

Hebrew, Early Judaic, and Early Christian Thought
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1. Monarchism and the Heavenly Council

Monarchism, related to the terms henotheism and monolatry,¹ is the worship of a supreme God—whose majesty, might, and holiness merit undisputed respect and veneration—without the denial of the existence of other gods. These other gods are members of the heavenly council of the gods, also known as the 'heavenly' or 'divine assembly.' The gods on the council are enormously powerful and holy in their own right, but cannot match the splendor, power, and holiness of God, who stands at the head of the council as its divine monarch, and are, therefore, not worthy of independent worship.² Professor G. Ernest Wright writes:

There is a large amount of evidence in the Old Testament for the heavenly assembly or council,

¹ Henotheism hypothesizes that Israel was originally polytheistic and followed a monotheistic trend that led towards the placing all gods in a position subservient to God. Monolatry, on the other hand, stresses that Israel was originally monotheistic and became compromised as a polytheistic trend introduced gods that became subservient to God. Some scholars now recognize that Israel had a monarchic character from its earliest history which was retained in Judaic and early Christian thought. See Peter Hayman, "Monotheism—A Misused Word in Jewish Studies?", *Journal of Jewish Studies*, vol 42, no 1 (Spring 1991); Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology* (J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], Tubingen : 1995), especially 15-21. For a list of scholars who find the use of monotheism troublesome, see G. M. Tucker, D. L. Peterson, R. R. Wilson, eds., *Canon, Theology, and Old Testament Interpretation* (Fortress, Philadelphia: 1988) 103 n. 3, cf. 92-107. For an argument that broadens the meaning of monotheism, and thereby stresses its continuity in the Judaic and Early Christian eras, see Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism*, 2nd ed. (T&T Clark, Edinburgh: 1998).

² E. Theodore Mullen, Jr., *The Assembly of the Gods: The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature*, *Harvard Semitic Monographs* 24 (Scholars Press, Chico California: 1980) 192-193.

presided over by God and composed of Divine attendants, heralds, and administrators.³

Tryggve N. D. Mettinger describes the heavenly council in terms of an earthly monarchy, with God sitting as king, and the members of the council surrounding him as his advisors. He writes:

Just as earthly monarchs have a court and a government, the King of kings had his court of advisors... The God of the Bible is surrounded by myriads of heavenly beings, for whom the Hebrew language has a rich terminology. Thus we encounter such designations as “the sons of God,” “the divine council”; and the “divine assembly.”⁴

Herbert Niehr describes the council and the gods who sit on it:

The divine assembly can also be called 'elohim. These 'elohim cannot be confused with [Yahweh] because in nearly all the places where the divine assembly is called 'elohim, it is stressed that [Yahweh] is higher than the 'elohim. The divine assembly fulfills several tasks on [Yahweh's] behalf; it serves him, gives him advice, glorifies him, mediates between [G]od and humans, protects peoples and human beings, and hears the prayers of humanity.⁵

Mullen writes that God is recognized in Hebrew and Canaanite tradition as the head of the council:

The most striking similarity between the council in Ugaritic and in early Hebrew literature is the role played by the high god— 'El— in the Ugaritic texts and Yahweh in the Old Testament. Both are depicted as creator, king, and absolute ruler of the gods.⁶

El ... was the king, father, and progenitor of the gods in Canaanite mythology. As such, he stood at the head of the pantheon, unaffected by the various conflicts among the younger, cosmogonic deities. When consulted, he delivered his decree. El must thus be pictured as the aged judge who, as we shall show, sat at the head of the assembly, surrounded by the other gods. Likewise, the pictures of Yahweh in his council present him as the head of the assembly, the god whose decree determined the decision and actions of his messengers and holy ones.⁷

Ex 15:11 “Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods” (King James Version⁸).⁹

³ G. Ernest Wright, *The Old Testament Against its Environment* (H. Regnery, Chicago: 1962), 32-33, cf. 30-41.

⁴ Frederick H. Cryer, trans., Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *In Search of God* (Fortress, Philadelphia: 1988) 133, cf. 134-135.

⁵ Herbert Niehr, “The Rise of YHWH in Judahite and Israelite Religion: Methodological and Religio-Historical Aspects,” in Diana V. Edelman, ed., *The Triumph of Elohim: From Yahwisms to Judaisms* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids: 1995) 62, cf. 61.

⁶ Mullen, 4.

⁷ *Ibid*, 120.

⁸ *The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments* (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake: 1989); hereafter KJV.

⁹ Compare the Dead Sea Scroll 1QHymns 1, 2 (1Q35), “Who is like you, Lord, among the

- Ps 29:1-2 “Ascribe to the LORD, you gods, ascribe to the LORD glory and might” (New English Version¹⁰).¹¹
- Ps 47:6-7 “Sing praises you gods, sing praises, sing praises to our king, sing praises. For he is king of all the earth, O gods, sing a skillful song” (Anchor¹²).
- Ps 50:1 “The God of gods is Yahweh [Jehovah], he spoke and summoned the earth, From the rising of the sun to its setting” (Anchor).
- 1 Cor 8:4-6 There are gods many and lords many, but to us there is one God. (Cf. Origen, Against Celsus, 4, 29 below.)

Council members are given a number of titles:

1. Sons of God The Canaanite (*bn 'ilm*) and Hebrew titles of *bene 'elim* (Job 1:6) and *bene 'elohim* (Job 38:7) *bene 'el* (Deut 32:8 NEV)--translated literally as ‘sons of God’--mean ‘gods,’ and specifically refer to the gods who sit on the heavenly council; the Greek parallel is *'uioi theou* (Romans 8:14).
2. Gods The Hebrew plural *'elim* (Ex 15:11) and *'elohim* (Ps 82:1), or the Greek plural *theoi* (1 Cor 8:5).
3. Lord The Hebrew plural *adonim* (Deut 10:17), or singular *adon* (Zech 4:4-5); the Greek plural *kurioi* (1 Cor 8:5; 1 Tim 6:15) or singular *kurie* (Acts 10:4, 14; 11:8).
4. Holy Ones The Hebrew plural *qedosim* (Job 5:1) or *qodes* (Deut 33:2), often translated as ‘saints’ in the KJV Old Testament.
5. Angels or Archangels In Hebrew the plural *mal'akim* (Gen 19:1) or singular *mal'ak* (Jud 5:23); the Greek plural *aggeloi* (Mat 4:11) or singular *aggelos* (Mat 1:20); a new title in the Greek *archaggelos* (Jude 1:9).
6. Stars The Hebrew plural *kokabim* (Deut 4:19); Greek *'asteron* (Rev 1:16, 20).
7. Paul uses four Greek plurals from Colossians 1:16 refer to various classes/ranks of angels in heaven. All of the following denote levels of authority and rule in heaven:
 - a. Thrones, *Thronoi*;
 - b. Dominions (Lordships), *Kuriotates*;
 - c. Powers (Rulers), *'Archai*;
 - d. Principalities (Authorities), *'Exousiai*.
8. Watchers Aramaic plural *'irin* (Dan 4:17) singular *'ir* (Dan 4:13).
9. Princes The Aramaic plural *sharim* (Dan 10:13) or singular *sar* (Dan 4:13).
10. Spirits The Hebrew *ruah* (1 Kings 22:21); the Greek singular *pneuma* (Acts 23:9) and plural *pneumata* (Heb 1:14; Rev 3:1; 4:5).
11. Kings The Greek applies a new title to men who become members of the council, *basileuonton* (1 Tim 6:15).

gods? Who (is) like your truth?" All Dead Sea Scrolls translations in this handout come from: Wilfred G. E. Watson, trans., Florentino Garcia Martinez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated, The Qumran Texts in English*, 2nd ed. (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids: 1996) unless otherwise indicated.

¹⁰ Sandmel, Suggs, and Tkacik, eds., *The New English Bible, Oxford Study Edition*, (Oxford press, New York: 1976); hereafter cited as NEV.

¹¹ “Ps 8:6, 29:1; 82: 86:8; 89:7; 95:3; 97:7; 135:5; 138:1; 148 all simply assume the existence of other deities in the heavenly sphere” (Lowell K. Handy, “The Appearance of Pantheon in Judah,” 31, n. 9, in *Edelman*).

¹² Mitchell Dahood, S.J., *The Anchor Bible, Psalms 1-50* (Doubleday & Co, Garden City, New York: 1966); hereafter cited as Anchor.

Miller elaborates on the titles of the heavenly council; they include:

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| 1. | Council of God | Hebrew <i>'adat 'el</i> (Ps 82:1). |
| 2. | Council of the holy ones | Hebrew <i>sod qedosim</i> (Ps 89:8). |
| 3. | Assembly of the holy ones | Hebrew <i>qahal qedosim</i> (Ps 89:6). |
| 4. | The mount of assembly | Hebrew <i>mo'ed</i> (Isa 14:13). |
| 5. | Council of Yahweh | Hebrew <i>sod yhwh</i> (Jer. 23:18). |
| 6. | Council of God | Hebrew <i>sod 'eloah</i> (Job 15:8). |
| 7. | Host of heaven | Hebrew <i>saba hassamayim</i> (2 Kings 21:3); Greek <i>stratias ou'ranion</i> (Luke 2:13). |
| 8. | Stars of God | Hebrew <i>kokebe 'elohim</i> (Job 38:7). ¹³ |

The Book of Daniel is helpful in defining the roles and titles of members of the heavenly council. In Daniel members of the council are called *'irin* or “watchers,” and *qadisin* “holy ones” (Hebrew *'irim* and *qedosim*): “As I was watching, there was a Watcher, a Holy One coming down from heaven” (Dan 4:13 NEV); “The issue has been determined by the Watchers and the sentence pronounced by the Holy Ones” (4:17 NEV; cf. 4:23, 8:13, 8:15ff). The NEV footnote to Dan 4:13 states: “Watcher, Holy One are synonyms for ‘angel.’” In 10:13 Michael is called “one of the chief princes [*sharim*]” (New International Version¹⁴), referring of course to his premier status on the council. In 10:19 Daniel also calls an angel “my lord.” Therefore, the titles of council members in Daniel include gods (2:47, *'elohin*; 11:36 *'elim*),¹⁵ son of the gods (3:25 NIV, *bar 'elohin*), angels, watchers, holy ones, princes, and lords. The comfortable precedent of these titles in Daniel makes it very difficult for the “gods” and “lords” of 1 Cor 8:4-6 to be interpreted in any other way than monarchic. In fact, all the titles of the members of the heavenly council can be found in the New Testament or in contemporaneous Judaeo/Christian texts. Consider the following list of common titles for the gods that are repeated in the first centuries of Christianity:

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| 1. Kings/gods/lords | A new title is applied to members of the council in the New Testament as Christ is King over kings (1 Tim 6:15; Rev 7:14; 19:16). The title of gods is also used in John 10:34-35 and 1 Cor 8:4-6). Compare passages that deal with the heavenly council in the Dead Sea Scrolls; “Rise up, rise up Oh God of gods, and be exalted with power, [King of kings!]” (1QM XIV 16). “[Ra]phael and Michael, [Sariel and Gabriel] went [and said in front of the Lord of the world; [you are the God of gods and the Lord of lords and the King of kings.]” (4Q221 III 13-14); “For he is the God of the gods of all the chiefs of the heights, and king of kings of all the eternal councils” (4Q403 I 34); “For he is the God of the gods of all the chiefs of |
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¹³ Miller, 66-67. For more analysis of the titles of the council and its members, see Niehr, 60-62; Mettinger, 134, Miller, 109; Frank M. Cross, John J. Collins, eds., *Daniel, A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Fortress Press, Minneapolis: 1993) 303, 314; John Sturdy, trans., Werner H. Schmidt, *The Faith of the Old Testament* (Westminster Press, Philadelphia: 1983) 144-146; Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God, Yahweh and the Other Ancient Deities in Ancient Israel* (Harper and Row, San Francisco: 1990) 101; G. Ernest Wright, ed., *Interpreter's Bible*, 12 vols (Abingdon, New York: 1951-57) vol. 1, 360. For commentary on the titles of the angels in the Dead Sea Scrolls see Carol Newson, *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice: A Critical Edition* (Scholars Press, Atlanta Georgia: 1985) 23-38.

¹⁴ John R. Kohlenberger III, *The Interlinear NIV Hebrew-English Old Testament* (Zondervan Publishing, Grand Rapids: 1987); hereafter NIV.

¹⁵ Mullen makes it clear that the use of *'elim* in Dan 11:36 is an example of the council in Early Judaism (192); cf. A. Van Selms, ed., *Pretoria Oriental Series*, vol. 5, C. J. Labuschagne, *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament* (E. J. Brill, Leiden, Netherlands: 1966) 64ff.

the heights, and king [of kings of all the eternal councils"] (4Q405 4-5, 2). Christ is also known as Lord over lords (Rev 7:14; 19:16). Compare this with Apocalypse of Zephaniah A¹⁶, "And a spirit took me and brought me up into the fifth heaven. And I saw angels who are called 'lords'" (Cf. 4Q221 III 13-14 above).¹⁷

2. Lord
Angels who speak to Cornelius and Peter are addressed in the New Testament as "Lord" (Acts 10:4, 14; 11:8). Compare the use of Lord in the following Judaeo/Christian Pseudepigraphal passages: "And the LORD sent ... the archangel Gabriel. And he said to me, "Be brave Enoch! Don't be frightened! ... And I answered him [Michael] and said, "Woe to me, my LORD!" (2 Enoch J 21:3-4); "My lord Commander-in-chief [Michael], who is this most wondrous man ..." (Testament of Abraham A 11:8); And the man called her a second time and said, "Aseneth, Aseneth." And she said "Behold (here) I (am) Lord. Who are you, tell me. And the man said, I am the chief of the house of the Lord and commander of the whole host of the Most High... Aseneth rejoiced ... and said to him ... "What is your name, Lord; tell me in order that I may praise and glorify you for ever(and) ever" (Joseph and Aseneth 14:6-8; 15:12).
3. Stars
Angels who have stewardship over the seven churches in Asia are given the title of stars (Rev 1:16, 20). In like manner 4 Ezra states that the inheritance of the faithful to have "their face is to shine like the sun, and ... they are to be made like the light of the stars, being incorruptible from then on" (7:97); 2 Baruch declares that "they will be like the angels and be equal to the stars" (51:10); the Testament of Moses claims they will be raised "to the heights," and "firmly" "fix[ed] ... "in the heaven of the stars, in the place of their habitations" (10:9-10).
4. Sons of God
Faithful members of the Church are told they will be glorified and become the sons of God (John 1:12; Romans 8:14, 19; 1 John 3:2). Compare the following: "I told him his name and what rank he held among the sons of God. 'Are you not Uriel, the eighth after me? And I, Israel, the archangel of the power of the Lord and the chief captain among the sons of God?'" (Prayer of Joseph OTP 2, Fragment A 6-7); "<Melchizedek> is the one [who will prevail on this day over] all the sons of God, <bene el>" (11Q13 II, 14); "Who is the heavens is like you]

¹⁶ The Apocalypse of Zephaniah is part of the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha (James H. Charlesworth, ed., *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols. (Doubleday, New York: 1983, 1985) vol 2, 253; hereafter referred to as OTP) which scholars now recognize contain important primary sources critical for understanding Judaism and Christianity at the time of Christ.

