all commentators have found this explanation convincing. Jewish scholar Daniel Boyarin attacks this suggestion, saying:

> It seems not to have occurred to any who hold this view that it is fundamentally incoherent and self-contradictory. Surely, this position collapses logically upon itself, for if the Memra is just a name that simply enables avoiding asserting that God himself has created, appeared, supported, saved, and thus preserves

> his absolute transcendence, then who, after all, did the actual creating, appearing, supporting, saving? Either God himself, in which case, one has hardly "protected" him from contact with the material world, or there is some other divine entity, in which case, the Memra is not just a name. Indeed, as pointed out by Burton Mack, the very purpose for which Sophia/Logos developed within Judaism was precisely to enable "a theology of the transcendence of God." The currently accepted and dominant view ascribes to the use of the Memra only the counterfeit coinage of a linguistic simulation of a theology of the transcendence of God, without the theology itself. Rather than assuming that the usage is meaningless, it seems superior on general hermeneutic grounds to assume that it means something. It follows then that the strongest reading of the Memra is that it is not a mere name, but an actual divine entity, or mediator.[69]

With this in mind, how Rabbinic traditions responded to the mention of the Memra might also provide insight into how the Memra was perceived. On that topic, Boyarin notes:

> Although official rabbinic theology sought to suppress all talk of the Memra or Logos by naming it the heresy of "Two Powers in Heaven" (b. Hag. 15a), before the rabbis, contemporaneously with them, and even among them, there were many Jews in both Palestine and the Diaspora who held on to a version of monotheistic theology that could accommodate this divine figure linking heaven and earth. Whereas Maimonides and his followers until today understood the Memra, along with the Shekhinah ("Presence"), as a means of avoiding anthropomorphisms in speaking of God, historical investigation suggests that in the first two centuries CE, the

> Memra was not a mere name, but an actual divine entity functioning as a mediator.[70]

I am inclined to agree with Boyarin's remarks. It is at this point that I will highlight an interesting inconsistency among scholars regarding the Word of the Lord in the targums and the angel of the Lord in the Hebrew Bible. With the angel of the Lord, scholars like McClellan have no problem with saying that Jewish scribes and translators have invented another person and inserted them into the text to preserve God's transcendence. Yet, with the Memra, scholars bend over backwards to avoid saying that the translators of the targums did the same thing. Why is there an inconsistency here? Why is it perfectly rational to say that Jewish scribes inserted a mediating person with the angel of the Lord, but that they didn't also do this with the Memra?

One might wonder if that same argument could be shot back in my direction. If I am willing to recognize that the targum translators inserted a figure when it was previously talking about YHWH, why was I so against McClellan's claim that the same thing was done with the angel of the Lord? This is a reasonable question, but there is a crucial difference between these two. With the targums, we already know that the "word" is an interpolation. We know that this word does not correspond with the original Hebrew text. With the targums, it's not a matter of whether there was an interpolation; it's a matter of why there was an interpolation. The targums are filled with additional commentary and concepts; the Memra is just one among many. However, with the Hebrew text and the angel of the Lord, we have no textual reasons to posit that there is any such interpolation in the first place.

If we one day discovered a mass of Hebrew manuscripts that predate what we currently have, and those manuscripts lack the angel of the Lord and simply refer to YHWH in the passages we surveyed, I would quite likely hop the fence and agree with McClellan that the angel of the Lord was an interpolation because at that point we would actually have textual evidence for the insertion. We simply don't have that at the moment, so we are not justified in cutting up the text to suit our modern preferences and sensibilities. With the targums, we

know that there is interpolation not only because we can compare them with the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts, but also because we understand that the targums are not a strict translation. We can see elsewhere in the targums that the authors felt liberty to add explanatory words and renderings.

Thus, we see in the targums a way in which the Jewish community was reconciling embodied, or visible actions of YHWH with the idea that YHWH cannot be seen, and they were doing so with the concept of the "Word of the Lord," which is language already found in the Hebrew Bible. Of additional interest is that the Memra is not the only instance in which this strategy is employed in the targums. The idea of God's glory being a person, which we saw in Ezekiel, is also utilized in the targums. Just as Memra is inserted into texts which were originally about YHWH interacting with people on earth, so is the glory of God's Shekinah (dwelling). I mentioned earlier that the seventy elders are described as seeing the God of Israel in Exodus 24:10, yet in the targum we see: "They saw the Glory of the Shekinah of the Lord."[71] In Genesis 18, we discussed how the Lord appeared to Abraham before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. In the targum version of this event, we are told "The Memra of the Lord was revealed to Abraham,"[72] and that "The Lord said through his Memra: 'Am I to hide from my friend Abraham what I am going to do?'" Yet later in the story when Genesis says "the Lord went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham," the targum says, "And the Glory of the Shekinah of the Lord went up when it had finished speaking with Abraham."[73] We can thus agree with Jewish scholar Alan Segal that "Yahweh himself, the angel of God, and his Glory are peculiarly melded together, suggesting a deep secret about the ways God manifested himself to humanity."[74]

Philo of Alexandria

The targums are not the only area where we see Jewish thought trending in this direction. Philo of Alexandria was a Jewish philosopher and writer who lived during the time of Jesus. Despite being alive around the same period, it's unlikely that the teachings of Jesus and his disciples had a direct impact on Philo

due to geographical distances and the fact that Philo died before most of the New Testament was written. Philo wrote extensive commentaries on the Old Testament and is often credited with synthesizing Greek philosophy with Jewish theology.

Philo is of interest to us because, like the targums, he can provide insight into how some people in the Jewish community conceptualized and understood the data we have discussed. The most important aspect of Philo's work for our purposes is his idea of the Logos. "Logos" is the Greek term for "Word," though its semantic range was much wider than that. This term was also being used in Greek philosophy to refer to a rational principle or force behind the cosmos. In many ways, Philo takes the concept as it is found in Greek philosophical tradition and connects it with the data we have seen about an embodied YHWH and the Memra of the Lord. Like we saw in the targums, Philo understood God's Word (Logos) to be an agent that mediated between God and creation. The instances in the Old Testament in which people are described as seeing God or seeing the angel of the Lord are understood by Philo as referring to God's Logos. Consider the following passage from Philo:

> To His Word, His chief messenger, highest in age and honour, the Father of all has given the special prerogative, to stand on the border and separate the creature from the Creator. This same Word both pleads with the immortal as suppliant for afflicted mortality and acts as ambassador of the ruler to the subject. He glories in this prerogative and proudly describes it in these words 'and I stood between the Lord and you' (Deut. 5:5), that is neither uncreated as God, nor created as you, but midway between the two extremes.[75]

Notice that God's word is a messenger, and that this messenger serves as an ambassador to God's subjects. Philo says elsewhere:

> But if there be any as yet unfit to be called a Son of God, let him press to take his place under God's First-born, the Word, who holds the eldership among the angels, their ruler as it were. And many names are his, for he is called, "the Beginning," and the Name of God, and His Word, and the Man after His image, and "he that sees," that is Israel. And therefore I was moved a few pages above to praise the virtues of those who say that "We are all sons of one man" (Gen. 42:11). For if we have not yet become fit to be thought sons of God yet we may be sons of His invisible image, the most holy Word. For the Word is the eldest-born image of God.[76]

Elsewhere, Philo describes the Logos as the viceroy which God has set over mankind:

> For land and water and air and fire, and all plants and animals which are in these, whether mortal or divine, yea and the sky, and the circuits of sun and moon, and the revolutions and rhythmic movements of the other heavenly bodies, are like some flock under the hand of God its King and Shepherd. This hallowed flock He leads in accordance with right and law, setting over it His true Word and Firstborn Son Who shall take upon Him its government like some viceroy of a great king; for it is said in a certain place: "Behold I AM, I send My Angel before thy face to guard thee in the way."[77]

These passages are significant because Philo identifies the Logos as God's firstborn, the eldest of his angels, a great archangel, the name of God, the Word, the lieutenant and viceroy of the king. Moreover, he is the very image of God. Philo ascribes creation to the Word, saying, "The image of God is the Word through whom the whole universe was framed."[78] Everything that was hinted

at with the Word of the Lord in the Old Testament and in the targums is now much more explicit. Philo even goes so far as to call the Logos a second god: "For nothing mortal can be made in the likeness of the most high One and Father of the universe but (only) in that of the second God, who is His Logos."[79]

It is at this point important to emphasize that in saying this, Philo was not suggesting that the Word was some type of separate god external to the Father. For Philo, the Logos was an aspect of God, or an extension of God. The Logos was God's reason, mind, and power. There is much that could be said about Philo's concept of the Logos, as it is a complex and, in many ways, difficult idea. What is most important for our present purposes is that Philo views God's Word as a person. The Logos is an agent that mediates between man and God; yet the agent is not completely distinct from God but is an aspect of Him. It is important to note that Philo identifies the Logos with the angel of the Lord that we discussed earlier. Recall that in Exodus God says he will send an angel with Moses and that "my name is in him." When discussing this passage, Philo remarks:

> What is the meaning of the words, "Behold, I am sending My angel before thy face, that he may guard thee on the way, in order that he may lead and bring thee to the land which I have prepared for thee. Give heed and listen and do not disobey. For he will not show consideration for thee, for My name is upon him"? An angel is an intellectual soul or rather wholly mind, wholly incorporeal, made (to be) a minister of God, and appointed over certain needs and the service of the race of mortals, since it was unable, because of its corruptible nature, to receive the gifts and benefactions extended by God. For it was not capable of bearing the multitude of (His) good (gifts). (Therefore) of necessity was the Logos appointed as judge and mediator, who is called "angel." Him He sets "before the face."[80]

Similarly, in Numbers 22:31, the angel of the Lord appears before Balaam and blocks his way. Yet Philo refers to this figure as "the armed angel, the reason [Logos] of God."[81] Hagar is depicted as meeting the angel of the Lord in Genesis 16, yet Philo says she "met the angel or divine reason [Logos]."[82] Philo writes on the idea of God appearing as an angel, saying:

> Why, then, do we wonder any longer at His assuming the likeness of angels, seeing that for the succour of those that are in need He assumes that of men? Accordingly, when He says "I am the God who was seen of thee in the place of God" (Gen. 31:13), understand that He occupied the place of an angel only so far as appeared, without changing, with a view to the profit of him who was not yet capable of seeing the true God. For just as those who are unable to see the sun itself see the gleam of the parhelion and take it for the sun, and take the halo round the moon for that luminary itself, so some regard the image of God, His angel the Word, as His very self. Do you not see how Hagar, who is the education of the schools, says to the angel "Thou art the God that didst look upon me"? (Gen. 16:13); for being Egyptian by descent she was not qualified to see the supreme Cause. But in the passage upon which we are occupied, the mind is beginning, as the result of improvement, to form a mental image of the sovereign Ruler of all such Potencies. Hence it is that He Himself says "I am the God," whose image thou didst aforetime behold deeming it to be I Myself, and didst dedicate a pillar engraved with a most holy inscription (Gen. 31:13); and the purport of the inscription was that I alone am standing (Ex. 17:6) and that it was I alone that established the being of all things, bringing confusion and disorder into order and array, and sustained the universe to rest firm and sure upon the mighty Word, who is My viceroy.[83]

Philo thus takes the angel of the Lord, the Word of the Lord, and the visible appearances of YHWH, and he interweaves them all into one figure, the Logos. The Logos is the second deity, who is the very image of God. When Philo does this, he doesn't deny that God is actually appearing to people. Philo doesn't suggest that what people are really seeing is just some exalted being external to God. As Ronald Williamson notes:

> To regard the Logos as an intermediary in the proper and fullest sense would perhaps involve a departure from the Jewish view of God as a living God, himself active in the world and history—a step not taken by Philo. It cannot be emphasised enough that the Logos for Philo is God's Logos, the incorporeal Word or Thought of God, not a distinct and separate being having its own divine ontological status, subordinate to God.[84]

Boyarin makes similar remarks, saying:

> It is even possible that the beginning of the idea of the Trinity occurred precisely in pre-Christian Jewish accounts of the second and visible God that we find in many early Jewish writings. Philo, writing in first-century CE Alexandria for an audience of Jews devoted to the Bible, uses the idea of the *Logos* as if it were a commonplace. His writings make apparent that at least for some pre-Christian Judaism, there was nothing strange about a doctrine of a manifestation of God, even as a "second God"; the *Logos* did not conflict with Philo's idea of monotheism.[85]

Boyarin even goes so far as to say, "If Philo is not on the road to Damascus here, he is surely on a way that leads to Nicaea and the controversies over the second person of the Trinity."[86]

Conclusion

In light of the data discussed so far, if we encounter a first-century Jewish author depicting God's "Word" as if it were an actual person who was involved with creation and active in Israel's history, we are completely justified in taking that language at face value. Such concepts were quite common by the first century and do not warrant any incredulous stares. A straightforward, literal understanding of God's Word as a person who engaged in these activities is precisely what we might expect to find in a first-century Jewish writing. In the next chapter, we will look at a famous example of a first-century Jewish author who does this very thing.

Chapter Three

The New Testament's Depiction of Jesus

Much of the previous two chapters was spent discussing data related to YHWH's Word (Memra/Logos). In light of this, it is only appropriate to begin our journey through the New Testament by examining the most well-known use of this very concept. I am, of course, here referring to the prologue of the Gospel of John. The prologue of John's Gospel is one of the most dense, disputed, and difficult sections in the entire New Testament. This passage is so filled with theological implications that it has become the well from which all Christological arguments draw. I would not begin our journey through the New Testament with such a contested passage unless I believed it was worth it. However, I will seek to sidestep many controversies that are not relevant to our immediate context. Let us begin by simply reading John 1:1–18 in its entirety.

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light,

> but came to bear witness about the light. The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

We may begin our discussion by narrowing down on the concept of the "Word." The Greek word that underlies our English translation of "Word" is *Logos*. This is the same word that we saw Philo use in the previous chapter. This same word has conceptual overlap with the Aramaic *Memra*, which we saw was used throughout the targums. As we will see, John's similarities with Philo and the targums do not extend merely to his vocabulary. John 1:1 begins with words that any Jewish reader would have no trouble recognizing, "In the beginning." There should be no doubt that this verse is intended to recall the creation account described in Genesis 1:1, as has been widely recognized by commentators. As Raymond Brown notes:

> In the Hebrew Bible the first book (Genesis) is named by its opening words, "In the beginning"; therefore, the parallel between the Prologue and Genesis would be easily seen. The parallel continues into the next verses, where the themes of

> creation and light and darkness are recalled from Genesis. John's translation of the opening phrase of Gen 1:1, which is the same as that of LXX, reflects an understanding of that verse evidently current in NT times.[87]

Haenchen, Funk, and Busse agree with this inference, stating that this language

> is no mere coincidence; the agreement is international. But the differences are much greater than this scarcely accidental congruence: Gen 1:1 narrates an event: God creates. John 1:1, however, tells of something that was in existence already in time primeval; astonishingly, it is not "God." The hymn thus does not begin with God and his creation, but with the existence of the Logos in the beginning.[88]

We can thus agree with Craig Keener's remark, "That John intends an allusion to Genesis 1 may be regarded as certain."[89] This inference is strengthened by the fact that shortly after John's use of "In the beginning," creation is described in verse 3.

John's audience would also likely pick up on his placement of the "Word" at the beginning of creation. It is well known that Genesis 1 describes YHWH as speaking creation into existence, but of additional interest is how this creation moment is described in the targums. In Targum Neofiti, we see: "From the beginning with wisdom the Memra of the Lord created and perfected the heavens and the earth."[90] Shortly after this statement, John tells us that all things were made through the Logos. This comment connects not just to the targums, which ascribe the act of creation to God's Word, but also to Philo's statements that all things were created through the Logos.[91] Just as Philo describes God's Logos as the instrument of creation, John also describes the Logos that is with God as the instrument of creation.

Shortly after this, we are told that the Logos is the light and life of men. This comment, coming on the heels of John's statements about creation, resembles the poem of the four nights found in Targum Neofiti's treatment of Exodus 12:42. In this poem, we read:

> The first night: when the Lord was revealed over the world to create it. The world was without form and void, and darkness was spread over the face of the abyss, and the Memra of the Lord was the Light, and it shone; and he called it the First Night.[92]

The significance of this connection has not been lost on commentators. McNamara remarks regarding this connection:

> Arguments have been produced elsewhere in favour of a very early date, and a generally faithful transmission, of the form of the Palestinian Targum as found in Neofiti. It may well have been in use in Palestine from the second century A.D. onwards. Its substance would then go back to pre-Christian times. In fact, some authors claim that there are positive arguments for dating it in the pre-Christian era. It is legitimate, then, to presume that the author of the Fourth Gospel heard read in the synagogue that, at the very beginning of time, at the creation of the universe ('the first night'), there was an all-pervading darkness. There was also God, or 'the Word of the Lord'. This Word of the Lord was the light and it shone-to use the very words of Neofiti. This is the very thing the prologue says when it speaks of the creative action of the Word (Logos) at the beginning of all things.[93]

Boyarin shares McNamara's disposition, stating:

> The conclusive evidence for the connection of the targumic *Memra* and the Logos of John has been adduced by Martin McNamara himself in the guise of the Palestinian Targumic poetic homily on the "Four Nights." ... This text appears in various witnesses to the Palestinian Targum, so it cannot be taken as a later "Christianizing" interpolation into the text. McNamara's conclusion that this text represents a cognate to the first verses of the Johannine Prologue, with their association of Logos, the Word, and light, is therefore compelling, although, as we shall see below, the Prologue shows other "midrashic" connections as well ... The Gospel of John, according to this view, when taken together with Philo and with the Targum, provides further important evidence for Logos theology, used here as a general term for various closely related binitarian theologies, as the religious Koine of Jews in Palestine and the Diaspora.[94]

It is worth noting that the Greek which underlies the phrase "Was the Word" may very well depict the concept of eternal pre-existence. This implication arises from the nuances of the verb used for "was" (ἦν/ēn) and how the author used this verb instead of another verb for "made" (Ἐγένετο/egeneto). As D. A. Carson notes,

> Although the meanings of ēn ('was') and egeneto (rendered 'were made' in v. 3, 'came' in v. 6 and 'became' in v. 14) often overlap, John repeatedly uses the two verbs side by side to establish something of a contrast. For example, in 8:58 Jesus insists, '[Before] Abraham was born [a form of the second verb], I am [a form of the first verb].' In other words, when

> John uses the two verbs in the same context, ēn frequently signals existence, whereas egeneto signals 'coming into being' or 'coming into use'. In the beginning, the Word was already in existence. Stretch our imagination backward as we will, we can find no point in time where we may agree with Arius, who, speaking of the Word, said, 'There was once when he was not.'[95]

Murray J. Harris offers similar remarks, saying:

> In Genesis the creation of the world is contemporaneous with or marks "the beginning"; in John the existence of the Word is anterior to "the beginning." In itself John 1:1a speaks only of the pretemporality or supratemporality of the Logos, but in his conjunction of ἐν ἀρχῇ and ἦν (not ἐγένετο) John implies the eternal preexistence of the Word. He who existed "in the beginning" before creation was himself without a beginning and therefore uncreated. There was no time when he did not exist. John is hinting that all speculation about the origin of the Logos is pointless. The imperfect tense ἦν (= Latin *erat*), which here denotes continuous existence, is to be carefully distinguished from ἔστι ("he is"), which would have stressed his timelessness at the expense of any emphasis on his manifestation historically (cf. 1:14), and from ἐγένετο, which would have implied either that he was a created being ("he came into existence") or that by the time of writing he had ceased to exist (= Latin *fuit*).[96]

On this point, Kenner states:

> Many commentators have laid heavy stress on the verb ἦν: in contrast to many Wisdom texts which declare that Wisdom or

> Torah was created "in the beginning" or before the creation of the rest of the world, John omits Jesus' creation and merely declares that he "was." This verb may thus suggest the Word's eternal pre-existence; after all, how could God have been without his Word? That God created "all things" through the Word in 1:3 (naturally excluding the Word itself as the agent) further underlines the contrast between the Word and what was created ... One might be tempted to argue that such a suggestion is too much to hang on a mere linking verb; after all, "beginning" could refer only to the rest of creation, as sometimes in Jewish texts, and is defined in this text only by the allusion back to the creation of heavens and earth in Gen 1:1. The temptation to diminish the force of the ἦν is probably removed, however, by the literary contrast between Jesus' "becoming" flesh (1:14; cf. 1:6) and his simply "being" in the beginning, and finally eliminated by identifications of Jesus with his Father's deity throughout the Fourth Gospel. If John can say that the Word "was God" (1:1c; cf. 1:18), that Jesus claims, "Before Abraham was, I am" (8:58), and that it is appropriate to believe in Jesus as Lord and God (20:28), John's Jesus is more than merely divine Wisdom. [97]

Raymond Brown sees this phrase as "akin to the 'I am' statements of Jesus in the Gospel proper ... There can be no speculation about how the Word came to be, for the Word simply was."[98]

With this in mind, it is worth noting that John undeniably links the Logos with the person of Jesus. This connection has been rejected by some commentators who seek to avoid the theological implications; however, such a denial is ultimately futile. The data in support of this connection are simply overwhelming. Consider the following connections:

1. John 1:1–5 speaks of the Logos and refers to it as the life and light of men. Immediately after this, we are told that John the Baptist testified about a light that was coming into the world. What is the light that John testified about? It is obviously the Logos, which was just referred to as the light of men in the preceding passages. Yet we know from numerous passages that John the Baptist was preparing the way for Jesus (see the next chapter). If we know that John came to prepare the way for the Logos, and we also know that John came to prepare the way for Jesus, it is obvious that the Logos being referred to in John 1 is the very person of Jesus.

2. Jesus says in John 8:12 that he is the light of the world, and this claim is repeated in 9:5 and 12:46. These statements clearly identify Jesus as the light which was mentioned in the prologue.

3. In John 1, we are told that the life of men is in the Logos. Yet, in John 11:25 and 14:6, Jesus says he is the life. Jesus also says that he has life in himself (5:26), that coming to him grants life (5:40), and that he is the bread of life (6:35). In 1 John 1:1–4, when speaking about the Word of Life/Eternal life which was with the Father from the beginning, John says that it has been heard, seen, touched, and manifested to us.

4. John 1 tells us that the word was not received by his people, and Jesus says in 5:43 that he came in his Father's name and that nobody received him.

5. John 1 says that those who believe in the name of the Word are granted the ability to become children of God. Jesus says in John 3:15–18 that whoever believes in him will have eternal life, and whoever does not believe in him is condemned.

6. We are told in John 1:14 that the Logos became flesh and that we have seen his glory. This means that at some point in history, there is some fleshly object that we can point to and say, "That is the Logos." After John tells us that we

have seen the glory of the Logos, we are told that it is the glory of the only Son from the Father. Jesus is repeatedly depicted as the Son who comes from the Father throughout the book of John.

7. In John 1, the Word is depicted as being with the Father before all creation. Similarly, Jesus states that he was with the Father before the foundation of the world (John 17:5).

8. John explicitly refers to Jesus as the Word of God in his other writings. We see this in Revelation 19:13, in which we are explicitly told that the name by which Jesus is called is the Word (Logos) of God.

I want to emphasize that with these connections, Jesus is not depicted as merely having the Logos within himself as if he and the Logos are two different things. Rather, Jesus is depicted as being the very Logos itself. In light of these data, any denial that Jesus is the Logos of John's prologue can be regarded as a desperate exegetical maneuver performed by those who see the Christological implications closing in.

It is at this point fruitful to turn our attention to the divinity of the Word as it is presented in John 1:1 and 1:18. The word for "God" applied to the Logos in verse 1 is *theos*, the same term used in line 1:1a to refer to the God that the Logos is with. The major difference between John's first use of this term in 1:1 and his second is that in the second use, *theos* is in the anarthrous state, which means it lacks the definite article that was previously used. Put simply, the difference is between saying "The God" and "God." One of these statements includes a definite article (the) while the other does not. The fact that John does not include the definite article in his statement about the Word being God has led many to claim that John sees the Word as ontologically inferior to "The God" previously mentioned.

Can such conclusions be drawn from this lack of a definite article? Probably not. While Philo does differentiate between God and his Logos by use of the definite article, it is difficult to make such a connection in John for a few reasons.

First, John's use of the anarthrous state is perfectly normal given the order of the words. In Greek, the predicative nominative (God/*theos*) comes before the verb (was). When this occurs, it is usually the case that the predicative nominative is anarthrous. As Keener summarizes:

> In one study of about 250 definite predicative nominatives in the NT, 90 percent were articular when following the verb, but a comparable 87 percent were anarthrous when before the verb, as here. Grammatically, one would thus expect John's predicate nominative "θεός" to be anarthrous, regardless of the point he was making.[99]

The second issue with this line of argument is that the Father is referred to without the definite article numerous times throughout the Gospel of John. In fact, the Father is referred to with no definite article multiple times in this very chapter (verses 6, 12, 13, and 18). Harris notes that the Johannine usage shows that there is no necessary distinction between *ho theos* and *theos*, with both being used of the Father. Harris remarks:

> In spite of the neatness and attractiveness of the view, the evidence does not support the frequently repeated thesis that Jesus Christ is θεός but not ὁ θεός. Given the general NT oscillation between θεός and ὁ θεός when referring to the Father, it should occasion no surprise that if θεός is used of Jesus (as in John 1:1, 18; Rom. 9:5), ὁ θεός also should occasionally refer to him (as in 2 Pet. 1:1 and Titus 2:13, not to mention the two uses of the vocatival ὁ θεός in John 20:28 and Heb. 1:8). As far as the NT is concerned, the crucial distinction is not between the meaning of θεός with the article and its meaning without the article, but between predominant usage (where both θεός and ὁ

> θεός denote the Father) and exceptional usage (where either θεός or ὁ θεός may denote the Son).[100]

However, neither of the above points means that the lack of a definite article in 1:1c is frivolous or insignificant. The fact that John uses the articular and anarthrous state in succession like this should provoke investigation. Why does John include the definite article in 1:1a but not 1:1c? The most obvious reason is that John wants to avoid identifying the Word with the Father, as doing so would contradict the statement about the Word being "with God." As Harris notes:

> It would have been impossible for him to have written ὁ λόγος ἦν ὁ θεός (or ὁ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος) without suggesting a precise identification of the person of the Logos (the Son) with the person of the Father. Having just distinguished the Logos from ὁ θεός in verse 1b, would he be likely immediately afterward to dissolve that personal distinction? For him to have used ὁ θεός in the predicate of verse 1c would have implied either that subject and predicate were identical or coextensive or that this predicate referred to none other than the ὁ θεός of the preceding clause ... As it is, in verse 1c John maintains the distinction between the Logos and the Father that he has drawn in verse 1b, while at the same time affirming the participation of the Logos in the divine essence (θεός).[101]

Moreover, Keener notes that John has no issue referring to Jesus as *ho theos* when there is no danger of him being identified with the Father.[102]

Some might object that John merely wanted to predicate divinity to the Word, but did not want to put him on the level of the Father. However, if that is what John intends, we might expect him to use a different Greek word, *theios,* which had the adjectival meaning of "divine." John's refrain from using

this word and his insistence on using *theos* (which he previously used of the Father) seems to indicate that John wishes to make a statement about what type of divinity the Word had, namely, that of the Father's. This understanding preserves a consistent use of "God" in the text. Suggesting that any other type of divinity is predicated to the Word introduces an inconsistency within the verse. Such arguments would have John radically changing his use of *theos* within a few lines.

With all this in mind, we can now examine 1:18, which I consider to be one of the most significant passages in all the New Testament. This verse is best translated along the following lines:

ESV: No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

NET: No one has ever seen God. The only one, himself God, who is in closest fellowship with the Father, has made God known.

Let us closely examine the logic of this verse. There is the God which nobody has seen, which is clearly to be understood as the Father. Additionally, there is one who is by the Father's side. This one who is by the Father's side is himself God, and makes the unseen God known. Put simply, there is the Father, and there is the God that is at his side who reveals him. This idea comes very close to Philo's language about the Logos being a second deity who reveals God, or the language in the Targum about God revealing himself in his Memra. Just as Philo's Logos is the image of God and makes him known, John's Logos plays the role of making the invisible Father known. It is worth noting that throughout the book of John, there is a continual theme of the Father being invisible and of Jesus revealing the Father (5:37; 6:46; 14:7; 14:9).

Some might be tempted to object to my use of this verse on textual grounds, as there are some textual variants which do apply the term "God" to the Son in verse 18, but simply say "the only one, the son," or "the only son."[103] This objection will fail for two reasons. First, as Brown notes, the reading which

applies "God" to the Son is "supported by the evidence of the best Greek manuscripts."[104] Metzger similarly states, "With the acquisition of P^{66} and P^{75}, both of which read θεός [God], the external support of this reading has been notably strengthened."[105]

The second reason this objection fails is because whether the Son is called "God" in verse 18 is not overly important to my present argument. The most important aspect of this verse for my present argument is that immediately after the Father is described as one whom no one has seen, the Son is presented as being the one who makes him known. The fact that the Son is given the label "God" in this passage is just additional icing on an already decadent cake.

We thus have clear conceptual overlap between the ideas in Second Temple Judaism, which we discussed in previous chapters, and the opening of John's Gospel. John draws on the idea of God's Logos/Memra as an intermediary figure, which was already present in Jewish thought, and he used that concept as a framework to introduce his readers to the person of Jesus. John was declaring that a figure already in their theological system had become incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ. This does not entail that John endorsed Philo's exact understanding; it just means he was utilizing the existing language and concepts to communicate to his audience. With this verse of John in mind, let us now think back to all the instances of a visible YHWH figure that we encountered in the first chapter. For John, who might that YHWH figure be? Who was it that wrestled with Jacob, or met Abraham, or was beheld by Moses? John is emphatic that nobody has seen the Father, which means the next best candidate is the Son, who is at the Father's side and makes the Father known.

This is, of course, highly damning for any person seeking to deny divine Christology. If Jesus is the one who appeared in all the instances we discussed in chapter 1, then Jesus is himself the one who is referred to as YHWH, the most high God. It would follow that the actions credited to YHWH and the titles ascribed to him in the Old Testament could properly be ascribed to Jesus. This is exactly what we see throughout the rest of the New Testament. The conception of Jesus that we see portrayed in these opening lines of John's Gospel fits perfectly with what we see said of Jesus elsewhere in the New Testament. John,

writing his Gospel later than most other New Testament books, makes explicit what the rest of the New Testament already contained. To see this, let us now consider a few areas where we see the NT writers support the understanding described above.

Jesus as Creator in Colossians, 1 Corinthians, and Hebrews

We saw in John 1 that the Logos is described as the instrument of creation. We have also seen how this idea connects well with the Logos of Philo and the Memra of the targums, both of which were divine persons credited with creation. In addition to John 1, there are at least three other instances in the New Testament where Jesus is depicted as the instrument of creation. Let us examine each of them briefly. In Colossians 1:15–20, Paul says regarding Jesus:

> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

It is worth noting here how this passage connects with what we have seen in John, as well as what we saw in Philo and the targums. Just like Philo's Logos, Paul describes Jesus as God's image, his firstborn, the one through whom all was created, the one through whom all things hold together,[106] and the visible aspect of the invisible God. As we recently discussed, this is how John depicts Jesus in his prologue. This is also how the targums depict God's Memra, which

was present at creation and was the means through which God revealed himself to Israel.

This is not the only passage in which Paul connects Jesus with the creation of all things. We also see this in 1 Corinthians 8:6, in which Paul says, "Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist." Much like the passage in Colossians, Paul depicts Jesus as the instrument or medium of creation. All things come from the Father, but they come through the person of Jesus Christ. This again brings us back to the idea of the Logos/Memra as the means through which God creates.

I also wish to highlight Paul's statement that all things are through Christ and that all things are for God. Paul uses similar language in Romans 11:33–36 and Colossians 1:16. However, in these passages, the language is different. While all things are through Christ in 1 Corinthians 8:6, all things are through God in Romans 11:33–36. While all things are for God in 1 Corinthians 8:6, all things are for Christ in Colossians 1:16. Paul can simultaneously affirm that all things are through and for God and that all things are through and for Christ. This indicates a fusion and a blurring between God and Jesus in the mind of Paul that is consistent with the Jewish fusion of YHWH and the Word.

There is one more passage relating to creation to which we should turn our attention. In Hebrews 1:1–3, we see:

> Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

Much like the verses we examined in John, Colossians, and Corinthians, the author of Hebrews affirms that Jesus is the one through whom all things were created. Thus, we have no less than four affirmations of Jesus's preexistence and

involvement with creation. While Hebrews does not use the language that we saw in John or Colossians, it does hint at concepts discussed in chapters 1 and 2, above. Hebrews depicts Jesus as the Son who is the "heir of all things," which meshes nicely with the motif of God's firstborn Son, which we saw in John, Colossians, and Philo. The language about Christ being the radiance of the glory of God connects well with the idea that we saw in Ezekiel of God's glory being a person, as well as the glory of the shekinah in the targums.

If there was any doubt that the author of Hebrews viewed Jesus as YHWH, the creator of the universe discussed in the Old Testament, that doubt is removed in Hebrews 1:10–12, in which God is depicted as saying the following to the Son:

> You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning,
> and the heavens are the work of your hands; they will perish,
> but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, like a robe
> you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But
> you are the same, and your years will have no end.