¹⁷ Wintermute comments on the title of "lords" found in the Apocalypse of Zephaniah (1st cent. B.C.- 1st cent. A.D.), A, the Book of Daniel, and 1 Cor 8:5:

In 2En 18 the seer also finds a host in the fifth heaven. In that text they are called "Egoroi" ("Gregori" in text A). Charles identifies them with them [aramaic] *'irim* who appear in Dan. That word is translated into [Greek] as *egregoroi*, "watchers".... When Enoch first saw them, they were lamenting for their fallen brethren, but he persuaded them to praise God with their singing, as the "lords" are doing in the present passage. The background for designating an angelic host as "lords" may be sought in the LXX version of Deut 10:14-17 where the God of the heavens is described as "God of gods and Lord of lords." The mention of "many gods and many lords" in 1 Cor 8:5 may also be related to Deut 10:17, but it is basically pejorative in its thrust and consequently belongs to a different tradition than the present work. (OTP 1, 508 n. a.)

my God? And who among the sons of gods? And in the whole [company of the holy ones?...]” (4Q381 15, 6-7). It is important to note that Paul makes it clear that both genders are included among the faithful in the hereafter. In several places in his epistles he indicates that it not just the sons of God who are welcomed into God’s presence, but all of God’s children (*tekna*) are “joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:16; cf. 9:26; Gal 3:7).

5. Angels/Archangels The title of angel is obviously retained throughout the New Testament and the Western religious tradition. The title that is relatively new to New Testament Judaism is that of archangel. It is used by Early Christians and applied to Michael (1Thess 4:16; Jude 1:9). Compare the following Pseudepigraphal documents: "And the LORD summoned Vereveil, one of his archangels" (2 Enoch A 22:10); "“It is well that you have come, my Lord, with your great archangel, Michael" (Testament of Isaac 6:28); "And Sariel the archangel came to me and I saw (him), and his appearance was very beautiful and awesome" (The Ladder of Jacob OTP 2, 3:3). In Jewish tradition the archangels number seven. 1 Enoch identifies the seven as Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, Sur’el, Raguel, Saraqua’el, and Remiel (OTP 1, 20:1-7; cf. n. g).
6. Holy ones/Princes None of these three terms are applied to divine beings in the New Testament. They do, however, appear in Judaeo/Christian texts contemporary with the New Testament. Job, in the Testament of Job, shows his "throne with the splendor of its majesty, which is among the holy ones." He further explains, "My throne is in the upper world, and its splendor and majesty come from the right hand of the Father" (OTP 1, 33:2-3). The Dead Sea Scrolls show how "God" is "awesome in the splendor of [his] majesty, and the congregation of [his] holy ones <*qedosim*> is amongst us for everlasting assistance" (1QM XII 12,7); they also show the belief that the righteous can "become united with the sons of your truth and in the lot of [God’s] holy ones" (1QH XIX 11). The title of prince is found in the Dead Sea Scrolls; “And exalt him, you chiefs of the princes with his wonderful portion... Praise [the God of the divinities, the seven priests who approach...{the chiefs of the princes of the wonderful pri[esthoods]}... the prince, the angels of the king in their wonderful residences” (4Q403 II 20-21, 23). Princes is also found in the apocryphal Epistles to the Apostle (note also references to the divine titles of Col 1:16; cf. Testament of Levi 3:3-5, 7-8 below); “While I was coming from the Father of all, passing by the heavens ... and passing by the angels and archangels in their form and as one of them, I passed by the orders, dominions, and princes ... and the archangels ... followed me” (NTA,¹⁸ Ethiopic, 13). Watchers, treated as synonymous with holy ones,¹⁹ is also found in 1 Enoch,

¹⁸J. K. Elliot, ed., *The Apocryphal New Testament. A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Clarendon Press, Oxford: 1999).

¹⁹*Cross and Collins*, 316.

where it is claimed that “Enoch was hidden ... And his dwelling place as well as his activities were with the Watchers and the holy ones” (OTP 1, 12:1-2).

7. Spirits The divine title spirit (*pneuma*) appears in Acts 23:9 as the Pharisees say that perhaps Paul has been visited by an angel or a spirit. One can posit, then, two types of heavenly beings from this evidence. For Early Christians a spirit can be an anthropomorphic spiritually embodied being without flesh and bones, as seen in Luke 24:39 when Christ first appears to the apostles and is mistaken for a spirit, or an angel who is physically embodied and can intercede on God’s behalf. But it seems that physically embodied angelic beings can have the title of spirit as well. This is clarified in the crucial passage of Heb 1:14, where the title spirits (*pneumata*) appears as the Christian author explains that all angels are “ministering spirits.”²⁰

Peter Hayman describes this relationship between God and the gods as a difference in “class” but not “kind”:

The Hebrew Bible is quite clear on the fact that these figures belong to the class of divine beings bene ’elohim/ bene ’elim, members of the 'host of heaven (*saba hashamayim*). Yahweh belongs to this class of beings, but is distinguished from them by his kingship over the heavenly host. However he is not different from them in kind.²¹

Thus, passages such as Deut 10:14-17, where the God of the heavens is described is “God of gods and Lord of lords” (cf. 1 Enoch 9:4) are best described as monarchic, as the gods who reside and rule at the side of God receive veneration but not worship.

Joseph Smith reveals a plurality of the gods in the Nauvoo era of the Church of Jesus Christ. Note the similarities with Hebrew, Early Judaic, and Early Christian thought. God is at the head of the council, and the gods counsel with him as his advisors and servants. The existence of the gods does not undermine the rule of God the Father:

A time to come in the which nothing shall be withheld, whether there be one God or many gods, they shall be manifest... And also, if there be bounds set to the heavens ... According to that which was ordained in the midst of the Council of the Eternal God of all other gods before this world was ... (D&C 121:28, 32²² dated March 20, 1839; cf. 76:58 and 29:12 (below).)

²⁰ I Enoch also talks about the spiritual nature of the “sons of God” who sinned by leaving the heavens and having relations with mortal women (Gen 6:1-4). God directs this message to them:

Surely you, you [used to be] holy, spiritual, the living ones, [possessing] eternal life; but now you have defiled yourselves with women... producing flesh and blood (which) die and perish... Indeed you, formerly you were spiritual, (having) eternal life, and immortal in all the generations of the world. That is why (formerly) I did not make wives for you, for the dwelling of the spiritual beings of heaven is heaven. But now the giants who are born from the (union of) the spirits and the flesh shall be called evil spirits upon the earth, because their dwelling shall be upon the earth ... The dwelling of spiritual beings of heaven is heaven; but the dwelling of the spirits of the earth, which are born upon the earth, is in the earth. (OTP vol 1, 15:4, 7-8, 10)

²¹ Hayman, 5.

²² *The Doctrine and Covenants* (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake: 1989)

And again, verily I say unto you, if a man marry a wife by my word, which is my law, and by the new and everlasting covenant, and it is sealed unto them by the Holy Spirit of promise ... it shall be said unto them--Ye shall come forth in the first resurrection; and if it be after the first resurrection, in the next resurrection; and shall inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, all heights and depths ... and if ye abide in my covenant... it shall be done unto them in all things whatsoever my servant hath put upon them, in time, and through all eternity; and shall be of full force when they are out of the world; and they shall pass by the angels, and the gods, which are set there, to their exaltation and glory in all things, as hath been sealed upon their heads, which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever. Then shall they be gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting, because they continue; then shall they be above all, because all things are subject unto them. Then shall they be gods, because they have all power, and the angels are subject unto them. (D&C 132:19-20)

It has been a doctrine taught by this church that we were in the Grand Council amongst the Gods when the organization of this world was contemplated and that the laws of government were all made and sanctioned by all present and all the ordinances and ceremonies decreed upon.²³

I once asked a learned Jew, "If the Hebrew language compels us to render all words ending in 'heim' ["him"] in the plural, why not render the first Eloheim ['elohim] plural?" He replied, "That is the rule with few exceptions; but in this case it would ruin the Bible."²⁴

The Book of Abraham also explains the deliberations of the council in the pre-existence. Note the debates made in the council as a second estate is being offered to God's children:

Now the Lord had shown unto me, Abraham, the intelligences that were organized before the world was; and among all these there were many of the noble and great ones; And God saw these souls that they were good, and he stood in the midst of them, and he said: These I will make my rulers; for he stood among those that were spirits, and he saw that they were good; and he said unto me: Abraham, thou art one of them; thou wast chosen before thou wast born. And there stood one among them that was like unto God, and he said unto those who were with him: We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell; And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them; And they who keep their first estate shall be added upon; and they who keep not their first estate shall not have glory in the same kingdom with those who keep their first estate; and they who keep their second estate shall have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever. (Ab 3:22-26)²⁵

Breck England describes the early Church of Jesus Christ doctrine of a plurality of gods:

The Prophetic Almanac for 1845... contained... extracts from the writing and speeches of Joseph

²³ Andrew F. Ehat, " 'It Seems Like Heaven Began on Earth': Joseph Smith and the Constitution of the Kingdom of God." *BYU Studies*, 20 (Spring 1980): 269.

²⁴ Andrew F. Ehat and L. Cook, comp. and eds., *The Words of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, (Bookcraft, Salt Lake: 1980) 409; cf. nn. 15-17.

²⁵ *The Pearl of Great Price* (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake: 1989).

Smith and others. One intriguing aspect of the almanac is "The Mormon Creed," a list of doctrinal concepts in question-answer form. This is one of the earliest summary statements of Mormon belief: "What is man? The offspring of God... What is his final destiny? To be like God. What has God been? Like man... How many gods are there? There are Lords many, and gods many: but to us there is but one God" (Orson Pratt, *Prophetic Almanac for 1845*, 5-10). Although these answers could not be simpler, they are very far reaching; the Mormons did not shrink from proclaiming godhood their ultimate destiny and eternal progression or evolution the basic justification for the existence of man on earth.²⁶

2. The Title of Spirit in Judaeo/Christian Thought

The title of 'spirit,' as was previously shown to be a title of the members of the council of gods (Acts 23:9, Heb 1:14, 1 Enoch 15:4, 8-9), merits closer inspection. Often anachronistic meanings are pushed back into the Old and New Testaments, such as is seen when John 4:24 is thought to show that God is an immaterial spirit. However, passages in the Bible (such as Acts 23:9, and Heb 1:14 mentioned above) show that 'spirit' is a title that can be applied to God's angelic corps, regardless of whether they are spiritually or physically embodied. In these cases the title 'spirit' would be equivalent to 'higher divine corporeal being,' and have nothing to do with Greek metaphysical absolutes which would declare that spirit must be incorporeal. In fact, the Dead Sea Scrolls also show how 'spirit' is a title for members of the heavenly council:

Sing to the God who is awesome in power [all the spirits of knowledge and of light], to exalt together the splendidly shining vault of the sanctuary of his holiness. [Praise him,] divine spirits, praising [for ever] and ever the main construction. The spirits of the holy of the holies, the living gods <'elohim>, the spirits of everlasting holiness above all the holy ones [... marvelous wonder of splendor ...and the glory] in the most perfect light, and the knowledge [... in all the wonderful sanctuaries. The spirits of the gods around the residence of the king of truth and justice. All its walls ...] (4Q403 I 41-46)

And at its feet [...] the manifestation of the glorious form of the chiefs of the kingdom of the spirits [...] [...] his glory. And the gates, in all their movements (?) [...] the shaft of lightning (?) [...] to crush. The gods [...] among them run gods <'elohim> in the form of embers [of fire ...] going around. The spirits of the holy of holies [...] of the holy of holies, spirits of the gods<'elohim>, eternal vision [...] and the spirits of the gods<'elohim>, form of flames of fire around [...] wonderful spirits. (4Q403 II 2-10)

"In the assembly of all the deities [of knowledge, and in the council of all the spirits] of God" (4Q400 I I 4-5).²⁷

The Book of Revelations also makes it clear that seven divine beings²⁸ with the title of 'spirits' stand before the throne of God (3:1; 4:5). These are likely the seven angels who have stewardship over the seven churches in Asia (1:11), and who are also given the divine title of stars (1:20). It is also very likely that they correspond with the seven archangels (see above) of Judaeo/Christian tradition. Note how

²⁶ Breck England, *The Life and Thought of Orson Pratt* (U of U Press, Salt Lake: 1985) 94.

²⁷ Cf. 1QH XIX 13; 1QH XV 29; 1QH 3,22; 4Q403 I 35, 38; 4Q404 5 1-8.

²⁸ Compare the seven spirits of Revelations with 4Q403 1.

they are called “seven torches of fire” (4:5), using language reminiscent of the Dead Sea Scrolls which describe the “spirits of the gods” as “form of flames of fire around” (4Q403 II 9). In these passages the gods are thought to shine with glorious light (cf. Luke 24:4, 2 Cor 11:14, and “The Glory of God” below), and both John and the Qumran scribes are attempting to describe the glorious nature of their luminous bodies. The nature of the divine title of spirit is elaborated upon in the Ascension of Isaiah, where the Holy Ghost—who clearly is given the title of spirit—is seen to be an anthropomorphic spiritually embodied being. The Christian author records that he saw the “second angel,” referring to the Holy Spirit, “standing ... on the left of my LORD,” a clear reference to the embodied nature of the Holy Spirit and the rest of the Christian Godhead (OTP 2, 9:30-36). The text further reinforces the Holy Spirit’s spiritual embodiment as he and the archangel Michael triumphantly carry the resurrected Christ triumphantly from his tomb on their shoulders (3:16-17).

1 Corinthians 15 speaks of the resurrected bodies of Christ and the saints as spiritual in nature, further showing that spirit can refer to a physically embodied being. Paul states that there is a natural or mortal body (*soma psuchikon*) and a higher spiritual body (*soma pneumatikon*) that we will have in the resurrection (44). He further explains that Christ became a life-giving “spirit” (*pneuma*) as part of his resurrection (45), and that in his resurrected state he is a “spiritual” (*pneumatikov*, 46) or “heavenly man” (*epouranios*, 48), like the other “heavenly ones” (*epouprniou*, 49) or angelic beings who dwell in the heavens. Hence, as Christ and the saints are understood to be physically embodied corporeal beings in the resurrection, and as Paul describes these corporeal bodies as “spiritual” in nature, it is conclusively shown that ‘spirit’ when applied to holy heavenly beings must be understood to mean ‘higher divine corporeal being.’ It is also noteworthy that Hebrews 12:23 speaks the righteous in the hereafter as “the spirits (*pneumasi*) of just men made perfect” (KJV). Since the New Testament consistently interprets ‘spirit’ as a title of a divine being, it makes sense that John 4:24, which also calls God “spirit” (*pneuma*), should be interpreted the same way. Resurrected man, the gods, and the resurrected Christ are *pneuma* or *pneumatikos* beings in the hereafter, but the textual evidence clearly shows that these same beings are physically embodied; and God who is also *pneuma* should be seen as a divinely embodied being as well.

A number of these titles of the council—God, Lord, Holy One, King, and Spirit—are applied directly to God. The use of these titles for both God and the gods shows a great deal of kinship between them. It is clear in the tradition of Hebrews, Jews, and Early Christians, that God is mightier, holier, and more glorious than the gods, but otherwise they are similar beings. The Ascension of Isaiah (c. 2nd century A.D.), for example, makes it clear that God is “the Holy One, the One who rests among the holy ones” (6:8,) but it is clear that both God and the gods belong to the class “holy ones.” Compare this to the “Hymn to the Creator” from the Dead Sea Scrolls, where God is also seen as the “the Holiest of Holy Ones”:

Great and Holy are you, YHWH <Yahweh>,
the Holiest of Holy Ones, from generation to generation.
In front of him walks glory
and behind him copious waters.
Goodness and truth surround his face,
truth, uprightness and justice are the base of his throne.
He separated light from darkness
established the dawn with the knowledge of his heart.
Then all his angels saw him and sang
for he showed them what they had not known.
(11Q5 XXVI 9-12)

3. The Heavenly Council in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

One of most significant sources on the council of the gods is found in the Dead Sea Scrolls. These scrolls were written by a group of Jews called Essenes who withdrew from the larger Jewish community to Qumran on the shores of the Dead Sea. The scrolls were preserved in caves bordering the Dead Sea, and translated after their discovery in the middle of the 20th century. The following five fragments are from the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice (early 1st century A.D.), and were hymns sung at by the semi-ascetic Jews at Qumran. They provide descriptions of the heavenly temple, the heavenly holy of holies, God's throne, doors or gates leading into and out of the presence of God, and references to the living quarters of the gods--the "many mansions" of John 14:2. The gods are seen as part of the council, entering and exiting the heavenly temple as they perform the tasks assigned by God:

[...And exalt his exaltation] to the heights, gods <'elohim> [of the august divinities, and the divinity of his glory above] all the august [heights. For he is the God of the gods of all the chiefs of the heights, and king [of kings of all the eternal councils. By the words] of his mouth a[ll the august divinities] exit; by what issues from his lips, all the] eternal [spirits]; by the wi[ll of his knowledge, all his creatures in their enterprises.] ... (4Q405 4-5, 1-3 (4Q403 I, 33-36))

[... for a wonderful song] in [eternal] happiness. You, praise with them all the found[ations of the holy of the holy ones, [the] supporting [columns] fo the highest vault, and all the corners [of his building. Sing to God, who is awesome in power, all spirits] of knowledge and of light, to exalt together the splendidly [shining] vault [of the sanctuary] [of his holiness. Praise him, divine spirits, praising] for ever and ever the main vault of the heights, [all its beams] [and walls, all its form, the work of its structure.] The spirits of the holy of the holy ones, the living gods <'elohim>, the spirits of [everlasting] holiness [above all the holy ones ...] impressive wonder of splendor [...] and the glory in the [most perfect] light, [and the knowledge ...] wonderful sanctuary. The spirits of God around the residence [...] in the holy of the holy ones [...] ... [...] ... [...] the sound of [...] they shall cause to hear (4Q405 6, 1-11 (4Q403 I, 40-45))

[...] their tasks [...] [...] when they rise [...] [...] the throne of the glory of his kingdom and all the assembly of those who serve [...] wonderfully. The gods will not shudder for ever [...] for they are steady in the tasks of all, because the gods of the offering [...] his offering. The gods <'elohim> praise when they begin to rise, and all the spirits of the pure vault rejoice in his glory. And there is a voice of blessing from all their divisions which counts the vaults of his glory. And the gates praise with jubilant voice. When the divinities of knowledge enter through the gates of glory, and in all the departures of the holy angels to their domains, the gates of the entrance and the gates of the exit declare the glory of the king, blessing and praising all the spirits of God in the exits and in the entrances through the gates of holiness. And among them there is no-one who omits a regulation or who opposes the precepts of the king. They do not deviate from the path nor do they go far from his territory. They do not esteem themselves above their duties nor do they demean themselves. For he will have compassion during the rule of the severity of his obliterating wrath. He will not judge while his glorious wrath resides. The fear of the king of the gods <malak 'elohim> is dreadful for all the gods <'elohim>. [He sent them] on his mission in order ... And they go [...] ... [...] (4Q405 23 11-14)

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

king of [the holy ones ²⁹ ...] of his glory. And they confirm each regulation for the seven [eternal counsels. Because he] set them up for himself as the ho[ly of the holy ones, who serve in the holy of] holies. [...] approached them in the council [...] of the knowledge of [...] holy of holies, pr[iests ...] They are princes [...] in the temple of the king. [...] in their territory and in their inheritance [...] They do not tolerate anyone whose path is [warped.] There is no impurity in their holy offerings. For them he has engraved ho[ly precepts] by which all the holy ones become perpetually holy; and he purifies the pure [shining ones, so that they deal] with all those of depraved path. And they shall appease his will, in favor of all those converted from sin. [...] knowledge in the priests who approach, and from their mouths (come) all the teachings of the holy ones, with the precepts of [his glory...] his favors for compassionate, eternal forgiveness, and [to destroy] in the vengeance of his jealousy [...] He has established priests for himself, who approach the holy of holies. [... god] of the divine ones, priests of the exalted heights, who approach [...] ... [...] (4Q400 I, I, 1-21)

Praise the God of the august heights, you august ones among the divinites of knowledge. May the holy ones of God make holy the king of glory, who makes holy with his holiness all the holy ones. The chiefs of the praises of all the gods, praise the God of magnificent praises, for in the magnificence of the praises is the glory of his kingdom. From it come the praises of all the divinites, together with the splendor of all his majesty. And exalt his exaltation to the heights, gods <'elohim> of the august divinities, and the divinity of his glory above all the august heights. For he is the God of the gods of all the chiefs of the heights, and king of kings of all the eternal councils. {By the consent} {of knowledge} By their words a[ll the august divinities] exist; by what issues from their lips, all the eternal spirits; by the will of his knowledge, all his creatures in their enterprises. Sing with joy, those of you enjoying his knowledge, with rejoicing among the wonderful gods. (4Q403 I 30-36)

The Songs to the Sage carry a similar theme:

Bless[ings to the Ki]ng of glory...
 To the God of knowledge, to the resplendence of the powerful,
 God of gods, Lord of all the holy ones.
 His rea[lm] is above the powerful mighty
 before the might of his power are all terrified,
 they scatter and flee before the radiance of his dwelli[ng]
 of his glory and majesty. (4Q510 I, 1-3 (4QShir))

The War Scroll speaks of the coming final conflict between light and darkness and the preparation individuals must undergo to be part of the “sons of light.” The semi-ascetic Essenes had long since separated themselves from the Jews of Jerusalem who they considered unclean. Those who wished to join them spent many years in semi-baptismal ritual purification before they were allowed into the community. With this cleanliness it was thought that God and the gods could enter into their community. Note the belief that the angelic holy ones are already thought to be present in the Qumran community, and how even God could enter their presence and assist them:

[...] for you shall wage war against them from the heavens [...]
 For there is a multitude of holy ones <*qedosim*> in heaven and a host of angels in your holy

²⁹ Collins and Cross (303, cf. 314-316) point out that 4Q400 is significant for its use of *qedosim*, or ‘holy ones,’ a recognized title of the gods, no fewer than six times. Obviously Martinez concurs.

dwelling to [praise] your [name.]
 And the chosen ones of the holy people you have established for yourself in [...]
 The [bo]ok of the names of all their armies is with you in your holy dwelling, [...] in the dwelling
 of your glory.
 And the rewards of your blessings [...] the covenant of your peace you engraved for them with the
 chisel of life,
 in order to rule [...] during all times eternal, to organize the arm[ies] of your chosen ones in its
 thousands and in its myriads,
 together with your holy ones <qedosim> and your angels to direct the hand in battle
 [and destroy] the rebels of the earth by your great judgments.
 And the people of the chosen ones of the heavens will triu[mph].
 You are a God, awesome in the splendor of your majesty,
 and the congregation of your holy ones (*qedosim*) is amongst us for everlasting assistance.
 [We will] treat kings with contempt, the powerful with jeers and mockery,
 for the Lord is holy and the King of glory is with us together with his holy ones (*qedosim*).
 The heroes of the army of his angels are enlisted with us ... (1QM XI 17, XII 1-8)³⁰

For great is] the plan of your glory, and your marvelous mysteries on hi[gh;] in order to raise
 [from the dust for yourself and subdue] [gods. Rise up, ri]se up, Oh God of gods,['el 'elim] and
 be exalted with power, King of kin[gs...] you have placed over [...] they scatter before you, the
 sons of darkness, and your great light [... god]s and men [...like a fire] which lights up the places
 of darkness and of ruin; in the places of the ruins of Sheol will bu[rn...] (4QMa I 12-15)

This *War Scroll* fragments further describes the preparations of God and the heavenly council for
 the final conflict on earth. Collins and Cross show that the archangel Michael is given authority among
 the gods:³¹

He has sent everlasting aid to the lot redeemed by the power of the majestic angel for the
 dominion of Michael in everlasting light. He will the covenant of Israel shine with joy, peace and
 blessing to God's lot. He will exalt the authority of Michael above all the gods ['elim] and the
 dominion of Israel over all flesh. Justice will rejoice in the heights and all the sons of his truth
 will have enjoyment in everlasting knowledge. (1QM XVII 6-8)

The Dead Sea Scrolls show the similarities between the members of the heavenly court and man,
 for Melchizedek is seen as having achieved the honor of presiding over the assembly of the gods. Note
 how the Jews at Qumran interpreted Ps 82:1-8:

[...] your God ... [...] [...] And as for what he said: *Lev 25:13* "In this year of jubilee, [you shall
 return, each one, to his respective property", as is written: *Dt 15:2* "This is] the manner (of
 effecting) the release: every creditor shall release what he lent [to his neighbor. He shall not
 coerce his neighbor or his brother when] the release for God [has been proclaimed]". [Its
 inter]pretation for the last days refers to the captives, about whom he said: *Isa 61:1* "To proclaim
 liberty to the captives." And he will make their rebels prisoners [...] and of the inheritance of
 Mechizedek, for [...] and they are the inheri[tance of Melchizedek, who will make them return.
 He will proclaim liberty for them, to free them from [the debt] of all their iniquities. And this
 will [happen] in the first week of the jubilee which follows the ni[ne] jubilees. And the day [of

³⁰ Cf. Collins and Cross, 315.

³¹ *Ibid*, 375.

atonement]ent is the end of the tenth jubilee in which atonement will be made for all the sons of [God] and for the men of the lot of Melchizedek. [And on the heights] he will decla[re in their] favor according to their lots; for it is the time of the "year of grace" for Melchizedek, to exa[lt in the tri]al the holy ones of God through the rule of judgment, as is written about him in the songs of David, who said: *Ps 82:1* "Elohim will stand up in the assem[bly of God,] <'elohim> in the midst of the gods he judges". And about him he said: *Ps 7:8-9* "Above it return to the heights, God will judge the peoples". As for what he sa[id: *Ps 82:2* "How long will yo[u] judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? *Selah.*" Its interpretation concerns Belial and the spirits of his lot, who were rebels [all of them] turning aside from the commandments of God [to commit evil.] But, Melchizedek will carry out the vengeance of God's judgements [on this day, and they shall be freed from the hands] of Belial and from the hands of all the sp[irit]s of his lot.] To his aid (shall come) all "the gods <eli(m)?> of [justice"; he] is the one [who will prevail on this day over] all the sons of God, <bene el> and he will pre[side over] this [assembly.] This is the day of [peace about which God] spoke [of old through the words of Ias]iah the prophet, who said: *Isa 52:7* "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, of the mess[enger of good who announces salvation,] saying to Zion" 'your God [reigns.]" Its interpretation: The mountains are the pro[phets ...] And the messenger is [the ano]inted of the spirit about whom Dan[iel] spoke [... and the messenger of] good who announces salv[ation is the one about whom it is written that [he will send him *Isa 61:2-3* "to comfo[rt the afflicted, to watch over the afflicted ones of Zion".] "To comfo[rt the afflicted", its interpretation:] to instruct them in all the ages of the worl[d...] in truth. [...] [...] it has been turned away from Belial and it [...] [...] in the judgments of God, as is written about him: *Isa 52:7* "Saying to Zion: 'your God rules'" ["Zi]on" is [the congregation of all the sons of justice, those] who establish the covenant, those who avoid walking [on the pa]th of the people. "Your God" is [... Melchizedek, who will fr]ee [them] from the hand Of Belial. And as for what he said: *Lev 25:9* "You shall blow the hor[n in every] land". (11QMelchizedek (11Q13 II, 1-25)

F. G. Martinez explains how the exalted Melchizedek has been given total charge of the heavenly council by the Qumran Jews:

The liberator, that is, the leader of the heavenly spirits (literally gods) is Melchizedek, identified with the archangel Michael and presented as the one who will judge the holy ones and lead them to participate in his heritage... In his battle, Melchizedek not only is assisted by "all the gods" [kol 'eli, line 14] and by the "sons of God" [bene 'el, line 14], but is himself designated as "your God" ['elohym, line 25] ...: "and 'your God' is (Melchizedek, who) will save them from the hand of Belial."³²

Thus, it is clear from the Dead Sea Scrolls that the Jews at the time of Christ had a strong belief in council of the gods.

4. Multiple Functions of the Heavenly Council

Further reference to the members of the heavenly council is found in the Testament of Levi (2nd century B.C.). The text indicates that the Holy Ones rule in the heavens as "thrones and authorities," and also act as priests in God's heavenly temple. It also refers to angelic "messengers" and the "armies" or host of heaven, who are angels of lesser rank and holiness. But the "Holy Ones," "archangels," and "thrones and authorities" refers to members of the council of the gods:

³² Florentino Garcia Martinez, *Qumran and Apocalyptic, Studies on the Aramaic Texts from Qumran* (E. J. Brill, New York: 1992) 176-177.

In the second [heaven] are the armies arrayed for the day of judgment to work vengeance on the spirits of error and Beliar [Satan].³³ Above them are the Holy Ones. In the uppermost heaven [third or highest heaven] of all dwells the Great Glory in the Holy of Holies superior to all holiness. There with him are the archangels, who serve and offer propitiatory sacrifices to the Lord ... In the heaven below them are the messengers who carry the responses to the angels of the Lord's presence. There with him are thrones and authorities; there praises to God are offered eternally. (3:3-5, 7-8; see also Ascension of Isaiah 7:14, 21; Origen, *Against Celsus*, 4, 29 below.)

The heavenly council is present with God at the most important events of the universe, including when the foundations of the earth were laid (Job 38:7) and the creation of man. Gen 1:26-27 shows the assembled members of the council at the creation of Adam. God converses with members of the council, saying "Let us make man in our image" (KJV: cf. 3:22; 11:7; Is 6:8).

The *Interpreter's Bible* comments on Gen 1:26:

God first consults with divine beings other than himself ... [Hebrew thought] was familiar with the idea of a heavenly host with whom God took council ... it is fitting, if not necessary, that there should be something like cooperation on the part of the whole company of heaven.³⁴

The Book of Abraham recognizes the presence of the council at the creation of Adam:

And the Gods took counsel among themselves and said: Let us go down and form man in our image, after our likeness; and we will give them dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So the Gods went down to organize man in their own image, in the image of the Gods to form they him, male and female to form they them. (Ab 3:26-17)

In the *Life of Adam and Eve* (1st Century A.D.) reference is made to the gods participating in the creation of Adam in the Garden of Eden. This conservative Jewish author shows no embarrassment or hesitation as he portrays God commanding the members of the heavenly assembly—the "us" of Genesis 1:26—to pay homage to Adam because he is an exact, albeit earthly, copy of God. It is clear from the text that it is not Adam who is being worshiped, but God's image that has been placed on him. God indicates to Adam that he has been formed after his own image and that of the gods present with him in the Garden. Adam's image is worshiped because he exactly resembles God's glorious form, and approximately

³³ See 2 Cor 6:15 for Paul's use of Beliar (Belial) as one of Satan's names.