What must be emphasized about this passage is that this is a citation of Psalm 102:25–27, which was originally about YHWH. The author of Hebrews thus takes a passage which was originally about YHWH creating the world, and claims that this verse is about Jesus. The author does this while depicting the Psalm as being spoken by the Father to the Son. There can be no doubt that the author of Hebrews viewed the Son as the Father's unique, pre-existing agent of creation.

Jesus as Active Agent in Israel's History

Recall that in the Old Testament the question "Who saved the people out of Egypt?" could rightfully be answered with either YHWH or with the angel of the Lord, who contains the very presence of YHWH. With that in mind, consider Jude 5: "Now I want to remind you, although you once fully knew

it, that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe." This passage explicitly connects the person of Jesus with the act of saving the people out of Egypt.

Some might object to this argument by noting that there are textual variants of this verse that don't use "Jesus," they instead say "Lord." There are two problems with this argument. First, it is well recognized that the external evidence (the manuscript data) supports the reading of "Jesus" and not "Lord." The decision to choose "Lord" in opposition to "Jesus" by some textual critics arises not because the textual data require it, but because the critics in question found the reading of "Jesus" too difficult. Consider the following quote from the NET translation footnotes:

> The reading Ἰησοῦς (Iēsous, "Jesus") is deemed too hard by several scholars, since it involves the notion of Jesus acting in the early history of the nation Israel (the NA has "the Lord" instead of "Jesus"). However, not only does this reading enjoy the strongest support from a variety of early witnesses (e.g., A B 33 81 88 322 424 665 915 1241 (1735: "the Lord Jesus") 1739 1881 2298 2344 vg co eth Or Cyr Hier Bede), but the plethora of variants demonstrate that scribes were uncomfortable with it, for they seemed to exchange κύριος (kurios, "Lord") or θεός (theos, "God") for Ἰησοῦς (though P has the intriguing reading θεὸς Χριστός [theos Christos, "God Christ"] for Ἰησοῦς).[107]

Similarly, Osburn states that the reading of "Jesus" has

> the best attestation among Greek and versional witnesses and that critical principles seem to require its adoption, most of the committee found it "difficult to the point of impossibility" ... However, such bold dismissal of the strength of manuscript evidence would be justifiable only in an extreme circumstance.

> Yet there is good reason to suggest that both internal evidence and transcriptional probability cohere with the external data.[108]

Osburn and other commentators note that a reference to Jesus as active in Israel's history would be right at home in both the New Testament and in the early Church writings. Jerome H. Neyrey defends the "Jesus" reading, saying:

> It enjoys a weightier and more frequent textual attestation than the alternative readings; and it is the more difficult reading, with a presumption in its favor for this very reason. Although Metzger's committee (*A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 726) considers this reading "difficult ... to the point of impossibility," the reading of "Jesus" is hardly as theologically awkward as some claim. There is an early stream of Jewish-Christian christology which saw Jesus active and operative in events described in the Old Testament. First, Paul reflects a very early Christian reading of an Exodus tradition where Christ was present and active in that Old Testament event (1 Cor 10:4; possibly also in Heb 11:26–28). In several places, the Fourth Gospel states that Abraham, Jacob, and Isaiah saw Jesus (8:56; 12:41; see J. H. Neyrey, "The Jacob Allusions in John 1:51," *CBQ* 44 [1982]: 587–89). Such a christology is found in Jewish-Christian circles, as witnessed by the Pharisee Paul, the Fourth Gospel, and Justin *Dial.* 113; 120.3.[109]

Put simply, there is no reason to reject the "Jesus" reading if one simply looks at the textual data and sets theological presumptions aside.

This leads us to the second major problem with objecting to this passage based on a textual variant. The only viable textual variant besides "Jesus" is "Lord." Even if we grant that the text was originally "Lord," it makes

no difference to the meaning of the text when considered in light of the immediately preceding verse. In verse 4, the author says, "Certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." If verse 5 is to be rendered as "Lord," that statement comes immediately after we are told that Jesus Christ is our only Master and Lord. The reader would need to have the memory of a goldfish to think that "Lord" in verse 5 meant anything other than how it was just used in verse 4.

The idea of Jesus being present in Israel's history is contained in other New Testament works as well. In 1 Corinthians 10:9, Paul states, "We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents." In this passage, Paul references the events of Numbers 21:4–9 in which God punishes the people for complaining by sending serpents upon them. Gordon Fee notes that Paul's language here seems to be echoing that of Deuteronomy 6:16 in the Septuagint: "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test as you put him to the test at *Peirasmos*."[110] Psalm 78:18–19 uses similar language: "They tested God in their heart by demanding the food they craved."

It should be obvious that the Israelites could not have put Christ to the test in the wilderness unless Christ existed at that time and was with them in the wilderness. Both the story in Numbers and the reference in Psalm 78:18–19 describe the testing and rebellion as being against the Lord. Yet Paul explicitly states that when the ancient Israelites tested the Lord in these stories, they were testing Christ. Of additional interest is that in the Palestinian Targum of Numbers 21, it is the Memra of the Lord that the people are described as murmuring against.[111]

Some might try to object that 1 Corinthians 10:9 has textual variants which say "Lord" instead of "Christ." However, this objection is utterly hopeless. First, as Bruce Metzger notes, the reading of "Christ" is

> attested by the oldest Greek manuscript (p^{46}) as well as by a wide diversity of early patristic and versional witnesses (Irenaeus

> in Gaul, Ephraem in Edessa, Clement in Alexandria, Origen in Palestine, as well as by the Old Latin, the Vulgate, Syriac, Sahidic, and Bohairic).[112]

Metzger goes on to note that copyists likely substituted the other variants due to perceived difficulty in the idea of Jesus being with the Israelites in the wilderness, and that "Paul's reference to Christ here is analogous to that in ver. 4." We can thus agree with Gordon Fee's statement "that 'Christ,' not 'Lord,' is the word used in the original text is almost certain."[113]

Second, even if "Lord" is the original reading, our objector will find no relief in light of Paul's "consistent and basically exclusive use of κύριος [Lord] as referring to Christ."[114] A few chapters earlier (8:6), Paul explicitly says, "for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ." So, even if "Lord" is the correct variant (which is almost certainly not the case), a basic understanding of Pauline style would yield the exact same meaning.

Jesus Bears YHWH's Titles

In addition to inserting Jesus into the world's history in moments that rightfully belong to YHWH, the New Testament authors often apply language and terms to Jesus that previously were reserved for YHWH alone. For brevity, I will limit this to a few examples.

Jesus as the Lord of Glory

In 1 Corinthians 2:8, Paul says, "But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." This phrase, "Lord of glory," is where I want to direct our attention. There can be no doubt that Jesus is the one being referenced by this term, as the

Lord of glory is described as being crucified. However, where does Paul get this phrase "Lord of glory" from? Why does he use that term to refer to Jesus?

It might surprise my reader to know that this phrase is never used anywhere in the Old Testament. I contend that there are three probable sources from which Paul draws this phrase. The closest parallel in the Old Testament to Paul's language is Psalm 24:8, where the Psalmist says, "Who is this King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle!" In this passage, the "LORD" is, of course, YHWH. Another contender is in Psalm 29:3, in which we are told that "The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD, over many waters." Thus, we have Old Testament material through which to understand YHWH as both the King of glory and as the God of glory. It would not be a far stretch for Paul to derive the phrase "Lord of glory" from either of these passages, especially Psalm 24:8, in which the King of glory is immediately identified with the Lord.

However, the reader might recall that I began this section by stating that there are three plausible sources that Paul might have drawn this phrase from. Where, you might ask, is the third? The third source, which is arguably the strongest, is not to be found in the Old Testament at all, but rather in the book of 1 Enoch. The book of 1 Enoch was a well-known work in Second Temple Judaism, which several New Testament authors show familiarity with. Paul, being the well-read Pharisee that he was, was very likely to have known it. In 1 Enoch, the most high God is referred to with several titles, one of which is "the Lord of glory." An example of this language is 1 Enoch 22:13, in which we see, "Then I blessed the Lord of glory and said: 'Blessed be my Lord, the Lord of righteousness, who ruleth for ever."[115]

Thus, when Paul says that the rulers of this world crucified the Lord of glory, he is using a title that, no matter how you slice the cake, would have been understood as referencing the God of Israel. That Paul would use "Lord of glory" in this manner is not at all surprising, as we have already seen in this same letter that Paul credits Jesus with actions originally attributed to YHWH.

Jesus as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords

In the Old Testament, a continual theme regarding the God of Israel is that YHWH was above all other gods. YHWH was the king and ruler of the heavenly host. In the ancient world, "god" was used in a manner much looser than what we moderns use it. To say that YHWH was "god," by itself, does not say much. However, for the Israelites, YHWH was not just one god among many; YHWH was the God who created all the heavenly host, ruled them, and judged them. This concept of YHWH's supremacy is depicted with several phrases. For instance, in Deuteronomy 10:17, we are told: "For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords." Similarly, the Psalmist encourages people to "Give thanks to the Lord of lords."

This title is thus something proper only to the God of Israel, for it is only the God of Israel who is over and above all other gods and lords. Yet in Revelation 17:14 we are told, "They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings." In the Book of Revelation, the Lamb is undeniably Jesus, yet we are told that the reason the Lamb will be victorious is because the Lamb is the Lord of Lords and King of kings. The Lamb is thus given the same title given to YHWH in the Old Testament.

In light of all these data, we can see a line of continuity between the authors of the New Testament and the ideas discussed in the previous chapters. The ideas and language used by writers in the Second Temple period were used as a useful framework for first-century Christians to understand the person of Jesus. Much like those who came before, the New Testament authors affirmed that there is a unique person who is the image of the invisible God and who is the instrument of Creation. Much like those who came before, they portray this figure as God's Word and Son. I want to clarify that the argument of this chapter is not that the Christology of New Testament authors was identical to that of Philo's Logos or of the Memra. Nor am I saying that we should use Philo or the targums as a template to which all New Testament statements must be forced to fit. Rather, my argument is that within first-century Judaism there were already concepts of a second, visible YHWH figure who was referred to as God's image, Son, and

Word, and that the New Testament authors placed Jesus into this conceptual category. This does not mean that the New Testament authors did not expand their framework to incorporate new data about Jesus, nor does it mean they never said anything new about this figure; it just means they were not starting from scratch.

Jesus as Word and Angel in Early Church Writings

Before ending this chapter, I want to draw attention to the fact that the position I have articulated was also expressed by many of the earliest Christian writers. In citing these early writers, I do not mean to imply that they are authoritative sources of doctrine. Nor do I wish to imply that they can decisively settle the issue before us. Rather, I cite the following sources to show that the ideas that I have expressed so far are found very early in Christian history. I am attempting to show my readers that there is a continuous line of thought which can be traced from the Old Testament, through Second Temple Judaism, through the New Testament, and to what was held in the earliest centuries of the Church.

Justin Martyr

Justin Martyr, who lived roughly from 100–165 CE, is one of the earliest non-canonical Christian authors whose work has come down to us.[116] Justin wrote several works defending Christianity; the most relevant for our interests is his *Dialogue with Trypho*. This work contains a dialogue between Justin and a Jew named Trypho, in which Justin tries to argue in support of certain Christian doctrines. Consider the following remarks by Justin:

> Wherever God says, 'God went up from Abraham,' or, 'The Lord spake to Moses,' and 'The Lord came down to behold the tower which the sons of men had built,' or when 'God shut Noah into the ark,' you must not imagine that the unbegotten

God Himself came down or went up from any place. For the ineffable Father and Lord of all neither has come to any place, nor walks, nor sleeps, nor rises up, but remains in His own place, wherever that is, quick to behold and quick to hear, having neither eyes nor ears, but being of indescribable might; and He sees all things, and knows all things, and none of us escapes His observation; and He is not moved or confined to a spot in the whole world, for He existed before the world was made. How, then, could He talk with any one, or be seen by any one, or appear on the smallest portion of the earth, when the people at Sinai were not able to look even on the glory of Him who was sent from Him; and Moses himself could not enter into the tabernacle which he had erected, when it was filled with the glory of God; and the priest could not endure to stand before the temple when Solomon conveyed the ark into the house in Jerusalem which he had built for it? Therefore neither Abraham, nor Isaac, nor Jacob, nor any other man, saw the Father and ineffable Lord of all, and also of Christ, but [saw] Him who was according to His will His Son, being God, and the Angel because He ministered to His will; whom also it pleased Him to be born man by the Virgin; who also was fire when He conversed with Moses from the bush. Since, unless we thus comprehend the Scriptures, it must follow that the Father and Lord of all had not been in heaven when what Moses wrote took place: 'And the Lord rained upon Sodom fire and brimstone from the Lord out of heaven;' and again, when it is thus said by David: 'Lift up your gates, ye rulers; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting gates; and the King of glory shall enter;' and again, when He says: 'The Lord says to my Lord, Sit at My right hand, till I make Thine enemies Thy footstool.'[117]

Justin elsewhere states:

> 'I shall give you another testimony, my friends,' said I, 'from the Scriptures, that God begat before all creatures a Beginning, [who was] a certain rational power [proceeding] from Himself, who is called by the Holy Spirit, now the Glory of the Lord, now the Son, again Wisdom, again an Angel, then God, and then Lord and Logos; and on another occasion He calls Himself Captain, when He appeared in human form to Joshua the son of Nave (Nun).'[118]

Irenaeus

Irenaeus is a well-known figure of ancient Christianity who lived and wrote sometime between 120 and 203 CE and was a bishop of Lyon.[119] He is probably best known for writing a massive apologetic work arguing against Gnosticism called *Against Heresies*. In this work, Irenaeus remarks:

> "For if ye had believed Moses, ye would also have believed Me; for he wrote of Me;" [saying this,] no doubt, because the Son of God is implanted everywhere throughout his writings: at one time, indeed, speaking with Abraham, when about to eat with him; at another time with Noah, giving to him the dimensions [of the ark]; at another, inquiring after Adam; at another, bringing down judgment upon the Sodomites; and again, when He becomes visible, and directs Jacob on his journey, and speaks with Moses from the bush. And it would be endless to recount [the occasions] upon which the Son of God is shown forth by Moses.[120]

Theophilus of Antioch

Theophilus was the sixth bishop of Antioch who died around the year 180 CE.[121] Much like the others mentioned so far, he was engaged in early apologetic efforts to defend critiques of Christianity. In his work *To Autolycus,* which defended Christianity against attacks from a pagan, Theophilus remarks:

> The God and Father, indeed, of all cannot be contained, and is not found in a place, for there is no place of His rest; but His Word, through whom He made all things, being His power and His wisdom, assuming the person of the Father and Lord of all, went to the garden in the person of God, and conversed with Adam. For the divine writing itself teaches us that Adam said that he had heard the voice. But what else is this voice but the Word of God, who is also His Son? Not as the poets and writers of myths talk of the sons of gods begotten from intercourse [with women], but as truth expounds, the Word, that always exists, residing within the heart of God. For before anything came into being He had Him as a counsellor, being His own mind and thought. But when God wished to make all that He determined on, He begot this Word, uttered, the first-born of all creation, not Himself being emptied of the Word [Reason], but having begotten Reason, and always conversing with His Reason. And hence the holy writings teach us, and all the spirit-bearing [inspired] men, one of whom, John, says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God," showing that at first God was alone, and the Word in Him. Then he says, "The Word was God; all things came into existence through Him; and apart from Him not one thing came into existence." The Word, then, being God, and being naturally produced from God, whenever the Father of

> the universe wills, He sends Him to any place; and He, coming, is both heard and seen, being sent by Him, and is found in a place.[122]

Tertullian

Tertullian was an influential Carthaginian theologian who lived between 155 and 220 CE. He wrote a good number of works that have survived, the most notable for our interest being *Against Praxeus*. In this work, Tertullian attacks those who seek to conflate Jesus with the Father and deny their distinction. In doing so, Tertullian states:

> It is the Son, therefore, who has been from the beginning administering judgment, throwing down the haughty tower, and dividing the tongues, punishing the whole world by the violence of waters, raining upon Sodom and Gomorrah fire and brimstone, as the Lord from the Lord. For He it was who at all times came down to hold converse with men, from Adam on to the patriarchs and the prophets, in vision, in dream, in mirror, in dark saying; ever from the beginning laying the foundation of the course *of His dispensations*, which He meant to follow out to the very last. Thus was He ever learning even as God to converse with men upon earth, being no other than the Word which was to be made flesh. But He was thus learning (or rehearsing), in order to level for us the way of faith, that we might the more readily believe that the Son of God had come down into the world, if we knew that in times past also something similar had been done.[123]

Clement of Alexandria

Clement of Alexandria, like the others discussed so far, lived and wrote in the second century (150–215). One of the main works of Clement was *The Instructor*, in which he remarks, "But our Instructor is the holy God Jesus, the Word, who is the guide of all humanity. The loving God Himself is our Instructor."[124] Elsewhere in this work, Clement elaborates:

> Again, when He speaks in His own person, He confesses Himself to be the Instructor: "I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt." Who, then, has the power of leading in and out? Is it not the Instructor? This was He who appeared to Abraham, and said to him, "I am thy God, be accepted before Me;"[6] and in a way most befitting an instructor, forms him into a faithful child, saying, "And be blameless; and I will make My covenant between Me and thee, and thy seed." There is the communication of the Instructor's friendship. And He most manifestly appears as Jacob's instructor. He says accordingly to him, "Lo, I am with thee, to keep thee in all the way in which thou shalt go; and I will bring thee back into this land: for I will not leave thee till I do what I have told thee." He is said, too, to have wrestled with Him. "And Jacob was left alone, and there wrestled with him a man (the Instructor) till the morning."[8] This was the man who led, and brought, and wrestled with, and anointed the athlete Jacob against evil. Now that the Word was at once Jacob's trainer and the Instructor of humanity [appears from this]—"He asked," it is said, "His name, and said to him, Tell me what is Thy name." And he said, "Why is it that thou askest My name?" For He reserved the new name for the new people—the babe; and was as yet unnamed, the Lord God not having yet become man. Yet Jacob called the name of the place, "Face of

> God." "For I have seen," he says, "God face to face; and my life is preserved."[10] The face of God is the Word by whom God is manifested and made known. Then also was he named Israel, because he saw God the Lord. It was God, the Word, the Instructor, who said to him again afterwards, "Fear not to go down into Egypt." See how the Instructor follows the righteous man, and how He anoints the athlete, teaching him to trip up his antagonist.[125]

Conclusion

Let us briefly review what we have discussed in this chapter. We began by looking at John 1, in which we saw the author cast Jesus as the preexistent word of God through whom all things were created, and who is the ultimate revealer of the Father. In doing this, we saw ways in which the language used by John is reminiscent of ideas discussed in the previous two chapters. We then saw that these ideas appear elsewhere in the New Testament as well. We saw that Jesus is credited with creating the world in several different writings, that he is credited with actions originally attributed to YHWH in Israel's history as well as titles originally belonging to YHWH. We then saw that this strand of thought continues into many of the earliest Christian writers. This was illustrated by briefly looking at five Christian authors who lived during the first two centuries of the Church's existence.

I must confess that at this point in our journey, I find the case in favor of divine Christology nearly bulletproof. Before we conclude our discussion of the biblical data and proceed to offer a philosophical synthesis of the ideas we have discussed, there is one last rock under which we must check. That is, we must consider how Jesus viewed himself. Did Jesus say or do things that prompted this understanding to his followers? It is to this question that we now turn.

Chapter Four

How Jesus Viewed Himself

In the previous chapter, we saw that the earliest Christians understood Jesus to be the visible YHWH figure spoken of in the Old Testament. In this chapter, I aim to demonstrate that this view was likely rooted in Jesus's words and actions. Put simply, the apostles and authors of the New Testament did not invent a view of Jesus that he did not express himself. To illustrate that this is the case, we will look at Jesus's words in the Gospel of John, the Gospel of Matthew, and the Book of Revelation. We will finish by looking at Jesus's actions in the Gospel of Mark.

Jesus's Words in the Gospel of John

We saw in the previous chapter that the prologue of John's Gospel portrays Jesus as God's pre-existent Word. Jesus's teachings support this understanding throughout the rest of the gospel. For instance, Jesus affirms on numerous instances that he has existed long before his birth from Mary. In John 6:38, Jesus says, "For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me." If Jesus has come down from heaven, that means that Jesus was previously in heaven. This point was not lost on Jesus's audience, who proceeded to grumble about this very notion. In verses 61–62, when Jesus's disciples were questioning Jesus about his teachings, Jesus says, "Do you take

offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?" The context of this statement makes clear that the place he was "before" is in heaven.

In John 8, Jesus argues with some Jewish critics and says, "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad." In response, the Jews ask, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" I want to emphasize that in this question, the issue raised by the enemies of Jesus is that Jesus is not old enough to have seen Abraham. The topic at hand, at this point, is how Jesus can make this claim when Jesus is not even fifty. In response to this question, Jesus says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."

Two things are worth noting about this response. First, Jesus responds to the question about his age by establishing a timeline and positioning himself on the side of that timeline that precedes Abraham. Jesus does not say, "I know this about Abraham because God has revealed it to me." Nor does Jesus say, "I know this about Abraham because I am God's messenger, and I have the authority to say such things." Jesus responds to the question of how he can know Abraham despite his young age by directly rejecting the idea that he is as young as he appears to be. Jesus picks out the person in question (Abraham), points to the side of the timeline which comes before Abraham and then states that even on that side of the timeline, he is present. J. H. Bernard notes that Jesus's contrasting statement resembles what we see said of YHWH in Psalm 90:2, in which the Psalmist says of YHWH, "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God."[126] Both statements contain the same concept, which is that before ancient event X, Y exists. Whereas in the Psalm the ancient event is the formation of mountains, in John the ancient event is the life of Abraham.

The second point to note is that Jesus makes his claim to pre-existence with his use of the phrase *ego eimi* (I am), which scholars have widely recognized as being an allusion to the divine name of Exodus 3:14. Scholars across the ideological spectrum, including those with no allegiance to Trinitarian conceptions of Jesus, have recognized the implications of Jesus's words here.

New Testament scholar Maurice Casey, who describes himself as not being part of any religious group,[127] says that throughout the Gospel of John, "The 'I am' statements are intended to recall Old Testament passages such as Exod. 3:14 ... in which the words 'I am' are part of God's revelation of his name, and to hint thereby at Jesus' deity."[128] Similarly, atheist New Testament scholar Bart Ehrman says:

> Jesus tells his opponents, "Truly I tell you, before Abraham was, I am" (8:58). This particular phrase, "I am," rings a familiar chord to anyone acquainted with the Hebrew Bible. In the book of Exodus, in the story of the burning bush ... Moses asks God what his name is, and God tells him that his name is "I am." Jesus appears to be claiming not only to have existed before Abraham, but to have been given the name of God himself. His Jewish opponents know exactly what he is saying. They immediately take up stones to stone him.[129]

Dan McClellan, who has been an outspoken critic of Nicaean conceptions of Jesus, nonetheless remarks:

> An educated Greek-speaking Jewish person in the first century CE likely would have understood Jesus's concluding and emphatic ego eimi as a subtle allusion to specific passages from the Jewish scriptures. Ego eimi is used in the Septuagint to render two of God's Hebrew statements of self-identification. The first comes from Exodus 3:14, where God responds to Moses's question about what name he should give the Israelites ... Then we have another Hebrew phrase, ani hu ("I am he"), which occurs once in Deuteronomy 32:39 and then six times in Deutero-Isaiah. In the Deuteronomy passage, God says, "Now see that I—I am he, and there is no god with me." One of the

> occurrences from Deutero-Isaiah is Isaiah 43:10: "So that you will know, and will believe me, and will understand that I am he." This is God's way of saying "I am the Main Character," and in Greek it also gets translated as ego eimi. Jesus's use of the phrase echoes this rhetoric from the Greek translation of the Jewish scriptures and so represents some kind of identification with God. Again, Jesus's relationship with God seems to have something to do with the divine name.[130]

Some might try to avoid this connection by asserting that Jesus's words are a normal Greek phrase used numerous times in scripture. However, such objections fail to account for the absolute use of these words in the absence of an implied predicate and Jesus's unneeded use of the present tense. As Craig Keener notes:

> Especially in its predicative form (6:35, 48, 51; 8:12; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5), "I am" is a grammatically normal enough statement (8:18). Even in its absolute form, it does not necessarily imply deity when it contextually implies, "I am (the one in question)" (9:9; cf. 4:26; 6:20). When "I am" lacks even an implied predicate, however, it becomes unintelligible except as an allusion to God's name in the Hebrew Bible or LXX. In the Fourth Gospel both forms are significant (many of the predicates prove inappropriate for merely human bearers), and the absolute form is a claim to deity (see 18:5–8). Some dispute that claim in 8:24, 28; 13:19, arguing for an implied predicate there; but most scholars recognize the claim in 8:58. Given the absolute use in 8:58 and John's propensity for double entendres, however, the implications of deity may carry over to the other uses as well. The implied deity of such "I am" statements would recall the implied reader to the introduction (1:1–18) ... The absolute use of the expression

> in 8:58, contrasted explicitly with Abraham's finite longevity, clearly refers to a Jewish name for God. The most natural way to express simple preexistence (e.g., for divine Wisdom) would have been to have claimed existence in the past tense before Abraham; the use of the present, by contrast, constitutes a deliberate citation of the divine name. As in the prologue, εἰμί is opposed to γίνομαι in such a way as to imply Jesus' deity (1:1–3).[131]

It is thus difficult not to agree with Bernard:

> It is clear that Jn. means to represent Jesus as thus claiming for Himself the timeless being of Deity, as distinct from the temporal existence of man. This is the teaching of the Prologue to the Gospel about Jesus (1:1, 18); but here (and at 13:19) Jesus Himself is reported as having said *I (am) He*, which is a definite assertion of His Godhead, and was so understood by the Jews. They had listened to His argument up to this point; but they could bear with it no longer. These words of mystery were rank blasphemy (see 10:33), and they proceeded to stone Him.[132]

In the Gospel of John, Jesus claims not just to pre-exist Abraham, but the entire created world itself. In Jesus's prayer in John 17:5, Jesus remarks, "And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed." Jesus's claim to have glory with the Father before the existence of the world resonates nicely with John's opening statement that "in the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God."

Jesus's Fulfillment of Isaiah 40 and Malachi 3

One of the most significant passages indicating Jesus's self-understanding comes from Matthew 11:1–6, in which John the Baptist sends messengers to inquire about Jesus's identity. Before we can see the significance of that encounter, we must establish the appropriate context for what occurs.

In the Old Testament, there are at least two instances in which we are explicitly told that YHWH, the God of Israel, will come to his people. In Isaiah 40:3–5, we see:

> A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

In this verse, the coming of YHWH to his people is associated with and prefaced by a person who will prepare the way of YHWH. This forerunner is a voice that cries out in the wilderness. It is also worth noting that this forerunner is associated with preparing the way for the revelation of God's glory. Similarly, in Malachi 3:1, God says:

> Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.

In this verse, YHWH speaks in the first person and declares that he will come to his temple. YHWH says that this will happen suddenly, and that his way will be prepared by a messenger, much like Isaiah 40:3. The idea of a messenger

forerunning a king is not unique in the ancient world, as John Walton notes: "This concept probably comes from an ancient Near Eastern custom of sending messengers ahead of a visiting king to inform local inhabitants of his coming in order for them to pave the way (remove all obstacles) for the monarch."[133]

With this idea in mind, we can now turn to see how these two texts, which were originally about the coming of YHWH, are applied in the New Testament. Various New Testament authors depict John the Baptist as being the voice crying out in the wilderness, and as Jesus being the one whose way he prepares. Consider, for instance, the opening of Mark's Gospel:

> The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'" John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

At the very beginning of Mark's Gospel, he prefaces his work with a reference to Isaiah and the one who prepares the way for the Lord. Immediately after citing this verse, Mark makes clear that John is the forerunner. This is clear from the fact that John is described as appearing in the wilderness and as preaching about one who comes after him, whose sandals he is not worthy to untie. Immediately after introducing us to John as the forerunner, Mark then pivots to telling the story of Jesus. The clear indication is that the forerunner in Isaiah

and Malachi is John the Baptist, and that Jesus is the one whose way is being prepared.

If there is any doubt that this is Mark's understanding, the doubt can be removed by examining how consistently the other Gospels make this exact connection, often more explicitly. For instance, in Matthew 3:3, we are explicitly told that John the Baptist is the forerunner from Isaiah. In Matthew 11:7–11 and Luke 7:27, Jesus explicitly references Malachi and says that John is the one the verse was about. John the Baptist also identifies himself as the figure spoken of in Isaiah when he says in John 1:23, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said." Thus, everybody knew that John the Baptist was the figure spoken of in Isaiah and Malachi. Jesus knew it, John knew it, the gospel writers knew it; this point cannot be contested.

John the Baptist also understood that the person he was forerunning was YHWH, the God of Israel. We know this not only because it is obvious from the passages in Malachi and Isaiah, but also because of the way John speaks about the person who will come after him. John says that the one coming after him has a winnowing fork and will clean the threshing floor (Luke 3:17), which is language used to describe the coming of YHWH (Jeremiah 13:24, 15:7; Isaiah 27:12). John says that the one coming after him will punish with unquenchable fire (Luke 3:16–17), which is the language used of YHWH in Isaiah 66:24. Finally, we know that John the Baptist, like the authors of Matthew and Mark, understood Jesus to be the person he was forerunning, as is clear from John 1:12–34.

All of this, in itself, is strong evidence that the New Testament authors understood Jesus in the manner described in the previous chapter. By depicting this relationship between Jesus and John, Jesus is being portrayed as YHWH, the God of Israel, who is finally coming to his people as prophesied. Of even more significance is that Jesus grounds this understanding of himself with his own words. In Matthew 11:1–6, we are told that John the Baptist was in prison. Despite John's earlier recognition of Jesus as the one to come after him, John was apparently having some doubts. I imagine that sitting in prison can have that

effect on a person. To allay his doubts, John sends messengers to Jesus who ask, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" It is important to remember that in John's mind, the "one who is to come" is none other than YHWH, the God of Israel. This is made clear from John's understanding of himself as the forerunner spoken of in Isaiah and Malachi, and from John's previously mentioned statements which indicate the one after him was YHWH. As a result, when John asks this question to Jesus (through his messengers), John is essentially asking Jesus if he is YHWH. This is one of the few passages in scripture where Jesus is explicitly asked such a question. The very topic of this passage is the identity of Jesus.

With this in mind, how does Jesus respond? If ever there was a time for Jesus to clearly and distinctly deny being YHWH, this would be it. John the Baptist is no pharisee, or pagan enemy to the faith. John is a faithful follower of YHWH who was prophesied about in scripture. This inquiry was not some trap or trick for Jesus. This was an inquiry from an imprisoned follower of YHWH, seeking hope amidst his doubts. So, how does Jesus respond? Jesus says in verses 4–6:

> Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.

This response might seem unsatisfying to modern readers. Why doesn't Jesus answer the question? Why the dodge? More importantly, you might be irritated with me for building up this encounter only to be let down by such a cryptic response.

However, if we look closely, we will see that this is not a dodge on Jesus's part. This is not a cryptic answer to John's ears. To understand why, we need to revisit Isaiah. In Jesus's response, he references the blind receiving sight, the deaf hearing, the lame walking, and the dead being raised. Each one of these is

mentioned in the Book of Isaiah in connection with the Lord coming to his people. For instance, in Isaiah 35:4–6, we read:

> Say to those who have an anxious heart, "Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you." Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.

In Isaiah 26:19–21, we read:

> Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead. Come, my people, enter your chambers, and shut your doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until the fury has passed by. For behold, the Lord is coming out from his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity, and the earth will disclose the blood shed on it, and will no more cover its slain.

Remember that John understood his self-identity through the lens of Isaiah. John saw himself as the one spoken of in Isaiah who prepared the way for the coming of YHWH. John the Baptist, to put it mildly, was familiar with the Book of Isaiah. When Jesus responds to John's question of his identity by referencing these miracles, John would not have missed this connection. Jesus, when asked about his identity, points to the evidence and says, "What do you think?"

Jesus's response, in this context, is an invitation for John the Baptist to come to his own conclusion about Jesus's identity based on the evidence. This remark would surely provide the encouragement that John needed, and I suspect it provided more encouragement than if Jesus had simply said, "Yes, I am the

one to come." Jesus doesn't just tell John his identity; he shows it through the testimony of the messengers who will bear witness to what he has done. It is no wonder, then, that so many of the earliest Christians depict John as the messenger who forerunners the coming of YHWH, for that teaching is rooted in the words of Jesus himself.

Jesus as the First and the Last

The final words of Jesus which we will examine come from the Book of Revelation. Out of all of the reported words of Jesus, I find no claim as explicit as what is found in the Book of Revelation. On multiple occasions in the Book of Revelation Jesus identifies himself as the "first and the last." We see this in Revelation 1:17–18, 2:8, and 22:13. Like much of the Book of Revelation, this concept is drawn directly from the Old Testament. In the Book of Isaiah, YHWH refers to himself with this title multiple times. For example, we see in Isaiah 44:6: "Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: 'I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god." In Isaiah 48:12, YHWH says, "Listen to me, O Jacob, and Israel, whom I called! I am he; I am the first, and I am the last."