³⁴ *Wright, Interpreter's Bible*, 482-82. *Hayman* cites Genesis Rabbah 8:4-5, where this explanation is offered: "When He came to create the first human being He took counsel with the ministering angels. He said to them, 'Shall we make humanity?' (Gen 1:26). They said to Him, 'What will be his nature.' (12).

resembles the images of the host of angels who accompanied him from heaven. To pay homage to Adam, then, was not an act of sacrilege for the author, for in paying respect to the perfectly replicated image of God stamped upon Adam, the angels paid homage to the creator and archetype of the divine image. M. D. Johnson suggests a mixture of "transcendent majesty and quaint anthropomorphism" is seen as God is described by the author. Latter-day revelation makes it clear that Adam and Michael are the same person, but this detail is not known in extant pseudepigraphal and apocryphal accounts. Satan, who confronts Adam and Eve in the text, describes the events in the Garden:

The devil replied, "Adam, what are you telling me? It is because of you that I have been thrown out of there. When you were created, I was cast out from the presence of God and was sent out from the fellowship of the angels. When God blew into you the breath of life and your countenance and likeness were made in the image of God, Michael brought you and made (us) worship you in the sight of God, and the LORD God said, 'Behold Adam! I have made you in our image and likeness. And Michael went out and called all the angels, saying "Worship the image of the LORD God, as the LORD God has instructed. And Michael himself worshiped first, and called me and said, 'Worship the image of God, Yahweh.' And I answered, 'I do not worship Adam.' And when Michael kept forcing me to worship, I said to him, 'Why do you compel me? I will not worship one inferior and subsequent to me. I am prior to him in creation; before he was made, I was already made. He ought to worship me. (OTP 2, Vita 13:1-14:3)

Another responsibility of the members of the council was stewardship over areas of the earth. Evidence of this can be found in Deut. 32:8, but the Masoretic text, from which most of the Old Testament has been translated, has been edited and references to the stewardships of the gods removed. The "sons of Israel" (*bene yisrael*) currently found in the KJV is a deliberate revision of the text which originally read "sons of God" (*bene 'el*).³⁵ The understanding is that God assigns earthly stewardships to each of the members of the heavenly council. The NEV translates the passage "according to the number of the sons of God," and adds this footnote: "*The sons of God* are minor figures in the divine ... council to whom *the Most High* has assigned governorship of the nations, retaining Israel for himself" (cf. Deut R. below). Collins and Cross write that "'Divine being' rendered literally would be 'a son of a God,' that is, in Semitic idiom, a member of the class 'gods.'"³⁶ In this passage, then, the gods are given specific assignments over the nations.

The heavenly council also meets together to counsel with God. In 1 K'n 22:19-38 the prophet Micaiah sees by revelation a meeting of the heavenly assembly. This passage shows the deliberatory nature of the council, in that God actively seeks the advice and consent of the members of the assembly before proceeding with decisions of great import. Micaiah describes God as he solicits advice from members of the council (22:20). He asks how Ahab should be punished and lured into a battle that out of pride (22:8, 18) and a misaligned allegiance to Baal (18:19; 22:6) they did not first authorize with God's commissioned prophet. A discussion takes place among the members of the council as to how best carry out God's will. Micaiah describes the deliberation as "one said on this manner, and another said on that manner" (22:20), with the understanding that the various members of the council are placing their

³⁵ The Greek Septuagint, for example, translates Deut 32:8 as *uion theou*, or "sons of God," and fragments of the Dead Sea Scrolls also show that it is the *bene 'el* or "sons of God" who have stewardship over the nations; *Dahood*, 175; *Mullen*, 119 n. 19, 202-3 n, 153; *Smith*, 7, 114n. 138; Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge: 1973) 46; Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Fortress, Minneapolis: 1992) 269, 365. For possible reasons for the change see "'El and 'Elohim" below.

³⁶ *Collins and Cross*, 190.

recommendations before the full council. At one point in the discussion a spirit who is part of the council presents his plan to the assembly. He will cause the prophets of Baal to fail in their prophecy by being a “lying spirit” (22:22). God approves this plan to punish Ahab, and the spirit who proposed it is directed to carry out the decision of the council (22:22-23).

It is understood in Hebrew thought that the prophets, such as Miicaiah above, actually have membership on the divine council. Mullen points out that Haggai (1:12) is called the messenger of Yahweh (*mal'ak Yahweh*) in precisely the same manner that the gods on the council were called messengers.³⁷ Prophets thus have the important role of being the heralds or messengers of the council’s decisions. For example, Jeremiah claims that his authority stems from the fact that he has physically stood in the midst of the heavenly council:

For who among them has stood in the council [*sod Yahweh*] of the LORD to perceive and to hear his work, or who has given heed to his word and listened? ... But if they had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to the people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings. (RSV³⁸ 23:18,22)³⁹

Mullen claims that the same should be understood in Job 15:8, where Job is asked if he has stood “in the council of God” (*sod eloah*) and “listened in” (RSV) as deliberations were underway. He also explains that Amos 3:7, which declares that God “does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets” (RSV), means prophetic presence in the heavenly council.⁴⁰ He claims that a mortal—such as Isaiah (6:8) or Joshua the high priest (Zech 3:5)—can be the focus of the council's attentions, and their participation helps to bring about the end of the council's deliberations. He calls this the “intervention of one of the participants,” and either human or angelic action is necessary to carry about the decisions of the council.⁴¹ When a prophet declares “Thus saith the LORD,” his proclamation was treated with the same importance as the imperatives directed to the divine council.⁴² To have the word of God delivered to you was to have the authorized message of God, delivered directly from the council. Mullen writes,

It is also clear from the prophetic material that the prophet was more than simply the mouthpiece of Yahweh. He was Yahweh's messenger. The very designation *nabi'*, “one who is called” ... implies the background of the council, for the prophet was called to proclaim the will of the deity which was issued from the assembly... The prophet is the herald of the divine council. He delivers the decree of Yahweh, which is the decree of the council. The authority of the prophet as the herald/messenger of the assembly is that of the power which sent him. He is the vocal

³⁷ Mullen, 215, cf. 119, 209-210; Wright, *Old Testament*, 36.

³⁸ May, Metzger eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha: Revised Standard Version* (Oxford Press, New York: 1977); hereafter RSV.

³⁹ Mullen, 218-220.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*; cf. Niehr, 62.

⁴¹ Mullen, 217-218.

⁴² Mullen uses six passages to illustrate the imperatives given by prophets to men; 1 Kings 12:22-24; 1 Kings 13:20-22; 2 Sam 7:4-5; Isaiah 38:4-5; Jeremiah 21:11-12; and Ezek 28:1-2. (*Ibid.*, 223-226)

manifestation of the deity who dispatched him.⁴³

Himmelfarb also concurs with the understanding that the prophet participates in the council. She links the ascent of Enoch (*Book of the Watchers*) with the book of Ezekiel and other early recognized participation of the prophets in the council:

In content, Enoch's ascent must be understood against the background of an aspect of prophetic thought not limited to Ezekiel, the idea of the prophet's participation in the divine council... In ancient Israel the prophets claim for themselves the role of messengers alongside the regular members of the council.⁴⁴

Thus, the prophet is more than a mere messenger. He is God's appointed servant, who is allowed to participate in heavenly decisions. He brings God's word directly to the people. He is authorized by the fact that he has stood in the presence of God and as a member of the council, and has received his will.

- Job 1:6 “The day came when the members of the court of heaven (*bene ’elim*, or ‘sons of God’) took their places in the presence of the LORD, and Satan was there among them” (NEV).
- Job 15:8 “Do you listen in God's secret [heavenly] council or usurp all wisdom for yourself alone?” (NEV; cf Anchor and RSV. See comments on Job 15:8 by Mullen above.)
- Ps 73:24 “Lead me into your [heavenly] council, and with glory take me to yourself” (Anchor).
- Ps 89:5-7 “The heavens praise thy wonders, O LORD, and the council of the holy ones exalts thy faithfulness. In the skies who is there like the LORD, who like the LORD in the court of heaven, like God who is dreaded among the assembled holy ones, great and terrible above all who stand about him?” (NEV).
- Is 6:1-8 Isaiah is purged from sin and stands in the presence of God, as smoke or cloud, partially fills the edifice. God is understood to be an enthroned anthropomorphic king dwelling in the heavenly temple. God addresses the heavenly assembly, asking who should represent the “us” of the council: “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us (*lanu*) ?” (KJV) .
- Col 1:13-16 Christ rules over all the members of the heavenly council, he is supreme over “the invisible orders of thrones, sovereignties, authorities, and powers” (NEV).

5. The Role of Christ on the Heavenly Council.

Throughout the Old Testament a second in command is continuously seen in heaven. The position of second in command is variously assigned to the “angel of the LORD” (*mal’ak Yahweh*,⁴⁵ also known as the captain of the heavenly host⁴⁶) Michael,⁴⁷ the “son of man,”⁴⁸ Melchizedek, and Enoch.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 216, 226. Cf. *Miller*, 68-69.

⁴⁴ Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Oxford Press, New York: 1993) 13.

⁴⁵ *Miller*, 72, 99. Cf. Ex 14:19 where the *mal’ak Yahweh* stands in the pillar of fire; Jud 5:23 where he curses Meroz; Zech 3:1 where he acts as the chief officer of the heavenly court; Num 22:23, and 1 Chr 21:16; Testament of Levi 5:5-7.

⁴⁶ Josh 5:14; *Miller*, 128-132.

⁴⁷ Cf. Daniel 10:1ff; Jude 1:9; 1QM XVII 6-8; 1 Enoch 71:1-3, 5; Life of Adam and Eve Vita 13:1-14:3; Apocalypse 22:1-3; 2 Enoch J 22:6-10; Rev 12:7; Testament of Isaac 2:1-5; Testament of Abraham A 2:1-12ff; Ascension of Isaiah 3:13, 15-18.

By the time of Christ it is generally accepted by most Jews that Michael is the right hand man of God,⁴⁹ but exceptions are made for exalted Melchizedek for the Jews at Qumran,⁵⁰ and exalted Enoch for Jews in the 4th and 5th centuries A.D.⁵¹

- Josh 5:14 Joshua meets with the captain of the heavenly host, the angelic army of God, before the conquest of Canaan. The captain is second in command in heaven and leads the army of God, composed of members of the heavenly council and other celestial beings.
- Rev 12:7 Michael is named head of the heavenly host, but it is also important to note that Christ takes command of the heavenly armies in Rev 19:11-16 (cf. Testament of Isaac 2:1-5 below where Michael is named the “chief of the angels”).

As one would imagine Christ is thought to be the second in command for early Christians. However, early Christians not only put Jesus in the number two spot, they lift him to a level where he is virtually equal with God. For Early Christians it is important to show that Christ’s status is greater than that of council. No member of the council is superior to Christ, for he has overcome all things and has been exalted to God’s right hand by God himself. Michael is still God’s archangel, but Christ has been lifted above his divine status.

The premier status of Christ on the council can be seen in a court session found in Revelations 4-5. The text shows God sitting on his throne (4:3), 24 exalted elders (*presbuteros*) seated on thrones dressed in white and wearing crowns (4:4), the seven exalted archangels or “spirits” (pneumata) of God (4:5), and four heavenly creatures who praise God (4:7-9). The issue at hand is to find one worthy to open the scroll that God holds in his right hand. An angel on the council who acts as herald for the council asks the assembled gods “who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” (NEV 5:2), and one of the exalted elders comforts John when it appears that even among the heavenly court none is able (5:4-5). He explains that Christ, who is, after all, the premier member of the council, “has won the right to open the scroll and break its seven seals” (NEV 5:5).⁵²

- John 1:1-3, 14 Christ was a God along with the Father from the beginning. He is given the title of Word (Logos), and he dwelt among men in the flesh.
- John 10:34-36 Christ asks the Jews why he could not be the ‘son of God’ if God has called others gods in the past. James Tabor, in commenting on the Jews to whom Christ's words were directed, suggests "there seems to be a sense in which they too are "gods."⁵³

⁴⁸ Dan 7:13-14; 1 Enoch 46:1-5; 62:13-16.

⁴⁹ Hayman writes, “When Yahweh was identified with El and became the head of the pantheon, the pattern we saw behind Deut 32:8 f. remained unchanged. Michael stepped into the vacant slot and became the number two in the hierarchy, the special representative of Israel and her protector against her enemies (11). Cf. Margaret Barker, *The Great Angel. A Study of Israel's Second God* (SPCK, London: 1992).

⁵⁰ 11QMelchizedek (11Q13 II, 1-25).

⁵¹ 1 Enoch A 22:10-24:5; 25:4-26:1; 36:1-3; 3 Enoch 4:1-3; 5-8; 10:1-6; 15B:1-3. Hayman also lists other Rabbinic texts that posit a second in command in heaven (11-12).

⁵² R. Dean Davis, *The Heavenly Court Judgement of Revelations 4-5* (Univ Press, Lanham Maryland: 1992) 122-188.

⁵³ James D. Tabor, *Studies in Judaism: Things Unutterable, Paul's Ascent to Paradise in its*

- Acts 7:42 Stephen recognizes and condemns previous attempts to worship the gods on the heavenly council.
- Phil 2:5-8 Christ, though he had already become the preeminent member of the council, did not exploit his position, but humbled himself, became mortal, and the author of salvation.
- Col 1:13-16 Christ rules over all the members of the heavenly council, he is supreme over “the invisible orders of thrones, sovereignties, authorities, and powers” (NEV).
- Heb 1:1-4 Christ merits a title superior to that of the angels. He takes his seat on the right hand of God, the highest seat of honor on the heavenly council, gaining exaltation second only to that of God the Father.

The NEV comments on Hebrews 1:1-4:

The idea of Christ's exaltation to a position of supreme authority (*right hand*) in the heavenly “court” is derived from Psalms 110:1, which is quoted in Hebrews 1:13; 5:6; 7:21 and applied to Christ.

The Odes of Solomon (late 1st to early 2nd century A.D.) shows how Christ obtained the right to be the premier member of the council—sitting on the right hand of the Father. Note the monarchic language, God rules as head of the council, with Christ as his second in command, as Lord, on his right hand. Nevertheless, Christ is a “greatest among the great ones,” or the premier member of the council of the Gods, exalted over all of them at God’s right hand. In each of the following passages Christ speaks:

Hear the word of truth, and receive the knowledge of the Most High. Your flesh may not understand that which I am about to say to you; nor your garment that which I am about to declare to you... I took courage and became strong and captured the world, and it became mine for the glory of the Most High, and of God my Father. And all who saw me were amazed, and I seemed to them like a stranger. And he who knew and exalted me is the Most High in all his perfection. And he glorified me by his kindness, and raised my understanding to the height of truth. And from there he gave me the way of his paths, and I opened the doors which were closed. And I shattered the bars of iron, for my own iron(s) had grown hot and melted before me. He who caused me to descend from on high, and to ascend from the regions below; And He who gathers what is in the middle, and throws them to me; He who scattered my enemies, and my adversaries; He who gave me authority over chains so that I might loosen them; He who overthrew by my hands the dragon with seven heads, and placed me at his roots that I might destroy his seed... (The Spirit) brought me forth before the Lord’s face, and because I was the Son of Man, I was named the Light, the Son of God; Because I was most praised among the praised; and the greatest among the great ones. For according to the greatness of the Most High, so she made me; and according to his newness he renewed me. And he anointed me with his perfection; and I became one of those who are near him. (OTP 2, Odes of Solomon 8:8-9; 10:4; 17:6-10; 22:1-5; 36:3-6)

The Book of Abraham explains Christ’s deity in the same manner. Note the preeminent status of Christ from the beginning. Christ is greater, or “more intelligent,” than all those in the preexistent council. Christ is one of the “noble and great ones” among God’s rulers, but his preeminence is

Greco-Roman, Judaic, and Early Christian Contexts (Oxford Press, New York: 1986) 80. For an extensive analysis of John 10:34-36, its connection with Ps 82:1-8, and the development of Hebrew monarchism, see Daniel C. Peterson, “‘Ye are Gods’: Psalms 82 and John 10 as Witnesses to the Divine Nature of Humankind,” in Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges, eds., *The Disciple as Scholar: Essays on Scripture and the Ancient World in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson* (The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS), Provo: 2000) 471-594.

recognized as he “was like unto God”:

And the Lord said unto me: These two facts do exist, that there are two spirits, one being more intelligent than the other; there shall be another more intelligent than they; I am the Lord thy God, I am more intelligent than they all... Now the Lord had shown unto me, Abraham, the intelligences that were organized before the world was; and among all these there were many of the noble and great ones; And God saw these souls that they were good, and he stood in the midst of them, and he said: These I will make my rulers; for he stood among those that were spirits, and he saw that they were good; and he said unto me: Abraham, thou art one of them; thou wast chosen before thou wast born. And there stood one among them that was like unto God, and he said unto those who were with him: We will go down, for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these may dwell; And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them; And they who keep their first estate shall be added upon; and they who keep not their first estate shall not have glory in the same kingdom with those who keep their first estate; and they who keep their second estate shall have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever. And the Lord said: Whom shall I send? And one answered like unto the Son of Man: Here am I, send me. And another answered and said: Here am I, send me. And the Lord said: I will send the first. And the second was angry, and kept not his first estate; and, at that day, many followed after him. (Ab 3:19, 22-28)

6. The Council of the Gods as a Heavenly Tribunal

Ps 82:1-8 The heavenly council functions as a divine tribunal, judging sinful members of the heavenly court:

God takes his stand in the court of heaven to deliver judgement among the gods ... This is my sentence: Gods you may be, sons all of you of a high god, yet you shall die as men die; princes fall, every one of them, and so shall you. (NEV; cf. 11Q13 II, 1-25, and Origen, *Against Celsus*, 4, 29 below.)

The view of the Old Testament is that members of the heavenly council, who are powerful and capable of righteousness, could not approach the fullness of these qualities inherent in the nature of God, and thus are not worthy of independent worship. The members of the heavenly council, referred to in Psalms 82, have sinned and are to be punished. The New Testament writers interpret the actions and condemnation of the members of the council as, "God spared not the angels that sinned" (2 Peter 2:4, cf. Jude 6). Compare this with the analysis of Psalms 82 made in the Dead Sea Scrolls:

[And on the heights] he will decla[re in their] favor according to their lots; for it is the time of the "year of grace" for Melchizedek, to exa[lt in the tri]al the holy ones of God through the rule of judgment, as is written about him in the songs of David, who said: *Ps 82:1* "Elohim will stand up in the assem[bly of God,] <'elohim> in the midst of the gods he judges". And about him he said: *Ps 7:8-9* "Above it return to the heights, God will judge the peoples". As for what he sa[id: *Ps 82:2* "How long will yo[u] judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? *Selah*." Its interpretation concerns Belial and the spirits of his lot, who were rebels [all of them] turning aside from the commandments of God [to commit evil.] But, Melchizedek will carry out the vengeance of God's judgements [on this day, and they shall be freed from the hands] of Belial and from the hands of all the sp[irits of his lot.] To his aid (shall come) all "the gods <eli(m)?> of [justice"; he] is the one [who will prevail on this day over] all the sons of God, <*bene el*> and he will pre[side over] this [assembly.] (11QMelchizedek (11Q13 II, 10-14)

One of the most important functions of the heavenly council is the judging of men and angels. Members of the heavenly council, with God presiding, judge both earthly and heavenly affairs. Zechariah 3:1-8 shows a scene similar to Psalms 82:1-8, when court convenes in the Holy of Holies in the heavenly temple. Zechariah's vision shows God sitting on his throne, surrounded by the gods who sit on the council. Joshua, the man who held the office of high priest during the time of the prophet Zechariah, stands before an angel who acts as a herald and mediator of God's decisions.⁵⁴ The herald gives Joshua the word of the Lord concerning "Branch" in verses 8-10. Satan stands to the right of Joshua as an accuser, claiming that Joshua is guilty of misdeeds. But God exonerates Joshua from all guilt and condemns Satan (who is, presumably, cast out). Next, Joshua, by God's command, receives purification in the form of clean white clothing, replacing the filthy articles of clothing originally worn before the court. The gods themselves clothe Joshua before the court continues with its proceedings. The clean white clothing is an indication that Joshua has been purified and is now worthy to stand in the presence of the council and God. Zechariah, who has been observing the proceedings of the court with his angelica escort, shows his familiarity with the proceedings. He even takes part in the clothing of Joshua, calling out to the gods that a mitre (turban or cap) should be included in Joshua's heavenly attire (5). The members accept and carry out his suggestion. His participation is indicative of his authority as the council's messenger, a position of rank on the council itself.

This white clothing is identical to that worn by all high priests, including Joshua, when entering the earthly Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem temple to perform the highest rites of the Mosaic law. The high priest is allowed to enter the most sacred room of the temple, the Holy of Holies, only one day out of the year (Lev 16:29). This day is called *Yom Kipper*, or 'Day of Atonement.' The high priest would usually garb himself in the elaborate ritual clothing required by the law; including drawers, coat (tunic), girdle (sash), robe (each of these articles of clothing made out of linen, the finest material known in the ancient world) ephod, breastplate (on which twelve stones are placed representing the tribes of Israel), mitre (turban or cap), and a frontlet (to be attached to the front of the mitre) engraved with the words, "Holiness to the Lord" (Exodus 28, 39). On the Day of Atonement, however, the dress of the high priest is entirely unassuming when compared to the elaborate raiment usually worn. The high priest would wear a simple outfit consisting of a white tunic, drawers, sash (all made of linen), and the cap (Lev 16:4, Ezek 44:17-19). The high priest would then offer up various sacrifices and enter the Holy of Holies wearing this more modest outfit. There he would utter the sacred name of Yahweh (Jehovah) and perform the rituals intended to absolve Israel as a people of their sins. Entering the Holy of Holies is thought to be equivalent to entering into the very presence of God.⁵⁵ Thus, God instructs council members to dress Joshua in the same sacred clothing that would be worn by the high priest when entering the presence of God in the earthly temple (Zec 3:4-5). It seems altogether fitting that the high priest, who alone enters the Holy of Holies, on the most sacred day of the year to atone for the sins of Israel, is allowed to stand in the presence of God in the heavenly Holy of Holies, clothed in the simple white garments of his priestly office. As Joshua is now dressed in the garb of the high priest of Israel, he is prepared to officiate in the heavenly Holy of Holies as he would in the Holy of Holies on the earth.

Joshua then receives a divine commission to continue his righteous ministry on the earth. God covenants with Joshua that if he would conform to the will of God and dutifully perform his role as the high priest of Israel, then he will be allowed to control the temple and its precincts on the earth after it is rebuilt (6-8). He then receives a further promise of continued access to the Holy of Holies, to God, and to

⁵⁴ Cross, 187. The herald of the court is most likely the captain of the heavenly host, the second in command in heaven, encountered by Joshua in the Book of Joshua 5:14. See also 2 Enoch 22:6-10 below.

⁵⁵ Cf. Exodus 25:22; Numbers 7:89; Lev. 16:2; 1 Kings 8:10-28.

the council of the gods in the heavenly temple. He is to be allowed to attend the council of the gods as a member of the assembly. He is told that the members of the divine assembly are his "fellows," (*reya* (3:8), meaning 'friends,' but better translated as 'associates,' or 'colleagues.' Cf. Odes of Solomon 36:3-6 above, and 2 Enoch J 22:6-10 below.). Joshua is again mentioned in Zechariah 6:11-13, where he is given a crown and is promised that he will to rule at the side of "Branch."⁵⁶

This is an astonishing promise to any man. To receive the right to walk among the gods in the heavenly temple is a great honor, but even more so if that man is yet a mortal. That he is allowed permanent access to the heavenly assembly, a seat on its council, and the eventual right to rule with the Messiah illustrates how much man is like God and the other members of the council. This belief continues into later Judaic and early Christian thought. Mark Smith, an authority on Hebrew, Canaanite, and other early Semitic cultures, suggests that Zechariah "includes the high priest in the ranks of the celestial courts."⁵⁷

A similar cleansing motif is found in the Testament of Levi (2nd century B.C.). Levi sees seven angels in vision who cleanse and clothe him in the elaborate vestments usually worn by the high priest:

And I saw seven men in white clothing, who were saying to me, 'Arise, put on the vestments of the priesthood, the crown of righteousness, the oracle of understanding, the robe of truth, the breastplate of faith, the miter for the head, and the apron for prophetic power.' Each carried one of these and put them on me and said, 'From now on be a priest, you and all your posterity.' The first anointed me with holy oil and gave me a staff. The second washed me with pure water, fed me by hand with bread and holy wine, and put on me a holy and glorious vestment. The third put on something made of linen, like an ephod. The fourth placed ... around me a girdle which was like purple. The fifth gave me a branch of rich olive wood. The sixth placed a wreath on my head. The seventh placed the priestly diadem on me and filled my hands with incense, in order that I might serve as priest for the Lord God. (OTP 1, Testament of Levi 8:2-10)

Another heavenly court scene is depicted in Daniel 7. In Daniel 7 the Seleucid emperor Antiochus Epiphanes IV⁵⁸ (cf. "The Hellenization of Christianity" below), who is called the "little horn" (8, 19-21; 8:9), is put on trial by the council. The thrones to be occupied by the gods are "set in place" (NEV 9),⁵⁹ the Ancient of Days takes his seat (9), and the Son of Man approaches the assembled court in glory (13). The text indicates that "the court sat, and the books were opened" (NEV 10), Antiochus is judged guilty of crimes against God and his people (25), and his sovereignty is to be taken away (26).

The Life of Adam and Eve (1st century A.D.) records a trial of Adam, Eve, and the serpent held in the Garden of Eden. God enters the Garden accompanied by members of the council—the "us" who are

⁵⁶ For a more extended treatment of the trial of Joshua, see Roger D. Cook, "Joshua the High Priest and the Council of the God in the Book of Zechariah: A Post-Exilic Jew in King Yahweh's Court," in *Proceedings of the First Annual Mormon Apologetics Symposium* (Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research (FAIR), 1999).

⁵⁷ Smith, 102.

⁵⁸ M. Cary, *A History of the Greek World From 323 to 146 B.C.*, 2nd ed (Methuen and Co., London: 1951) 217-227.

⁵⁹ The KJV erroneously suggests that "thrones were cast down," but the Aramaic *remaw* should be translated as "set up."

present with God in the Garden (Gen 3:22)—and the trial of Adam, Eve, and the serpent begins. (As mentioned above, Latter-day revelation makes it clear that Adam and Michael are not the same person, but this detail is not known in extant pseudepigraphal or apocryphal accounts.) Note that God’s final judgement is just and cannot be overturned by the members of the council who are participating. But the gods do see a need for Adam to take seeds from the Garden for sustenance and the proper worship of God, and they admonish God to allow him to do so. Thus the gods can make judgements independent of God, and have a great deal to offer in the decisions of the council. In the text Eve speaks to her children:

And in the same hour we heard the archangel Michael sounding his trumpet, calling the angels, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD, “Come with me into Paradise and hear the sentence which I pronounce on Adam.’” And as we heard the archangel sounding the trumpet, we said, ‘Behold, God is coming into Paradise to judge us.’ We were afraid and hid. And God returned to Paradise, seated on a chariot of cherubim, and the angels were praising him. When God came into Paradise, all the plants ... bloomed forth and were established. And the throne of God was made ready where the tree of life was... God said to [Adam], ‘Who showed you that you are naked unless you have forsaken my commandment which I delivered to you to keep?’ ... And he turned and said to [Eve], ‘Why have you done this?’ ... God said to Adam, ‘Because you transgressed my commandment and listened to your wife, cursed is the ground in your labors...’ “Turning to me, the LORD said to me, ‘Since you have listened to the serpent and ignored my commandment, you shall suffer birth pangs and unspeakable pains...’ “And after he had told me these things he spoke to the serpent in great wrath ... “accursed are you beyond all the wild beasts...” “Having said these things, he ordered his angels to us cast out of Paradise. While we were being expelled and lamenting, your father Adam begged the angels, ‘Let me be a little while so that I may beseech God that he might have compassion and pity me, for I alone have sinned.’ And they ceased driving him out. And Adam cried out with weeping and said, ‘Forgive me, LORD, what I have done. Then the LORD said to his angels, ‘Why have you stopped driving Adam out of Paradise? Is the guilt mine, or did I judge badly?’” Then the angels fell on the ground and worshiped the LORD, saying, ‘You are righteous, LORD, and you judge uprightly.’” ... “When the LORD had said these things, he ordered us cast out of Paradise. And your father wept before the angels opposite Paradise, and the angels said to him, ‘What do you want us to do for you, Adam?? Your father answered and said to the angels, ‘See, you are casting me out; I beg you, let me take fragrances from Paradise, so that after I have gone out, I might bring an offering to God so that God will hear me.’ And they come to God and said, ‘Jael, eternal king, command that fragrant incenses from Paradise be given to Adam.’” And God ordered Adam to come that he might take aromatic fragrances out of Paradise for his sustenance. When the angels allowed him, he gathered both kinds... (OTP 2, Apocalypse 22:1-3; 23:3,5; 24:1; 25:1; 26:1; 27:1-5; 29:1-6)

Another elaborate description of the heavenly court is found in 3 Enoch (c. 500 A.D.). In this Pseudepigraphal work God is seen seated on his throne, with members of the council called “watchers” acting as the highest officials of the court. Here the council members act in concert with God, he doing nothing without first consulting them:

R. Ishmael said: The angel Metatron, Prince of the Divine Presence, said to me: Above all these are four great princes called Watchers and holy ones, high, honored, terrible, beloved, wonderful, noble and greater than all the celestials, and among all the ministers there is none equal to them... Their abode is opposite the throne of glory, and their station is facing the Holy One... so that the splendor of their abode resembles the splendor of the throne of glory, and the brilliance of their image is as the brilliance of the Sekinah (glory). They receive glory from the glory of the Almighty, and are praised with the praise of the Sekinah. Moreover the Holy, One, blessed be he, does nothing in his world without first taking counsel with them; then he acts ... There are two