What is important to note in these passages is that being the "first and the last" is something unique to YHWH. In Isaiah 44, this phrase is coupled with the phrase "besides me there is no god." YHWH's statement about being the first and last is a statement that expresses not just his eternality, but his complete uniqueness amongst the other gods. For a first-century Jew, there might be other "gods," but there was only one first and last.

Yet in Revelation, we see Jesus saying that he is the first and the last. Jesus takes the phrase associated with the unique, most high God of the Old Testament, and he labels himself with that title. This claim of Jesus to be the first and the last of Isaiah meshes well with the proclamation in 19:16 that Jesus is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. I also want to emphasize that this verse completely removes any possibility of Jesus being a created being who has existed for a finite amount of time. If Jesus was created a finite amount of time ago, then he is

not the first; he is at best the second. Any contrived attempt to maintain that Jesus can be the first and the last while also being created by another God will completely contradict the theological message of Isaiah, which is the source of the phrase.

Jesus's self-identification as the first and the last in Revelation is only one example of Jesus taking Old Testament YHWH concepts and applying them to himself. In the Old Testament, YHWH says in Jeremiah 17:10, "I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds." Notice two things associated with YHWH in this verse. First, YHWH searches the heart and tests the mind. Second, YHWH repays man according to his ways. With these things in mind, consider what Jesus says in Revelation 2:23: "I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works." While the Old Testament states that YHWH searches the heart and repays people according to their works, Jesus says that people will know that *he* is the one who searches hearts and repays according to their works. This is a clear statement by Jesus that the churches will come to know him as the one spoken of in the Old Testament. I also want to emphasize that in the Old Testament, Solomon declares that it is YHWH alone who knows the hearts of mankind (1 Kings 8:39).

Jesus Walks on Water and Rebukes the Storm

So far, we have focused on words spoken by Jesus that showcase his self-understanding. However, it is equally important to focus on Jesus's actions. Jesus can make statements about his identity with his deeds just as much as he can with his words. Nowhere else in the New Testament is this clearer than in the stories of Jesus walking on the water in Mark 6:45–51 or Jesus calming the stormy sea in Mark 4:35–41. Let us begin by reading the passages in question.

Mark 6:45–51:

> Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray. And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased.

Mark 4:35–41:

> On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

On the surface, these stories are impressive and obviously miraculous. However, in these stories, Jesus did more than merely display superhuman abilities; he also made an explicit claim to be YHWH. To understand why this is the case, a few things must be noted.

First, it must be noted that walking on the waters and stilling the storming sea are powers which the Old Testament delegates to YHWH alone. Regarding the idea of YHWH walking on water, consider Job 9:8–10, in which we see Job state that it is God alone who "stretched out the heavens and trampled the waves of the sea." In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT used during the time of Christ), God is described as one who "walks about upon the sea as upon the ground." In Isaiah 43:16, we see "Thus says the LORD, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters." A particularly powerful expression of this idea can be seen in Psalm 77:16–19:

> When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they were afraid; indeed, the deep trembled. The clouds poured out water; the skies gave forth thunder; your arrows flashed on every side. The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind; your lightnings lighted up the world; the earth trembled and shook. Your way was through the sea, your path through the great waters; yet your footprints were unseen.

Regarding the idea of YHWH rebuking the storming seas, we see in Job 26:11–12: "The pillars of heaven tremble and are astounded at his rebuke. By his power, he stilled the sea; by his understanding, he shattered Rahab. By his wind the heavens were made fair; his hand pierced the fleeing serpent." In Psalm 89:9–10, the Psalmist says to YHWH: "You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them. You crushed Rahab like a carcass; you scattered your enemies with your mighty arm." We are told in Psalm 107:23–31:

> Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the great waters; they saw the deeds of the LORD, his wondrous works in the deep. For he commanded and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea. They mounted up to heaven; they went down to the depths; their courage melted away in their evil plight; they reeled and staggered like drunken men and were at their wits' end. Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. Then they were glad that the waters were quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven. Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man.

We thus see in the Old Testament a continued theme of YHWH having power over the chaotic, storming seas. It is important to note why the Old Testament contains such passages in the first place. Why did the Old Testament writers make such a big deal about YHWH treading upon the waters or rebuking the sea? The simple answer to this question is that for the ancient Hebrew writers, such statements mean more than we might realize. In the ancient Near Eastern world, the sea and its inhabitants were tightly connected with concepts of chaos.[134] The sea, along with the monsters within it, was a force of disorder and darkness that needed to be subdued. This is why many ancient Near Eastern stories feature the defeat of sea monsters or the subduing of primordial waters. The Old Testament authors, when desiring to exalt YHWH and praise him, utilized the ancient Near Eastern motifs surrounding water to do so. This is why we have so many instances in the Old Testament that depict God as being exalted over the waters. We even have passages about YHWH slaying sea monsters such as Rahab and Leviathan. God's defeat of such monsters in the ancient world represented God's victory over the powers of chaos and disorder.

With this understanding in mind, we can now understand why the ancient Hebrew author would make such bizarre statements about God walking on

water. When YHWH is depicted as treading down the waves, that must be under as YHWH treading upon the spiritual powers of chaos and evil which were associated with the waters. When YHWH is said to make his way through the sea, that is to be understood as YHWH, the high God, overcoming the great cosmic chaos and asserting his superiority.

With all this in mind, we can now understand the significance of Jesus's actions more fully. When Jesus walks upon the water, He is communicating that he is YHWH, the high God who subdues the cosmic powers. He does this through language and imagery appropriate to his time. I think it is worth questioning what Jesus's goal was with this action. Is Jesus simply trying to get from point A to point B? If so, and if Jesus did not wish to present himself as YHWH, he could surely have done so in a way which would not have evoked the concepts we just discussed. Jesus could have teleported, or flown, or crossed the ocean in a single bound. Yet none of these are what Jesus did. He chose to present himself in a manner that directly correlates to how YHWH is presented in the Old Testament.

Some might object to the significance of these verses by noting that Peter also walks on water in Matthew 14:28–31. However, this argument misses the point. The point of this argument is not that it is metaphysically impossible for any non-YHWH person to walk on water. I am confident that YHWH could make you and me walk on water by the end of the day. Rather, the point is what this action communicates to a first-century audience.

With Peter, the miracle only occurs after Peter requests that Jesus call him out. After Jesus tells Peter to come to him, Peter is only successful for a few moments before falling back into the water and being saved by Jesus. Throughout this entire passage, there is nothing in the actions of Peter or the recording of the event that would indicate to the reader that Peter was actually YHWH. There is nothing in the event in danger of giving that appearance, as Peter's brief expedition in the water is contingent on his being empowered by God to do so.

This is in sharp contrast to Jesus, with whom we get no such indications. An objector might press and claim that Jesus was empowered by God just as

Peter was. However, even if true, that won't save them from the implication of the act. Let us suppose that Jesus is here walking on the water because YHWH empowers him to do so. If that is the case, that means YHWH is directly empowering Jesus to perform an action that would present Jesus as being YHWH. The best explanation for why YHWH would do such a thing is if YHWH wants the audience to draw the inference that Jesus is YHWH. Again, if Jesus's walking on the water is merely a way to get from point A to point B, surely YHWH could have empowered Jesus to do so in a way that wouldn't explicitly connect Jesus to YHWH. God could have empowered Jesus to do all sorts of feats which would either transport Jesus to where he was going, or would display his unique powers as Messiah. Yet, YHWH instead chose to empower Jesus to perform an act that YHWH knew a Jewish audience would interpret through the lens of the Old Testament. Thus, when Jesus performs this action, be it through his own power or through the empowerment of the Father, he is performing an action that would communicate a specific self-understanding to the audience. It seems highly improbable that Peter's actions would constitute an intentional self-identification with YHWH.

Perhaps an analogy would help. In our society, there are certain actions that correlate with certain messages we wish to communicate. Suppose you are walking in the park, and you see a man get down on one knee before a woman. He takes out a small box and begins telling the woman how much he loves her. After a brief speech, the man opens the box, which reveals a ring. As he opens the box, he asks, "Will you make me the happiest man alive?"

In this scenario, we all understand what the man is trying to convey. The man's actions and words indicate that he is trying to convey his love and desire to marry the woman. This is obvious. However, suppose I said to you, "Actually, you shouldn't think that the man wants to convey his love to the woman, because all those actions can be performed by the man in the absence of love. In fact, I watched a comedy sketch routine the other day in which one of the characters did something very similar, and they obviously didn't actually want to marry the other person."

This would be an asinine response on my part; it is, of course, possible for such actions to be performed in the absence of love and sincere desire for marriage. Perhaps the man is a professional scam artist, and this is all part of a plot to gain access to the woman's money. Or perhaps this is all a clever ploy to make his ex-girlfriend jealous. Maybe he is just sadistic and wants to make the woman happy just to crush her spirits later. All of these are possible counter-explanations for the actions we saw. However, none of these changes the fact that by performing these actions, the man is, at the very least, trying to convey that he has love and desire for the woman. Even if all those other scenarios were true, it would still be the case that the man's actions, performed in this way, constitute an attempt to communicate a message to the woman in question.

It is the same thing with Jesus walking on the water. Just as our culture associates getting down on one knee with a proposal, a first-century audience recognized that walking on the sea and rebuking the waves were associated YHWH. A major difference between the analogy and the story of Jesus is that anybody can get down on one knee, whereas not just anybody can do what Jesus did. Unlike getting down on one knee, the actions performed by Jesus had to be sanctioned by YHWH. So, either YHWH empowered Jesus to send a message contrary to what YHWH wants us to believe about Jesus. Or YHWH empowered Jesus to send this message because YHWH wants us to draw these conclusions.

Similarly, in Jesus's rebuke of the storming sea, Jesus does not pray and ask God to stop the sea; he simply does it himself. If Jesus had simply said, "Dear God, please stop the storm," there would be no grounds for misunderstanding. Instead, Jesus speaks in such a way that implies he is the God of the Old Testament who rebukes the waves and calms the storms. The disciples in the boat with Jesus understood the significance of this, as they immediately asked, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" These disciples already knew that the wind and sea obeyed YHWH. What surprised them was that the wind and the sea obeyed Jesus. Jesus, without a request for help from YHWH (the one they knew had authority to do this), speaks as if he is the one

bearing the authority of the forces. Moreover, not only does Jesus speak as if he has the authority, but the forces of nature actually obey him!

Conclusion

The simplest explanation for why Jesus performs these actions in the way that he does is that Jesus wants us to make these connections. Jesus wanted the disciples to question his identity and consider the implications of his rebuking the sea and walking on water. Jesus wanted John to make inferences about his identity based on the testimony of the messengers. Jesus wanted his audience to interpret him as the great "I Am" from the Old Testament. The idea that Jesus would say or do all of these things when what he *really* wants is for you to believe that he is anything other than YHWH is absurd.

How then are we to understand the person of Jesus? What exactly is his relationship with YHWH, the God of Israel? How are we to understand Jesus's numerous statements throughout the New Testament about his relationship to the Father? Isn't the Father YHWH? In the next chapter, we will shift our focus and begin to explore the most effective theory for addressing these questions.

Chapter Five

How to Understand the Data

It is at this point that I wish to take the data that we have discussed and offer a plausible understanding of Jesus's relationship to YHWH, the God of Israel. It appears that our understanding of Jesus can be categorized into one of three areas. First, we can identify Jesus with YHWH such that Jesus = YHWH. Second, we can posit that Jesus is a person external to the being of YHWH. Third, we can posit that Jesus is a person internal to the being of YHWH.

Let me elaborate on what I mean by each of these options. Imagine that I give you a closed box and tell you that a toy truck is inside. However, I tell you not to open the box until your birthday. Suppose you overhear me tell somebody that item X is in the box. You don't know anything about X, just that it is in the box. What are your options for understanding X in relation to the toy truck? You could consider X to be a completely separate toy, in addition to the toy truck I mentioned earlier. Perhaps X is a yo-yo or an action figure. In this case, X is external to the truck. You might also think that X is part of the toy truck I mentioned earlier, such as one of the tires or the steering wheel. In this case, X is internal to the truck. Finally, you might think that X just is the truck that I mentioned earlier, and that X is just another way of referring to the truck. In this case, X would be identical to the toy truck, and everything true of X would be true of the truck.

How might you decide between these options? So far, I have not provided you with enough information to make a confident decision. All these options are roughly equal in plausibility based on the data that you have. However, as we put more data into consideration, some of these options will become less tenable. For instance, suppose I told you that X weighs three pounds while the truck weighs eight pounds. This would be a useful point of data, as it would allow you to exclude one of our original options. If X and the truck have different properties, they cannot be identical to one another. This would leave us with two options. Either X is external to the truck, which would mean that the total weight of X and the truck is eleven pounds. Or X is part of the truck, in which case the three pounds of X are included in the eight pounds of the truck.

How might we narrow things down further? Suppose I told you that there is only one object in the box. This piece of data would be consistent with X being identical to the truck and with X being a part of the truck. However, that piece of data would not mesh well with the idea that X is external to the truck. If X is external to the truck, then it seems like there would be two objects in the box. Thus this piece of data, combined with the data about X's weight, would strongly support the internal option.

With this in mind, the question before us is whether Jesus is external to YHWH in the sense that another toy might be external to the truck, internal to YHWH in the sense that the truck's steering wheel might be internal to the truck, or identical to YHWH in the sense that X and the truck are the exact same thing. I wish to clarify that the above distinctions are not confined only to material objects. One can make internal/external/identity distinctions with all types of non-material objects. For instance, consider the set of all natural numbers. The number two is contained within this set, but neither the set nor the number is a material object. The set of all negative numbers is not identical to the set of all natural numbers, nor is it a part of the set of all natural numbers. We can likewise recognize stories, music, plays, and minds as having parts which are not identical to the wholes, even though these things cannot be reduced to a material object. With this in mind, I believe we can easily eliminate two of the above options.

Jesus Is Not Identical to YHWH

First, we can rule out the option that Jesus is identical to YHWH, as this option cannot account for the New Testament data about Jesus's relationship with the Father. Scripture makes it abundantly clear that Jesus is not identical to the Father, as Jesus and the Father bear different properties. We are told in scripture that nobody has seen God, yet Jesus has been seen (John 1:18, 5:37; 6:46; 14:7–9). We are told that the Father is greater than Jesus (John 14:28), and that the Father knows things which Jesus doesn't (Matthew 24:36). If Jesus judges, he is not judging alone but with the Father (John 8:16). Jesus says he can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing (John 5:19). Jesus claims that he does not come to do his will, but that of the Father's (John 5:30, 6:38). The Son is sent by the Father (Luke 9:48). The Father speaks to the Son in heaven (Hebrews 1). The Son is described as sitting at God's right hand and interceding for us (Hebrews 7:25, 10:12; 1 John 2:1). Jesus says that all who acknowledge him before men will be acknowledged by him before his Father (Matthew 10:32). The Son does not bear witness about himself, but the Father is the one who bears witness about him (John 5:32). Jesus prays to the Father calling him the one true God (John 17:3).

These verses are damning to any position that would result in Jesus being identical to the Father. Yet, if Jesus is identical to YHWH, and the Father is identical to YHWH, this entails that Jesus is identical to the Father. We could put this argument as a syllogism:

1. If Jesus and the Father are both identical to YHWH, then Jesus and the Father are identical to each other.

2. Jesus and the Father are not identical to each other.

3. Jesus and the Father are not both identical to YHWH.

The only hope for the Jesus = YHWH option would be to affirm that Jesus is identical to YHWH, but to deny that the Father is identical to YHWH. This suggestion is hardly worth being considered in light of the biblical testimony mentioned above. This would require saying that another, non-YHWH being gives all authority to YHWH, sends YHWH, and is greater than YHWH. This is completely inconsistent with the data of both testaments. The idea that Jesus is identical to YHWH can thus be excluded.

Jesus Is Not External to YHWH

The next option to consider is the idea that Jesus is external to YHWH. By external, I mean that Jesus is not identical to YHWH and is not a part of YHWH. There are various degrees to which one could maintain that Jesus is external to YHWH. Muslims and Socinians, for example, believe that Jesus is external to YHWH in that Jesus is a human prophet who did not pre-exist his birth or take part in creation. Jesus may be unique in being the Messiah or in being God's special agent, but he is nonetheless still a mere human. Arians would go further and say that Jesus is not just a human; he is an angelic/divine person who pre-existed his human birth and was involved in creation. However, Arians believe that the Father created the Son, and that the Son is a highly exalted created being who does not share the same type of divinity with the Father. Yet another way to hold to the externality of the Son can be found in the idea of Monarchical Trinitarianism. Monarchical Trinitarianism affirms that the Father is identical to YHWH and that the Son is an external person to the Father whose existence is eternally grounded by the Father.[135] Monarchical Trinitarians also affirm that Jesus shares in the same type of divinity as the Father and is omnipotent, omniscient, and so on.

Let us eliminate some of these options. We have already seen that there are extensive biblical data that depicts the person of Jesus as pre-existing his human birth. We can thus eliminate the external understandings held by Muslims and Socinians. This leaves us with two options: Arianism and Monarchical

Trinitarianism. We will begin by discussing problems with Monarchical Trinitarianism.

While there is much that could be said about the philosophical coherence of Monarchical Trinitarianism, I wish to focus our discussions on exegetical issues. Specifically, I want to narrow in on two areas where I find the implications of Monarchical Trinitarianism particularly disastrous. We saw in chapter 1 that there are numerous verses in the Old Testament where YHWH is depicted as appearing to people visibly. These verses are problematic for Monarchical Trinitarians, as they wish to identify YHWH with the Father. If YHWH is the Father, and YHWH has been seen, that means the Father has been seen. However, as noted previously, the New Testament emphasizes multiple times that nobody has seen the Father.

Monarchical Trinitarians such as Joshua Sijuwade rightfully wish to understand these instances of a visible YHWH as references to the pre-incarnate Son.[136] However, if these appearances of YHWH in the Old Testament are actually of the Son, and the Son is not YHWH, then YHWH did not appear at all. Every verse that says YHWH appeared to people is, under Monarchical Trinitarianism, simply false. When the Son appears to Moses in the burning bush and claims to be YHWH, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Son is making a statement that he knew was false. To try and avoid this issue, Monarchical Trinitarians will try to say that in these appearances the Son is an agent of YHWH who can be called YHWH in a metonymical sense.[137] However, as I discussed in chapter 1, the appearances of YHWH in these texts cannot be dismissed as being merely agents or messengers external to YHWH. As noted in chapter 1, Moses, Abraham, and Jacob were given no data that would indicate to them that they had merely seen a messenger.

In contrast, they had multiple points of data which would lead them to infer that they had just seen YHWH. As a result, it is most likely that they interpreted these appearances as partial manifestations of YHWH, and this is what was intended by the authors of scripture. Any interpretation of these passages that renders Old Testament appearances of YHWH as merely that of an external

agent is contrary to what the original person, author, and reader would have understood.

As a result of the above, Monarchical Trinitarians will have to admit that their interpretation of these passages is inconsistent with what the patriarchs in question would have believed about their encounters and is inconsistent with what the original authors of these scriptures intended. When pressed on this issue in a debate, Joshua Sijuwade admitted that Moses would have walked away thinking he had just seen YHWH.[138] Despite this, Sijuwade tried to save his position by claiming that if Moses had seen the Son, his cognitive state would have been the same as if he had just seen the Father.

In arguing in this way, Sijuwade appears to miss the point. First, under Sijuwade's view it is not the case that Moses's cognitive state would have been the same after seeing the Son as it would have been after seeing the Father. I suspect that there would have been a rather significant difference in Moses's cognitive state if he had seen the Father in the burning bush instead of the Son. If Moses had seen the Father, he would have been dead!

However, let us suppose that I grant this point by Sijuwade. Sijuwade's claim seems to be that if Moses's cognitive state is the same after seeing the Son as it would have been after seeing the Father, then it is true when the Son claims to be YHWH in this instance, even though he actually isn't. This is clearly absurd. Suppose that one of your loved ones goes missing for a few days. Search teams are sent out, and you fear the worst. One night, you hear a knock at the door. You rush to answer, and you see at the door several police officers standing with your lost loved one between them. You are told a story about how your loved one had been kidnapped, but thankfully, the police were able to track down the criminals and get them back. Suppose that everything you are told by the police is completely true and that the person standing in front of you is, in fact, your rescued loved one.

Now, imagine a similar scenario where nearly all the same events unfold. You receive the same knock on your door, and you are greeted by the same sight of the police officers standing with what appears to be your loved one. Just as in the past scenario, you are given a story about kidnappings and

daring rescues. However, in this scenario, your loved one was actually killed, and their body was found. The local authorities don't want to disclose all this information because they have been involved in some recent scandals. So, instead of telling you that your loved one is dead, they use advanced technology to create a hyper-realistic android that resembles your loved one. This robot is so advanced that it resembles your loved one so closely that there is no way to tell the difference between your loved one and the android without sophisticated medical tests. The android not only looks like your loved one, but it also speaks and acts like them. When the android enters your house, it says everything that your loved one would have said in the first scenario, and it says it in the exact same way. Everything in this second scenario would appear exactly the same to you as it would in the first, except in this scenario, you are actually talking to an android and not your lost loved one.

In this scenario, wouldn't we all still conclude that the police had just lied to you? The fact that your cognitive state is the same in the second scenario as it would be in the first does not change the fact that the android is not actually your loved one. Your cognitive state being the same would not change the fact that the authorities told you something that they knew was explicitly false. If you discovered the deception years later, wouldn't you be upset?

With this in mind, we can recognize how faulty Sijuwade's argument is. Even if seeing the Son in the burning bush had produced the same cognitive state as seeing the Father, this does not change the fact that when the Son speaks in the first person, claiming to be YHWH, he is saying something that is straightforwardly false. When the Son commands Moses to tell the Israelites that YHWH appeared to him, under Sijuwade's view, Jesus is explicitly commanding Moses to tell the Israelites something that Jesus knew was false. It is difficult to see how the Son is not engaging in straightforward deception in these passages.

Sijuwade tries to justify his reading of scripture by arguing that the Old Testament must be understood in light of the New Testament.[139] This is all well and good, but there is a significant problem with this argument. There is nothing in the New Testament that supports Sijuwade's problematic interpretation. There is no verse, no passage, no teaching in the New Testament

that supports the problematic reading that Sijuwade has offered. Every verse of the New Testament is compatible with an interpretation of this verse that doesn't make the Son a liar. It thus seems that Monarchical Trinitarianism necessarily commits us to a theologically tenuous position regarding the Old Testament theophanies discussed in chapter 1. Not only will Sijuwade have us reject an understanding of these appearances which would have been most likely in the mind of the original author, he will do so while putting false statements into the biblical text and into the mouth of Jesus.[140]

The second disastrous implication of Monarchical Trinitarianism is that it violates numerous passages in the Bible which extol YHWH's uniqueness among the heavenly beings. In the Old Testament, we are told that none of the gods are comparable to YHWH. We are told that YHWH created the world alone (Isaiah 44:24), that YHWH is alone in his might (Psalm 89:5–8), and that YHWH is alone in his knowledge of the hearts of man (1 Kings 8:39). However, under Monarchical Trinitarianism, all of these statements are false. Under Monarchical Trinitarianism, eternally alongside YHWH, there is a separate divine person who was involved in creation who is just as omnipotent as YHWH, just as omniscient as YHWH, and shares the same divine nature as YHWH.[141] This person explicitly claims to know the things that only YHWH knows, and takes upon himself the titles that are supposed to be unique to YHWH. This seems to be problematic for those who want to take the beliefs and statements of the Old Testament authors seriously.

Finally, remember that in Malachi 3, YHWH says that the Lord whom they seek will suddenly come to his temple. We saw that Jesus was understood in the New Testament as being the fulfillment of this statement. Yet according to Monarchical Trinitarians, this passage has not been fulfilled. According to Monarchical Trinitarians, only the Father is YHWH. Jesus coming to the temple would therefore not bring about the fulfillment of this passage. If a Father tells his daughter, "I am going to come to your school and have lunch with you this week, I promise!" Would anybody think the Father had fulfilled his promise if he had never had lunch with his daughter, but merely sent one of his subordinates from work?

More could be said about Monarchical Trinitarianism, but I will conclude my remarks on this view for now. My reader might recall that we had two external options to consider: Monarchical Trinitarianism and Arianism. I have shown that Monarchical Trinitarianism faces unsavory implications, but what about Arianism? Put simply, Arians will face many of the same issues noted with Monarchical Trinitarianism. Arians will likewise struggle with accounting for Old Testament appearances of YHWH and will try to explain these passages as appearances of an external agent. In doing so, my critiques of them will be similar to those raised against Monarchical Trinitarianism. These Old Testament theophanies cannot be adequately addressed by inserting an external agent in the place of YHWH. Like Monarchical Trinitarians, Arians will face issues with YHWH creating alone and Jesus being involved with creation. Arians will also be forced to conclude that Malachi 3:6 has never been fulfilled, which contradicts the teachings of the New Testament.

Additionally, Arians will have to deal with the New Testament passages which indicate Jesus's eternality, such as John 1:1, John 8:58, and Revelation 22:13. Arians, like Monarchical Trinitarians, will have to account for the abundant New Testament data which ascribe to Jesus the titles and actions appropriate only to YHWH. Both Arians and Monarchical Trinitarians will likely try to deal with these data by claiming that such statements can be explained by Jesus being a name-bearing agent of YHWH. This unsuccessful objection will be discussed in the next chapter.

Jesus as Internal to YHWH

In light of the previous remarks, we need an understanding of Jesus that does not make Jesus identical to YHWH, while also not making Jesus an external person to YHWH. It seems that the best (and only) remaining option is the idea that Jesus is internal to the being of YHWH. For the rest of this chapter, I will explore this option. In doing so, I will argue that the relationship between Jesus and YHWH is that of a part-whole relationship (also known as partialism). For many of my readers, this statement might come as a jarring (and unpleasant)

surprise. This is, of course, understandable. One does not have to look long or hard on the internet to see the term "partialism" being thrown around as if it were a theological slur. The claim that partialism is heresy is repeated so often, and with such fervor, that most Christians never give partialist understandings of God a fair assessment. If they did, they would see that partialism not only excels in handling the biblical data, but it is also philosophically coherent, intuitive, and aligns closely with what the earliest Christians believed.

In arguing for this position, I will proceed in the following manner. First, I will present two partialist models that one might adopt to make sense of the biblical data. After presenting and discussing these two models, I will briefly illustrate how these models can easily avoid the problems outlined in the above positions. I will then conclude by addressing some of the most common objections to partialism.

Before we continue, several preliminary remarks are needed. First, although this book is not primarily about the Trinity, a significant portion of this chapter will include discussions and remarks about the Trinity. In doing this, I am not attempting to sneak in any assumptions about the Holy Spirit. It just happens that most discussions surrounding Jesus's relationship with the Father occur in a Trinitarian context. I also recognize that many of my Trinitarian readers will take issue with my advocacy of partialism, and that I will therefore need to defend myself against their objections as well. Because of this, a good number of the objections in this chapter will involve responding to objections raised by my fellow Trinitarians. Thus, if you are not a Trinitarian, do not let my sudden language about the Trinity concern you. You may take comfort in knowing that I will address your objections soon enough.

Second, before proceeding, it is wise to make a few remarks regarding the language that will be used throughout this section. Debates about Jesus often center on whether the statement "Jesus is God" is true. Unfortunately, this is an ambiguous statement and conversations about Jesus often fail to clarify the meaning of this phrase. The ambiguity primarily arises from the use of the word "is." Sometimes, "is" can be used to represent identity. For example, one might say "Water is H2O" to mean that water is identical to a certain chemical

structure. Identity, understood in this way, has strong implications. If X is identical to Y, anything that is true of X must also be true of Y. If we discover that there is something true of X that is not true of Y, this entails that X is not identical to Y. For example, suppose I said, "The person who knocked on my door at midnight last night is identical to the forty-fifth president of the U.S." This sounds like the beginning of an interesting story, but your interest would probably be crushed if I proceeded to say, "She was 5'2", Latina, and roughly thirty-six years old." The reason this would lose your interest is because you know that the forty-fifth U.S president has certain properties, such as being old, white, and male. Because there are things true of the person who knocked at my door that are not true of the forty-fifth president, you can quickly recognize they are not identical. When "is" appears in a sense conveying identity, it would make no sense to say something like "James is the current U.S President, Zach is the current U.S President, but James is not Zach."

However, "is" does not always convey a meaning of identity. Sometimes "is" can be used to describe an object as having certain properties. For example, one might say, "James is bald." In this statement, the speaker is not ascribing identity; they are simply describing James. One can make a statement such as "James is bald, William is bald, but James is not William," because "is" in this statement is being used to predicate certain properties to James and William, it's not suggesting that anything true of "bald" is also true of James and William. In the following discussion, you will likely see language about statements of predication and statements of identity. Clarifying this issue now should help alleviate any confusion. With these remarks out of the way, let us examine some options.

Partialist Option 1: God Is the Trinity, Jesus Is a Part of the Trinity

One way that we might understand Jesus as internal to YHWH is by maintaining that YHWH is identical to a collection of persons. Just as a car is not one wheel or one spark plug, but a collection of parts, some Trinitarians

understand the Father, Son, and Spirit to be persons who are parts of the one God. Consider the following passage by Kirschner:

> Often ordinary objects have parts. Mallets, for example, have a handle and a head as parts. The simple analysis that ordinary objects have parts opens the door to a variety of philosophical issues. Suppose the mallet in question is comprised of only two parts—the handle and the head—and is the only physical object in the world. How many physical objects are there in this world? Some may be inclined to say one as there is just one mallet. But the mallet is composed of a handle and a head. So it seems that the handle and head must be counted, too. Does this mean there are three things? Three does not seem right. There is one mallet, which is comprised to two parts (a handle and a head), but to say that three things exist seems to count something twice.[142]

In evaluating this conundrum, Kirschner surveys several options. First, one might maintain that the mallet is a distinct object from the head and handle. However, this has two issues. First, under such an understanding, we have co-location of material objects.[143] The head and handle (taken together) always occupy the exact same area of space as the mallet, which at first glance seems weird. One might also think that there are problems with causal overdetermination if we think of the handle and head collectively as something distinct from the mallet.[144] For instance, suppose you throw the mallet at a window causing the glass to shatter, and afterward begin to reflect on what caused the window to break. It seems like one would have to say that the mallet caused the window to break, but also that the head and handle collectively caused the window to break. Thus, for any normal instance of a cause producing an effect, that effect is heavily overdetermined. One might resign oneself to saying that the head and handle are the only objects, but then Kirschner asks, "What happened to the mallet?"[145] This would imply that there are no

such things as phones, mallets, houses, etc., which is contrary to our everyday language and intuitions.

For Kirschner, this is where the thesis of Composition as Identity (CAI) comes into play.[146] CAI can be understood as "the thesis that a whole and all its parts collective is the same thing under two different modes of presentation."[147] Under CAI, the head and handle collectively are identical to the mallet. This thesis solves several of the oddities previously presented. Consider the issue of co-locating material objects. Megan Wallace notes that "Co-location of parts and wholes is no more of a problem on this view than co-location is a problem for Superman and Clark Kent—the object(s) under discussion are identical, so there are no distinct objects to co-locate."[148] Regarding the issue of overdetermination, it is "no more a problem than overdetermination is a problem for Superman and Clark Kent—the object(s) under discussion are identical, so there are no distinct objects to overdetermine anything."[149]

In addition to solving everyday mereological puzzles, Kirschner sees CAI as playing a positive role in explaining how Christians can conceive of one God and three divine persons. Kirschner suggests:

> The one God is the three persons (collectively). The three persons (collectively) are the one God. The one God is composed of the three persons (collectively). The three persons (collectively) compose the one God. The three persons are distinct divine persons, but it is not the case that each person individually/distributively is identical with God.[150]

Kirschner maintains that such an understanding can help Christians respond to the accusation that "Trinitarian Christians are having trouble counting: they need 3 to equal 1."[151] Kirschner illustrates his position by asking us to imagine a wall that is composed of three bricks.[152] Incorporating CAI, the three bricks taken collectively are identical to the wall. Now suppose that each of the bricks has the property of being red. If one were to ask how many red things are present, two plausible answers could be given. One might be tempted to say that there

are three red things present because of the three bricks. However, one might also reasonably reply that there is only one red thing, the wall. The correct answer depends on what is being counted. If one is counting bricks, the correct answer is three. However, if one is counting walls, the correct answer is one. This is referred to as relative counting, which Kirschner describes as the position that "A person cannot determine how many things there are until she has been given a sortal (a concept or kind) under which to count by."[153] Regarding God, one can say, "God is Unity when counting 'gods.' God is Trinity when counting 'persons.'"[154]

William Lane Craig has endorsed a model of God which likely falls into this category, though Craig emphasizes that God is not merely a collection of persons, but is one tri-personal spiritual substance.[155] Craig describes his model saying, "God is an immaterial substance or soul endowed with three sets of cognitive faculties each of which is sufficient for personhood, so that God has three centers of self-consciousness, intentionality, and will."[156] Going forward, I will refer to models resembling Craig's and Kirschner's as Trinity Monotheism.[157]

Partialist Option 2: The Father Is God, and Jesus Is a Part of the Father

Under the previous model, we examined the option that God might be the Father, Son, and Spirit taken collectively. Or put another way, these three persons were all parts of a whole in the previous model. Our second model will be similar, but with slight differences. Under this second model, God will be identified with the Father, while the Son and Spirit are considered parts of the Father. I will refer to this model as "Logos Christology" going forward. While this model does not have many contenders in the contemporary scene, this view seemed to be popular amongst the earliest defenders of Christianity. When we examine Christians writing in the second century, we see a common idea that the Father existed completely alone with the Logos within himself. Then, at some point far in the past, the Logos was emitted/begotten by the Father. The Logos,

which was previously inside YHWH, and is now in some sense outside of him and with him, served as the Father's instrument in creation. Let's examine some representative examples of this concept.

The first writer I wish to examine is Theophilus of Antioch, an early Christian apologist writing in the second century. Theophilus writes:

> And first, they taught us with one consent that God made all things out of nothing; for nothing was coeval with God: but He being His own place, and wanting nothing, and existing before the ages, willed to make man by whom He might be known; for him, therefore, He prepared the world. For he that is created is also needy; but he that is uncreated stands in need of nothing. God, then, having His own Word internal within His own bowels, begat Him, emitting Him along with His own wisdom before all things. He had this Word as a helper in the things that were created by Him, and by Him He made all things. He is called "governing principle" [ἀρκὴ], because He rules, and is Lord of all things fashioned by Him.[158]

Elsewhere in that same work, Theophilus writes:

> You will say, then, to me: "You said that God ought not to be contained in a place, and how do you now say that He walked in Paradise?" Hear what I say. The God and Father, indeed, of all cannot be contained, and is not found in a place, for there is no place of His rest; but His Word, through whom He made all things, being His power and His wisdom, assuming the person of the Father and Lord of all, went to the garden in the person of God, and conversed with Adam. For the divine writing itself teaches us that Adam said that he had heard the voice. But what else is this voice but the Word of God, who is also His

> Son? Not as the poets and writers of myths talk of the sons of gods begotten from intercourse [with women], but as truth expounds, the Word, that always exists, residing within the heart of God. For before anything came into being He had Him as a counsellor, being His own mind and thought. But when God wished to make all that He determined on, He begot this Word, uttered, the first-born of all creation, not Himself being emptied of the Word [Reason], but having begotten Reason, and always conversing with His Reason. And hence the holy writings teach us, and all the spirit-bearing [inspired] men, one of whom, John, says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God," showing that at first God was alone, and the Word in Him. Then he says, "The Word was God; all things came into existence through Him; and apart from Him not one thing came into existence." The Word, then, being God, and being naturally produced from God, whenever the Father of the universe wills, He sends Him to any place; and He, coming, is both heard and seen, being sent by Him, and is found in a place.[159]

This idea is also contained quite explicitly in the work of Tertullian, who is worth quoting at length:

> For before all things God was alone—being in Himself and for Himself universe, and space, and all things. Moreover, He was alone, because there was nothing external to Him but Himself. Yet even not then was He alone; for He had with Him that which He possessed in Himself, that is to say, His own Reason. For God is rational, and Reason was first in Him; and so all things were from Himself. This Reason is His own Thought (or Consciousness) which the Greeks call λόγος, by which term we also designate Word or Discourse and therefore it is now usual

with our people, owing to the mere simple interpretation of the term, to say that the Word was in the beginning with God; although it would be more suitable to regard Reason as the more ancient; because God had not Word from the beginning, but He had Reason even before the beginning; because also Word itself consists of Reason, which it thus proves to have been the prior existence as being its own substance. Not that this distinction is of any practical moment. For although God had not yet sent out His Word, He still had Him within Himself, both in company with and included within His very Reason, as He silently planned and arranged within Himself everything which He was afterwards about to utter through His Word. Now, whilst He was thus planning and arranging with His own Reason, He was actually causing that to become Word which He was dealing with in the way of Word or Discourse. And that you may the more readily understand this, consider first of all, from your own self, who are made "in the image and likeness of God," for what purpose it is that you also possess reason in yourself, who are a rational creature, as being not only made by a rational Artificer, but actually animated out of His substance. Observe, then, that when you are silently conversing with yourself, this very process is carried on within you by your reason, which meets you with a word at every movement of your thought, at every impulse of your conception. Whatever you think, there is a word; whatever you conceive, there is reason. You must needs speak it in your mind; and while you are speaking, you admit speech as an interlocutor with you, involved in which there is this very reason, whereby, while in thought you are holding converse with your word, you are (by reciprocal action) producing thought by means of that converse with your word. Thus, in a certain sense, the word is a second person within you, through which in thinking you utter speech,

> and through which also, (by reciprocity of process,) in uttering speech you generate thought. The word is itself a different thing from yourself. Now how much more fully is all this transacted in God, whose image and likeness even you are regarded as being, inasmuch as He has reason within Himself even while He is silent, and involved in that Reason His Word! I may therefore without rashness first lay this down (as a fixed principle) that even then before the creation of the universe God was not alone, since He had within Himself both Reason, and, inherent in Reason, His Word, which He made second to Himself by agitating it within Himself.[160]

Tertullian goes so far as to say elsewhere that "The Father is the entire substance, but the Son is a derivation and portion of the whole, as He Himself acknowledges: My Father is greater than I,"[161] and the Word is "to be reckoned as being in the Father, even when He is not named."[162]

Within the works of these two writers, both of whom wrote long before the controversies of Nicaea, we see the idea that the Logos is something that resides within God and is a part of God. This part of God is God's Wisdom or Reason, which existed within him. Tertullian and Theophilus both take seriously the idea that God was alone before creation, and neither has any desire to contradict Isaiah on this matter. What is of additional interest is that both writers affirm that the Logos being begotten by the Father happened at a certain moment in time. In saying this, the authors are not claiming that this is the moment at which the Logos came into existence.

I have presented Tertullian as a representative of Logos Christology, yet even Tertullian says (emphasis added):

> Now, what difference would there be between us and them, if there were not this distinction which you are for breaking down? What need would there be of the gospel, which is the substance of the New Covenant, laying down (as it does) that

> the Law and the Prophets lasted until John the Baptist, if thenceforward **the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are not both believed in as Three, and as making One Only God?** God was pleased to renew His covenant with man in such a way as that His Unity might be believed in, after a new manner, through the Son and the Spirit, in order that God might now be known openly, in His proper Names and Persons, who in ancient times was not plainly understood, though declared through the Son and the Spirit.[163]

I find this quote interesting, as Tertullian seems here close to what Craig and Kirschner argue. Tertullian does not say that it is the Son and the Spirit that together make the Father; rather, he says that it is the three that make the one God. This seems to land us back into Trinity Monotheism.

Was Tertullian just sloppy here? Possibly, but I don't think so. Remember that under Tertullian's view, God had the Logos within himself, and then the Logos was in some sense spit out, emitted, or begotten. To makes sense of this, I will offer an analogy. Imagine that you have a car in a garage. We might identify your car as the sum of its parts (wheels, tires, spark plugs, transmission, etc.). Your engine is no doubt part of your car. However, suppose I were to remove the engine from your car and place it in the living room. If I did this, it seems like there are two things that we might be tempted to say. We might be tempted to say that the object in the garage is your car, of which the object in the living room is a part. However, since the car has been identified as the totality of the parts, it might be more proper to say that your car is the combination of the objects in the garage and the object in the living room. In this case, the object in the garage is a part of your car just as much as the engine is, despite the fact that the object in the garage is in some sense the whole from which the engine originally came. In this instance, what remains in the garage is not the entirety of the car, for there is a part of the car that remains in another room.

I think this thought experiment might help us understand the interplay between the two partialist models outlined above. Suppose we join Tertullian

and Theophilus in maintaining that God existed all alone, and the Logos was originally within God. To make things conceptually easier, let us imagine God sitting on the heavenly throne. Next, let us follow Tertullian and Theophilus in maintaining that at some point, the Logos was emitted or sent out from the God in which he previously existed. Imagine that after the Son is sent out in this way, he is now standing before the throne of God. Unlike our car thought experiment, in which the removal of the engine would result in a loss of functionality in the car, imagine that God sending out a part of himself in this way does not negatively affect the functions and abilities of the sender. Unlike the engine, which needs to be physically connected to the rest of the car to perform its function, imagine that the role eternally played by the Son within God is uninterrupted by his being sent out and standing before the throne. Suppose also that the figure standing before the throne has all the power and knowledge possessed by the figure sitting on the throne.

Now, let us ask the all-important question: Is God the one sitting on the throne, is God the one standing in front of the throne, or is God both the person sitting and the person standing taken collectively? It seems to me quite reasonable to say that, strictly speaking, God is the combination of the sitting figure and the standing figure. It is both of these figures taken collectively that is God. However, it would still be quite proper for the standing figure to refer to the sitting figure as God, and vice versa. If the sitting figure sends the standing figure to deliver a message, it would make sense for the standing figure to say that God had sent him, and it would make sense to refer to him as a messenger. It would make sense to say that the standing figure is a part of the sitting figure, who is God. Yet it would also make sense to say that the sitting figure is himself part of God, since God would be both figures taken collectively. Thus, our two models might begin to blur together. It seems that Logos Christology (if one includes the Holy Spirit) is potentially just another form of Trinity Monotheism. However, I suspect that many who fall into the Trinity Monotheism camp will object to the sketch I just provided, so I will continue to use "Logos Christology" to refer to the general idea of the Son being (in some sense) part of the Father.

Biblical Assessment of Partialist Models

It is at this point that my reader might expect me to argue that one of these models is superior to the other. However, I will not be doing this. One's attraction to a particular model will likely be influenced by doctrinal controversies which I have no interest in addressing in this work. Regardless of which model one chooses, I think partialists should think about God as a single spiritual substance (or soul) which is multipersonal. I would maintain that the Son is a visible part of God who is sent out to us for revelatory purposes. Humans cannot see all of God and live, so we are sent a part of God as a messenger and revealer. While I take inspiration from the writings of Tertullian and Theophilus, I see no need to identify this part as God's wisdom or reason as they did (though I leave that door open). One might also draw inspiration from the Old Testament's depiction of YHWH's glory as a person and use this to conceptualize how the Son is the visible part of God.

In addition to the above, I would contend that any person internal to God can rightfully be called divine because of the part/whole relationship they stand in. To justify this contention, I will ask my reader to consider what it is that makes an action a divine action. It seems that the simplest answer is that a divine action is an act performed by God. Similarly, what is it that makes a thought a divine thought? Presumably, a divine thought is a thought that occurs in the mind of God. If we follow this logic, it seems reasonable to say that a divine person is any person internal to the being of God.

Perhaps an analogy will help. One could point at me and predicate humanity to me, or one could point at my skeleton and predicate humanity to my skeleton. In both instances, the predication would be correct. While my skeleton is not a full human in itself, it can have humanity predicated to it because of the part-whole relationship that the skeleton stands in with a full human. The fact that my skeleton is only part of a human does not mean that I do not have a fully human skeleton![164] If one thinks that my skeleton is only partially human, I am very interested to learn what the rest of my skeleton is supposed to be! Is the

rest of my skeleton canine? This is obviously preposterous. Just as my skeleton can be fully human despite not possessing all the properties that I possess, I believe that we can refer to the Son as fully divine despite not possessing all the properties of the whole. Thus, we can affirm statements such as "Jesus is God" as true in a predicative sense.

Finally, I will note that it is normal to refer to parts with language of the whole. Imagine I point at your left arm, and I ask, "Is this your body?" It would be quite reasonable for you to answer in the affirmative. Now, suppose I asked the same question about your right arm, or your nose, or your toes. In all these instances, wouldn't it still be reasonable to say that the thing I am pointing to is your body? Surely it would be, yet your arm is neither identical to your nose nor to your body as a whole. Despite this, it is still normal to refer to these parts using the language of the whole. Similarly, when the Son appears to us, it is quite proper to say that God has appeared to us.

With these ideas in mind, the question before us is how well partialism can account for the biblical data. As noted previously, external models such as Monarchical Trinitarianism contradict statements about YHWH's uniqueness in scripture, and they contradict verses about YHWH appearing to people in the Old Testament. However, by viewing the Son as part of YHWH, we can avoid these issues. This is because YHWH being alone at creation entails the presence of any parts of YHWH. If I told you that my car was alone in the parking garage on the night of the robbery, and I told you that my catalytic converter was stolen from the garage on the night of the robbery, would you think that I just contradicted myself? Of course not! This is not a contradiction because my catalytic converter is a part of the car that was previously mentioned as being alone in the garage. Similarly, if YHWH creates alone, that is not in contradiction with the Son being involved with creation, so long as the Son is viewed as being internal to YHWH. This same reasoning would also apply to statements about none of the heavenly host being as mighty as YHWH or having the knowledge of YHWH.

What about the Old Testament appearances of a visible YHWH? Under partialism, there is no need to contradict the text by positing that these are really

just appearances of a special messenger who isn't actually YHWH. Rather, with partialism, one can maintain that these are instances in which YHWH does actually appear to people, though it is through a partial manifestation. In these instances, YHWH is really being seen, but the fullness of YHWH is not being seen, as that would result in death. As we saw in chapter 1, this is likely how these appearances would have been interpreted in an ancient Near Eastern context, and this is likely why Moses later asked to see YHWH's glory. Moses knew that there was more to YHWH than what he had already seen.

It is at this point that it is worth emphasizing that if these were partial manifestations of YHWH, it still makes perfect sense to say that YHWH appeared to people. If you came over to my home for a pool party and, upon arrival, saw me standing in the pool with water up to my shoulders, you might say, "Ah, I see that James is already in the water." You would be justified in saying this even though only part of me is in the water. If you were at the grocery store and saw me briefly at the end of an aisle, you might tell someone later that you saw me at the store. However, in that moment, you likely didn't see all of me; you probably just saw my back or my side. You certainly didn't see my brain or my lungs! The partialist explanation of these passages does not utilize an idiosyncratic use of language.

In contrast, imagine you came over to my pool party and saw me sitting by the edge of the pool, fully clothed and bone dry. Would it make sense to say that I was in the water just because somebody who worked for me was in the water? Of course not! The mere fact that I might have an agent who is in the water would not justify you in saying that I am swimming. This would still be the case regardless of how similar the agent is to me. Partialism thus explains the Old Testament appearances of YHWH in a way that coheres well with how we know people conceptualized the presence of deity in the ancient world, and it does so in a way that does not require idiosyncratic use of language.

Partialism likewise has no problem accounting for biblical data which depict the Father and Son as separate persons, or with the New Testament's affirmation that Malachi 3:6 has been fulfilled in Jesus. Partialism can thus account for all our biblical data in a way that is consistent with what the original author and

audience likely meant: it does so in a philosophically coherent manner, and it is consistent with how many in the early Church thought about Jesus. Why then should this understanding of God be rejected? Now that we have at last found such a fertile theological soil, what would motivate us to continue to look for greener pastures? I am sure that many would claim that the above benefits are outweighed by other, more significant problems presented by partialism. Partialism, they might say, is so problematic on other grounds that it must not even be left on the table as a theological option. I believe that such claims are incorrect. For the rest of this chapter, I will examine various objections to partialism.

Objection: Partialism Denies That the Fullness of God Dwelled in Christ

Beau Branson objects to Craig's (partialist) understanding of the Trinity from various angles, including the charge that it contradicts scripture. Branson argues:

> Colossians 2:9 says, "In [Christ] dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." The Greek "theotes" ("Godhead") means precisely the divine nature. Greek distinguishes between "theos" (a god), and "theios" (divine). But theotes is the abstract form of theos, not theios. It isn't "divine-ish-ness." It's god-hood. Craig himself makes a parallel point about John 1:1 (39–40) ... Ultimately Craig, no less than Tuggy, must reject the straightforward readings of Colossians 2:9, John 1:1, and the like.[165]

This passage is a common citation when objecting to partialism, and for good reason. At first glance, it seems to be a decisive refutation. Partialists say that

the Son is part of God. If this is the case, only a part of God dwelled in Jesus. However, Paul said the fullness of God dwelled in Jesus. Case closed, right?

Unfortunately, this logic will likely end up cutting against any Trinitarian, not just the Trinity Monotheist. We might ask the objector, "Did the Father become incarnate, or was it just the Son?" Most Christians will surely want to say that it is the Son who becomes incarnate and not the Father. However, notice the bind that the objector has created for themself. We could now turn this passage around and apply it to our objector with equal zeal. If they deny that the Father became incarnate, how is it that the fullness of God dwelled in Christ? I suspect that our objector will have a difficult time creating a response that a proponent of partialism cannot equally employ.

Thus far, I have not offered a solution to the proposed problem. I have only pointed out that my objector will likely share this problem. On behalf of all Trinitarians, I will seek to provide an answer. Let us begin by looking at the Greek word for "deity," which Branson has drawn to our attention. It may be that Branson has put too many eggs in one basket when appealing to the distinction between *theotes* and *theios*, as biblical scholars have argued that these words were used interchangeably during Paul's time. As Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke note:

> Of great significance is an investigation by H. S. Nash of the two expressions *theotēs* and *theiotēs*. He put together a rich variety of sources that demonstrate that both substantives were used almost synonymously until far beyond Paul's time. H. S. Nash (p. 16) summarizes, "The history of the interpretation, roughly divided, falls into two periods: the Patristic period, and what may be called, by a stretch of terms, the Greek renaissance of the ninth to the twelfth centuries. In the first period, I have not found a single exegetical support for the tradition (that is the conventional exegetical differentiation between the two concepts, H.B.).[166]

The Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (BDAG) seems to share this view, listing Colossians 2:9 under its entry for both *theiotēs* and *theotēs*. BDAG offers a meaning for these words as "the quality or characteristic(s) pert. to deity, divinity, divine nature, divineness"[167] and "the state of being god, divine character/nature, deity, divinity, used as abstract noun for θεός,"[168] respectively. The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* lists "divinity" as a gloss and says regarding Colossians 2:9:

> It occurs only once in the NT, Col. 2:9 ... The Εἷς θεός of the OT has attracted to Himself all divine power in the cosmos, and on the early Christian view He has given this fulness of power to Christ as the Bearer of the divine office.[169]

Eduard Lohse, in his commentary, maintains a distinction between the terms, but not in a way that would support Branson's contention. Lohse notes:

> The term "deity" (θεότης) should be distinguished from "divine nature" (θειότης). The term "divine nature" (θειότης) describes the character of God, divinity. The term "deity" (θεότης) describes the quality of being divine. Since the words "fulness" and "to be filled" (πληροῦσθαι) are stressed so emphatically, they must have been key concepts in the "philosophy." Where is the fulness to be found? And how does man attain and participate in it so that he is suffused by divine power? Col answers these questions with the polemical assertion: The entire fulness of deity dwells in Christ. Therefore, only that person can be filled who belongs to this Lord—only he who is in him, who has died with him, and has been raised to new life "with Christ" (σὺν Χριστῷ). Under no circumstances whatsoever can entrance to the "fulness" be attained by submissive worship of

> the "elements of the universe" and fearful observance of their "regulations" (δόγματα).[170]

Lohse remarks in a footnote:

> The word "deity," which is only used here in the NT, is frequently attested in Hellenistic literature. Cf., e.g., Plutarch, *Def. orac.* 10 (p. 415b, c): "Even so from men into heroes and from heroes into demigods better souls obtain their transmutation. But from the demigods a few souls still, in the long reach of time, because of supreme excellence, come, after being purified, to share completely in deity."[171]

If this word is being used in Greek literature to refer to what humans can become, it seems unwise for Branson to put too much weight on this as an argument.

It also must be noted that Branson seems to be importing modern conceptions of the "divine nature" into his argument. In modern theological discussions, the phrase "divine nature" appears to be a stand-in for all the properties (or essential properties) possessed by the one true God. However, that is not how this phrase was understood in the ancient world. Peter tells us that as believers, we will partake in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4); yet surely nobody wants to interpret that passage as meaning we will possess all the properties of YHWH.

Setting that issue aside, let us now return to Colossians 2:9. We have seen that this phrase is very much compatible with an understanding of "divinity" or "divineness." What then is supposed to be the issue for partialists? Partialists affirm that the divine soul of YHWH dwelled in Jesus through the indwelling of the Son. How does this not meet the standard for the fullness of divinity? When the Son dwelled in Christ, it was not some diminished divinity like one might find in a gnostic emanation. Nor was this the divinity of some Greek demigod or

exalted hero. This was the presence of the one most high God who was revealed through the works of Jesus. As Craig Keener notes, "Whatever precise sense Paul means by 'fullness,' he clearly means that access to all that God is and does is available only through Christ, a function ancient Judaism often attributed to divine Wisdom."[172]

I will end our discussion on this passage by noting that the solution to this puzzle might be simpler than I have let on. Trinitarians of all stripes will likely want to affirm that the fullness of God dwelled bodily in Christ without also affirming that the Father became incarnate. Solving this riddle might be as simple as recalling the words of our Lord:

> Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.[173]

Trinitarians of all stripes can note that although the Father did not become incarnate, he nonetheless dwelled in the Son in some way. Partialism provides a useful lens for how this indwelling might work. The Father and Son, though distinct minds, are of the same soul and thus share a mutual indwelling. Biblical objections to partialism will thus need to be found elsewhere.

Objection: Partialism Results in Too Many Gods

Branson's critique of Craig contains more than a solitary biblical proof text. Branson also voices concern that such a model leads to the existence of too many gods. Branson argues regarding Craig's model:

> Although there's a sense in which there is only "one God" (the Trinity) there's also a sense in which there are three gods (the

> persons). And we can't downplay that sense—it's the only sense in which the Father, Son, or Spirit "is God." So, to the extent that there's any good sense in which each "is God," there's a good sense in which there are three Gods.[174]

Branson thinks this is a problem, but I believe a partialist can reasonably respond by asking, "So what?" Branson's argument is that there is a sense in which there are three gods under partialism, but it seems insignificant whether partialism entails that there are three gods *in some sense*. What matters is whether partialism entails that there are three gods in a biblically problematic sense. See the "Monotheism" objection in the next chapter for further discussion.

Objection: Partialism Entails That No Person Is Actually God

Branson objects that Trinity Monotheism denies that any person of the Trinity has the divine nature, saying:

> What's worse, in Socialist Trinitarianism, the "divine" persons don't even have the divine nature either! "From him who has not, even what he has shall be taken away." Now no divine person is identical to God, and no divine person even has the divine nature. Apparently no divine person is "God" in any but an analogical sense.[175]

It is important to note that this would only apply to Trinity Monotheism and not to Logos Christology. If Branson is correct, this would simply help us to decide between our existing options. However, for this objection to have any sort of force, Branson must clarify what he means by "divine nature." This term, despite being constantly invoked in Trinitarian debates, is rarely defined by those who seek to use its power. Is "divine nature" referring to the set of

properties that a person must possess to be considered divine? If this is its meaning, then I would say that every person of the Trinity possesses the divine nature under Trinity Monotheism, because each person stands in a part-whole relationship with the Trinity, which I consider sufficient for a person to be considered divine. Does "divine nature" refer to the set of properties that God essentially has? If so, and "God" is in reference to the Trinity (as the Trinity Monotheist will insist), then this objection becomes "Social Trinitarianism entails that none of the persons have all the properties of the Trinity!" This is of course true, but completely trivial. Why should anybody be bothered about this implication? The supposed lack of the divine nature by the trinitarian persons can only be an issue if "divine nature" is defined in a way that makes its absence problematic. Branson has not done this.

Objection: If God Has Multiple Minds, God Wouldn't Be Multiple Persons; God's Personhood Would Just Be Overdetermined

Dale Tuggy has objected to Craig's understanding of Trinity Monotheism by citing both philosophical and biblical issues. Regarding philosophical issues, Tuggy argues that multiple minds sufficient for personhood in God would merely entail the overdetermination of God being a person, not that God is three persons. Tuggy remarks:

> If this soul has three cognitive faculties, each of which is "sufficient for personhood" (i.e., sufficient to make that soul a person), then that soul is overdetermined to be a person! And yet Craig clearly intends to be in the three-self or "social" Trinitarian camp ... consider a sci-fi scenario where a man gets some cognitive upgrades. Since he has a large derriere, he decides to put it to good use, and has a donated brain installed in the left cheek, and another in the right. He now has to be careful how he

> sits, but it's worth it, since each of these brains gives him another set of cognitive capacities. Of course, it is not a brain which thinks, but rather the person whose brain it is, using the brain. Now, he can use three brains at once. But this doesn't make him three persons! Rather, he's just one, one who is over-determined to be a person; even if he lost any two of the brains, he'd still be a person, for any one would be sufficient.[176]

This line of argument is mistaken, as the additional persons would not entail that God is overdetermined to be *a person*, but that God is overdetermined to be *personal*. As Craig rightly remarks:

> The key to understanding Tuggy's criticism is the notion of overdetermination. In cases of causal overdetermination two separate causes are alleged to be each sufficient to bring about a single effect, for example, two matches' simultaneously lighting a single candle. But in the case at hand, there is no causal overdetermination. For each set of rational faculties is sufficient for being a person, but not for being the same person. Tuggy's illustration of the man with three brains perfectly illustrates the point. He would be three distinct persons. In fact, in the case of Siamese twins, we do have two persons, not one, each with a distinct self-consciousness, will, and intentionality. The model holds that God is too richly endowed to be a person but is rather three persons. If, per impossible, God lost two sets of his rational faculties, then Tuggy is right that God would, indeed, be a person; but if he lost only one set, he would be bipersonal.[177]

Objection: Partialism Means That Jesus Is Not Fully God

It is extremely common for objectors to claim that partialism entails that Jesus is not fully God. In fact, if you were to put this book down and do a quick Google search for "problems with partialism," the overwhelming number of objections you would see boil down to this objection. Whether or not this objection is true depends on what is meant by "is fully God." If one uses this phrase to mean that Jesus is fully identical to God, and "God" is in reference to the Trinity or the Father, then it is true that partialism entails that Jesus is not fully God *in that sense*. However, nobody should affirm that Jesus is fully identical to the Trinity or the Father, as this would lead us back to the problems discussed earlier about Jesus being identical to YHWH. If the phrase "is fully God" means that Jesus is fully divine or fully God in a predicative sense, then this is perfectly compatible with partialism. Partialists can maintain that divinity can be predicated of a person if the person is God or if the person is a part of God.

Some might object and say that whether a person is divine or fully divine is not a matter of the part-whole relationship they stand in, but rather a matter of the properties they exemplify. For example, somebody might want to say that X is divine/fully divine if X possesses properties such as omnipotence, omniscience, perfect moral goodness, etc. I see no reason why I should adopt this definition, but even if this is the case, partialists could respond that each divine person possesses these properties and would thus qualify as divine, despite being only a part of God. The objector would thus need to do more to render partialism untenable.

Maybe an objector would say that for a person to be considered fully God, everything true of God as a whole must be true of the person. Since under partialism Jesus is merely a part of God and thus does not possess all the properties of God as a whole, Jesus is not fully divine. There are three problems with this claim. First, there is no reason to adopt this criterion. Second, this is inconsistent with how we predicate humanity to our skeletons despite the fact that they do not exemplify all the properties of a human. Third, for Trinitarians,

no divine person could ever possess all the properties that God possesses. It is simply impossible for everything true of God to also be true of each person in the Trinity. For example, most theologians agree that God is essentially triune. However, it is clearly not the case that each person of the Trinity is triune. Thus, if one wants to say that a partialist understanding of Christ is not divine because he lacks a property that God has, then one has committed to the position that the Father and Spirit are also not divine, as they also lack the property of being triune, which is supposed to be possessed by God. If Jesus possessed the property of being triune, that would, unlike partialism, be a bona fide heresy condemned by the Church. Chalcedon is explicit that Jesus is only one person.

One might be tempted to dismiss the property of being triune as an exception to the rule. One might suggest instead something like "If X is to be fully God, X must possess all the properties that God possesses, except being triune." This strategy would face the issue that "being triune" is not the only property that God possesses but that the persons of the Trinity must lack. For example, Trinitarians will need to affirm that God is a prime number of persons. However, this is not true of any singular person. It is true of the Trinity that it is more than two persons, yet this is also not true of any singular person in the Trinity. It's important to note that these properties, though they all relate to numerical issues, are distinct properties. A number can be greater than two without being three and without being prime.

We can also note several properties relating to Christian doctrine that are possessed by God but not by each member of the Trinity. For instance, Trinitarians are committed to the position that nothing external to the Trinity was involved in the creation of the first object to be created. Thus, it is true of the Trinity that it created the first thing without the involvement of anything external to it.[178] However, this is not true of all members of the Trinity, as we are told in scripture that it was through Christ that all things were created.[179] If the Father is not identical to the Son, and the Father created through the Son, then it is not true of the Father that he created the first thing without involvement of anything external to himself. Most Trinitarians will likely also want to affirm that nothing external to the Trinity is omnipotent, omniscient, morally perfect,

and so on. However, this would not be true of any person of the Trinity, as it would be true of each person of the Trinity that there is a person external to it which possesses the properties of omniscience, omnipotence, etc. Additionally, a common view throughout Christian history has been the claim that the Father eternally generates the Son. This also provides us with a relevant example, as if this is the case, it is true of the Trinity that it does not rely on anything external to itself to exist. However, this is not a property possessed by the Son.

This is a short list of examples; no doubt more could be offered. With these remarks in mind, it appears difficult to maintain the position that for a person to be "fully God" they must possess all the properties exhibited by the triune God as a whole. The simple fact is that the overwhelming number of people who raise the "not fully God" objection against partialism have not thought through the implications of what they demand. I don't think most people who use this objection have even stopped to question what it means to say that Jesus is God or fully God. If you want to maintain that the Father and Son are not identical persons, then they must possess different properties. In order for the Father and Son to possess different properties, they can't both have all the properties that God has. If they both have all the same properties as God, it just logically follows that they have the same properties as each other, which means they are the same person. In order to press the "not fully God" objection, the objector would need to provide a reasonable criterion for what makes a person "fully God" that would not be met by partialist understandings of God. They would need to do this in a way that doesn't collapse the members of the Trinity into one person, and then they need to argue for why we should actually adopt their criteria in the first place.

I want to conclude this objection by closing a door that I suspect some objectors will try to run to. In my above remarks, I have argued that the criteria which opponents of partialism use to attack partialism will logically entail the collapse of the Trinity. I have turned the tables and suggested that it is their view, not mine, which will contradict scripture or logically entail some form of heresy. I suspect some of my opponents might wish to say something like "Ah, yes, but you are applying logic to God. God is not bound by logic, and we can't use our

fallen, limited faculties to understand God." If my opponents choose to pursue this route when confronted with the implications of their arguments, they can do so. However, I can then counter with the same response when they object to partialism. Any argument about how partialism compromises the full deity of Christ will depend upon some logical inference. As a result, my objector must make a choice. They can choose to put discussions about God outside the realm of logic, in which case they have no grounds to attack my position. Or they can commit to attacking my position, in which case all the above remarks apply to them, and they are in an even worse state than I am. My objector cannot demand that I must play by rules that they are unwilling to submit themselves to.

Objection: Partialism Denies That Jesus Is Identical to YHWH

Some might object to any position that entails that Jesus is not identical to YHWH. The fact that partialism entails that Jesus is not identical to God (regardless of what "God" refers to) is thus an insurmountable difficulty. To this, I will note two things in response. First, nothing in scripture warrants maintaining the truth of "Jesus is identical to YHWH" at all costs. This level of commitment appears to stem from norms and phrases in modern Christian culture, rather than from the biblical text. Second, and most significantly, affirming the truth of "Jesus is identical to YHWH" in conjunction with "The Father is identical to God" will logically entail that Jesus is identical to the Father. I see no coherent way to avoid this.

Objection: Partialism Entails That God Is Contingent

One objection raised against a partialist model of the Trinity is that it entails that God is contingent. To say that God is contingent is to say that God could possibly not exist. The idea here is that God depends on the parts to exist, so if the parts came apart or did not exist, God would not exist. However, this

argument fails to recognize that if each part exists necessarily in an inseparable way, then that would entail the necessity of God. The only way to conclude that God is contingent from partialism is to smuggle in the assumption that the parts are contingent and separable. Partialists can simply recognize that this assumption is unwarranted.

Objection: Partialism Entails That Somebody or Something Put the Parts Together

It is surprisingly common to hear that if God is composed of parts, this entails that something had to create these parts and put them together. However, this does not follow even remotely. One could maintain that all of the parts of God exist necessarily and never existed in isolation from the others. For a successful argument against partialism, the objector would need to give some type of argument against the possibility of parts existing in this way.

Objection: Partialism Violates Divine Simplicity

Many will object to partialism because it entails a contradiction of the doctrine of divine simplicity. The doctrine of divine simplicity is often presented merely as the idea that God does not have any parts. While this is certainly entailed by divine simplicity, the doctrine goes much farther than this. Put simply, divine simplicity maintains that no real distinction can be made regarding God.[180] Under this doctrine, God is identical to all of his acts, which are all identical to each other. Similarly, God's wisdom is identical to his love, which is identical to his justice, which is identical to him and all his actions.