Watchers and two holy ones. How do they stand before the Holy One, blessed be he? It is taught that a Watcher stands on one side and a holy one on the other. They abase the arrogant to the earth and exalt the lowly on high... When the Holy One, blessed be he, sits in judgment on the throne of judgement, his garment is white like snow, the hair of his head is as pure wool, his whole robe shines like a dazzling light and he is covered all over with righteousness as with a coat of mail. The Watchers and the holy ones stand before him like court officers before the judge; they take up and debate every single matter and they close each case that comes for judgment before the Holy One, blessed be he, as it is written, "Such is the sentence proclaimed by the Watchers, the verdict announced by the holy ones" [Dan 4:17]. Some of them decide the cases; some of them issue the verdicts in the great court in Arabot [7th or highest heaven]; some of them raise the questions in the presence of the Almighty; some complete the cases before the One Above, and some carry out the sentences of the earth beneath ... Why are their names called Watchers and holy ones? Because they sanctify the body and the soul with lashes of fire on the third day of judgment ... (OTP 1, 28:1-10)

These are full council members, not flunkies. Note that while the watchers are not worshiped, they are given admiration and fully reflect the God's glory and image. The text continues:

When the Holy One, blessed be he, sits on the throne of judgment, Justice stands on his right hand, Mercy on his left, and Truth stands directly facing him. When a man enters his presence for judgment, a staff, as it were, extends toward him from the splendor of Mercy and takes up a position in front of him. At once the man falls prostrate, and all the angels of destruction fear and shrink from him, as it is written, "His throne is established through Mercy and he sits upon it in truth" [Isaiah 16:5] ... angels of mercy stand on his right, the angels of peace stand on his left, and the angels of destruction stand facing him. A scribe stands below him and a scribe stands above him. (31:1-2, 33:1-2)

The mention of only "four" watchers and holy ones in 3 Enoch is unusual. 1 Enoch (c. 200 B.C.) 6:6 and 10:9 "implies that the Watchers are numerous" (OTP 1, 283 n d). In like manner 3 Enoch 30:1-2 limits the number of "princes" to 72 who are allowed to participate in the proceedings of the heavenly court. These elaborations are the speculations of a later period of Judaism, but even early Judaeo/Christian thought has a distinct angelology where the functions of the members of the council and/or classes of angels are elaborated upon. For example: Col 1:16 names four classes of divine beings: namely, thrones, dominions, powers, and principalities. These are divine beings with authority, but their exact function was not elaborated upon by Paul. The Ascension of Isaiah (200 B.C.-400 A.D., OTP 2) 7:14, 21 also speaks of an angelic class called "thrones," who have places of authority in each of the lower heavens. It seems that the angelology of 3 Enoch demands different functions for the watchers, holy ones, and princes who sit on the council.

7. The Church Father Origen and the Heavenly Council

In the 2nd century Christianity underwent a process of Hellenization, in which they began to place Greek absolutistic philosophy above the simple doctrines that they developed internally or inherited from the Jews. But the Hellenized Church Fathers attempted to retain both their unique Judaeo/Christian beliefs in the council of the gods, and a belief in theosis, or that the righteous are to become gods in the hereafter. In the following passage, Origen of Alexandria (185- c. 254) recognizes that the gods of the nations exist, but they are but mere idols/demons. He recognizes the legitimate gods who sit on the council, and argues that a belief in the gods does not compromise the supremacy or exclusive worship of Christ. Note that Psalms 82:1-8, Psalms 96:5, Mat 5:48, 22:30, Col 1:15, 1 John 3:2-3, and, perhaps most important, 1 Cor 8:4-6 are all interpreted in a monarchial and theotic fashion. Note also his total rejection

of innate depravity as men are not totally incapable of doing good:

For we know that there are many creatures more honorable than man; and we have read that "God standeth in the congregation of gods," but of gods who are not worshiped by the nations, "for all the gods of the nations are idols." We have read also, that "God, standing in the congregation of the gods, judgeth among the gods" [Ps 82:1] We know, moreover, that "though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth (as there be gods many and lords many), but to us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by Him" [1 Cor 8:5-6]. And we know that in this way the angels are superior to men; so that men, when made perfect, become like the angels. "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but the righteous are as the angels in heaven" [Mat 22:30] and also become "equal to the angels." We know, too, that in the arrangement of the universe there are certain beings termed "thrones," and others "dominions," and others "powers," and others "principalities" [Col 1:15] and we see that we men, who are far inferior to these, may entertain the hope that by a virtuous life, and by acting in all things agreeably to reason, we may rise to a likeness with all these. And, lastly, because "it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like God, and shall see Him as He is" [1 John 3:2-3]. And if any one were to maintain what is asserted by some (either by those who possess intelligence or who do not, but have misconceived sound reason), that "God exists, and we are next to Him," I would interpret the word "we," by using in its stead, "We who act according to reason," or rather, "We virtuous, who act according to reason." For, in our opinion, the same virtue belongs to all the blessed, so that the virtue of man and of God is identical. And therefore we are taught to become "perfect," as our Father in heaven is perfect [Mat 5:48]. No good and virtuous man, then, is a "worm rolling in filth," nor is a pious man an "ant," nor a righteous man a "frog;" nor could one whose soul is enlightened with the bright light of truth be reasonably likened to a "bird of the night."⁶⁰

In this text Origen unequivocally identifies his belief in the council of the gods. These are not the heathen gods worshiped by the nations, but the legitimate gods who act as part of God's heavenly government:

Before proceeding to the next point, it may be well for us to see whether we do not accept with approval the saying, "No man can serve two masters," with the addition, "for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other," and further, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." The defense of this passage will lead us to a deeper and more searching inquiry into the meaning and application of the words "gods" and "lords." Divine Scripture teaches us that there is "a great Lord above all gods." And by this name "gods" we are not to understand the objects of heathen worship (for we know that "all the gods of the heathen are demons"), but the gods mentioned by the prophets as forming an assembly, whom God "judges," and to each of whom He assigns his proper work. For "God standeth in the assembly of the gods: He judgeth among the gods" [Ps 82:1] For "God is Lord of gods," who by His Son "hath called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof." We are also commanded to "give thanks to the God of gods." Moreover, we are taught that "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." Nor are these the only passages to this effect; but there are very many others.

The sacred Scriptures teach us to think, in like manner, of the Lord of lords. For they say in one

⁶⁰ Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids: 1951) vol 4, "Against Celsus," 4, 29 (hereafter ANF).

place, "Give thanks to the God of gods, for His mercy endureth for ever. Give thanks to the Lord of lords, for His mercy endureth for ever;" and in another, "God is King of kings, and Lord of lords" [Deut 10:17]. For Scripture distinguishes between those gods which are such only in name and those which are truly gods, whether they are called by that name or not; and the same is true in regard to the use of the word "lords." To this effect Paul says, "For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, as there are gods many, and lords many" [1 Cor 8:5]. But as the God of gods calls whom He pleases through Jesus to his inheritance, "from the east and from the west," and the Christ of God thus shows His superiority to all rulers by entering into their several provinces, and summoning men out of them to be subject to Himself, Paul therefore, with this in view, goes on to say, "But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by Him" [1 Cor 8:6]; adding, as if with a deep sense of the marvelous and mysterious nature of the doctrine, "Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge." When he says, "To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things," by "us" he means himself and all those who have risen up to the supreme God of gods and to the supreme Lord of lords. Now he has risen to the supreme God who gives Him an entire and undivided worship through His Son — the word and wisdom of God made manifest in Jesus. For it is the Son alone who leads to God those who are striving, by the purity of their thoughts, words, and deeds, to come near to God the Creator of the universe. I think, therefore, that the prince of this world, who "transforms himself into an angel of light," was referring to this and such like statements in the words, "Him follows a host of gods and demons, arranged in eleven bands." Speaking of himself and the philosophers, he says, "We are of the party of Jupiter; others belong to other demons."

Whilst there are thus many gods and lords, whereof some are such in reality, and others are such only in name, we strive to rise not only above those whom the nations of the earth worship as gods, but also beyond those spoken of as gods in Scripture, of whom they are wholly ignorant who are strangers to the covenants of God given by Moses and by our Savior Jesus, and who have no part in the promises which He has made to us through them. That man rises above all demon-worship who does nothing that is pleasing to demons; and he rises to a blessedness beyond that of those whom Paul calls "gods," if he is enabled, like them, or in any way he may, "to look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are unseen." And he who considers that "the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God, not willingly, but by reason of him who subjected the same in hope," whilst he praises the creature, and sees how "it shall be freed altogether from the bondage of corruption, and restored to the glorious liberty of the children of God," — such a one cannot be induced to combine with the service of God the service of any other, or to serve two masters. There is therefore nothing seditious or factious in the language of those who hold these views, and who refuse to serve more masters than one. To them Jesus Christ is an all-sufficient Lord, who Himself instructs them, in order that when fully instructed He may form them into a kingdom worthy of God, and present them to God the Father. But indeed they do in a sense separate themselves and stand aloof from those who are aliens from the commonwealth of God and strangers to His covenants, in order that they may live as citizens of heaven, "coming to the living God, and to the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and Church of the first-born, which are written in heaven" [Heb 12:22-23].⁶¹

In this passage Origen examines the meaning of Colossians 1:15. He differentiates between the various classes of angelic beings, identifying the ranks of gods, thrones, dominions, lordships, and powers:

⁶¹ (*Ibid*, 8, 3-5.)

It appears to me, then, that the reasonable beings which exist are characterized by many forms, and that some of them are the first, some the second, some the third, and so on to the last. To pronounce exactly, however, which is the first, what kind of a being the second is, which may truly be designated third, and to carry this out to the end of the series, this is not a task for man, but transcends our nature. We shall yet venture, such as we are, to stand still a little at this point, and to make some observations on the matter. There are some gods of whom God is God, as we hear in prophecy, "Thank ye the God of gods," and "The God of gods hath spoken, and called the earth." Now God, according to the Gospel, "is not the God of the dead but of the living." Those gods, then, are living of whom God is God. The Apostle, too, writing to the Corinthians, says: "As there are gods many and lords many," and so we have spoken of these gods as really existing. Now there are, besides the gods of whom God is God, certain others, who are called thrones, and others called dominions, lordships, also, and powers in addition to these. The phrase, "above every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come," leads us to believe that there are yet others besides these which are less familiar to us; one kind of these the Hebrews called Sabai, from which Sabaoth was formed, who is their ruler, and is none other than God. Add to all these the reasonable being who is mortal, man. Now the God of all things made first in honor some race of reasonable beings; this I consider to be those who are called gods, and the second order, let us say, for the present, are the thrones, and the third, undoubtedly, the dominions. And thus we come down in order to the last reasonable race, which, perhaps, cannot be any other than man. The Savior accordingly became, in a diviner way than Paul, all things to all, that He might either gain all or perfect them; it is clear that to men He became a man, and to the angels an angel. As for His becoming man no believer has any doubt, but as to His becoming an angel, we shall find reason for believing it was so, if we observe carefully the appearances and the words of the angels, in some of which the powers of the angels seem to belong to Him. In several passages angels speak in such a way as to suggest this, as when "the angel of the Lord appeared in a flame of fire. And he said. I am the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob."⁶²

In this text Origen attempts to explain the nature of his Hellenized, absolute God and Christ. Even as he gives God an existence metaphysically above and outside the universe, he still maintains his belief in the gods who sit on the council. His claim is that as the Son derives his divinity from the Father, so the Son imparts of his divinity to the gods:

We next notice John's use of the article in these sentences. He does not write without care in this respect, nor is he unfamiliar with the niceties of the Greek tongue. In some cases he uses the article, and in some he omits it. He adds the article to the Logos, but to the name of God he adds it sometimes only. He uses the article, when the name of God refers to the uncreated cause of all things, and omits it when the Logos is named God. Does the same difference which we observe between God with the article and God without it prevail also between the Logos with it and without it? We must enquire into this. As the God who is over all is God with the article not without it, so "the Logos" is the source of that reason (Logos) which dwells in every reasonable creature; the reason which is in each creature is not, like the former called par excellence The Logos. Now there are many who are sincerely concerned about religion, and who fall here into great perplexity. They are afraid that they may be proclaiming two Gods, and their fear drives them into doctrines which are false and wicked. Either they deny that the Son has a distinct nature of His own besides that of the Father, and make Him whom they call the Son to be God all but the name, or they deny the divinity of the Son, giving Him a separate existence of His own, and making His sphere of essence fall outside that of the Father, so that they are separable from each

⁶² (ANF vol 4, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 1, 34.)

other. To such persons we have to say that God on the one hand is Very God (Autotheos, God of Himself); and so the Savior says in His prayer to the Father, "That they may know Thee the only true God;" but that all beyond the Very God is made God by participation in His divinity, and is not to be called simply God (with the article), but rather God (without article). And thus the first-born of all creation, who is the first to be with God, and to attract to Himself divinity, is a being of more exalted rank than the other gods beside Him, of whom God is the God, as it is written, "The God of gods, the Lord, hath spoken and called the earth." It was by the offices of the first-born that they became gods, for He drew from God in generous measure that they should be made gods, and He communicated it to them according to His own bounty. The true God, then, is "The God," and those who are formed after Him are gods, images, as it were, of Him the prototype. But the archetypal image, again, of all these images is the Word of God, who was in the beginning, and who by being with God is at all times God, not possessing that of Himself, but by His being with the Father, and not continuing to be God, if we should think of this, except by remaining always in uninterrupted contemplation of the depths of the Father.

Now it is possible that some may dislike what we have said representing the Father as the one true God, but admitting other beings besides the true God, who have become gods by having a share of God. They may fear that the glory of Him who surpasses all creation may be lowered to the level of those other beings called gods. We drew this distinction between Him and them that we showed God the Word to be to all the other gods the minister of their divinity. To this we must add, in order to obviate objections, that the reason which is in every reasonable creature occupied the same relation to the reason who was in the beginning with God, and is God the Word, as God the Word occupies to God. As the Father who is Very God and the True God is to His image and to the images of His image — men are said to be according to the image, not to be images of God — so He, the Word, is to the reason (word) in every man. Each fills the place of a fountain — the Father is the fountain of divinity, the Son of reason. As, then, there are many gods, but to us there is but one God the Father, and many Lords, but to us there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, so there are many Logoi, but we, for our part, pray that that one Logos may be with us who was in the beginning and was with God, God the Logos. For whoever does not receive this Logos who was in the beginning with God, or attach himself to Him as He appeared in flesh, or take part in some of those who had part in this Logos, or whoever having had part in Him falls away from Him again, he will have his portion in what is called most opposite to reason. What we have drawn out from the truths with which we started will now be clear enough. First, we spoke about God and the Word of God, and of Gods, either, that is, beings who partake in deity or beings who are called Gods and are not. And again of the Logos of God and of the Logos of God made flesh, and of logoi, or beings which partake in some way of the Logos, of second logoi or of third, thought to be logoi, in addition to that Logos that was before them all, but not really so. Irrational Reasons these may be styled; beings are spoken of who are said to be Gods but are not, and one might place beside these Gods who are no Gods, Reasons which are no Reasons. Now the God of the universe is the God of the elect, and in a much greater degree of the Saviors of the elect; then He is the God of these beings who are truly Gods, and then He is the God, in a word, of the living and not of the dead. But God the Logos is the God, perhaps, of those who attribute everything to Him and who consider Him to be their Father.⁶³

8. Pseudo-Monotheistic Passages

There are a number of passages in the Old Testament which seem to reject the existence of or need for a divine council or the gods who those who sit on it. For example, Ex 20:3 says "Thou shalt

⁶³ (Ibid, 2, 2-3.)

have no other gods before me.” This, however, does not declare the non-existence of other gods, only that worship is to be exclusively given to God.⁶⁴ In fact, the text itself presumes the existence of gods other than Yahweh since being exist who are not to be worshiped. More problematic is the creedal Shema of Deuteronomy 6:4 that states that God is “one.” Here are several translations:

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one (*'echad*) LORD” (KJV, RSV).