There is a lot that could be said in critique of this doctrine, the most obvious being that it seems nonsensical from the outset. To give a full treatment of this doctrine would massively inflate the length of this chapter. However, for our purposes, it is enough to note that there is absolutely no reason whatsoever to commit oneself to this doctrine. There is nothing in scripture that supports this

doctrine, nor is there anything in scripture that even remotely suggests that God can't have parts. Because of this, most arguments for divine simplicity end up being philosophical in nature. The philosophical arguments in favor of divine simplicity largely resemble the type of arguments that I address elsewhere in this chapter (such as issues with aseity, contingency, etc.).

Objection: Partialism Violates God's Aseity

A popular objection to partialism is that it compromises the aseity of God. Whether or not this is the case depends on how one defines aseity. Ryan Mullins defines aseity saying, "A being exists *a se* if and only if its existence is in no way dependent upon, nor derived from, anything external."[181] If this is the definition of aseity employed, then partialism would not entail that God lacks aseity because all the parts of God are internal, and not external, to God.

However, one might define aseity as the property of not depending on anything at all, internal or external, for one's existence. If this is the definition of aseity used, then partialism might indeed violate aseity because God would potentially be dependent on the parts. However, why should we care whether God holds aseity under this definition? I see no biblical or philosophical reason to maintain that God must conform to this definition of aseity. In order to press this objection, the objector must argue for why we should be bothered that God is dependent on his parts.

Branson attacks Trinity Monotheism by citing its implications for God's aseity and the number of ultimate sources. Branson argues:

> Either the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each a se—but God isn't; God is a se—but the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit aren't; or all four—the Father, Son, Holy Spirit, and God—are a se. But the first option contradicts the unassailable view that God is a se, and the second contradicts Craig's own view that the Son and Spirit must be a se to be "fully divine."[182]

Branson goes on to note that Craig supports the third option, which is that every person of the Trinity is *a se*, and the Trinity is also *a se*. Branson objects to this by saying that if this is the case, then we have four beings that are God in the sense of being the ultimate source of everything except itself.[183] However, this simply does not logically follow. Branson seems to define an entity as being an ultimate source if the being in question is the source of everything that is not itself.[184] However, being an ultimate source (in the way that Branson has defined it) is not what the word aseity means. Aseity has to do with whether the being in question depends on anything external to itself for existence. Aseity is not about whether the being in question causes all things external to itself.

Once this distinction is made, we find that the exact opposite of what Branson has concluded is true. If the Father exists *a se*, that means that the Son does not cause the Father to exist. By the definition Branson has provided for an ultimate source, the Son is therefore not an ultimate source (since he does not cause the Father). Similarly, if the Son exists *a se*, that means that the Father is not an ultimate source (since he does not cause the Son). Put simply, if each member of the Trinity exists *a se*, it seems impossible for any member of the Trinity to be the ultimate source (as Branson has defined it). No member of the Trinity is the cause of the other members of the Trinity, and thus they are not ultimate sources (as defined by Branson). However, the Trinity is the cause of everything that exists external to itself. Thus, it seems like the Trinity Monotheist can preserve the desired piece of data that there is only one thing that is the ultimate source of things external to itself, and that is the Trinity.

It is also worth noting that while Craig may affirm that all persons of the Trinity are *a se*, one need not agree with Craig on this point to affirm partialism. A proponent of partialism could affirm that only the Father is a se, and that the Father eternally grounds the Son and Spirit. Or a proponent of partialism could maintain that there is some type of mutual dependence amongst the members of the Trinity. In summary, partialists have options when it comes to aseity, none of which are particularly problematic.

Objection: Partialism Is Heresy

To address this question, we first need to inquire what is meant by "heresy." It seems that this term has two broad usages. The first, and more proper use, refers to doctrines that the Church has officially condemned in its statements. Arianism, for instance, is a heresy because there were official Church proceedings that explicitly spoke on it. Under this definition, heresy is not merely a doctrine that is false. Whether partialism is a heresy under this definition largely depends on whether any of the official Church decrees address the topic.

At this point, it is essential to emphasize two key points. First, I care very little about whether my view contradicts an "official" teaching of the Church. I care about whether my view is true, and I assess the truth of my positions based on the biblical data and on their philosophical coherence. If I find a position that makes sense of all the biblical data and is philosophically coherent, I am not going to abandon that view just because a group of guys who lived a thousand years after the time of Christ tells me I have to trust them. When we look at the history of the Church and at the theological debates that have arisen over the centuries, what we see is Christians (much like you and me) engaging in philosophical reflection about their faith. Sometimes, this philosophical reflection is good, sound, and well-reasoned. Sometimes, this philosophical thought is sloppy, irrational, and ridiculous. At times, we see early Christian writers basing their views on scripture and holding it as their authority. At other times, we see Christian writers twisting scripture to fit their philosophical presumptions. I see nothing in the history of the Church that would give me confidence to check my brain at the door and blindly trust a group of people who don't seem particularly privileged in their philosophical and exegetical abilities.

The second point to emphasize is that every Protestant reading this is already a heretic under this formal definition. If you reject any "official decrees" across the centuries, you have already committed heresy. Do you, as a Protestant, venerate icons in your worship? No? Congratulations, you are a heretic

according to the seventh ecumenical council. The irony of Protestants fervently accusing others of heresy would be laughable if the stakes were not so high. I might be a heretic, but at least I am not a hypocrite.

Most Protestants, however, do not seem to use the word "heresy" in the way that I have described it above. Rather, many Protestants seem to use this word merely to refer to doctrines that they feel are deeply problematic or dangerous. If the accusation against partialism is that it is heresy in this loose sense, then by all means, you have my attention. While I care very little about my views conforming to a particular Church decree, I care greatly about making sure that my views are neither problematic nor dangerous. What then is supposed to be so problematic or dangerous about partialism? Does it contradict the Bible? If so, produce the texts, and we will exegete them together. Is partialism philosophically disastrous? If so, form a syllogism, and I will go where the logic demands. In this chapter, I have already addressed the usual philosophical and biblical objections to partialism and shown that they topple like a house of cards. If my reader wishes to press a biblical or philosophical attack that I have not addressed, why do they not cut to the chase?

The truth is that the accusation of "heresy" is nothing but a lazy theological shortcut. Calling one's interlocutor a heretic is the last desperate move of somebody who has no other arguments to give. When one searches the Bible and finds no scripture that will avail them, and when no philosophical argument brings the desired conclusion, one can always resort to the tried-and-true schoolyard tactic of name-calling. My critics are welcome to engage in this sort of name-calling all they wish; I will not stop them. I will merely extend to them the invitation to join me in dialogue if they ever feel so inclined.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we surveyed three different ways to think about the relationship between Jesus and YHWH. We could say that Jesus is identical to God, that Jesus is internal to God, or that Jesus is external to God. We ruled out Jesus being identical to God because it cannot account for the distinctness of the

Father and the Son, and would result in a collapse of two obviously different persons. We ruled out the idea that Jesus is external to God because this view contradicts statements about YHWH's uniqueness, is at odds with Old Testament theophanies, and entails that Malachi 3:6 has never been fulfilled. We then turned our attention to the internal option, which we designated as partialism. We saw that partialism is consistent with all the biblical data which were contradicted by the other two options, and we saw that all the major objections to partialism fail.

In summary, we should think of Jesus being a part of the most high God, YHWH. Specifically, I have suggested that we think of Jesus as that part of YHWH which can be seen by humans, and which God sends out to communicate with us. This part is a bona fide person that has always existed within the divine soul, and has a deep unity with God such that Jesus can rightfully be called YHWH, God, the King of kings, Lord of lords, the first and the last, and the Lord of glory. In the next chapter, we will examine some common objections to the deity of Christ, and see how they fare against the partialist model that we have adopted.

Chapter Six

Refuting Objections to Divine Christology

In the previous chapter, I presented a way to understand Jesus's relationship to YHWH and addressed potential objections to that understanding. Most of what was addressed in the last chapter were philosophical objections to my model or general objections that I expect from my fellow Trinitarians. However, there are many biblical objections that might still be made against divine Christology. Because debates about Jesus are ongoing, I have no illusions about this chapter being exhaustive or comprehensive. Rather, the goal of this chapter is to respond to the most common biblical objections to divine Christology in light of the understanding offered in the previous chapter.

Objection: Jesus Pre-Existed as an Idea, Not a Person

In earlier chapters, we examined several passages in the New Testament that clearly present Jesus as pre-existing his human birth. Some Unitarians, such as Dustin Smith, have tried to avoid the clear and obvious implication of these verses by claiming that Jesus pre-existed only as an idea in the mind of God.[185] According to Smith, anytime we see Jesus being spoken of as existing in the past,

we can simply dismiss it as a reference to Jesus existing in the mind of God or as part of God's plan.

First, we must note that an idea about an object is not the same thing as the object itself. Suppose that I decide in 2030 that I want to build a picnic table, and I map out in my mind how that picnic table will look. I mentally plan out what material to use, how to fix the wood, etc. Suppose that I finally get around to building the table in 2040. When I build the table in 2040, and I finally sit at my nice new picnic table, the table at which I sit is not the same object as the idea I had in my mind. The table at which I am sitting never existed as an idea in my mind. The idea that I had in my mind about the table did not magically leap out of my mind and transform from a mental state into a physical object. My mental state about the table and the table itself are two different objects with two different sets of properties and origins.

This is something that we all recognize in our everyday language. Suppose that right after I build my picnic table in 2040, you come over to have dinner with me, and we are sitting at my nice new table. You turn to me and say, "This is a nice table you have. How long have you had it?" It would be insane for me to say, "Oh, I have had this old thing for about ten years now." Suppose you question me further, "Really, ten years? Didn't you move from London to New York in the last ten years? Was it expensive to get it shipped?" To which I respond, "Not at all, I just took it onto the cabin of the plane when I made the flight. In fact, I have taken this table all over the world with me. I took this table with me when I went to the top of Mount Everest, as well as when I went deep-sea diving in the Caribbean. I even took this table skydiving with me a few years ago!"

For me to speak like this would be absolute nonsense, yet according to Dustin Smith, this is all perfectly reasonable! According to Dustin, my idea about the table and the table itself can be spoken of as if they are the same thing. According to Smith, it's perfectly reasonable for me to point at the table and say, "I took this to the top of Mount Everest" because when I climbed Mount Everest, I had the idea of the table in my mind!

If we can all recognize that these remarks with the picnic table are absurd, we should likewise reject Smith's convoluted attempt to avoid the actual personal preexistence of the person of Jesus. All throughout the New Testament, we see the person of Jesus being referred to and talked about as if he existed before his birth to Mary. Jesus speaks in the first person, saying, "Before Abraham was, I am." Jesus also speaks to the Father of the glory that "I had with you before the world existed." The word "I" refers to the person who is speaking. The object being referred to is the person speaking, not some idea in the mind of God. This statement refers to a person and ascribes to that person properties at a specific point in time. God merely having an idea about Jesus in his mind would not render this statement true. Similarly, Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man and says that the Son of Man will go back to where he was before. "Son of Man" is a phrase that is used in the New Testament to refer to the person of Jesus, so for this sentence to be true, that specific person needs to have previously been in heaven. When we are told that Jesus created all things and led the people out of Egypt, these are phrases that ascribe actions to a specific being, and the being in question is obviously the person of Jesus. There is no evidence that these titles were ever used merely to refer to the idea of Jesus in God's mind. Such usage would not even make sense! It makes no sense to say that the Israelites put the idea of Jesus in God's mind to the test, nor does it make sense to say that the idea of Jesus is what led the people out of Egypt.

The absurdities of this line of argument do not stop here. If Jesus can be spoken of with this language simply because he existed in God's mind, wouldn't that apply to every human as well? If you think that God has eternally known that he would create you, then you can apparently claim for yourself the same things said about Jesus! Because you existed in God's mind, you can claim to exist with the Father before the foundation of the world, or to be the one through whom all things are created. After all, according to Smith, these types of statements are perfectly reasonable if God merely had you as an idea in his mind. So go ahead and feel free to put on your resume that you were present at the foundation of the world, and try to collect your social security benefits, because according to Smith, at this point you are actually billions of years old!

Smith claims that he can bolster this notion by grounding it in the ancient Jewish mind. Sure, we as modern minds find this type of language odd, but Smith will insist that we must read the scriptures with the mindset of a first-century Jewish author. In order to make this defense, Smith attempts to provide passages which demonstrate that ancient authors regularly talked about non-existent beings as if they actually existed.[186]

The major problem with this attempt is that not a single one of Smith's attempted proof texts is successful in supporting his contention, as the texts he appeals to don't even remotely compare to what he is suggesting occurs with Jesus. Before turning to the prooftexts offered by Smith, I want to emphasize what exactly Smith needs to show in order to support his argument. Under Smith's view, Jesus is described as existing and as actively engaging with the world in a time when Jesus did not yet exist. This is supposedly acceptable because Jesus existed in the mind of God as an idea or notion. Smith implies that if something was thought about by God before its creation, it was normal for Jewish writers to talk about the thing as if it already existed. According to Smith, when we look at the Bible and other Jewish literature, we will see non-existent entities spoken of as if they actually existed, including language about the thing in question being causally active in the world before its creation.

In order to support the above contention, it is not enough to merely point to instances in which God is depicted as having a plan for creation. Virtually everybody agrees that God has a plan for creation and that God planned various things before he created them. What Smith needs to show is that the things in God's plan were spoken of as if they existed, when they literally didn't. Put simply, two things need to be true of a text for it to support Smith's contention. First, it needs to refer to something with language that, if taken literally, would entail its existence. Second, it needs to be the case that the thing being spoken of by the author was merely an idea in God's mind. Both of these things must be present to support Smith's case. It doesn't matter if Smith produces a text that indicates God had ideas about a person before their existence if that text does not also talk about the non-existent person using language which, if taken literally, would imply their existence. Similarly, it doesn't matter if Smith produces a text

that uses language which, if taken literally, would imply existence if the thing in question was believed to actually exist by the author. I emphasize this point because when Smith offers prooftexts for his radical claim, he only provides texts that meet one of these conditions, but not both. Let us look at some examples.

Jeremiah 1:5

Smith appeals to Jeremiah 1:5,[187] in which we see God say, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." In this passage, we are first told that God knew Jeremiah before he was in the womb. This meets one of the conditions mentioned above, as God is clearly depicted as having mental states about a person. However, the other condition is not met as this verse never speaks about Jeremiah by using language which, if taken literally, would imply his existence and active engagement with the world. Knowledge is a mental state, and one can have a mental state about X even if X has not yet been created. Nor does knowing a thing entail its causal presence in the world. Compare this with the claim in Jude 5 that Jesus led the people out of Egypt. Such a statement is not a comment about a mental state God had about Jesus; it's a statement about the person of Jesus existing and actively performing a task in the past.

The above remarks are equally applicable to the claim that God consecrated Jeremiah or appointed him as a prophet. Both of these things have to do with Jeremiah being a special part of God's plan. One can say that God planned for him to be a prophet before he was born, without ever implying that Jeremiah actually existed before his birth. For this passage in Jeremiah to be comparable to the remarks about Jesus, we would need to see something like "Before you were in your mother's womb, you preached my words to the Israelites" or some other such statement in which Jeremiah is described as actively engaging with the world before his birth. These remarks regarding Jeremiah are equally applicable to Smith's references to Acts 2:23, Romans 8:28–30, and Galatians 1:15. All Smith has done in citing these passages is give examples of God having thoughts about people before their creation. However, this was never the issue. The issue

is how Jewish writers spoke about objects that were merely God's thoughts. For these texts to be successful, we would need to see Paul say something like "Before I was born, I had already preached the Gospel to the Gentiles." Or we would need to see God say to Jeremiah, "You were a prophet to my people from ancient times, you spoke my words in generations past." Statements such as these would meet both conditions spoken of earlier.

Smith elsewhere appeals to Revelation 4:11, in which the elders who stand before God fall before the throne and say, "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created." At first glance, it is difficult not to be deeply confused about how Smith thinks that this passage supports his position, as all this passage says is that God created everything! This mystery might be alleviated by noting that when Smith cites this passage, he does not cite it as it is translated in any English translation that I could find. Rather, he inserts the word "already" into the text so that it reads "Because of your will they already existed, and were created." This added word is not supported by the underlying Greek and seems to be something that Smith has snuck into the text in the hopes of bolstering his case.

The closest thing Smith has to a reasonable biblical prooftext comes from his reference to Revelation 13:11, which says, "All who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain." My reader may be confused about how this verse fares any better than the others that Smith has referenced. The quote I just provided, which comes from the ESV, doesn't speak of God's ideas with language that, if taken literally, would imply existence. What sets this verse apart as being closer to a successful prooftext than the others? In appealing to this verse, Smith does not utilize the ESV; he utilizes a translation which renders the verse as "The Lamb who has been slain from the foundation of the world."[188] The difference is that in Smith's translation, the phrase "before the foundation of the world" is connected with the Lamb being slain, while in the ESV, "from the foundation of the world" is connected with the names being written in the book of life. The NET makes this distinction even more explicit in

its translation: "All those who live on the earth will worship the beast, everyone whose name has not been written since the foundation of the world in the book of life belonging to the Lamb who was killed." Similar translations are found in ESV, NASB, and NRSV.

Smith's reference thus appears at first glance to be somewhat reasonable, so long as one doesn't look closely at what translation he is using, and as long as one doesn't start to question which translation is more accurate. If one starts to question which translation is more accurate, it will quickly become obvious that the modern translations mentioned above render the verse correctly. This is apparent for at least three reasons. First, there is nothing in the Greek which demands that "before the foundation of the world" be connected with the Lamb being slain instead of the names being written. Second, Jesus was not actually slain from the foundation of the world, so basic logic would suggest that we use a translation that avoids this implication. Third, and most significantly, we see in Revelation 17:8: "The dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast." In this passage, there is no ambiguity about what is "from the foundation of the world." The thing that occurs from the foundation of the world is explicitly connected with the writing of names in a heavenly book. Thus, we should understand the verse in Revelation 13:8 in a manner consistent with Revelation 17:8 and go with an understanding reflected in the NET or NSRV. When we do this, Smith is left utterly void of any verse to which he can appeal.

However, Smith is not content with just misrepresenting Christian texts; in an attempt to support his untenable position, he also appeals to Jewish texts. However, much like with Bible passages he cites, none of these texts support his contention. Smith appeals to the Targum of Zechariah 4:7, which depicts the Messiah's name as being spoken of from the beginning.[189] However, nothing about the Messiah's name being spoken from the beginning depicts the Messiah as existing in a time when he actually didn't. Neither does this passage depict the Messiah as being causally active in the world despite a lack of existence. Furthermore, the very question up for debate is whether or not the

Messiah pre-existed the world, so even if this does constitute literal pre-existence language, Christians can just add this to their list of prooftexts for the literal pre-existence of Christ.

Smith appeals to the Prayer of Joseph, a pseudepigraphic text which has been almost completely lost to us.[190] We have only a few fragments of this work which have survived as quotations in early Church writers, such as Origen.[191] In Fragment A of the Prayer of Joseph, which is found in Origen's *Commentary on John,* the speaker states that Abraham and Isaac were created as the first of all works. This text, unlike the others cited by Smith, does at least use language that indicates literal pre-existence. However, nothing about this text implies that the author understood Abraham and Isaac's creation in a notional manner. Taken at face value, this fragment seems to be suggesting that Abraham and Isaac were literally created before their respective births in the Genesis narrative. Why should we think that the author of the prayer didn't mean this literally? One might try to object that the literal meaning of this text is absurd in light of the biblical testimony surrounding Issac and Abraham. However, this objection loses much of its force once we consider the fact that in the Prayer of Joseph, the very text that Smith is appealing to, Jacob is depicted as a pre-existing archangel who is the firstborn of YHWH and who came to be incarnated in the patriarch Jacob. If the author of the Prayer of Joseph believed that Jacob was actually a pre-existing archangel who became flesh in the patriarch Jacob, it is no more ridiculous to understand the author's remarks about Isaac and Abraham as indicating something similar.

Smith similarly cites a comment from the Testament of Moses in which Moses is depicted as saying that God designed/devised/planned/prepared Moses before creation.[192] As we discussed regarding the biblical passages above, nothing about this statement constitutes literal language about Moses existing. One can say that God literally prepared or designed Moses before the foundation of the world, while also maintaining that Moses did not exist at that time. This passage meets the condition of referring to God's ideas, but it does not use language that, if taken literally, would imply existence. Nor does it depict Moses as being causally active in the world prior to his creation.

Pesachim 54a

Smith appeals to Pesachim 54a from the Talmud, which states:

> Seven phenomena were created before the world was created, and they are: Torah, and repentance, and the Garden of Eden, and Gehenna, and the Throne of Glory, and the Temple, and the name of Messiah.[193]

In this text, we have language that does indicate existence, but what reason is there for thinking that the Jewish author did not intend this literally? Smith cites this passage and just assumes that the things which were "created" are in reference to God's ideas about each of these things. However, there is nothing in this passage that indicates that this is the case. In fact, later in Pesachim 54a, we get evidence that the creation spoken of here is literal and not merely about God's ideas. Shortly after making this statement, numerous passages from the Old Testament are cited to support the claim that these things existed before creation. Even more damaging to Smith's attempted use of Pesachim 54A is that the author explicitly distinguishes between God having an idea and God actually creating the thing in question. For instance:

> Rather, the void of Gehenna was created before the world was created, and its fire was created only on the second day of the week. And the thought arose in God's mind to create our fire on Shabbat eve; however, it was not actually created until the conclusion of Shabbat, as it was taught in a *baraita* that Rabbi Yosei says: The thoughts of two phenomena arose in God's mind on Shabbat eve, but were not actually created until the conclusion of Shabbat.[194]

In this passage, the authors are careful to distinguish between God's thoughts and the actual creation. This means that when we see statements about God creating in Pesachim 54A, we should not understand these phrases to merely be statements about God's thoughts, as God's thoughts about what he will create are distinguished elsewhere. Ironically, Smith cites another Jewish text that undercuts him in the exact same way. Smith cites Bereshit Rabbah 1.4, which says:

> Six things preceded the creation of the world; some of them were actually created, while the creation of the others was already contemplated. The Torah and the Throne of Glory were created ... The creation of the Patriarchs was contemplated ... [The creation of] Israel was contemplated ... [The creation of] the Temple was contemplated ... The name of Messiah was contemplated.[195]

Notice that in this passage, the authors distinguish between what God actually created and what he merely thought about. Smith's entire point was that Jews talked about God's ideas with language that would imply actual existence, yet the very passages Smith cites are passages that show that the ancient Jewish writers did no such thing! These authors were careful to distinguish between God's actual creation and God's ideas. It's also noteworthy that in this passage the Torah is depicted as being literally created before the world and not just thought about. This is significant, as it directly undercuts Smith's citation of Genesis Rab. 1.1 and Genesis Rab. 8.2, which speak about Torah being created before the foundation of the world. If the statement about Torah being created before the world is not in reference to God's contemplation of Torah, then it doesn't support Smith's contention. Smith's mishandling of the Jewish literature thus results in him citing texts that ultimately defeat his own argument.

Let us now draw our discussion of this objection to a close. At no point in any of these texts did we see the authors talk about ideas in God's mind

with language that implies actual existence, nor did we see authors talk about ideas in God's mind with language that implies active causal influence in the world. We saw texts which depicted God as thinking about things before he created them, and we saw Jewish texts which depict some things being created before the world, but we never saw the type of linguistic conflation that Smith assured us was common in the ancient world. In contrast to all the examples given by Smith, Jesus is described using language that implies his actual pre-existence and active engagement with the world. We thus have no grounds for rejecting a straightforward, literal reading of the biblical statements about Jesus's pre-existence.

Objection: Jesus Is God's Personified Wisdom

In Jewish wisdom literature, such as the Wisdom of Solomon, Book of Sirach, and Book of Proverbs, wisdom is often personified. Consider the following example from the Wisdom of Solomon 9:9–10:

> And with you is Wisdom who knows your works and was present when you created the world, and knows what is pleasing in your eyes and what is right according to your ordinances. Send her forth from the holy heavens and dispatch her from your majestic throne, so that she may labor at my side and I may learn your pleasure.[196]

In this passage, and others like it, wisdom is depicted as a person existing alongside God at creation. Many scholars from various backgrounds have seen in the New Testament similarities between how Jesus is portrayed and how wisdom is depicted in these texts. Moreover, many scholars believe that New Testament authors were directly drawing from these wisdom traditions in their descriptions of Jesus.

Because of these wisdom motifs in application to Jesus, many scholars talk of a Wisdom Christology. Put simply, this is the idea that Jesus is portrayed as

being God's wisdom. Wisdom Christology itself is not problematic for those who hold to the divinity of Christ or to his pre-existence. One can affirm that the New Testament writers use wisdom language in application to Jesus and depict him as God's wisdom while also affirming the numerous New Testament statements that affirm Jesus actually pre-existed his human birth and is rightfully called YHWH.

Yet, for some who wish to deny the abundant New Testament evidence of Christ's pre-existence, Christ's portrayal as God's wisdom is seen as a silver bullet. Unitarians often argue along the following lines:

1. New Testament authors draw on motifs in Jewish wisdom literature to depict Jesus as God's wisdom.

2. Our understanding of these motifs in application to Jesus must match how these motifs were understood in the original wisdom texts.

3. In these wisdom texts, wisdom is not a real person that existed in the past with YHWH at creation, but was merely a poetic personification.

4. Therefore, Jesus was not being presented as an actual, real person existing in the past either; he was just the incarnation of a personification of wisdom (whatever that means).[197]

Regarding the first premise, many of the passages that are often cited as clear instances of Wisdom Christology are not obviously so. For instance, proponents of Wisdom Christology often cite Colossians 1:15–18 as a passage that should be interpreted through the lens of Jewish wisdom literature due to its similarities with the Wisdom of Solomon 7. However, not all scholars agree with such a connection. Gordon Fee, a leading scholar on Paul, critiques many of the Pauline proof texts offered in support of Wisdom Christology, and makes the following remarks regarding Colossians 1:15–17:

> What often is not said, but needs to be, is that even those who find Wisdom here are confronted by the reality that *most* of what Paul says in this "hymn" has no relationship to Wisdom at all. Indeed, as Martin, for example, points out about the second part of line *b′*, "No Jewish writer rose to these heights in daring to predict that wisdom was the ultimate goal of all creation." And since the "parallels" are only in the mind of the beholder, the same could be said of all the alleged parallels, including that between Christ and Wisdom as the agent of creation, for, apart from this altogether dubious one, there simply is no parallel of any kind in Paul's writings between Christ and personified Wisdom.[198]

Similarly, many assert that John 1 depicts a Wisdom Christology and support this claim by drawing on similarities between the prologue and ancient wisdom literature. However, as noted in chapter 3, a tight connection can also be made between John 1 and the Memra of the targums. I am not here denying that there is any connection between Jesus and wisdom literature in the New Testament; I am merely pointing out that proponents of Wisdom Christology often play fast and loose with the verses they wish to cite in their favor.

Regarding the second premise, many objectors fail to recognize that an author can utilize the language and concepts of an existing work without committing themselves to the work as a rigid and inerrant framework. If the first-century Jewish world was already speaking about Wisdom as a pre-existing person present at creation, and the disciples wanted to say something similar about Jesus, these existing works would supply a fruitful conceptual springboard for the New Testament authors, regardless of whether the original works were literal or not. As Craig Keener notes, "It was easier to stretch Wisdom or Logos language to new bounds than to try to communicate Jesus' identity with no point of contact."[199] Keener further remarks:

> John's Jesus is more than merely divine Wisdom. Jesus may remain distinct from and subordinate to the Father and may exercise roles frequently equivalent to the exalted role of Wisdom in Jewish literature; yet he does not precisely fit the traditional categories. John utilizes the closest concept available from his milieu, but modifies it to fit his Christology rather than his Christology to fit beliefs about divine Wisdom.[200]

Many Unitarians are so preoccupied with finding a way to suppress the New Testament's teachings on Christ that they have failed to appreciate how the New Testament authors can utilize existing concepts not by following them rigidly, but by stretching them to fit the revelation provided by Christ.

To make matters worse, the Old Testament is filled with instances in which the authors draw on non-biblical sources to present their ideas. For instance, in Daniel 7 when the Son of Man comes upon the clouds to meet the Ancient of Days, this is almost certainly drawing on Canaanite language and imagery originally applied to Baal/El. As John and Adela Collins note regarding this passage, "No other material now extant provides as good an explanation of the configuration of imagery in Daniel's dream."[201]

Should we all conclude that Jesus is actually Baal as a result of this? Of course not! However, if proponents of the above argument were to follow their absurd methodology, they would be forced to this conclusion. According to the above argument, if an author draws upon the language of X to depict Y, the understanding of Y must be dictated by what was true of X. In the Canaanite sources from which Daniel drew, the cloud rider who is given dominion by the Ancient of Days was undeniably Baal. Since the Son is depicted using this Baal imagery, according to the above syllogism, we must all conclude that Daniel was identifying the Son of Man with Baal!

While more could be said in objection to these first two premises, I will actually grant them for the sake of argument. I will grant these premises to our Unitarian friends because, in a poetic twist of irony, these premises will actually end up supporting my position. To see why this is the case, we must turn our

gaze to the third premise in the numbered list above. In many presentations of this argument, the objector seems to take for granted the assumption that talk of Wisdom for a first-century Jew was merely poetic. However, if our objector is wrong about this, and if Wisdom was understood in the first century to be an intermediary person similar to the Logos of Philo or the Memra of the Targum, then not only will the argument fail, but the argument will also actually end up cutting against the Unitarian who presents it. If Wisdom was believed to be a real, pre-existing person that existed with YHWH at creation and was active in Israel's history, and if the New Testament authors depict Jesus as being this Wisdom, then according to the second premise of the Unitarian reasoning outlined above, that would entail what I have been arguing for in the last few chapters.

This brings us to a crucial question. Did Jews in the first century think of Wisdom as a real person, or merely a poetic personification? The most likely answer to this question is that they viewed Wisdom as a real person, and that this person was merged with the angel of the Lord and the Word of the Lord by the first century. This merging would be similar to how we saw Philo merge God's Logos with the angel of the Lord and with visible appearances of YHWH. To keep this section brief, I will present evidence for this contention arising from the Wisdom of Solomon, as it is one of the central texts that objectors appeal to, and its writing is close to the time of the New Testament.

In the Wisdom of Solomon 10:1–26, the reader is given an overview of Wisdom's involvement with the patriarchs. What is significant about this overview is how often Wisdom performs the roles and duties associated with YHWH / the angel of the Lord. In 10:6, we see that it was Wisdom that rescued Lot from Sodom. However, in Genesis 19, we see that it was two "angels" who rescued Lot. In 10:17, we are told that Wisdom rescued the people from Egypt, and that it was Wisdom that was the pillar of cloud/fire which guided them. However, as noted in chapter 2, in the Old Testament, it was YHWH / the angel of the Lord who rescued Israel from Egypt and who was in the cloud. In 10:10–12, Wisdom's actions with Jacob are described as follows:

> It was she who guided a righteous man, fugitive from his brother's wrath, on the straight path; she showed him the kingdom of God and gave him knowledge of holy things; she prospered him in his toils and multiplied the fruits of his labors. When men in their greed tried to get the better of him, she stood by him and made him rich. She sedulously guarded him from his enemies, and secured him from ambush; she gave him victory in a hard contest, that he might know that godliness is more potent than all else.[202]

However, in Genesis, it is God who spoke to Jacob in his dream at Bethel (Genesis 28:12–17). It is this God who watches over Jacob who is described as the angel of the Lord in Genesis 31 and is credited with helping Jacob when Laban became covetous. In Wisdom of Solomon 10:12, Wisdom is described as declaring Jacob victorious in his arduous contest, which no doubt refers to Jacob's wrestling with God in Genesis 32. However, we know that it was YHWH / the angel of the Lord who wrestled with Jacob and declared him victorious.

Perhaps more importantly, in the Wisdom of Solomon, "Word" and "Wisdom" seem to be used interchangeably. Both Word and Wisdom are described as being all-powerful and as occupying the Divine Throne (7:23 and 9:4), and in 9:1–2, Word and Wisdom are used back-to-back in a seemingly interchangeable way. Of additional interest is that Philo also seems to equate Wisdom with the Word in his work so that the two are interchangeable.[203]

Yet, in chapter 18 of the Wisdom of Solomon, the Word (Logos) is depicted as the angel who carried out the tenth plague of the Egyptians:

> While all things were enveloped in peaceful silence and night was midway through her swift course, your all-powerful Logos, out of the heavens, from the royal throne, leaped like a relentless warrior into the midst of the land marked for destruction, bearing your unambiguous decree as a sharp sword. Standing

> it filled all things with death; it touched the heavens, yet stood poised upon the earth.[204]

Jarl Fossum notes that this description of the Word reflects the language and imagery of 1 Chronicles 21:15–16,[205] in which the angel of the Lord is described as follows:

> God sent the angel to Jerusalem to destroy it, but as he was about to destroy it, the Lord saw, and he relented from the calamity. And he said to the angel who was working destruction, "It is enough; now stay your hand." And the angel of the Lord was standing by the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. And David lifted his eyes and saw the angel of the Lord standing between earth and heaven, and in his hand a drawn sword stretched out over Jerusalem.