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one (*'echad*) (NIV).

On the surface it seems that a philosophic monotheism is being described. In this interpretation God would be the single ‘ground of existence’ or “one,” as seen in the KJV translation. A more careful analysis, however, shows that translating *'echad* as “one” is problematic, and that this passage remains clearly within the monarchic character of the Old Testament. The literal rendition of the passage is “Yahweh our God is one Yahweh,” but this makes little sense. Compare these translations of Deuteronomy 6:4 which allow for a different translation of *'echad*:

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone (*'echad*)” (NEV).

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone (*'echad*)” (RSV and NIV variants).

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the unique (*'echad*) LORD” (BYU professor Steven Rick’s translation).

Most scholars suggest that the text itself demands that *'echad* be translated as “alone.” Peter Hayman discusses Deut 6:4, 4:35, 39 and writes that:

it is hardly ever appropriate to use the term monotheism to describe the Jewish idea of God, that no progress beyond the simple formulas of the Book of Deuteronomy can be discerned in Judaism before the philosophers of the Middle Ages, and that Judaism never escapes from the legacy of the battles for supremacy between Yahweh, Ba'al, and El from which it emerged.⁶⁵

T. J. Meek further comments that:

Deut. 6:4 ... is usually translated, "Hear, O Israel, Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one," whatever that may mean. If it makes any sense at all, it seems to mean that there was only one Yahweh and not many as there were of the Baals. According to the conservative Jewish scholar, Jacob Hoschander, the words "express the unity of the Lord as far as Israel was concerned, and do not imply the doctrine of an absolute Monotheism, which denies the very existence of all other gods." Against the popular rendering both grammar and syntax require the translation, "Hear, O Israel; Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone," but even so there is again nothing to suggest anything more than monolatry.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ T. J. Meek, *Hebrew Origins*, (Harper, New York: 1960) 215-217. Lowell K. Handy concurs: "There is no reason to assume, though it often is, that the prophets, priests, or rulers of these two kingdoms in the first half of the first millennium were essentially monotheists"; "Appearance of Pantheon," in *Edelman*, 28.

⁶⁵ Hayman, 2

⁶⁶ Meek, 217; cf. 208-217. For definitions of monolatry and henotheism see footnote 1 above. Von Rad is another among the many prominent Old Testament scholars who denies the existence of monotheism in ancient Israel. He writes:

The problem of monotheism in ancient Israel is admittedly connected with the first commandment ... the first commandment has initially nothing to do with monotheism; on the

In like manner, Jack Miles reasons that Deut 6:4 is only a declaration of Israel's full fidelity to God. He writes that the passage "is now more usually translated in the light of historical research" as "the Lord is our God, the Lord alone."⁶⁷ Hayman also provides a translation of a Rabbinic commentary on the Shema (Deut R.) which explicitly links the monarchism of Deut 32:8, where God portions out stewardships to the members of the heavenly council, with the declarations of the 'alone' God of Deut 6:4:

Hear, O Israel (Deut 6:4). This refers to Lam. 3:24--"the portion of the Lord, says my soul." What is "the portion of the Lord"? When the Holy One, Blessed be He, shared out his world to the nations of the world, as it says, *When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance* (Deut 32:8), and they each chose their own god, one chose for itself Michael, one chose Gabriel, yet another chose the sun and the moon. But Israel chose for itself the Holy One, Blessed be He, as it is said, For the Lord's portion is his people, etc. (Deut 32:8).⁶⁸

Even the extremely late 3 Enoch (5th-6th century A.D.) continues to interpret the Shema in a monarchical fashion. Enoch, who has been taken up into the highest heaven, and transformed into the glorious Metatron, has been "exalted above all gods." Metatron, who now stands as the second god next to Yahweh (3 Enoch 4:8; 10:1-6; 14:1-5), and is proclaimed the "lesser Yahweh" by God himself (12:5), proclaims the Shema to the assembled host of heaven; the exalted gods of glory:

Metatron is Prince over all princes, and stands before him who is exalted above all gods. He goes beneath the throne of glory, where he has a great heavenly tabernacle of light, and brings out deafening fire, and puts it in the ears of the holy creatures, so that they should not hear the sound of the utterance that issues from the mouth of the Almighty. When Moses ascended to the height, he fasted 121 fasts, until the dwellings of the *hasmal* [7th palace] were opened to him, and lo, his heart was as the heart of a lion; he saw countless legions of the hosts surrounding him . . . and 1,800,000 advocates for Israel came out to meet Moses, and with them was Metatron, Prince of the Divine Presence. They received the prayers of Israel and placed them as a crown on the head of the Holy One, blessed be he. And he (Metatron) said, "Hear, Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one!" [Deut 6:4] and the face of the Sekinah rejoiced and was glad. They (the hosts) said to Metatron, "Who are these (the advocates), and to whom do they give all this honor and glory?" They received answer, "To the Majestic One of the House of Israel." (OTP 1, 15B:1-3)

Other pseudo-monotheistic passages in the Old Testament should also be understood in the same light. For example, Is 45:5 and 18 proclaim "I [am] the LORD, and [there is] none else, [there is] no God beside me... For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; I am the LORD; and there is none else" (KJV). These, however, seem to show nothing more than God is the supreme monarch of the heavens, rather than a denial of the gods who rule at his sides. In addition, special attention should be given to the

contrary, as the way in which it is formulated shows, it is only comprehensible in the light of a background which the historian of religion designates as polytheistic. Even the way in which Jahweh introduces himself, "I am Jahweh, your God," presupposes a situation of polytheism. For many a generation there existed in Israel a worship of Jahweh which, from the point of view of the first commandment, must undoubtedly be taken as legitimate, though it was not monotheistic. It is therefore called henotheism or monolatry. (Gehard Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology: Theology of Israel's Traditions*, 2 vols. (Harper, New York: 1962), vol. 1, 210-212); cf. Norman K. Gottwald, *A Light to the Nations*, (Harper & Row, New York: 1959) 141.)

⁶⁷ Jack Miles, *God, a Biography* (Alfred A. Knopf, New York: 1995) 413 n. 6. Schmidt, 73.

⁶⁸ Hayman, 6.

text of Isaiah 40: 1-3, 6, 13-14, 25.

The Book of Isaiah chapter 40 is monarchic despite language that seems to indicate monotheism. God often speaks with the gods, such as when he discusses with them the creation of man (Gen 1:26), Adam's fate after he and Eve partook of the forbidden fruit (3:22), and as they prepare to thwart the building of the tower of Babel: in the latter case saying, "let us go down, and there confound their language" (KJV 11:7).⁶⁹ In Isaiah 40:1-3, 6, God gives commands in first person plural, language which Cross calls "characteristic of address in the divine council." In other words, commands given by God in this manner are exclusively directed to the members of the heavenly assembly. Cross also writes that "this form is introduced by a plural imperative, often repeated imperatives."⁷⁰ The imperatives of Isaiah 40 are "Comfort ye!" (1), "Speak!" and "Declare!" (2), "Prepare!" and "Make Straight!" (3), and the singular imperative "Proclaim!" (6) as the herald speaks to the council.⁷¹ Cross indicates that the "setting" of Isaiah 40:1-8 is "in the heavenly council in which Yahweh addresses his heralds."⁷² In like manner Isaiah 6:8 shows God seated upon his throne in the holy of holies, and asking the heavenly council asking who should represent them; "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" (KJV). Cross writes that the use of the first person plural in Isaiah 6:8 is "characteristic of address in the divine council,"⁷³ and points out other passages in the Old Testament where divine speech is directed to the gods (Jud 5:3,23; Is 35:3-4; 40:1-8; 48:20-21; 52:7-10; 57:14; 62:10-12; Zech 3:4).⁷⁴ This address to the council is important, for his commands to the gods are found in the same chapter Isaiah indicates that God needs no "counselor" (13-14) and has no "equal" (25). Obviously, Isaiah is using language which is intended to show that God is the supreme ruler of the universe, but by declaring that God is the matchless monarch of the universe he is neither denying the existence of the gods nor their divine role in the heavenly assembly. Thus, despite the language of God being alone, and having no counselor, it is seen that the Old Testament remains monarchic and the gods retain their divine stewardships.

The Dead Sea Scrolls shows how Jews at the time of Christ can claim that God alone, but also declare in a monarchic fashion that he is surrounded by the gods. The following hymn to God from the Dead Sea Scrolls uses language that shows how God can be praised as the "prince of gods and king of the glorious ones," and yet that there is "no-one besides" him:

What can I say if you do not open my mouth?
And how can I answer if you do not give me insight?
See, you are prince of gods and king of the glorious ones,

⁶⁹ Consider Genesis Rabbah 8:4-5, where God consults with the gods: "When He came to create the first human being He took counsel with the ministering angels. He said to them, "Shall we make humanity?" (Gen 1:26). They said to Him, "What will be his nature?" (Cited in *Hayman*, 12). 3 Enoch 4:6-7 (OTP vol 1) also has members of the heavenly assembly approach and converse with God.

⁷⁰ *Cross*, 187; cf. n. 179; cf. *Mullen* 198, 216.

⁷¹ *Mullen* 217-218; cf. *Miller* 68.

⁷² *Ibid*, 188; cf. RSV Is 40:1 ft: "The background scene is the council of heaven, from which the voices come."

⁷³ *Cross*, 187; cf. n. 179; *Mullen*, 198, 216; *Miller*, 68.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 187.

lord of every spirit, owner of every creature.
 Without your will nothing happens,
 and nothing is known without your wish.
 There is no-one besides you,
 no-one matches your strength,
 nothing, in contrast with your glory,
 there is no price on your might...
 God of compassion and of abundant favor,
 because you have made me know these things ...
 To you all power [...]

by your pity in your great goodness
 and in the abundance of [your compassion...]
 I will delight in your forg[iveness...] (1QH XVIII, 7-10, 14-16)

The Hellenistic Synagoga Prayers (2nd to 3rd centuries A.D.) continues this language of God being supreme in the heavens and a tacit recognition of the gods. The prayers show how even Hellenized Jews of the 2nd and 3rd centuries continue to recognize that God alone rules as the monarch of the universe. He is so supreme in majesty, might, and glory that the members of the heavenly host cannot compare with him. Yet, the hymns also continue to recognize that he is “King of the gods,” and that he is the supreme “Holy One above all holy ones,” continuing to show the essential similarity of God with his council members. God’s majesty and sovereignty do not preclude the existence of the gods:

Our eternal Savior: the King of the gods, who alone is Almighty and Lord, the God of all beings ... And holy seraphim, together with the six-winged cherubim, singing to you the triumphal song, with never-silent voice cry out, *Holy, holy, holy, Lord Sabaoth, the heaven and the earth are full of your glory!* And the other throngs of the hosts, archangels, thrones, dominions, sovereignties, authorities, powers, crying out, say, Blessed by the glory of the Lord from its place! ... For there is no god beside you alone, there is no Holy one beside you; Lord God of knowledge, God of holy ones, Holy One above all holy ones. For those who have been made holy are under your hands. (OTP, vol 2, vol 2:1-2; 4:9-12, 27-29; cf. Ascension of Isaiah 8:1-15)

Compare this with a fragment from the Dead Sea War Scrolls. God cannot be compared with any others, for his mighty works show his power, and he controls the ranks of the "holy ones":

Who (is) like you, God of Israel,
 in the heavens or on earth,
 to do great deeds like your deeds,
 marvels like your feats? ...

[... You created] the dome of the sky,
 the army of luminaries,
 the support of the spirits,
 the control of the holy ones,
 the treasures of glory,
 [in the darkness] of the clouds . . . (1QM X 8-9, 11-12)

Thus, the preponderance of evidence shows that the Hebrew Shema, as well as the other pseudo-monotheistic passages of the Old Testament, need to be interpreted monarchically. God is the supreme God of gods and Lord of lords, but the gods and lords continue to rule by his side.

9. Grace and Salvation in Judaeo/Christian Thought

The idea that man is sinful but can be redeemed by grace and works is not foreign to Judaic thought, as can be seen in the Dead Sea Scrolls:

For your glory, you have purified man from sin, <grace implied> so that he can make himself holy for you <works implied> from every impure abomination and blameworthy iniquity, to become united with the sons of your truth and in the lot of your holy ones, to raise the worms of the dead from the dust, to an [everlasting] community and from a depraved spirit, to your knowledge, so that he can take his place in your presence with the perpetual host and the [everlasting] spirits ... (1QH XIX 10-13)

The New Testament is replete with the understanding that God aids man in achieving salvation.

Mat 19:16-30 After the rich young man rejects Christ's offer to sell all and join him, Christ chides the rich, saying that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter heaven. Peter then asks how can anyone be saved. Christ's answer is helpful in understanding both grace and salvation in Judaic thought and early Christianity. Christ says that nothing is impossible to God, implying that God can save men even when they fall short of salvation.

Luke 18:9-14 The parable of the Pharisee and the Publican. The Pharisee thanks God that he keeps the law and is not a sinner like the Publican, while the Publican recognizes his sin and prays for forgiveness. It is the heart that needs to be right with God, not the outer forms of the law.

John 15:15-19; 17:16

Christ tells the apostles that they his friends and no longer are servants/slaves as he has shared with them all the sacred things of the Father. They were of the world, but Christ has taken them from it.