Notice that in this passage, the angel of the Lord is depicted as being a destroying angel, wielding a sword and standing between earth and heaven. This is the same imagery that we saw used for the Word in the Wisdom of Solomon 18.

If the Word is equated with the angel of the Lord in the Wisdom of Solomon, that would fit perfectly with what we saw in chapter 2, in which we saw that Philo did something similar with his Logos. The most likely inference here is that there is an existing tradition that associated the angel of the Lord with the Word of the Lord, and that the Wisdom of Solomon drew from this tradition.

However, if this is the case, then the evidence against Unitarians is overwhelming. As has been noted above, and as Unitarians often admit, Word and Wisdom are used interchangeably in the Wisdom of Solomon. Thus, our understanding of the Word can inform our understanding of Wisdom in this work. The evidence that the author of the Wisdom of Solomon understood the Word to be God's angel arises not only from the passages above, but from all

of the evidence that we surveyed in chapters 1–2. If God's Wisdom and God's Word were merged and used interchangeably at this time, then all the evidence we previously discussed showing that God's Word was thought of as an actual person is also evidence that God's Wisdom was thought of as an actual person.

I want to emphasize here that my remarks on these matters are by no means novel. In making these connections, I am simply following the well-tread path of earlier scholars. For instance, Charles Talbert remarks, "The mythology of a heavenly, divine redeemer figure alternately described as Logos-Wisdom-Angel-Spirit existed in Alexandrian Judaism prior to Philo (e.g. Wisdom of Solomon). In this mythology the redeemer figure was personal."[206] Jarl Fossum notes, "Whatever is the ultimate origin of the Wisdom myth, in Judaism Sophia has assimilated the Biblical figure of the Angel of the Lord."[207] Darrell Hannah states: "It would appear, then, that Philo drew on a hellenistic Jewish tradition which asserted that by means of His Word, which was the same as His Wisdom, God created the universe and revealed himself to the prophets."[208] Daniel Boyarin remarks: "In the first and second centuries there were Jewish non-Christians who firmly held theological doctrines of a second God, variously called Logos, Memra, Sophia, Metatron, or Yahoel; indeed, perhaps most of the Jews did so at the time."[209]

The implication of all of this for Unitarians such as Dustin Smith is deeply embarrassing. Smith has dedicated significant energy and resources to arguing that the New Testament identifies Jesus with God's incarnate Wisdom. Smith used Jesus's connection to divine Wisdom as a beachhead for his attack against divine Christology. Yet, Smith's entire strategy hinged upon Wisdom being mere poetic personification, which, as we have seen, is likely false. This means that all the painstaking attention which Smith has mustered in an attempt to disprove the pre-existence of Christ will now actually end up supporting it! It turns out that every passage in scripture that Smith claimed was an identification of Jesus with Wisdom actually identifies Jesus with the angel of the Lord in the Old Testament!

Objection: Jesus Is Just an Agent

In the previous chapters, we saw numerous data points that depict Jesus as the embodiment of YHWH on earth. These data included statements made about Jesus by the New Testament authors, as well as statements that Jesus made about himself. One of the most common methods used by objectors to avoid these data is to claim that all these things could be said about Jesus merely because Jesus is YHWH's agent.

The central problem with this objection is that it is almost completely groundless. To be sure, there are instances in which something done by an agent can be attributed to the person they serve. For instance, if a president gives an order to Bob to assassinate somebody, we might say that Bob killed the person, or we might say that the president killed the person. The actions performed by Bob can reasonably be attributed to the president because it is through Bob that the president performs the action. This is completely reasonable. However, there is a limit to this type of language. If the president performed an action long before Bob was ever born, the mere fact that Bob is an agent of the president does not justify us in saying that Bob performed the action. Nor would it make any sense to say that Bob was with the president in these earlier moments.

Similarly, it would not be proper to go around attributing all the properties of the president to Bob just because of the agent relationship that Bob stands in to the president. If the president is six feet tall, male, and has red hair, we would not be justified in saying that Bob has all these properties just because Bob is an agent. Likewise, if Bob shows up at my door on Sunday night, I would not be justified in telling my friends that the president showed up at my door.

In other areas, we all recognize that there is a limit on what we can say about Bob based on the agent relationship that he stands in to the president. Yet when it comes to Jesus, all of this logic just goes out the window. I will remind my reader that Jesus explicitly says that he was with the Father before the creation of the world (John 17:5). Jesus is described as being involved in creation (Colossians 1:15–18) and is depicted as performing actions in Israel's history that were originally attributed to the very presence of YHWH (Jude 5). Jesus

speaks of himself in the first person and applies YHWH epithets and properties to himself (Revelation 1:17–18, 2:23).

Some objectors will try to find Old Testament passages to justify their assertion that agency can account for Jesus being spoken of in this way, but all such endeavors fail miserably. Within the Old Testament, we never see any human prophet spoken of as Jesus is spoken of in the New Testament, despite the fact that the Old Testament is filled with prophets who served as YHWH's agents here on earth! Despite this, objectors usually run to a handful of passages to try to make their case.

One passage that is often cited is Exodus 7:17, in which we see YHWH command Moses to say: "Thus says the Lord, 'By this you shall know that I am the Lord: behold, with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water that is in the Nile, and it shall turn into blood.'" In this passage, YHWH speaks through Moses in the first person and mentions the staff being "in my hand." However, we know that in this story, it is Moses who actually strikes the Nile with the staff. Thus, YHWH speaks of doing something in the first person that is actually done by Moses. Unitarians will thus use this passage to invoke the concept of agency whenever it suits them in the New Testament.

However, this passage cannot lead Unitarians to their desired conclusion for two major reasons. First, in this passage, YHWH commands his agents to do something, which is why YHWH is said to be the person who does it. I started our discussion by noting that agency can account for this type of language. Just as we can say that the president killed the person because of the order they gave Bob, we can say that YHWH strikes the Nile with the staff in his hand because of the order he gave Moses. However, this does not constitute an example comparable to Jesus, because Moses is not said to perform an action that he actually had no part in. In the Moses example, both YHWH and Moses are involved in the action, and Moses's actions are attributed to YHWH because of the agent relationship that Moses stands in. However, with Jesus, the Unitarian would have us believe that actions can be attributed to Jesus based on agency, despite the fact that Jesus had no actual role in the actions, and despite the fact that Jesus didn't even exist at the time of the action! Exodus 7:17 simply

does not set this precedent. Another problem with this prooftext is that Moses explicitly distinguishes himself from YHWH. Moses begins his statement with "Thus says the Lord," which sets the stage for the following statements to be understood with YHWH as the speaker. No such thing is done when Jesus says, "Before Abraham was, I am," or when he claims to be the first and the last.

There is simply no precedent in the Old Testament prophets that is comparable to what we see said of Jesus in the New Testament. Yet some Unitarians think that they can find justification for their position in other ancient Jewish literature. For instance, Smith appeals to the Talmud, saying, "I suggest that the Jewish definition of agency, where 'a person's agent is equivalent to the person himself' (b. Qidd. 42b, 43a), best accounts for the relationship between God and Jesus." At first glance, this might seem like a powerful argument. Smith appears to have produced a Jewish source that presents a person's agent as equivalent to the person. However, as is the case with most of Smith's prooftexts, a very different story is told when one simply reads the citation in question (emphasis added):

> The Gemara returns to discuss various aspects of agency. And there is a difficulty from that which we learned in a mishna (Bava Kamma 59b): In the case of one who sends an item that causes a fire in the hands of a deaf-mute, an imbecile, or a minor, the one who sent it is exempt according to human laws but liable according to the laws of Heaven. If he sent it in the hands of a halakhically competent person, only the halakhically competent person is liable. But why is the halakhically competent person liable? **Let us say that the legal status of a person's agent is like that of himself**. The Gemara answers: There it is different, as there is no agency for transgression, as we say: When there is a conflict between the words of the Master, i.e., God, and the words of the student, i.e., a human being, whose words should be listened

> to? Consequently, the agent is considered to have acted of his own accord, and the one who sent him bears no responsibility.

The context of the passage that Smith cites is about the legal culpability of an agent under various situations. There is nothing in this passage that would justify the Unitarian assertion that one can speak of an agent as if it has all the properties of the person it represents.

Objection: Jesus Is a Name-Bearing Agent

As we saw in the previous objection, Jesus being YHWH's agent is not enough to warrant the language that is used of him. However, objectors have another strategy that they can appeal to. Our objector might say that Jesus is not any mere agent; he is an agent that bears the divine name. In this objection, it is in virtue of Jesus bearing the divine name and Jesus being YHWH's agent that allows him to speak in the first person as YHWH, to perform tasks associated only with YHWH, and to have statements only true of YHWH ascribed to him.

In light of our earlier discussion of how YHWH's name was a circumlocution for YHWH's very presence in the Old Testament, one might rightfully be confused about how this objection avoids the divinity of Christ. If the objector admits that YHWH's name was in Jesus, or that Jesus had the divine name, that seems to be a flagrant admission that Jesus possessed the divinity for which I have been arguing. Yet many who use this objection don't recognize the full significance of what it means to say that Jesus had YHWH's name. Instead, many objectors treat the divine name as if it were merely a name badge that YHWH could slap on any person he desired. Once YHWH places this name badge on a person, that person suddenly has all the authority and prerogatives of YHWH, can speak as YHWH, can be attributed all the properties of YHWH, all while remaining an external agent to YHWH.

A central issue in this objection is confusion between a person performing some action in YHWH's name and YHWH's name being in a person. To say that a person performs an action in YHWH's name just means that the person

acts with YHWH's authority. We see scripture filled with examples of this. When David speaks to Goliath in 1 Samuel 17:45, he says that he comes in the name of the Lord. In Jeremiah 26:9, the prophet is described as prophesying in the name of YHWH. In Matthew 28:19, the disciples are told to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In all of these instances, all that is being said is that the person acts with the approval and authority of YHWH. In none of these instances are the lines between YHWH and the agent blurred to the degree that we see with Jesus. None of the disciples ever say, "before Abraham was, I am," and David is never depicted as being the one responsible for creation.

There is simply no evidence that a person who bore YHWH's name in this mere authoritative sense could be spoken about in the manner that we see Jesus spoken about in the New Testament. At this point, many would likely run to the angel of the Lord in the Old Testament as justification for their position. They might say that the angel of the Lord speaks in the first person as YHWH and is called YHWH in the Bible, and all of this is because the angel bears the divine name. However, this strategy fails for two reasons. First, the angel of the Lord is not depicted as merely doing something in the name of YHWH; rather, the angel is depicted as having YHWH's name in him. The idea of YHWH's name being in a person is never paralleled with any other person in the Old Testament. There are no biblical grounds to treat a person having YHWH's name in them as the same thing as a person doing something in YHWH's name. It is rather telling that the only instances in the Old Testament in which we see the lines between YHWH and an agent being blurred is the one instance in which YHWH's name is depicted as being in the person. The second reason this objection fails is that it assumes what it seeks to prove. In chapter 1, I dedicated a good amount of time to arguing that the angel of the Lord was likely understood as a partial manifestation of the God YHWH. Yet in running to the angel of the Lord as a counter example, the objector assumes that the angel is a non-YHWH agent who has been given a special name badge. As I argued in chapter 1, the very fact that the angel has YHWH's name in him is evidence that the angel is not merely an external agent, but is actually the deity in question.

Those who want to avoid the divinity of Christ by appealing to the fact that Jesus bears YHWH's name are thus utilizing an ambiguity in the phrase "bearing YHWH's name." When the objector uses this phrase, they use it in a manner that means merely acting with the authority of someone. Yet when they go to scripture to justify their position, they draw upon instances in which the name refers to the divine presence residing in a person. When faced with this objection to divine Christology, we can thus ask, "Does Jesus bear YHWH's name in the sense that he acts with YHWH's authority? Or does Jesus bear YHWH's name in the sense that YHWH's name resides within him?" If the objector takes the first option, then their arguments will be dashed upon the rocks of the biblical data, for nowhere do we see any justification for the idea that an agent merely acting with the authority of another could be spoken of as Jesus is spoken of, or that such an agent could speak as Jesus speaks. The scriptures are filled with people performing deeds in YHWH's name, but none of them come close to how Jesus is depicted.

If the objector takes the latter option, their argument is again dashed upon the rocks of the biblical data, as the only instances in scripture in which we see a person having YHWH's name "in them" is the angel of the Lord, and none of our evidence supports the idea that this was an agent external to YHWH. As discussed in chapter 1, the evidence we have indicates that the angel of the Lord was an actual (though partial) manifestation of YHWH, and that he bore YHWH's name in the sense that the divine presence actually resided in him. If Jesus "bears YHWH's name" in the sense that the angel of the Lord does, then that would entail that YHWH's actual presence came and was present in the person of Jesus. If this is the case, that certainly sounds like the Christian doctrine of the incarnation.

Some might seek to defend against my remarks by running to a handful of instances in which YHWH's name is said to reside in a person. One usual favorite is the figure Yahoel, who makes an appearance in the Apocalypse of Abraham. The Apocalypse of Abraham is a literary work, potentially dated to the latter half of the first century, that describes Abraham being taken on a spiritual journey by an angel named Yahoel. When Yahoel first meets Abraham,

Yahoel claims that he is the mediation of YHWH's names, and that YHWH's names have been put together in him.

In this figure, we have a person not merely acting in the name of YHWH, but of YHWH's name residing in a person. Yet it is difficult to see how this figure would help the objector's case. Throughout the work, Yahoel never speaks in a manner comparable to how Jesus speaks, nor is he spoken of as Jesus is spoken of. Moreover, nothing about Yahoel would be inconsistent with the understanding of the angel of the Lord that I discussed in chapter 1. For an objector to use this passage as a counterargument, they would need to show that Yahoel is an external agent to YHWH, and they would need to show parallels between the things said about Jesus and the things said about Yahoel. Neither of these avenues looks promising.

Ultimately, what sits at the root of this objection is vagueness surrounding the concept of the divine name. The divine name is depicted as being a means through which agency is communicated, and then this agency is used to explain the depiction of Jesus in the New Testament. However, for this to have any usefulness in our discussions of Christology, we must first come to an understanding of how the divine name communicates this agency. If we understand the divine name to be the very essence and presence of the deity, then of course the divine name is a vehicle for divine agency, because YHWH's name being in somebody is tantamount to YHWH being in that person. In application to Jesus, this would simply be the classic Christian conception of the incarnation. If the divine name is used to refer merely to authority, and not to YHWH's actual presence or essence, then there is simply no evidence to support the objector's use of the concept. The idea that Jesus can be depicted as we see him in the New Testament merely because he is an agent of YHWH or has YHWH's authority is without grounds.

It is also worth noting that this objection is impotent in addressing statements about Jesus which depict him as being pre-existent and involved with creation alongside the Father, as these are not statements that could reasonably be put into the mouth of the Father or be said about the Father. For instance, in John 17:5, Jesus speaks to the Father and says that he had glory with the Father

before the foundation of the world. This cannot be dismissed as Jesus merely speaking in the first person on behalf of YHWH, for he is speaking about a relationship that he had with another person before creation. Similarly, Jesus is depicted as being the one through whom God created in Hebrews 1. This can't just be a property of the Father being ascribed to the Son in virtue of a name-bearing representative role, because that would entail that the Father was the creative instrument of another God! Put simply, this objection would result in Jesus being ascribed properties which the Father cannot be said to possess, and which Jesus himself apparently does not possess, which is ridiculous.

Objection: Jesus Is the Name-Bearing Divine Image of YHWH

In addition to general appeals to Jesus bearing the divine name, Daniel McClellan has argued that Jesus was seen as a divine image comparable to other divine images in the ancient world. McClellan remarks:

> We talked a little bit about how the possession of the Divine name is one of the ways that another intermediary figure can bear God's authority and manifest God's presence. What are other entities in the ancient Mediterranean that bore a Divine name and so manifested God's presence? Divine images, or more vulgarly, idols. So, this is the logic of divine images that's going on here, and divine images were how people could see the god themselves while just looking at a piece of material media. And we see this in the Hebrew Bible as well and we see this in the archaeological data. The Temple at Arad, for instance, has a standing stone that is very clearly a divine image in the holy of holies in the Ancient Judahite Temple. So, what Jesus is saying here is that, "I am the authorized bearer of the Divine name, I bear God's Authority, I speak on behalf of God, I can even furtively identify with God, and as a walking, talking, sentient

> divine image, to see me is to see God." And we see Thomas realize this in John 20:28, where he falls down and says "my Lord and my God." He finally gets it. To see Jesus is to see God. Not because Jesus is God, but because Jesus is the authorized bearer of the divine name and just like a divine image, therefore reifies or manifests God's presence. He is the image of God. He manifests God's presence, to see him is to see God. And we see throughout the ancient Mediterranean world this idea that the divine image is both god and not the god, and to see the image is to see the god. This is what makes this so intuitive, it's because the entire world was steeped in this ontology, this idea that divine images manifest the presence of the deity they index. This is just appropriating something that everybody already knew and accepted and just applying it to Jesus rather than a piece of inanimate material.[210]

Much of what is said in this quotation about Jesus being an authorized bearer of the divine name has already been addressed in the previous objection. What I wish to focus on is the idea that Jesus is a walking, talking, sentient divine image. McClellan argues that divine images in the ancient Mediterranean world were material objects that were believed to manifest the presence of the deity through the bearing of the deity's name. As a result of this, one could point at a divine image and refer to it as the god whose name it bore and whose presence it manifested. It is this framework that McClellan insists we use to understand Jesus, and it is this framework that supposedly undercuts the traditional understanding of Jesus as God.

The central problem with McClellan's argument is that, if correct, it would essentially entail the Christian doctrine of the incarnation. McClellan does not seem to appreciate the fact that the reason images were spoken of as if they were the deity, and the reason they manifested the presence of the deity in question, is because the deity was believed to actually come and dwell in the material object. As Jean Bottéro explains:

> The ancient Mesopotamians had a very concrete concept of those images: mysteriously, they *were*, or *contained*, the personality they *represented*. The entire beginning of the poem *How Erra Wrecked the World* details the efforts of that god of sinister designs to convince Marduk to "leave" his cult statue (a core of rare wood, covered with sheets of stamped precious metal), so that, Erra suggested, it might be conveniently "cleaned" and restored to all its former brilliance, tarnished over time. When, in the end, Marduk allowed himself to be convinced, "he arose from his dwelling," both his statue and the sanctuary that sheltered it, thus opening the way for the misdeeds of the violent Erra, whom his presence would have deterred. Mysteriously, but true, in fact, in the eyes of the faithful, the god's image "enclosed" his person and ensured his "true presence." It was in the name of the same "realism" that, for example, the gods were moved around, in the form of their images, transported by cart or by boat, *intra muros* or beyond, to visit other divinities or even, lying side by side in their closed "bedroom," to spend their honeymoon night together, as in the *hieros gamos* of the first millennium. In the case of military defeat, the gods' images—as well as the kings'— were deported abroad by the conquerors.[211]

Similarly, David Lorton notes regarding divine images in ancient Egypt:

> In addition to *tut* 'statue', the cult statue could be called the *ba* or the *sekhem* of the deity, the first term meaning 'power that is manifest' or 'manifestation' and the second implying the 'empowerment' of the statue by some part of the divine essence that has entered into it. These are eloquent terms indeed,

> and in a very real sense they answer the question with which we are ultimately concerned here: how it is that the ancient Egyptians thought that their cult statues were something other than useless, inanimate objects. But Egyptian thinking could be complex, and of course there is more. From time to time in the course of this chapter, we have noted that the animate force in the statue was some part of the divine essence. The essence in question, both of deities and of deceased humans in the case of mortuary statues, was the *ka*. Basically—and perhaps as most primitively—conceived, the *ka* was the 'vital essence' or 'life force' of an individual.[212]

Such quotations are easily multiplied. Matthews, Chavalas, and Walton note that "the idol was not the deity, but the deity was thought to inhabit the image and manifest its presence and will through the image,"[213] while *The New Bible Dictionary* describes the relation between a god and its image, saying: "The image was not primarily intended as a visual representation of the deity, but as a dwelling-place of the spirit of the deity enabling the god to be physically present in many different places simultaneously."[214]

Let us now follow McClellan's logic to its conclusion. If Jesus is a divine image comparable to what we see elsewhere in the ancient world, then that would entail a material object (Jesus's body) being indwelled with the divine spirit. How is this not just the Christian doctrine of the incarnation? While I find it amusing that McClellan has managed to accidentally argue his way back to orthodoxy, I nonetheless welcome him home with open arms.

Excurses: Leaving Jesus Speechless

I want to briefly pause and note a significant problem that arises from the objections that we have surveyed thus far. It seems that objectors to divine Christology have set up various systems which entail that no matter what Jesus says, and no matter what anybody says about Jesus, they will never conclude that

Jesus is YHWH. Imagine that Jesus wants to convey that he is the God of Israel who has finally come to his people. What might Jesus say? He might say, "I am YHWH, the first and the last, and if you doubt it, behold my works! I tread upon water as upon dry land, and I rebuke the raging storms. Believe in me!" This seems like it would be a reasonably effective statement, but not to our stubborn Unitarian friends. To this, they would respond by saying, "When Jesus says, 'I am YHWH,' he doesn't mean he is actually YHWH; he just means he bears the divine name in the sense that he has YHWH's authority and is YHWH's agent." Suppose Jesus hears this and says, "No, you don't understand, I created all things. There is nothing that has been created that I did not create." To this, our Unitarian friends would respond by saying, "Oh yes, now I understand, by this he means that he is an expression of the Wisdom that God used to create everything. He isn't saying he actually created everything!" We might imagine a frustrated Jesus saying, "No, don't you get it. I existed before Abraham. I led you out of Egypt. It is I that the Israelites tested, and I was the one who punished them with snakes." To this, our Unitarian friends respond, "Of course, how could we have missed it! Jesus is trying to say that he existed in the mind of God during these events, but not as an actual person. It is perfectly clear now!"

Put simply, Unitarians have set up various systems in which any statement about Jesus that could be understood as him actually being the embodiment of YHWH will just be brushed off through one of these contrived explanations. Unitarians have effectively put tape over the mouth of Jesus and of every biblical author and denied them the ability to ever say anything that would contradict their preconceived notions. No matter how explicitly and emphatically Jesus is depicted as the God of Israel, he will always be demoted to merely an agent who is operating with YHWH's authority.

Objection: Jesus Says the Father Is Greater Than He Is

Some objectors to divine Christology point to the claim by Jesus that "the Father is greater than I," in John 14:28, as support for their position. However,

this statement by Jesus would only be problematic if one holds that the Father and Son are identical or that the Father and Son are equal in all ways. However, a proponent of divine Christology does not need to hold to either of these. There are at least three ways that one could understand Jesus's statement that the Father is greater than he is.

First, one could understand this statement in light of the incarnation. If one holds to a kenotic Christology in which the Son empties himself of certain abilities or knowledge at the incarnation, then the Father would be greater than the Son in the sense that the Father still has the abilities and knowledge which the Son gave up.[215] Second, one could understand Jesus's statement as a reference to rank or position. In terms of rank and authority, the president of the United States is greater than the vice president. However, both are still human and are not greater than the other in terms of their ontology. Similarly, one could hold to a view in which the Father has a greater rank or position of authority over the Son, but that they are nonetheless ontologically equal in the sense that a vice president and president are ontologically equal. Third, one could understand Jesus's statement that the Father is greater than he in terms of the Father eternally grounding the existence of the Son. This was an understanding employed by several early Church writers.[216] Under this view, the Son is eternally dependent on the Father, but there was never a point at which the Son began to exist. Fourth, one could hold that the Father is greater than the Son in the sense that the Father is the whole, but the Son is a portion of the whole. This is how Tertullian understood this statement.[217] Advocates of divine Christology will likely disagree on which of these options they chose. However, all of these interpretations are consistent with the understanding of divine Christology defended in this work.

Objection: Jesus Calls the Father His God

Many objectors to divine Christology point to passages in which Jesus refers to the Father as "my God," such as John 20:17. However, this is an easy objection to overcome. In the incarnation, Jesus is a human being who is subordinate to

and obedient to the Father. The Father is a spiritual being who is in a role of superiority and authority over all humans (Jeremiah 32:27), including the Son. As a result of this, it is perfectly appropriate for Jesus to refer to the Father as his God. To be the God of something in the ancient world often indicates authority over the thing in question (though merely having authority over something does not make one a god). For instance, YHWH is depicted as being the God of gods because YHWH has rulership and authority over all the other gods (Deuteronomy 10:17). Satan is described as being the god of this world in 2 Corinthians 4:4 because Satan was a spiritual being who was the ruler of this world prior to the victory of Jesus.[218] Put simply, Jesus can rightly refer to the Father as his God because the Father is in a position of superior rank and authority to the Son. Nothing about the Father being Jesus's God in this way eliminates the possibility that Jesus is himself internal to YHWH in the manner that I have described.

Objection: The Son Is Given Authority by the Father

Many objectors to divine Christology might cite scriptures in which Jesus is depicted as being given authority by the Father, such as Matthew 28:18. They use these verses to argue that Jesus cannot share the same ontological nature as the Father. However, such arguments do not follow. If I told you that the CEO of the company I work for had recently promoted me to a new position with more authority and power, it would be insane to suggest that I therefore do not share the same ontological nature with the CEO. This statement could suggest some type of difference in rank, position, or abilities, but it speaks nothing of one's ontological nature. Similarly, for the Son to be given authority by the Father speaks nothing about the Son's ontological nature in relation to the Father. The Father and Son having differences in their authority or rank is compatible with divine Christology.

We might wonder why the Father is in the position of giving authority, and why the Son is in the position of receiving it. What grounds this asymmetric

relationship? This could be answered in several ways. First, if the Father and Son are parts of the one true God, it could be that there are properties that are unique to the Father which make it more reasonable for him to hold the position of authority unique to him. Similarly, there could be properties about the Son that make it more reasonable for him to be the one sent. Perhaps the difference is that of personality. Or (if eternal generation is true), perhaps the Son submits to the will of the Father because the Son is dependent on the Father and recognizes the Father as his source. Regardless of what the difference is, if this is the case, and both the Father and Son are aware of aspects that render them more appropriate for one role than the other, then it seems reasonable that the Son might willfully submit to the Father, and that the Father might assume a position of authority over the Son.

Objection: Jesus Calls the Father the One True God

In John 17:3, Jesus refers to the Father as the only true God. This statement has often been seized upon by Unitarians, especially Muslims, to argue against traditional Christian understandings of Jesus. However, the fact that the Father can rightfully be called the one true God does not contradict divine Christology as I have defined it in this work. Nor does this contradict the claim that Jesus can rightfully be called the one true God. My reader might recall from our discussion in the last chapter that it is normal to refer to parts with language of the whole. Imagine that you have a very unique, one-of-a-kind car, called a Model MGSB. Part of what makes the Model MGSB so unique is its exterior design. The design of the Model MGSB is so unique that it can easily be recognized by car enthusiasts at a quick glance. Suppose I were to show a picture of the left side of your car to a car enthusiast, and I asked them, "What is this?" They might respond by saying, "That is the one and only Model MGSB." Suppose I showed a picture of the right side of your car to the same car enthusiast, and I asked them, "What is this?" They might still respond by saying, "That is the one and only Model MGSB." Would this be a contradiction?

Of course not! One can point at the left or right side of your car and call it the one unique Model MGSB, even if each side is not identical to the other. This can be done because both the left and right sides are parts of the same unique Model MGSB. Similarly, under the model presented in the last chapter, one can reasonably point to the Son or the Father and say, "That is the one true God" because of the part/whole relationship that the Son stands in with the one true God. What would be problematic is if Jesus had said that only the Father is the one true God. This, however, is not what Jesus said.

It is worth noting that if objectors think that the Father alone is the one true God, then they have a problem. Jesus is referred to as God numerous times in the New Testament (John 20:28; Romans 9:5; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8; 2 Peter 1:1, etc.). If only the Father is the one true God, then whatever God Jesus is, he must be a false God. Will our objectors have us believe that the New Testament authors wanted us to follow a false God? This is of course silly, but if one wishes to pound the table and stomp one's feet about how only the Father is the one true God, this issue will rear its head.

Objection: Jesus Cannot Be God Because There Are Things He Does Not Know

I have already dealt with this objection extensively in my book *What Jesus Didn't Know: A Defense of Kenotic Christology*, so I will keep my comments on this objection brief and recommend that work to readers who wish to go deeper. The central idea of this objection is to point to a property that God possesses, note that this property is lacked by Jesus, and therefore conclude that Jesus is not God. In responding to this argument, we need to inquire into what is meant by the conclusion "Jesus is not God." Is this conclusion merely that Jesus is not identical to God? If so, this is not a problem for me, as I think Jesus is identical to a part of God and not the whole. I will happily agree that Jesus is not identical to God, as I even argued as much in my last chapter. Is the conclusion supposed to be that Jesus is not God in a predicative sense? If so, this simply does not follow. As I have noted, it seems like one could reasonably refer to Jesus as God in a

predicative sense due to the part/whole relationship he stands in to YHWH. If one wishes to insist that Jesus must possess all the properties of God in order to be called God in a predicative sense, I can simply reject that premise.

I will conclude my remarks on this objection by noting that, as a proponent of kenotic Christology, I believe that at the incarnation Jesus gave up certain knowledge and abilities that he possessed in his pre-incarnate state. I believe this meshes well with scripture's description of Jesus as becoming like us in all respects except for sin (Hebrews 2:17), and of Paul's statement that though Jesus was rich, he became poor for us (2 Corinthians 8:9). I see no reason why Jesus's knowledge cannot be part of the riches he gave up. If this is the case, Jesus's lack of knowledge is not a negative statement about his divinity; it's a positive statement about his humility.

Objection: Jesus Cannot Be God Because There Are Things He Could Not Do

There are several potential avenues to take in responding to this objection. First, one could say much of what I said in the previous objection. One could point out that Jesus lacking a property God has does not mean that Jesus is not a part of God. Nor would this entail that Jesus is not divine. However, I think that would be avoiding the most important issue, which is why Jesus cannot do certain things in the first place. To answer this question, we can begin by noting that, regardless of what one wants to say about Jesus, there are certain things that God cannot do. Specifically, God cannot perform immoral actions. The idea that God cannot do immoral actions is often referred to as God's impeccability, and this doctrine has a long and privileged history throughout theistic thought. Augustine says regarding God, "He can't sin, he can't lie, he can't be deceived or mistaken; so many things he can't do, and if he could do them he wouldn't be almighty."[219] Anselm makes similar remarks:

> How are You omnipotent if You cannot do all things? But, how can You do all things if You cannot be corrupted, or tell lies,

> or make the true into the false (such as to undo what has been done), and many similar things? Or is the ability to do these things not power but impotence?[220]

The idea that there are immoral acts that God cannot perform is also found in several places throughout scripture. We are told in Habakkuk 1:13 that God is "Of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong." In 2 Timothy 2:13, Paul says, "If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself." Most explicitly, in Hebrews 6, we are told that it is impossible for God to lie, and because of this impossibility God swore by himself to guarantee his oath with Abraham.

This last idea presented in Hebrews 6 is what I want to narrow in on. If God commits himself to doing (or not doing) something in the form of a promise or covenant, then it becomes impossible for God to break that commitment. God's moral goodness entails that the commitment will not be broken. This, according to the author of Hebrews, is how God guarantees the promise to Abraham. It is important to note that if God promises not to do something, and then he is therefore unable to perform the thing in question, God has not ceased to be omnipotent. The reason for this is that out of all the various definitions for omnipotence, the vast majority of them don't entail the ability to do immoral things.

With this in mind, let us return to the question of why Jesus can't do things in the New Testament. If Jesus is omnipotent and morally perfect, and Jesus makes a promise at the incarnation to only use his powers under certain conditions, then Jesus would be unable to use his powers if those conditions are not met. This would not entail that Jesus isn't divine any more than God's inability to break his promise to Abraham entails that God is not divine. At the incarnation, Jesus may say something like "I promise to go down and live as one of them, with all of their weaknesses and all their frailties. Just as they must depend on the goodwill of the Father in their struggles, I promise to only rely on the goodwill of the Father in my struggles. I will not use any of my own powers to aid my

earthly life, but like them, I will do only what the Father empowers me to do. I will live in this way so that through my suffering I can draw them back to us."

If Jesus commits himself to limiting the use of his powers in this way (or in other ways), then Jesus would have real limitations on what he can do that would not violate his omnipotence. It is at this point that I will note that by postulating that Jesus makes such a promise, I am not engaging in anything ad hoc. Scripture is filled with God making promises and committing Himself to covenants. After the great flood, God promises never to destroy the earth again in this manner.[221] After the Tower of Babel incident, God makes a promise to Abraham.[222] After leaving Egypt, God makes a covenant with Moses.[223] Later, God makes a promise to David.[224] We are told that before the ages began, God promised us eternal life.[225] God promised a new heaven and a new earth.[226] God describes himself as having made a covenant with day and night.[227]

All of the above examples make it evident that I am not suggesting something that is alien to God's standard operating procedure. While the above passages are examples of God making promises in a general sense, there are also several scriptural passages that discuss God making a promise in relation to Christ's redeeming work. For instance, we are told that Christ "Has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old, as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises."[228] Similarly, we are told in Hebrews 7:21 that when Christ became our high priest,

> It was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath, but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him: "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever.'" This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.[229]

Another interesting example comes from Psalm 22. This Psalm has long been considered messianic, with Jesus himself quoting from it while on the cross. In Hebrews 2, Jesus is depicted as the one speaking in verse 22. Yet, if Jesus is the one speaking in verse 22, notice what is said in verse 25: "From you comes my

praise in the great congregation; my vows I will perform before those who fear him."

To summarize, positing that Jesus's incarnational work involved a vow or promise on his part is not at all implausible in light of the biblical data. If this is the case, Jesus would be bound by his promise. If Jesus promised to only do as the Father empowered him, then this would explain Jesus's statements about being completely reliant on the Father (John 5:19–20). If Jesus (or the Father, or both) promised to limit the miracles they worked to certain circumstances, then that might explain why Jesus was unable to perform miracles for those who did not believe (Mark 6:5). Why might Jesus (or the Father) commit to limiting their miracles to certain circumstances? I would note that when Jesus comes to earth, he is engaging in spiritual warfare with the powers of darkness. I believe that part of the goal of God's ongoing warfare with the Devil is to defeat allegations raised against God, and to convince those in the heavenly places that YHWH is, in fact, the rightful God of this world. Space does not permit me to delve more deeply into this idea here, so I will refer the reader to my previous work, *The Devil's Disbarment: Exploring Christ's Victory in the Divine Council.*

Objection: How Could Jesus Die if He Is the Immortal God?

One common objection raised against the divine Christology is that Jesus died, yet God is depicted as being immortal (1 Timothy 6:16). However, this objection fails for two major reasons. First, as Unitarians will agree, "God" in the New Testament is almost always used to refer to the Father. Thus, when we see immortality attributed to God, those verses could be understood as attributing that property to the Father. However, my view does not entail that Jesus is the Father, so it is difficult to see how such verses are supposed to trouble me. It seems that one can reasonably hold that there are properties true of the Father which are not true of the Son, and vice versa. This constitutes evidence that the two persons are not identical, but this does not constitute evidence that the two persons are not parts of the same whole, or that the Son is not a part of the

Father. I don't see anything immensely problematic with saying that the Son is the part of God which can become seen by humans, incarnate, and die, but that the Father cannot do these things. This seems perfectly in accord with scripture.

Second, it is important to note that many who raise this objection are likely confusing "dying" with "ceasing to exist." When one says that Jesus died, one is not saying that Jesus ceased to exist. Rather, one is saying that the person of Jesus experienced the biological process of the body shutting down and ceasing functions. One can affirm that Jesus is capable of dying in this biological sense without affirming that Jesus can die in the sense of his ceasing to exist. Similarly, when the New Testament speaks of God being unable to die, it is not clear to me that they are using this term in reference to physical death. One could maintain that Jesus was mortal in the sense that he could experience physical death, but immortal in the sense that he could not cease to exist.

Objection: Scripture Says the Messiah Will Be Human

In his written work, Dustin Smith argues against divine Christology by emphasizing the humanity of the Messiah in the Old Testament, New Testament, and Second Temple literature.[230] However, Christians all agree that Jesus was human. This is not a point of contention. Smith's arguments for the humanity of Jesus would only be a problem for divine Christology if Smith could show that it is impossible to be both human and God.

Yet in his written work, Smith has attempted no such demonstration. In order to demonstrate the impossibility of a human being God, Smith would need to offer a definition of what it means to be human. After offering this definition, Smith would need to show that the definition rules out the possibility of the person being God (in the manner I have defended). However, Smith will also need to argue in favor of his definition of humanity over rival definitions. How might Smith support his definition of humanity? It probably won't be through any biblical passages, as the Bible seems largely silent regarding

such definitions. As a result of this, Smith will have to argue for his definition of a human mainly on philosophical grounds.

Since Smith has offered no definition for what it means to be human, nor any philosophical argument in favor of such a definition, I cannot offer any critiques of what he would likely propose. I can, however, put forward what seems to be a reasonable criterion of a human which I believe to be consistent with an incarnation. Taking inspiration from William Lane Craig,[231] I propose that X is human if X meets two criteria. The first criterion is that X must have a mind that exhibits a certain set of properties. Which properties are in this set would likely be a controversial matter. Perhaps the mind needs to have self-consciousness, or the ability to reason, or moral accountability, etc. Luckily, for our purposes, we do not need to settle this controversy here. I will refer to the set of properties that a mind needs to possess as S. The second criterion for X to be human is that X's mind, which exemplifies S, must be embodied in a certain type of body, namely, a human body. Again, the criteria for what constitutes a human body can be left vague and unrefined. Perhaps it is a certain genetic sequence. Dealer's choice on how this is cashed out.

If the rough definition provided above is a reasonable understanding of what a human is, then it seems pretty easy to understand how a person could be both God and human. If X is a person internal to God who has a mind which possesses S but is not embodied, then all that needs to occur for this person to become human is for the person to become embodied in a human body. If Jesus pre-existed his birth from Mary and had a mind which possessed S, then the moment that this mind became incarnate and began operating through a human body, it would meet the definition of being a human.

This seems like a very reasonable understanding of what it means to be human. In light of this, I can thus agree with all of Smith's remarks about the humanity of Jesus without feeling any heat as it relates to divine Christology. In order to press his argument, Smith would need to show that the framework I presented is untenable and construct an alternative framework that excludes the possibility of a human also being God.

Objection: Matthew 1 Says That Jesus Has a Beginning to His Existence

Dustin Smith objects to the idea of Jesus pre-existing his birth to Mary by narrowing in on Matthew's use of the word "genesis" in Matthew 1:1, which states the book is about the genesis of Jesus Christ. Smith contends that "genesis" is a word that puts emphasis on the fact that Jesus came into existence at a specific moment.[232] Smith believes this to be a statement about the ultimate origins of the person of Jesus, which in Matthew is connected to his birth. As a result, Smith believes this passage defeats the idea of Jesus's pre-existence. Smith cites BDAG's entry on this word as support for his contention.

However, it seems that Smith is counting on his readers not fact-checking this citation from BDAG. If one looks at BDAG's entry on this word, they will see that one of the glosses offered in addition to the one cherry-picked by Smith is that of "an account of someone's life, history, life" and "persons of successive generations forming an ancestral line, lineage, family line, which describes the contents of Mt 1:1–17."[233] Thus, the very resource that Smith cites to construct his argument refutes him. BDAG notes that this word can be used to refer to a person's genealogy, and it explicitly references Matthew 1 as an instance of this meaning. This is obvious to anybody who has read Matthew 1, as shortly after this statement, we are met with an extended passage outlining Jesus's family lineage. Smith will thus find no support for his argument here.

Objection: Hebrews 1:1 Says God Spoke Through the Prophets, Not the Son

Dustin Smith tries to argue that Jesus is never presented as being active in the Hebrew Bible. This claim is demonstrably false in light of the data discussed in chapters 3–4. Nonetheless, Smith tries to support this contention by referencing Hebrews 1:1–2, which says that God spoke to us in past times through prophets, but has now spoken to us through his son. Smith contends, "The author of Hebrews argues that God used to speak through prophets, but

in these last days he has spoken to us through a Son (Heb 1:1–2) indicating that God didn't speak through a Son in the Hebrew Bible."[234] First, it must be noted that God does not exclusively speak through prophets in the Old Testament. There are times in the Old Testament where God is depicted as speaking directly with a person. However, while God spoke directly to prophets, God did not (for the most part) go out and speak directly with the people. That was the job of the prophets. God gave a message to the prophets; the prophets gave the message to the people. Recognizing that Jesus is the angel of the Lord or the embodied YHWH figure in the Old Testament would not change the fact that God still gave his messages to the people through prophets. It is not as if recognizing the angel of the Lord is Jesus suddenly changes the fact that God used Moses or Jeremiah to deliver his messages. It is not as if the angel of the Lord was the one regularly crying out in the streets for the people to repent in Isaiah or Ezekiel.

However, unlike in the past, the Son has now taken on the function that was normally reserved for the prophets. Whereas in the Old Testament the person crying out in the streets and preaching to the common man was the prophet, now that role is played directly by the Son. Thus, the author of Hebrews can affirm that the Son was active in the Old Testament, while also affirming that in the past God spoke to us through the prophets and has only recently spoken to us through his Son. Before the coming of Christ, even if the Son was active in the Old Testament, the everyday Israelite had their messages from God conveyed through a prophet. However, now the middleman is removed. The Word of the Lord that commissioned Jeremiah and appeared to Samuel has now walked the streets and taught the public directly.

Objection: Jesus Is Described as Being Begotten

Smith appeals to the fact that Jesus is depicted as being "begotten" in several passages of the New Testament, such as Luke 1:35 and Matthew 1:20. Smith contends that the Greek word used in these passages (*gennaō*) entails the origin of the person and the moment in which they were brought into existence.[235] As a result of this language, Smith claims that "the 'begetting' language

employed by both Matthew and Luke, by anchoring Jesus's beginning in time, categorically screens out any manner of literal, conscious preexistence of the Son."[236]

However, this is another example of Smith misrepresenting the lexical data. Smith cites BDAG to support his understanding of the word *gennaō* (translated as "became the father of" in many translations) as a reference to the absolute origin of a person, but BDAG notes that the glosses for this Greek word include "become the parent of" and "to give birth to, bear."[237] Neither of these glosses excludes the possibility of a person preexisting their physical birth through a woman.

Even more damning to Smith's argument is that BDAG explicitly notes instances in which this Greek word is used without implying the ultimate origin of the person in question. Paul uses this word multiple times to refer to him becoming a person's parental figure. For instance, we see Paul say in 1 Corinthians 4:15: "For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel." The same lemma that Smith claims intends absolute origin (*gennaō*) is used in the phrase "became your father." Does Smith think that Paul was literally the creator of all the people at the church he was writing to? Paul says in Philemon 10: "I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment." Does Smith think that Paul was literally Onesimus's father, and that Onesimus was born while Paul was in prison? Of course not!

Smith also appeals to the statement about Jesus being "begotten" in Hebrews 1:5, in which God says to Jesus, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you."[238] However, Smith fails to recognize that the language of being begotten or becoming God's son is language that was used of the Israelite king at their coronation. As Harold Attridge and Helmut Koester note:

> The scriptural catena begins with a rhetorical question, "to which of the angels did he ever say," which introduces the first two texts, Ps 2:7* and 2 Sam 7:14* ... In their original contexts, these verses reflect the ideology of kingship in Israel, according to which the monarch, upon his accession to the

> throne, entered into a special relationship with God, becoming his adopted son. The first is one of the royal psalms, where the person of the king expresses his confidence in God's protection against his enemies, citing in the process the "Lord's decree" that elevated him to the kingship. The second passage comes from Nathan's prophecy of Yahweh's promise to David that he would be succeeded by his son and that his house would be established forever. Early Christians applied the first text, Ps 2:7*, to Christ, alluding to it in the accounts of his baptism and citing it explicitly in the context of his exaltation. The latter of these applications was probably the most primitive, and such an application was most likely the one originally intended in the compilation of this catena.[239]

We can thus conclude that Smith's attempts to deny the pre-existence of Jesus based on the word *gennaō* are completely unfounded and lexically irresponsible.

Smith tries to make a similar argument with the word *monogenēs*, which is applied to Jesus several times in the Gospel of John (John 1:14, 18).[240] There are several major problems with this attempt. First, BDAG (which Smith elsewhere cites when making arguments based on vocabulary) lists two glosses for this word: "to being the only one of its kind within a specific relationship, one and only, only" and "to being the only one of its kind or class, unique (in kind)."[241] This word thus says nothing about Jesus's origins, only his uniqueness. Second, Smith shows awareness of BDAG's entry on this word, but still asserts: "Although some prefer to translate this word as the 'only one of its kind,' when it is used in relation to the Father it can hardly mean anything other than an only begotten son."[242]

What justifies this assertion on Smith's part? Why must it be the case that this word is here in reference to Jesus being begotten and not merely unique? Smith offers no arguments in support of this contention, but instead cites C. K. Barrett's commentary on the Gospel of John as justification. Yet, if we look at the section C. K. Barrett cited by Smith, Barrett makes the same assertion and

likewise presents no argument.[243] Barrett even admits that *monogenēs* means in itself only of its kind. So why should we follow Barrett and Smith in their baseless assertion that in John, the word must mean something different? The clear answer is that there is no reason to take this alternative definition; it is asserted by Smith because it is useful for making his argument. We thus have no reason to follow Smith's alternative definition of *monogenēs*.

Objection: Divine Christology Violates Monotheism

One of the most common objections raised against divine Christology is the claim that divine Christology violates monotheism. Opponents of divine Christology constantly hide behind this object when faced with passages that clearly imply the deity of the Son. Because opponents of divine Christology believe monotheism to be their undefeatable shield, it is worth dedicating time to deconstructing this objection.

We can begin by noting that any talk of first-century Jews being "monotheistic" is woefully anachronistic. The term "monotheism" is a term that has come about only recently as a way to easily categorize or classify different systems of religious thought. When one asserts that the Jews were monotheistic or that the Bible is monotheistic, one is taking a modern classification system and forcing an ancient culture into that modern framework.

One might be tempted to roll their eyes at this point and respond by saying, "Yes, yes, the term might be modern, but it expresses the biblical notion that there is only one God. This was a belief fiercely held by first-century Jews." However, the truth of statements such as "The Bible affirms the existence of only one God" and "First-century Jews believed in only one God" is contingent on what one means by the word "God." The Hebrew and Greek words translated as "God" are usually *elohim* and *theos,* respectively. The ancient texts make it abundantly clear that Jews did not view YHWH as the only *elohim/theos*. These words were used in a much broader sense than how modern Christians use the term "God." The word *elohim* is used in the Old Testament

to refer to YHWH, as well as to what modern Christians might refer to as angels and demons.[244] Even dead humans are referred to as *elohim* (1 Samuel 28:13). In the Greek LXX, *theos* takes over for *elohim* and enjoys a similar semantic range. In the New Testament, we even see Satan referred to as the god (*theos*) of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4). What was important for the ancient Jewish authors was not that no other god existed, but that no other God was comparable to YHWH. YHWH, for the ancient Jewish writers, was completely above all other gods and was their creator (Exodus 18:11; 2 Chronicles 2:5; Nehemiah 9:6).

With this in mind, I hope it is starting to become clear why the "monotheism" objection to divine Christology is so problematic. It is not enough to assert that my view entails two gods; one must show how my view entails two gods in a way that is biblically problematic. In order to do this, one must offer a definition of what it means to be a god, and then one must show that this definition being met by more than one person is problematic from a biblical perspective. If my view meets your criteria for there being two gods, that is hardly a problem if the Bible never prohibits there being two gods according to your definition. Let us consider an example to make this point clear.

Suppose you define a "god" as any person who is divine (for now, we can ignore what constitutes divinity). Under this definition, as a Trinitarian, I would happily affirm that there are three gods. However, I would then respond by asking why this result should concern me. As a Christian who primarily bases their theology on the Bible, I don't particularly care whether my view entails there being two gods according to the framework that you have constructed for using those words; I care about whether my theology goes against that of the Bible. According to the definition mentioned above, to say that my view entails three gods is just the same as saying my view entails three divine persons. I don't know of any verse that prohibits saying there are three divine persons, so what is the problem? There are, of course, verses saying that no God is comparable to YHWH, and that we have only one God, but these are not verses that prohibit saying that there are three divine persons. Similarly, if one defines a god as any person who partakes in the divine nature, then regardless of your view of the Trinity, none of us can be monotheists because the Bible explicitly says that as

believers we get to partake in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). In contrast, if one defines God as the tri-personal spirit which grounds all creation, then there is not more than one God under my view, because there is only one such being!

This is the ultimate problem with the monotheism objection to divine Christology. This objection takes advantage of an ambiguity in the use of the word "god," and it utilizes the rhetorical force of that word as it is used in our modern culture. Many Christians are taught a cheap, shallow slogan about how there is only one God, and thus they feel like they must avoid saying that there are two gods at any cost. They are never taught to question the definitions of the terms they are using, and whether those definitions align with the corresponding Greek and Hebrew words found in the Bible. Thus, when an opponent of divine Christology presents an argument indicating that divine Christology entails two gods, supposedly the gig is up. However, once we recognize that even the Bible affirms the reality of multiple gods under some definitions, this objection loses its rhetorical force. Put simply, the objector must argue that divine Christology affirms the existence of multiple gods in a way that contradicts the scriptures, and I have yet to see them do this.

Objection: Scripture Says Jesus Prays to God

This objection, like many that we have already looked at, only shows that Jesus is not identical to God. Prayer is simply communication with a deity. With that in mind, recall that in the last chapter I viewed Jesus as being a person who is a part of YHWH that has been sent out to us for revelatory and salvific purposes. When this person speaks to the God from which he has been sent, that would qualify as prayer. Is Jesus supposed to never talk to God while he is on earth? How does Jesus's talking to the God from which he was sent undercut the fact that Jesus stands in a part/whole relationship with this God and can thus be reasonably called God himself?

Objection: Scripture Says God Is Not a Man

Numbers 23:19 is a crowd favorite amongst some Unitarian objectors, especially Muslims, because it says that God is not a man. There are several things worth noting here. First, nobody thinks that God was a man in any sense at the time that this passage (and others like it) was written. If one thinks that God becomes a man after this statement, that will not render this statement inaccurate. However, even during Jesus's life it would still be accurate to affirm statements such as what we see in Numbers 23:13 for two reasons. First, in passages such as this, the speaker is contrasting YHWH with a mere man, with the idea being that YHWH is not like us in being fickle or untrustworthy. Even if YHWH becomes human, he would not be a man in the sense being used in this passage. Second, in my view, it is never the case that YHWH (as a whole) is a man. Rather, one part of YHWH becomes a man, but even this part of YHWH is never a mere man.

Objection: The New Testament Identifies the Father as God

A common objection by both Unitarians and Monarchical Trinitarians is that the New Testament identifies the Father as the one true God. These objectors might point to statements like 1 Corinthians 8:6, which says, "yet for us there is one God, the Father," as evidence for this claim. There are, of course, many passages in the New Testament which present this type of distinction, and the word "God" is indeed usually used in reference to the Father and not in reference to Jesus (though there are some exceptions).

Several things could be said about this objection. First, if one is a proponent of Logos Christology as outlined in the last chapter, this is not problematic. The Father can be God in an identity sense, while the Son (who is a part of the Father) is God in a predicative sense. Thus, a proponent of Logos Christology could affirm this objection and go about their day. This objection would only be applicable to those who deny that the Father is identical to God (such as Craig's

tri-personal monotheism) or to those who wish to assert that the Son is identical to God.

I have already expressed my objections to the idea that Jesus is identical to God, so I will not bother to defend such an option here. However, I will note that proponents of tri-personal monotheism should likely not be concerned with this objection. In the New Testament, the Greek word used for God is *theos*, and this is certainly a term that a first-century Jew would have used in application to YHWH. However, *theos* is not the only word that a first-century Jew might have used to refer to YHWH. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, areas which originally used the divine name "YHWH" would instead say *kyrios*, which is translated into English as Lord. While *theos* is usually used in reference to the Father in the New Testament, *kyrios* is usually used in reference to Jesus.

With this in mind, we might ask our objector why the word *theos* in application to the Father is more significant than the word *kyrios* in application to Jesus. Both are applications of YHWH language, yet for some reason our objector takes all uses of *theos* as statements of identity about the Father. Moreover, as we have seen, there are instances in the New Testament in which Jesus explicitly applies the divine name and YHWH epithets to himself (John 8:58; Revelation 1:17). Why are these not statements of identity as well? This objection stems ultimately from an inconsistent reading of scripture in which all statements about the Father are understood as statements of identity, while all statements of the Son are metonymical statements, statements of prediction, or hand-waved away using the agency objections already discussed. This inconsistency is difficult to justify from the biblical text and is largely arbitrary.

Objection: Jesus Never Explicitly Said "I Am God"

An extremely common objection amongst Muslim objectors to divine Christology is to ask one's interlocutor to point to an instance in which Jesus

says, "I am God." The implication of this challenge is that if Jesus never says these specific words, then Jesus must not have thought of himself in the way that Christians often depict him. The central problem with this objection is that it assumes that Jesus needs to say those specific words in order for us to conclude that his self-conception was in line with how Christians typically depict him. However, there is no justification for this claim. As I have argued in chapter 4, there are numerous actions and statements by Jesus that imply that he viewed himself as being the embodiment of YHWH.

Objection: God Cannot Be Tempted, Jesus Was Tempted

In James 1:13–16, we are told that God cannot be tempted. Yet Jesus is depicted as being tempted in Matthew 4:1–11 and in Hebrews 4:15. Isn't this a problem for divine Christology? As is the case with most of the objections that we have discussed, we need to inquire into what is referenced by "God" in our passage from James. As noted previously, when "God" is used in the New Testament, the reference is usually to the Father. In light of this, we can understand the statement in James 1 to be in reference to the Father being unable to be tempted. If the Father is not able to be tempted, that does not contradict saying that Jesus has been tempted and that Jesus is a part of YHWH.

One might wonder why the Father can't be tempted while the Son can. I think there are several plausible answers to this. First, I believe that when the Son becomes incarnated, he limits his knowledge significantly. This limitation in his knowledge may make it so that things that would otherwise be unappealing to the Son are now appealing. To give an example, I suspect none of my readers have the desire to stick their hand on a hot stove, or to drink drain cleaner. The temptation to perform these acts is not likely something you must fight regularly. The reason that you have no temptation in this area is because you are aware of the consequences of these actions. However, a toddler might feel a strong desire to put various colorful objects in their mouth, or to touch things they really shouldn't, because their mind and knowledge have not matured to

that of an adult. Knowledge of consequences and one's cognitive abilities thus seem to be a factor that contributes to the temptations that a person feels.

A second reason that the Son might experience temptations while the Father doesn't is that the Son, while on earth, is being afflicted by spiritual beings who are actively tempting him and trying to get him to sin. If a large portion of the temptation that we experience is produced by evil spirits, which are trying to get us to sin (1 Thessalonians 3:5; 1 Corinthians 7:5), and Jesus is assaulted by these spiritual forces while on earth, it is not surprising that he would be tempted. In contrast, there is no reason to think that such spiritual beings would be allowed (or even capable) of afflicting the Father this way in heaven.

Before concluding this objection, it is worth mentioning a potential response that I do not find viable. Some Christians have responded to this objection by claiming that James 1 is a statement about God being unable to experience an inward pull toward sin. In contrast, the statements about Jesus being "tempted" in other passages should be understood merely as Jesus being tested or going through a trial. The Greek word used in these passages does have a semantic range that includes both of these options, so this is a lexical possibility. However, I find this response unsatisfying because it denies that Jesus ever experienced the inward pull toward sin that you and I are all too familiar with. This, I think, goes against the central message of the book of Hebrews, which describes Jesus as becoming like us in all respects so that he could become our merciful, sympathetic, high priest (Hebrews 4:14–16). The idea in Hebrews is that a high priest is able to deal mercifully with those he represents because he is beset with the same weaknesses (Hebrews 5:1–10). Jesus, in becoming like us, has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Because of this, we can draw close to the throne of God with confidence because we have him as our intercessor.

I would invite my reader to reflect on all the sins that they have struggled with over their life. Reflect on the inner turmoil you felt when you really wanted to sin, but knew you shouldn't. If Jesus did not experience that feeling, did he ever really go through what we went through? Was he tested as we are tested if he did not experience that inner pull that must be fought? It seems to me obvious that he did not. If Jesus actually experienced this type of struggle, and he knows

firsthand how difficult this inner fight is, wouldn't that give us more confidence that we have a merciful high priest who can sympathize with us than if Jesus had never fought such battles? I see no way to preserve the logic of Hebrews if Jesus never actually felt the temptations that you and I feel. For more on this idea, I will refer my readers to my other work.[245]

Objection: Divine Christology Contradicts the Shema

It is common for objectors to Trinitarian conceptions of Jesus to cite Deuteronomy 6:4 (known as the Shema), in which we are told "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one." If Christians like myself say that God is three (or two), and this passage explicitly says that God is one, isn't the case closed? While many perceive this to be the case, such arguments rely on anachronistic readings of the text. The objector is taking modern debates about how many people are in the Godhead and shoehorning that discussion into the Book of Deuteronomy. The truth is that this verse almost certainly has nothing to do with how many people are in God. Scholars have disagreed about how precisely to interpret this passage due to ambiguities in the Hebrew,[246] but an interpretation which has gained a great deal of support is that Deuteronomy 6:4 is about Israel only having YHWH as their God. Under this interpretation, the Shema is a statement about Israel's solitary allegiance to YHWH and to no other gods. Jeffery Tigay, in the Jewish Publication Society's commentary, translates this passage as "The LORD is our God, the LORD alone."[247] Tigay remarks:

> The present translation indicates that the verse is a description of the proper relationship between YHVH and Israel: He alone is Israel's God ... This understanding of the Shema as describing a relationship with God, rather than His nature, has the support of Zechariah 14:9. According to Zechariah, what is now true of Israel will, in the future, be true of all humanity: "the LORD will be king over all the earth; on the day *the LORD shall be one*

> and His name one," meaning that for all of humanity, YHVH and His name will stand alone, unrivaled ... In other words, Deuteronomy and Zechariah both use "one" in the sense of "alone," "exclusively."[248]

Scholars such as Daniel Block have noted that the immediate context of the Shema strengthens this interpretation.[249] Immediately after verse 4, the people are told, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." This statement makes much more sense coming after a command to serve YHWH alone than it does coming after a metaphysical statement about the number of persons within YHWH. Thus, when we look at this passage in its Old Testament context, and we don't try to shoehorn modern debates into the text, we see nothing that would refute divine Christology. Our objectors are merely anachronistically reading their own theology into the text.

Objection: Jesus Is a Created Being in Colossians 1:15

More than a few Arians have tried to object to the eternality of Jesus based on a specific word found in Colossians 1:15. In this passage, Jesus is referred to as the "firstborn" of all creation, which many take to be a statement about Jesus being the first created being. However, this interpretation fails to note that the Greek word used here is also used in reference to rank. As Harris notes:

> The "firstborn" was either the eldest child in a family or a person of preeminent rank. The use of this term to describe the Davidic king in Ps. 88:28 ... indicates that it can denote supremacy in rank as well as priority in time.[250]

Todd Still makes similar comments:

> The term *prōtotokos* ("firstborn," GK *4758*) rarely appears in Paul's writings or elsewhere in the NT (cf. 1:18; Ro 8:29; Heb 1:6; Rev 1:5). Though *prōtotokos* occurs infrequently in Paul, it is common in the LXX, where it appears some 133 times. The LXX usually employs the word in reference to birth order (cf. Lk 2:7). Among the Israelites, firstborn sons possessed privileges not afforded other progeny. This fact gave rise to a metaphorical use of *prōtotokos* to express status and primacy. (For an example of this usage, see Ps 89:27: "I will also appoint him my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth.") This appears to be the primary meaning of "firstborn" here, even if the chronological connotations of *prōtotokos* (and resultingly the notion of Christ's preexistence) are not altogether absent (Lightfoot, 146–47; Caird, 176; cf. Chrysostom [*Hom. Col.* 3], who understands "firstborn" exclusively in reference to time). What other Jews may have attributed to Wisdom (cf. Pr 8:22–31), Paul claimed for Christ. In relation to creation, Christ is sovereign and supreme. He was before all creation in time and is above all creation in rank (cf. Moule, 65; Wright, 71). This "poem" does not praise Christ as one created (i.e., "firstborn out of creation," a partitive genitive), as Arius of Alexandria maintained, but it exalts Christ as the one "over all creation" (so NIV, a subordinative genitive), as Theodore of Mopsuestia, among others, has recognized.[251]

I will conclude my comments on this objection by noting that an interesting feature of Logos Christology is that it could actually affirm that Jesus is the firstborn in a chronological sense without denying Christ's eternality. Recall that in Logos Christology, Christ is seen as existing eternally within the Father before being emitted by an act of will before the creation of the world. If this is the case, one could understand Christ being the firstborn in regard to his being emitted in the manner described by Theophilus and Tertullian.

Objection: Jesus Didn't Claim to Be Good Like God Alone

Some objectors to divine Christology have suggested that Jesus actively denies being God in the New Testament. The favorite prooftext for this argument is Mark 10:18, in which Jesus is called a good teacher by a rich man. Jesus responds, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone." Objectors understand this statement by Jesus as a rebuke in which Jesus refuses to take a title onto himself which is only appropriate for God. Unfortunately for our objector, this argument fails for several reasons.

First, Jesus explicitly refers to himself as the good shepherd in John 10, so the idea that Jesus is against the idea of being called "good" is a non-starter.[252] Jesus also refers to normal everyday people as good in several passages (Matthew 5:45, 12:35, 22:10, 25:21). Second, this objection is in complete contradiction with the various "Jesus is just an agent" objections noted above. According to these agency objections, it is appropriate to give Jesus titles and epithets that were originally only reserved for YHWH because Jesus is YHWH's agent. If that was really the case, Jesus should have had no problem being called "good" by the rich ruler. Our objector would have to say with a straight face that Jesus doesn't want to be called good because that would wrongly associate him with YHWH, while simultaneously maintaining that Jesus has no problem taking the divine name onto himself in John 8:58, or YHWH's epithets in Revelation 1:17–18. To add to the insanity, our objector would have to say all this despite the fact that the term Jesus supposedly doesn't want applied to him is a term that Jesus explicitly applies to himself.

Objection: But Scripture Uses Singular Pronouns and Verbs in Reference to YHWH

A popular Unitarian objection involves appealing to the grammar that is applied to God throughout the Bible. In the Old Testament, we often see God described

as performing actions in which the verb used is in the singular form. An example of this would be Genesis 1:31, in which we are told, "And God saw everything that he made." The verb "made" in Hebrew is masculine singular, not plural, which is reflected in the translation of "he made" and not "they made." Similarly, God often speaks in the first person, like we see in Genesis 15:1, where God says, "Do not fear, Abram, I am shielding you." The Hebrew word for "I" is a first-person singular, not a plural such as "we" or "our." Our objector claims that if God is a plurality of persons, we should expect to see plural language instead of this singular language.

Several problems can be noted here. First, it is very common, even in our own language, to refer to objects using singular language even when it is composed of a plurality of parts. You might say, "I dropped my phone yesterday and it broke." In this sentence, singular language is used to describe your phone despite the fact that it is composed of a plurality of parts. Second, in many instances in which YHWH speaks in the first person or is referred to with singular language, one can maintain that it is only one person who is present and speaking. For instance, in Genesis 15, when YHWH is depicted as appearing to Abraham and speaking in the first person, one can maintain that there is one specific person present who is speaking (the Son), so it is perfectly reasonable to find singular language applied to this one person.

Objection: YHWH Says "I" Created Alone

In the previous objection, we saw several bad arguments arising from singular grammar in the Old Testament. However, a better version of this argument comes from Isaiah 44:24 in which God says, "I am the Lord, who made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself." In this passage, "I" must be understood as referencing the speaker. It is this speaker who is described as creating the world alone. It seems that the speaker is denying that anything external to him was involved with creation. While I have argued that this verse is damning to external models such as

Monarchical trinitarianism and Arianism, one might wonder if I am to be hoisted by my own petard.

I contend that this passage presents no problem for Logos Christology as I have presented it. Let us suppose that the speaker in this passage is the Father. Suppose the Father exists all alone prior to creation, and there is nothing that exists external to him. Now, suppose the Father uses a part of himself as the instrument for creation. The Father's use of this part of himself to create the world would not negate his ability to truthfully say that he alone created any more than a carpenter using his hands to create a table negates the fact that the carpenter alone created the table! Unlike the carpenter who creates a table, the part of the Father that is used to create is a bona fide person. However, this does not change the fact that it is the Father alone who creates. Thus, the Father can speak truthfully and say "I alone created" because the "I" in this passage does not exclude that which is internal to him.

If the Father in Isaiah had said, "We alone created the heavens," then it would give the impression that there is another person external to him that is equal to him, which would have been counterproductive to the overarching rhetoric throughout the Book of Isaiah, which was contrasting YHWH with other gods. If the Father had said, "I and my Son alone," this too would have depicted the Son as being external to the Father. Yet in speaking as he does, the Father maintains that there is none separate from him, while also allowing that one internal to him can be involved in creation. Thus, Logos Christology has no problem accounting for this passage.

Objection: Jesus Cannot Be the Angel of the Lord, as Hebrews 1:5 Says He Is Not an Angel

Many object to connecting Jesus to the Angel of the Lord by referencing Hebrews 1:5, which says, "For to which of the angels did God ever say, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you'?" The argument is that if God says something to the Son that he didn't say to the angels, then the Son cannot be an angel. The problem with this argument is that it fails to distinguish between

the Greek word translated to "angel" in the New Testament and the Hebrew word translated to "angel" in the Old Testament. As I noted in chapter 1, the Hebrew word that underlies the English word "angel" originally had nothing to do with the type of being that is described; it had to do with the person's function. However, by the time that the New Testament was being written, the Greek word which we translate as "angel" was used not as a general term referring to function, but in reference to a specific species of spiritual being. Hebrews 1:5 is thus contrasting Jesus with this specific species of being, not denying that Jesus has ever served as a messenger. This is perfectly consistent with saying that Jesus is the messenger of YHWH in the Old Testament, who is himself a manifestation of the divine presence.

Objection: Philippians 2:9–11 Refutes Divine Christology

Objectors to divine Christology will often appeal to several different aspects of Philippians 2:9–11 in order to argue against the divinity of Christ. One such feature is the statement in verse 9 that "God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name." Objectors will often note that the name which is above all names is the divine name, and that since this name was given to Jesus, this implies that there was a point at which Jesus did not previously have it.

I find this objection amusing because those who utilize this argument rarely recognize that this is just as much a problem for Unitarianism as it is for divine Christology! What objectors fail to recognize is that in this verse, Jesus is depicted as having the name bestowed upon him *after* his death. If this is to be understood as Jesus being given something he did not already have, then that would contradict the objections about Jesus being a name-bearing agent that we discussed earlier. Recall that when proponents of divine Christology point to things that Jesus says or does that indicate that he is YHWH, Unitarians generally object that these things can be said or done by Jesus because he is the name-bearing agent of YHWH. In order for this response to have any hope of

succeeding, Jesus must actually be bearing YHWH's name at the time he says or does those actions, most of which occur before Jesus's death. Yet when we get to Philippians 2:9, objectors to divine Christology will turn around and claim that Jesus is here being given something which he did not previously have. Which one is it? Either verse 9 depicts Jesus as gaining something he did not already have, in which case our Unitarian friends can't appeal to Jesus being a name-bearing agent to get themselves out of all the passages which clearly depict Jesus as being YHWH, or Jesus is not being given something he previously lacked, in which case this doesn't refute divine Christology. They cannot have their cake and eat it too.

Regardless of the inconsistency of our Unitarian friends, my reader might still be wondering how we should understand the idea that Jesus had the divine name bestowed upon him. I am inclined to agree with Komoszewski and Bowman that

> we should read all such statements about God granting Jesus a "name" at his resurrection and ascension as *honor language*—as expressing the honor that God showed to his Son before the whole world. By coming *incognito* as a human being and dying the most degrading death possible, Jesus had voluntarily abased or humbled himself in an extreme fashion. He therefore put himself in a position of dependence on the Father to reverse that humiliation by a correspondingly extreme exaltation. Recall that the Septuagint used the verb translated "highly exalted" for God to express not a change in his rightful status but the honor that is rightfully his as the Creator of all (Ps. 96:9 LXX). Likewise, in Philippians 2:9–10 Paul is saying that God "highly exalted" Jesus by "giving" him the name that was rightfully his. In Roman society, a man's status was elevated in proportion to the status of the man officially recognizing or honoring him. Paul therefore speaks in honor language that would be

> meaningful in the Roman society that dominated the culture in Philippi.[253]

Objectors to divine Christology will also often appeal to the phrase in 2:10 that every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord "to the glory of God the Father." I must confess that those who seek to appeal to this wording leave me confused. All that this wording implies is that the actions previously described will bring glory to the Father, which in no way diminishes or refutes the core tenets of divine Christology.

Objection: Malachi 2:10 Says That the One God Is the Father

In Malachi 2:10, the speaker says, "Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?" This is sometimes taken as evidence that the Father alone is to be identified with God. I will begin by noting that if one holds to the Logos Christology that I have offered in this book, one can simply agree that we have one God who created us, and that this God is the Father. One can simply maintain that Jesus is part of this one God and therefore can be called God in a predicative sense. However, I don't believe that this ground must be conceded. At the time in which the Book of Malachi was written, the distinction between the Father and Son was not yet made. "Father" could be used in reference to God in a general sense without any attempt to distinguish the figure that comes to bear that name in the New Testament. Appealing to this passage to resolve Trinitarian disputes seems to me simply anachronistic. I would also note that in Isaiah 9:6, the Messiah is referred to as "Everlasting Father," so the objector should be careful about how much they want to read into this language, lest it come back to bite them.

Conclusion

I will bring this section to a close by noting that the majority of objections that are raised against divine Christology stem from Christians failing to clarify what they mean by "Jesus is God." If this phrase is left ambiguous, then it is very easy for an objector to interpret it as a statement of identity. It is only then that many of the above objections can be used. For instance, it is common to see objectors say something like "Jesus says the Father is greater than him, but nothing is greater than God, so Jesus is not God," or "Jesus says authority has been given to him, but nobody gives authority to God, so Jesus is not God." These objections understand "Jesus is God" as an identity statement and therefore attack this statement by pointing to properties possessed by God that are not possessed by Jesus. However, if you clarify at the beginning of your conversation that you don't think Jesus is identical to God, but is internal to God, these arguments never get off the ground.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

In the previous chapter, I devoted a significant amount of time to defending divine Christology against popular attacks. I now wish to conclude this book by offering some suggestions for how you can launch attacks of your own. While I certainly hope that this book will be read by my ideological opponents and cause them to hop the fence, I recognize that I have likely been preaching to the choir. Many of you may have picked up this book intending to strengthen your apologetic ability to defend the deity of Christ, and truthfully, that is why I wrote this book in the first place. My ultimate hope in writing this book was that it would equip everyday Christians with better arguments. Because of this, I want to leave you with a few ideas on how to structure your arguments going forward.

Offensive Strategy 1: The Hammer and Anvil

In the first chapter of this book, we surveyed numerous instances in the Old Testament in which YHWH is described as being seen by humans. This includes instances in which YHWH was seen by Abraham, Moses, and even some of the elders of Israel. We also saw that the New Testament is explicit in stating that no one has seen the Father (John 6:46). I think these two data points, taken together, create a powerful argument for the deity of Christ that has been woefully underutilized in modern discussions. If you put these data points together, you can create a problem for your opponent. If the God of Israel is

only one person, and this person has never been seen, then how can the author of Genesis and Exodus say that the person seen by the patriarchs was the God of Israel? If Unitarianism is true, this is a simple contradiction. The solution is that the God of Israel is not one person. If the God of Israel is two (or more) persons, then you can have one person who appears to the patriarchs, and one person who remains hidden. As a result, the Father is the person whom no one has seen, while the Son (who is himself God) makes the Father known. Thus, you can preserve the truth of both texts without having to do any scriptural contortions.

If you engage in this strategy, you should be prepared for your interlocutor to try several avenues of escape. The first avenue of escape that you should be prepared for is that they will try to deny that YHWH is actually seen in the Old Testament. They will do this in a few ways. First, they might appeal to Exodus 33:20 and claim that this passage justifies their denial that YHWH is actually seen in passages such as Genesis 18. However, I have already addressed Exodus 33:20 in chapter 1 and shown that it never denies that YHWH can be seen, only that the fullness of YHWH can be seen.

The second avenue of escape that your interlocutor might use is to hand-wave Old Testament theophanies away by saying that they are just the appearances of angels or messengers. I have already given you the means through which to defeat this avenue of escape in chapter 1 and in my attack on Monarchical Trinitarianism in chapter 5. It is worth noting that when you employ this strategy, you don't even need to touch passages about the angel of the Lord. You can cite passages such as Genesis 18 or Numbers 12:5–8, which explicitly say that YHWH is seen, and which never mention a messenger at all.

The third avenue of escape that your interlocutor might try to take is to say that these are just visions or dreams and not actual appearances. You can defeat this avenue by pointing out that God explicitly denies that he comes to Moses in a dream (Numbers 12:5–8), and that YHWH is depicted as being present in clearly physical ways when he comes to Abraham in Genesis 18 or to Jacob in Genesis 32.

Some might try to object that the New Testament doesn't just say that nobody has seen the Father, it says nobody has seen God (1 John 4:12). However, this can be countered by noting that "God" in the New Testament is almost exclusively applied to the Father, while "Lord" is used for the Son. Thus, we can understand statements about nobody seeing God to be statements about nobody seeing the Father. This inference is strengthened when we examine passages such as John 1:18, in which a statement about nobody seeing God is immediately followed by a statement about how the Son (who is himself God) makes the Father known.

While the above argument is already quite strong, you can make it even stronger. You can bolster the strength of your inference by drawing on data from passages such as 1 Corinthians 10:9 and Jude 5, which explicitly describe Jesus as present and active in the Old Testament. You can also note that many of the earliest Christian writers make the same connection that you are making. Then, as the final nail in the coffin, you can draw on the data discussed in chapter 2 to show that pre-Christian Jews were already interpreting Old Testament appearances of YHWH as appearances of a specific divine intermediary figure, known as the Word, which just happens to be the same label given to Jesus in the New Testament.

As a result of all this, you have a solution to our problem that preserves the obvious meaning of the Old Testament theophanies while also affirming the truth of the New Testament passages about no one seeing the Father. This solution is consistent with what a first-century Jew would have likely believed and aligns with the earliest Christian beliefs. There is simply no explanation that compares to the explanation offered by divine Christology. One might refer to this as a "Hammer and Anvil" approach because you will essentially treat the New Testament texts about nobody seeing the Father as an anvil and the Old Testament theophanies of YHWH as a hammer. You will place your interlocutor between these two data points and proceed to hammer on them (with the love of Christ) until your arm grows tired.

Offensive Strategy 2: Reframe the Debate

Let's suppose that you are speaking with a Unitarian and they challenge you on the deity of Christ. They claim that the Bible does not support the idea that Jesus is God, and they want you to give them a verse that you think supports your position. What are you going to do? Most Christians will likely turn to a handful of common New Testament verses that they believe support the deity of Christ. These might be verses in which Jesus is called God, or in which Jesus is depicted as forgiving someone's sins, or in which Jesus receives worship.

Now, you could do the same thing and run to your favorite New Testament prooftexts. However, if you do this, you will likely face two obstacles. First, whatever proof text you cite, your opponent has likely heard it before and has a rejoinder waiting. Second, your opponent has their own list of proof texts that they are going to appeal to in their attempt to refute you. To be clear, neither one of these obstacles is insurmountable. It may be that their objections are horrible, and that their prooftexts are easily refuted. However, all of this is going to eat up time, and the conversation is likely going to be all over the place.

To put it simply, if you do what most Christians do in this situation, your opponent is going to see you coming. You will find yourself attacking what your opponent expects you to attack, and you will find yourself defending where your opponent wants you to defend. While these battles are certainly winnable, this may not be the most strategically wise course of action. In the words of Sun Tzu:

> Appear at points which the enemy must hasten to defend; march swiftly to places where you are not expected. An army may march great distances without distress if it marches through a country where the enemy is not. You can be sure of succeeding in your attacks if you only attack places that are undefended. You can ensure the safety of your defense if you only hold positions that cannot be attacked. Hence, a general is skillful in attack, whose opponent does not know what to

> defend; and he is skillful in defense, whose opponent does not know what to attack.[254]

When it comes to defending the deity of Christ, where is the country through which our armies can march swiftly without distress? How might we make it so that our enemy does not know where to attack or where to defend? We do so by beginning our attack not with New Testament passages (which is where we are expected), but by establishing that in the first century, many (if not most) Jews already believed in a unique divine figure that mediated between God and Man. We establish that this is a person who appears visibly in the Old Testament, is called YHWH, and who was referred to specifically as God's Word. In doing this, we are not seeking to argue that this figure is Jesus. We are simply establishing the presence of a concept in the pre-Christian Jewish culture.

Put simply, when challenged on the deity of Christ, you can begin by reframing the subject of the debate. Instead of arguing for the deity of Christ, you want to argue that there was a specific theological concept that was already established in first-century Jewish culture. To initiate this pivot, you might say something like: "Before we can properly understand the New Testament's statements about Jesus and what they imply about his deity, we need to first examine the cultural context in which the New Testament was written."

When you shift the topic of the conversation in this way, you are gaining a tactical advantage. As mentioned earlier, your opponent will likely have a long list of Bible verses that they think refute the deity of Christ. However, they are much less likely to have familiarity with Philo of Alexandria or the Palestinian Targum. You, in contrast, came prepared to discuss this very subject. Unlike your opponent, you will have specific quotations from Philo and the targums ready that support your case. You will even have quotes from leading Jewish scholars who agree with you (Sommer and Boyarin). For most laymen, they will never have heard any of this. Thus, you will have found a country through which your troops can march swiftly and without distress. Your opponent will be on their heels, seeking to figure out how to respond to these data on the fly, while you can have your defenses prepared ahead of time.

Notice also that when you shift the conversation in this way, you are robbing your opponent of their ammunition. If your opponent tries to cite some New Testament passage against the deity of Christ, you can simply respond by saying, "I am not arguing about Jesus or the New Testament right now; I am specifically arguing that a certain idea was present in the Jewish culture in the first century. If you wish to concede this point and move on, we can do so. If not, I would challenge you to engage with the data that I have presented." Thus, your opponent will not know where to attack, because all the areas they wish to attack are areas that you are not currently interested in defending. When doing this, you will want to hold your opponent's feet to the fire until their toes turn black. Until they concede the point, you are not interested in anything related to the New Testament. Once this point is conceded, you can use this admission to bolster your interpretation of passages such as John 1 and Jude 5. I will point out that the strategy I am now discussing is similar to the one I have utilized throughout this book. I began this book with an examination of the Old Testament text. Then I moved on to how pre-Christian Jews understood these concepts. It was only after I established a particular framework that I proceeded to discuss how the New Testament writings fit into the framework I previously established.

Offensive Strategy 3: Take Small Steps, Not Big Leaps

Many Christians who affirm the deity of Christ hold to some type of Nicene Christology. By this I mean that most Christians maintain that Jesus shares the same nature and substance as the Father and is ontologically equal with the Father. When these Christians are challenged on their beliefs, they often jump straight to defending this particular conception of Jesus. In many instances, this is tactically stupid. Let me explain why.

Suppose you are talking with a Muslim who believes that Jesus is just another human prophet. You want to convince them that they are wrong and that your view is correct. At the beginning of this conversation, there is a great

chasm between your understanding of Jesus and their understanding of Jesus. If you start the conversation by trying to argue for Nicene Christology, you are essentially trying to get your interlocutor to cross the Christological equivalent of the Grand Canyon in a single giant leap. This can be done, but it is a hard sell.

Instead of trying to get your interlocutor to take this giant Christological leap from the very start, why not get them to first take a small step in the right direction? Why not build a bridge of small steps that will eventually lead them to stepping foot on the other side? Instead of arguing for Nicene Christology from the outset, why not start by arguing that Jesus pre-existed his human birth? If you make this the starting point of your argument, the vast majority of the usual Muslim objections to Jesus are not going to be relevant, because those objections are against the idea that "Jesus is God." If you are arguing that Jesus pre-existed his human birth, and your interlocutor objects, "But Jesus says the Father is his God! God doesn't have a God!" You can respond by saying, "Cool, I am not arguing that Jesus is God right now, I am just arguing that Jesus pre-existed his human birth. We can talk about that verse later, but right now, it's not relevant." Then, once you and your interlocutor agree that Jesus pre-existed his birth, you can find another small step to take. Maybe the next small step is that Jesus is attributed actions originally attributed to YHWH (Jude 5), or that Jesus is called titles which were originally applied to YHWH (Revelation 1:17–18).

To be clear, your first step doesn't have to be that Jesus pre-existed his birth; it could be even smaller than that. You could begin by noting that the Old Testament contains the idea that a person distinct from YHWH can be called YHWH. That idea, just by itself, with no connection to Jesus, could be your first step. I am not going to give you a detailed list of how exactly to build this bridge, because the optimal number of steps is likely going to vary from person to person. Some people might be comfortable with jumping several feet at a time, while others are only comfortable stepping a few inches at a time.

Put simply, Christians need to stop trying to argue for everything all at once. Doing so makes it less likely that you will make any progress with your interlocutor, and it makes it so that your position is more difficult to defend.

By arguing for everything all at once, each of your prooftexts is required to bear significantly more weight and is significantly easier to topple over. I am not saying you shouldn't defend Nicene Christology, I am saying you should be tactical and strategic in how you do so. Christ told us to be as wise as serpents, so let's defend our faith wisely.

Endnotes

1. Esther Hamori, *"When Gods Were Men": The Embodied God in Biblical and Near Eastern Literature* (De Gruyter, 2008), 24.

2. It is worth noting that "ēl" can also be used as a generic word for "god." See Michael Hundley, *Yahweh among the Gods: The Divine in Genesis, Exodus, and the Ancient Near East* (Cambridge University Press, 2022), 205–17.

3. An example of such an equation noted by Michael Heiser in "Are Yahweh and El Distinct Deities in Deut. 32:8–9 and Psalm 82?," *LBTS Faculty Publications and Presentations* (2006), is 2 Samuel 22:3, which Heiser renders as "For who is El but Yahweh?"

4. Hundley, *Yahweh among the Gods*, 215.

5. Hamori, *"When Gods Were Men"*, 25.

6. This is not the only instance where the appearance of the angel of the Lord is associated with an appearance of YHWH. In 2 Chronicles 3:1–2, we are told that Solomon built the house of the Lord where YHWH had appeared to David on the threshing floor of Ornan. This is a reference to what occurs in 1 Chronicles 21:15–30. However, in that story it is the angel of the Lord that is described as appearing to David.

7. Michael Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Lexham Press, 2015), 140.

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9. Darrell Hannah, *Michael and Christ: Michael Tradition and Angel Christology in Early Christianity* (Wipf & Stock, 2011), 21.

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11. Louis Hartman and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Book of Daniel: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary on Chapters 1–9*, vol. 23, Anchor Yale Bible (Yale University Press, 2008), 236.

12. John Joseph Collins and Adela Yarbro Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ed. Frank Moore Cross, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Fortress Press, 1993), 333.

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14. Samuel Meier, "Angel I," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 2nd ed., ed. Karel van der Toorn et al. (Brill / Eerdmans, 1999), 49.

15. Benjamin D. Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 38.

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20. Ibid., 43.

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22. Ibid., 40.

23. Ibid., 40–41.

24. Michael Hundley, "Divine Presence in Ancient Near Eastern Temples," *Religion Compass* 9, no. 7 (2015): 203–15.

25. Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel*, 135.

26. Ibid., 125.

27. Meier, "Angel I," 47.

28. Michael Heiser, *Angels: What the Bible Really Says About God's Heavenly Host* (Lexham Press, 2018), 128.

29. Daniel McClellan, *YHWH'S Divine Images: A Cognitive Approach*, Ancient Near East Monographs 29 (SBL Press, 2022), 160.

30. Ibid., 161.

31. Ibid.

32. Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel*, 43.

33. McClellan, *YHWH's Divine Images: A Cognitive Approach*, 161.

34. Ibid.

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36. Ibid., 161.

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41. Nahum Sarna, *Exodus: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 213.

42. R. Laird Harris, "68" in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris et al. (Moody Press, 1999), 33–34.

43. Sarna, *Exodus*, 215.

44. Rebecca G. S. Idestrom, "'Show Me Your Glory' (Exodus 33:18): An Exegetical Analysis of Moses's Request in the Context of Exodus 32–34," in *Exploring the Glory of God: New Horizons for a Theology of Glory*, ed. Adesola Joan Akala (Fortress Academic, 2020), 5.

45. Anthony D. York, "The Targum in the Synagogue and in the School," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period* 10, no. 1 (1979): 74–86.

46. For a brief survey of scholarly approaches to this topic, see Martin McNamara, *Targum and Testament Revisited: Aramaic Paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible*, 2nd ed. (Eerdmans, 2010).

47. Ibid., 126–27.

48. For a brief overview of various targums, see Craig A. Evans, *Ancient Texts for New Testament Studies: A Guide to the Background Literature* (Baker Academic, 2011), 185–215. Regarding suppression of ideas in later targums, see Daniel Boyarin, "Two Powers in Heaven; or, The Making of a Heresy," in *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation: Essays in Honor of James L. Kugel*, ed. Hindy Najman and Judith H. Newman (Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 335, in which Boyarin remarks "Alejandro Díez Macho has observed that it is no mere coincidence that the more rabbinized of the Targums (Targums Onkelos and Pseudo-Jonathan) and rabbinic literature itself suppress the use of the term Memra quite observably. Indeed, in rabbinic literature, it has disappeared entirely."

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50. Martin McNamara, *Targum Neofiti 1: Genesis*, ed. Kevin Cathcart et al., trans. Martin McNamara, vol. 1A, The Aramaic Bible (Liturgical Press, 1992), 60.

51. Ibid., 122.

52. Ibid., 151.

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54. Martin McNamara et al., *Targums Neofiti 1 and Pseudo-Jonathan: Exodus*, ed. Kevin Cathcart et al., trans. Martin McNamara and Michael Maher, vol. 2, The Aramaic Bible (Liturgical Press, 1994), 74.

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57. Ibid., 122.

58. Ibid., 35.

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62. McNamara et al., *Targums Neofiti 1 and Pseudo-Jonathan*, 18.

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70. Daniel Boyarin, "Logos, a Jewish Word: John's Prologue as Midrash," in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler (Oxford University Press, 2011), 547.

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72. McNamara, *Targum Neofiti 1: Genesis*, 103.

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81. Philo, *Philo*, trans. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, vol. 2, The Loeb Classical Library (Harvard University Press, 1929), 29. From Philo's *On the Cherubim*, sec. 35.

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99. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 373.

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129. Bart Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee* (HarperOne, 2014), 124.

130. Daniel McClellan, *The Bible Says So: What We Get Right (and Wrong) About Scripture's Most Controversial Issues* (St. Martin's Essentials, 2025), Kindle location 3654.

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135. See Joshua Sijuwade, "Monarchical Trinitarianism: A Metaphysical Proposal," *TheoLogica* (2021): 1–40, https://doi.org/10.14428/thl.v5i2.54483 .

136. *Top Scholar PRESSED About The Trinity - Dr. Joshua Sijuwade*, hosted by Michael Jones (InspiringPhilosophy, 2025), YouTube Video, 2 hr., 55 min., at 2:25:00–2:27:00, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BlEU7lS2qJE.

137. Ibid., 1:41:00–1:51:00.

138. *Challenging Top Scholar on The Trinity: Dr Joshua Sijuwade vs Dr. James Agnew*, hosted by Michael Jones (InspiringPhilosophy, 2025), YouTube Video, 2 hr., 42 min., at 2:11:13–2:13:00, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eIEvtAb9GUo.

139. Ibid., 2:37:55–2:38:27.

140. It may be that there are instances in the Bible where we must conclude that the original intent of the author is false. However, we should not rush to such conclusions too quickly. If there is a plausible way to preserve the original intention of the author, that would be optimal. In this instance, there is nothing preventing us from maintaining the intention of the original authors. Because of this, we should reject Sijuwade's interpretation.

141. *Top Scholar PRESSED About The Trinity - Dr. Joshua Sijuwade*, 14:00–17:00.

142. Andrew Kirschner, "Will-Independent Mereological Trinity Monotheism: A Defense of the Logical Coherence of, A Priori Motivation for, and a Particular Model Concerning the Doctrine of the Trinity" (PhD diss., University of Arkansas, 2019), 24.

143. Ibid., 25.

144. Ibid., 27.

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146. CAI is not an uncontroversial mereological position. For objections to CAI and responses, see Kirschner, "Will-Independent Mereological Trinity Monotheism," 27–44.

147. E. Bohn, "Unrestricted Composition as Identity," in *Composition as Identity*, ed. D. Baxter and A. Cotnoir (Oxford University Press, 2014), 143.

148. Megan Wallace, "Composition as Identity Part 1," *Philosophy Compass* 6, no. 11 (2011): 805.

149. Kirschner, "Will-Independent Mereological Trinity Monotheism," 27.

150. Ibid., 39.

151. Shieva Kleinschmidt, "Many-One Identity and the Trinity," *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion* 4 (2012): 84.

152. Ibid., 41–42.

153. Ibid., 35.

154. Ibid., 52.

155. William Lane Craig, *A Muslim's Four Objections to the Trinity Part One*, Reasonable Faith Podcast, November 4, 2024.

156. William Lane Craig, "Trinity Monotheism Once More: A Response to Daniel Howard-Snyder," *Philosophia Christi* 8 (2006): 101–2.

157. Craig has changed the name of his model from "Trinity Monotheism" to "Tri-personal Monotheism." However, I will use the term "Trinity Monotheism" in this work as an umbrella term to refer not just to Craig's model, but to any model in the same conceptual vicinity. For objections to Trinity Monotheism, see Daniel Howard-Snyder, "Trinity Monotheism," *Philosophia Christi* 2 (2003): 375–403, and William Lane Craig's response in "Trinity Monotheism Once More: A Response to Daniel Howard-Snyder," *Philosophia Christi* 8 (2006): 101–13.

158. Theophilus, "Theophilus to Autolycus," in *Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria (Entire)*, ed. Alexander Roberts et al., trans. Marcus Dods, in vol. 2, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Christian Literature Company, 1885), 97–98 (book 2, chap. 10).

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161. Ibid., 603–4 (chap. 9).

162. Ibid., 613 (chap. 18).

163. Ibid., 627 (chap. 31).

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165. Beau Branson, "Socialist Trinitarianism," in *One God, Three Persons, Four Views: A Biblical, Theological, and Philosophical Dialogue on the Doctrine of the Trinity*, Studies in the Doctrine of God (Cascade Books, 2024), Kindle location 4220.

166. Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *Colossians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (Yale University Press, 2008), 363.

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168. Ibid., 452.

169. Gerhard Kittel and Friedrich Gerhard (eds.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley, 10 vols. (Eerdmans, 1964), 3:119.

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171. Ibid.

172. Craig Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 2nd edition (IVP Academic, 2014), 574.

173. John 14:10–11.

174. Branson, "Socialist Trinitarianism," Kindle location 4229.

175. Branson, "Socialist Trinitarianism," Kindle location 4343.

176. Dale Tuggy, "Changing the Subject, Cognitive Faculties, and 'God,'" in *One God, Three Persons, Four Views: A Biblical, Theological, and Philosophical Dialogue on the Doctrine of the Trinity*, Studies in the Doctrine of God (Cascade Books, 2024), Kindle location 4501.

177. William Lane Craig, "In Defense of Biblical Trinitarianism," in *One God, Three Persons, Four Views: A Biblical, Theological, and Philosophical Dialogue on the Doctrine of the Trinity*, Studies in the Doctrine of God (Cascade Books, 2024), Kindle location 6385.

178. By "external" in this section I mean something which is not identical to the object or identical to one of its parts. Clark Kent is not external to Superman because Clark Kent is identical to Superman. The mallet head is not external to the mallet because it is identical to one of the mallet's parts. My car is external to your car because my car is not identical to your car, and my car is not a part of your car.

179. John 1:3, John 1:10, 1 Corinthians 8:6, Colossians 1:16, Hebrews 1:2.

180. Ryan Mullins, "Simply Impossible: A Case against Divine Simplicity," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 7 (2013): 187.

181. Ryan Mullins, *From Divine Timemaker to Divine Watchmaker: An Exploration of God's Temporality*, Routledge Studies in Analytic and Systematic Theology (Routledge, 2024), 8.

182. Branson, "Socialist Trinitarianism," Kindle location 4238.

183. Ibid., Kindle location 4245.

184. Beau Branson, "God and His Word and His Spirit Are One God," in *One God, Three Persons, Four Views: A Biblical, Theological, and Philosophical Dialogue on the Doctrine of the Trinity*, Studies in the Doctrine of God (Cascade Books, 2024), Kindle location 1629.

185. Dustin Smith, "A Socinian Response to an Arian View," in *The Son of God: Three Views of the Identity of Jesus* (Wipf & Stock, 2015), 147.

186. Ibid., 145–46.

187. Ibid., 146.

188. Ibid., 147.

189. Ibid., 145.

190. Ibid.

191. J. Z. Smith, "Prayer of Joseph," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Doubleday & Company, 1985), 2:699.

192. Smith, "A Socinian Response," 145.

193. Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz, *Koren Talmud Bavli: Pesahim Part 1*, The Noé Edition, vol. 6 (Koren Publishers Jerusalem, 2013), 278.

194. Ibid., 279.

195. Rabbi Dr. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon (eds.), *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis I*, trans. Rabbi Dr. H. Freedman, with Rabbi Dr. I. Epstein (The Soncino Press, 1939), 6.

196. David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 43, Anchor Yale Bible (Yale University Press, 2008), 203.

197. This syllogism is a representation of the reasoning that undergirds many Unitarian arguments. I have not yet seen any Unitarians argue with this exact syllogism, but I believe it to be an accurate representation of what is going on in the background of their thought.

198. Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 325.

199. Keener, *The Gospel of John*, 365.

200. Ibid., 369.

201. John Joseph Collins and Adela Yarbro Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ed. Frank Moore Cross, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Fortress Press, 1993), 291.

202. David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 43, Anchor Yale Bible (Yale University Press, 2008), 210–11.

203. See Philo's *Allegorical Interpretation* 1.65.

204. Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, 313.

205. Jarl E. Fossum, *The Image of the Invisible God: Essays on the Influence of Jewish Mysticism on Early Christology* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 51.

206. Charles Talbert, *The Development of Christology During the First Hundred Years*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 140 (Brill, 2011), 95.

207. Fossum, *Images of God*, 61.

208. Hannah, *Michael and Christ*, 81.

209. Daniel Boyarin, *Borderlines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 92.

210. *Where Does Jesus Ever Claim to Be God?*, Daniel McClellan, 2025, YouTube Video, 26 min., 14:30–17:00, at https://youtu.be/F0teW0M5azk .

211. Jean Bottéro, *Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia* (University of Chicago Press, 2001), 65.

212. David Lorton, "The Theology of Cult Statues in Ancient Egypt," in *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient near East*, ed. Michael Dick (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 179.

213. Victor Matthews et al., *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (InterVarsity Press, 2000), Jeremiah 10:5.

214. D. R. W. Wood and Howard Marshall (eds.), *The New Bible Dictionary* (InterVarsity Press, 1996), 499.

215. For more on this idea, see James Agnew, *What Jesus Didn't Know: A Defense of Kenotic Christology* (2025).

216. See Athanasius, "Four Discourses Against The Arians," [translator unknown], in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, series 2, vol. 4 (T&T Clark, 1885), 1.13.58; Hilary of Poitiers, "On the Trinity," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff, Henry Wace, and W. Sanday, trans. E. W. Watson and L. Pullan, vol. 9, part 2 (The Christian Literature Company, 1908), 9.54.

217. Tertullian, "Against Praxeas," in *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, ed. Alexander Roberts et al., trans. Holmes Peter, in vol. 3, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Christian Literature Company, 1885), 603–4 (chap. 9).

218. For more on this idea, see my book *The Devil's Disbarment: Exploring Christ's Victory in the Divine Council.*

219. Augustine, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, part III, vol. 6, ed. John E. Rotelle, O.S.A., trans. Edmund Hill, O.P. (New City Press, 1990), 142, https://archive.org/details/worksofsaintaugu0000augu/page/n5/mode/2up .

220. M. J. Charlesworth, *St. Anselm's Proslogion: With A Reply on Behalf of the Fool by Gaunilo and The Author's Reply to Gaunilo*, trans. M. J. Charlesworth (University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 123, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvpj7bdc. .

221. Genesis 9:11–12; 6:18; 9:9–17.

222. Genesis 12:2–3; 15:17–18.

223. Exodus 19:5–6.

224. Psalms 89:2–4, 26–38; Acts 2:30.

225. Titus 1:2.

226. 2 Peter 3:13.

227. Jeremiah 33:20–26.

228. Hebrews 8:6.

229. Hebrews 7:20–22.

230. Dustin Smith, "A Socinian View," in *The Son of God: Three Views of the Identity of Jesus* (Wipf & Stock, 2015), 176–83.

231. See Craig and Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 759–61.

232. Smith, "A Socinian View," 183.

233. Walter Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. F. W. Gingrich (University of Chicago Press, 2000), 192.

234. Smith, "A Socinian Response," 73n52.

235. Dustin Smith, "A Socinian Reply," in *The Son of God: Three Views of the Identity of Jesus* (Wipf & Stock, 2015), 239.

236. Ibid.

237. Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament,* 194.

238. Smith, "A Socinian View," 187.

239. Harold Attridge and Helmut Koester, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Fortress Press, 1989), 53–54.

240. Smith, "A Socinian View," 88.

241. Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, 658.*

242. Smith, "A Socinian View," 188.

243. C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 2nd Edition (Westminster John Knox Press, 1978), 166.

244. For an extended discussion on this topic, see chap. 1 in James Agnew, *The Devil's Disbarment: Exploring Christ's Victory in the Divine Council* (2024).

245. See chap. 3 of Agnew, *What Jesus Didn't Know.*

246. For a brief discussion of the difficulties, see Daniel Block, "How Many Is God? An Investigation into the Meaning of Deuteronomy 6:4–5," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47, no. 2 (2004): 193–212.

247. Jeffrey Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 76.

248. Ibid.

249. Block, "How Many Is God," 201–8.

250. Murray J. Harris, *Colossians & Philemon*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Eerdmans, 1991), 43.

251. Todd Still et al., "Colossians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Ephesians–Philemon (Revised Edition)*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary 12 (Zondervan, 2006), 290.

252. It is worth noting that Jesus's language about being the good shepherd in John 10 might very well be a reference to Psalm 23.

253. J. Ed Komoszewski and Robert M. Bowman Jr., *The Incarnate Christ and His Critics: A Biblical Defense* (Kregel Academic, 2024), 491–92.

254. Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Lionel Giles (n.d.), https://classics.mit.edu/Tzu/artwar.html .

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