Paul believes that once a person gains the conviction that Christ atoned for the sins of the world, experiences an inner conversion, and becomes a member of the Church through baptism, that Christ would purify and exalt him. The Christian is free, no longer subject to the strictures of the law, for Christ has lifted him above and he is no longer subject to it. Paul believes that as we have been raised to life with Christ and now have a 'higher' or 'heavenly nature,' being stripped of earthly things. Man now follows the whisperings of the Spirit rather than the harsh dictates of the law. Through Christ we have entered the realm above where he sits at the right hand of God. Paul believes that it is as if a Christian has one foot firmly planted in the highest heaven. All he has to do to achieve exaltation is to make sure that the foothold he has in heaven is not lost by a return to the sins of the flesh. If he is caught up in lies, fornication, or other sins, then he can be pulled down from the exaltation that he has potentially qualified himself for in heaven. The Christian, then, lives with one foot in heaven as a heavenly man, but he also has one foot stuck on the earth in mortality—what Paul calls our 'lower nature' or the earthly man. One's life, after becoming a member of the Church, seems to center on keeping the body that yet remains in mortality from becoming entangled in webs of sin. Thus, conscious action and continual striving are important to Paul, for the Christian has not yet entirely achieved heaven. Upon death and resurrection the faithful Christian will be welcomed into the celestial world to claim his inheritance. Paul writes:

In the rigid obstinacy of your heart you are laying up for yourself a store of retribution for the day of retribution, when God's just judgement will be revealed, and he will pay every man for what he has done. To those who pursue glory, honor, and immortality by steady persistence in well-doing, he will give eternal life; but for those who are governed by selfish ambition, who refuse obedience to the truth and take the wrong for their guide, there will be the fury of retribution. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who is an evil-doer, for the Jew first and

for the Greek also; and for every well-doer there will be glory, honor, and peace, for the Jew first and also for the Greek For God has no favorites: those who have sinned outside of the Law of Moses will perish outside its pale, and all who have sinned under that law will be judged by the law. It is not by hearing the law, but by doing it, that men will be justified before God... For all who are moved by the Spirit of God are sons of God. The Spirit you have received is not a spirit of slavery leading you back into a life of fear, but a Spirit that makes us sons, enabling us to cry 'Abba! Father!' In that cry the Spirit of God joins with our spirit in testifying that we are God's children; and if children, then heirs. We are God's heirs and Christ's fellow-heirs, if we share his sufferings now in order to share his splendor hereafter. (Rom 2:5-13; 8:14-17 NEV)

Paul believes that the faithful have been prepared to become divine, and our bodies are to be changed and become incorruptible and immortal. We, therefore, should not focus on the lower world, but on God's eternal world where we will dwell. We must show good works to that end:

No wonder we do not lose heart! Though our outward humanity is in decay, yet day by day we are inwardly renewed. Our troubles are slight and short-lived; and their outcome an eternal glory which outweighs them far. Meanwhile our eyes are fixed, not on the things that are seen, but on the things that are unseen: for what is seen passes away; what is unseen is eternal. For we know that if the earthly frame that houses us today should be demolished, we possess a building which God has provided—a house not made by human hands, eternal, and in heaven. In this present body we do indeed groan; we yearn to have our heavenly habitation put on over this one—in the hope that, being thus clothed, we shall not find ourselves naked. We groan indeed, we who are enclosed within this earthly frame; we are oppressed because we do not want to have the old body stripped off. Rather our desire is to have the new body put on over it, so that our mortal part may be absorbed into life immortal [see 1 Cor 15:39-50 and the Ascension of Isaiah 9:9 in this handout]. God himself has shaped us for this very end; and as a pledge of it he has given us the Spirit. Therefore we never cease to be confident. We know that so long as we are at home in the body we are exiles from the Lord; faith is our guide, we do not see him. We are confident, I repeat, and would rather leave our home in the body and go to live with the Lord. We therefore make it our ambition, wherever we are, here or there, to be acceptable to him. For we must all have our lives laid open before the tribunal of Christ, where each must receive what is due to him for his conduct in the body, good or bad. (2 Cor 4:16-5:10 NEV)

Salvation is not entirely assured, even for the baptized Christian. Paul points out that those who do not cleave unto the higher nature which Christ has lifted us to, will find themselves returned to a carnal state. Constant effort to keep ourselves above the level of an earthly man is expected:

You, my friends, were called to be free men, only do not turn your freedom into licence for your lower nature, but be servants to one another in love. For the whole law can be summed up in a single commandment: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' But if you go on fighting one another, tooth and nail, all you can expect is mutual destruction. I mean this: if you are guided by the Spirit you will not fulfil the desires of your lower nature. That nature sets its desires against the Spirit, while the Spirit fights against it. They are in conflict with one another so that what you will to do you cannot do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. Anyone can see the kind of behavior that belongs to the lower nature: fornication, impurity ... quarrels ... selfish ambition ... I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who behave in such ways will never inherit the kingdom of God. But the harvest of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law dealing with such things as these. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the lower nature with its passions and desires. If the Spirit is the source of our life, let the Spirit also direct our course... Make no mistake about this: God is not to be fooled; a man reaps what he sows. If he sows seed in the

field of his lower nature, he will reap from it a harvest of corruption, but if he sows in the field of the Spirit, the Spirit will bring him a harvest of eternal life. (Gal 5:13-25, 6:7-8 NEV)

Man's condition, as a creature of the lower world, was such that God's mercy and grace were necessary to lift and justify us, as none of us can keep the law perfectly. With our acceptance of Christ we have already achieved salvation in the presence of God; but this is conditional upon continued good works. If we are faithful and maintain our status as heavenly men and women, our exaltation is assured:

I pray that your inward eyes may be illumined, so that you may know what is the hope to which he calls you, what the wealth and glory of the share he offers you among his people in their heritage, and how vast the resources of his power open to us who trust in him. They are measured by his strength and the might which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead, when he enthroned him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above government and authority, all power and dominion, and any title of sovereignty.... But God, rich in mercy, for the great love he bore us, brought us to life with Christ even when we were dead in our sins; it is by his grace you are saved. And in union with Christ Jesus he raised us up and enthroned us with him in the heavenly realms, so that he might display in the ages to come how immense are the resources of his grace, and how great his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by his grace you are saved, through trusting him; it is not your own doing. It is God's gift, not a reward for work done. There is nothing for anyone to boast of. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to devote ourselves to the good deeds for which God has designed us. (Eph 1:18-21, 2:4-10 NEV)

Paul continues to emphasize that salvation is assured as long as we keep our lives in harmony with Christ. By baptism we have been buried and raised with Christ: divested of our lower nature and raised with him to the realms above. The law, therefore, has no more claim over us, so live a life rooted with Christ in the heavenly realms. Our new nature conforms us completely to the spiritual image of God:

Therefore, since Jesus was delivered to you as Christ and Lord, live your lives in union with him. Be rooted in him; be built; be consolidated in the faith you were taught; let your hearts overflow with thankfulness. Be on your guard; do not let your minds be captured by hollow and delusive speculations, based on traditions of man-made teaching and centered on the elemental spirits of the universe and not on Christ. For it is in Christ that the complete being of the Godhead dwells embodied, and in him you have been brought to completion. Every power and authority in the universe is subject to him as Head. In him also you were circumcised, not in a physical sense, but by being divested of the lower nature; this is Christ's way of circumcision. For in baptism you were buried with him, in baptism also you were raised to life with him through your faith in the active power of God who raised him from the dead. And although you were dead because of your sins and because you were morally uncircumcised, he has made you alive with Christ. For he has forgiven us all our sins; he has canceled the bond which pledged us to the decrees of the law. It stood against us, but he has set it aside, nailing it to the cross. On the cross he discarded the cosmic powers and authorities like a garment; he made a public spectacle of them and led them as captives in his triumphal procession ... Did you not die with Christ and pass beyond reach of the elemental spirits of the universe? Then why behave as though you were still living the life of the world? Why let people dictate to you: 'Do not handle this, do not taste that, do not touch the other'-all of them things that must perish as soon as they are used? That is to follow merely human injunctions and teaching. True, it has an air of wisdom, with its forced piety, its self-mortification, and its severity to the body; but it is of no use at all in combating sensuality. Were you not raised to life with Christ? Then aspire to the realm above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God, and let your thoughts dwell on that higher realm, not on this earthly life. I

repeat, you died; and now your life lies hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is manifested, then you too will be manifested with him in glory. Then put to death those parts of you which belong to the earth—fornication, indecency, lust, foul cravings, and the ruthless greed which is nothing less than idolatry. Because of these, God’s dreadful judgement is impending; and in the life you once lived these are the ways you yourselves followed. But now you must yourselves lay aside all anger, passion, malice, cursing, filthy talk—have done with them! Stop lying to one another, now that you have discarded the old nature with its deeds and have put on the new nature which is being constantly renewed in the image of its Creator and brought to know God. (Col 2:6-3:11 NEV)

Paul is thus consistent with the teachings of Christ. Grace is offered to all who make the effort to overcome sin, even when they seem to fall short of perfection. They must but extend their faith to God, be received by baptism into the Church, and strive to put off the sins of the flesh. One must also continue to merit that grace by the actions that they take. Nickelsburg and Stone suggest that Paul believes that grace could be lost when one's works are evil:

The theme that one is to be judged according to one's deeds is far more frequent in the New Testament than many Christians recognize. The idea is explicit in the parable of the great judgment in Matthew 25:31-46 ... For the apostle Paul, one is made right with God ("justified") by the grace of God, which is appropriated through faith. Nonetheless, one can annul this relationship by a life of deeds that contradict it.⁷⁵

10. Thesis: Gaining Salvation by Becoming a God

- Dan 12:3 The faithful wise will shine with glory in the heavens, and be like the stars—a recognized title of the gods. (Cf. 1 Enoch 104:2)
- Luke 20:36 Christ teaches that men will become angels or the “sons of God” in the resurrection (NEV)
- Mark 10:37-40 James and John desire to sit on the right and left hand of Christ in heaven. Christ indicates that this is not his right to assign, but that those supreme places of honor will be filled by the Father.
- Rom 8:14-17 We are the children of God, and if children then heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ.
- 1 Cor 3:21-23 All things belong to the faithful. The faithful belong to Christ, who belongs to God.
- 1 Cor 6:2-3 The faithful will judge the world; they will also judge angels.
- Eph 1:20-22 Christ has overcome all things, and has been raised by God to his right hand in the heavenly realms, putting all things in subjection to Christ's feet, and placing Christ as the head of the Church. (See NEV)
- Eph 2:4-7 God has raised us up and enthroned us with Christ in the heavenly realms. (See NEV)
- 1 John 3:1-3 Our bodies will be transformed like unto Christ's who is like the Father.
- Heb 12:23 The spirits of righteous men are to be made perfect—spirit, of course, being a title of a divine being.
- Rev 1:6 The Saint’s lineage is that of God’s royal house. They will serve as God’s priests in his presence in the hereafter.
- Rev 2:26-28 Christ will give authority to the Saints--the same authority he received from the Father—to rule the nations.
- Rev 3:12 Those who are victorious will become a pillars in the heavenly temple. God's name is

⁷⁵ George W. E. Nickelsburg and Michael E. Stone, *Faith and Piety in Early Judaism, Texts and Documents* (Fortress Press, Philadelphia: 1983) 52.

- written on their foreheads.
- Rev 3:21 A significant theosis is seen as Christ invites us to sit in his throne as he has merited the right to sit with the Father in his throne.
- Rev 4:4 24 faithful elders are seated upon thrones directly in front of God in the heavenly temple. As these thrones would normally be occupied by members of the heavenly council, it is seen that John recognizes the divinity of the 24 exalted elders.⁷⁶
- Rev 5:10 We are to become part of the “royal house,” to serve God as priests, and we shall reign on the earth.
- Rev 20:4,6 Other thrones of judgement are given to the Saints, they are priests of God and Christ.
- Rev 21:2-5,24-27; 22:1-5 Men will reign with God and Christ forever, a permanent enthronement of the faithful.

Paul's position on grace must be examined from an understanding of theosis, a belief that one gains salvation by becoming a god. James Tabor explains that “Paul's understanding of salvation involves a particularly Jewish notion of *apotheosis*, (another term for theosis) and would have been understood as such by his converts.”⁷⁷ Morton Smith suggests that Paul's belief is that Christians have already been exalted with Christ while in mortality.⁷⁸ The *War Scroll* also describes a belief in theosis:

[...] the perfect [...et]ernal; a throne of strength in the congregation of the gods <adat 'elim> above which none of the kings of the East shall sit, and their nobles not [...] silence (?) [...] my glory [is incomparable] and besides me no-one is exalted. And he does not come to me, for I reside in [...] in the heavens, and there is no [...] [...] I am counted among the gods and my dwelling is in the holy congregation; [...my de]sire is not according to the flesh [and] and all that is precious to me is in glory [...] holy [pl]ace. Who has been considered despicable on my account? And who is comparable to me in my glory? Who, like the sailors, will come back to tell? [...] Who [...] sorrows like me? And who [...] anguish who resembles me? There is no-one. He has been taught, but there is no comparable teaching. [...] And who will attack me when I open [my mouth]? And who can endure the flow of my lips? And who will confront me and retain comparison with my judgement? [...] For I am counted among the gods, and my glory is with the sons of the king. To me, pure gold, and to me, the gold of Ophir ... the just in the God of [...] in the holy dwelling, sound [...] (4Q491 [4QMa] 11, I, 11-24)

The same fragment is translated by Smith:

[El Elyon <God most high> gave me a seat among] those perfect forever, a mighty throne in the congregation of the gods. None of the kings of the east shall sit in it and their nobles shall not [come near it]. No Edomite shall be like me in glory, and none shall be exalted save me, nor shall come against me. For I have taken my seat in the [congregation] in the heavens And none [find fault with me]. I shall be reckoned with gods <'elim> and established in the holy congregation. I do not desire [gold,] as would a man of flesh; everything precious to me is in the glory of [my

⁷⁶ Cf. *Collins and Cross*, 301.

⁷⁷ *Tabor*, 18.

⁷⁸ (Morton Smith, "Ascent to the Heavens," in Shaye J. D. Cohen, eds., *Studies in the Cult of Yahweh, Volume Two, New Testament, Early Christianity and Magic* (E. J. Brill, New York: 1996) 58). Peter Hayman points out that this is also the case with Luke 20:36, where theosis is seen to be “a goal attainable in this life,” and cites 1QH 3:19-23, 1QSb 4:22-26 (1Q28b), 1QS 11:7-9, and Jub 31:14 as further evidence of this widespread belief (5).

God]. [The status of a holy temple,] not to be violated, has been attributed to me, and who can compare with me in glory? What voyager will return and tell [of my equivalent]. Who [laughs] at griefs as I do? And who is like me [in bearing] evil? Moreover, if I lay down the law in a lecture [my instruction] is beyond comparison [with any mans']. And who will attack me for my utterances? And who will contain the flow of my speech? And who will call me into court and be my equal? In my legal judgment [none will stand against] me. I shall be reckoned with gods. And my glory, with [that of] the king's sons. Neither refined gold, nor gold of Ophir [can match my wisdom].⁷⁹

This Hymn to God from the Dead Sea Scrolls also explicitly shows that the future of the righteous is to become a god in God's presence:

I thank you, Lord,
because you saved my life from the pit,
and from Sheol and abaddon you have lifted me up
to an everlasting height,
so that I can walk on a boundless plain.
And I know that there is hope
for someone you fashioned out of clay
to be an everlasting community.
The corrupt spirit you have purified
from the great sin
so that he can take his place
with the host of the holy ones,⁸⁰
and can enter in communion
with the congregation of the sons of heaven. (1Qh XI 19-22)

These passages from the Dead Sea Scrolls, spoken to the priests/leaders of the Qumran community, also indicate an extreme theosis:

May the Lord bless you from [his] holy [residence]. May he set you as a glorious ornament in the midst of the holy ones. For you may he renew the covenant of [eternal] priesthood. May he grant you a place [in the] holy residence]. May [he judge] all the nobles by your works and by what issues from your lips, all the [princes of] the peoples. As inheritance may he give you the first fruits of [all de]lights. And by your hand may he bless the designs of all flesh. (1Q28 III 25-28)

He will be pleased with the tread of your feet [...] of man and of the holy ones [...] [...] and has been mingled with him [...] ... [...] May everlasting blessing be the crown of your head. [...] [...] to control [...] [...] around him over [...] [...] and has justified your from all [...] he has chosen you

⁷⁹ Smith and Cohen, 58.

⁸⁰ The radically Hellenized Jewish author of the Wisdom of Solomon (c. 100 B.C.) shows a continued belief in theosis despite his absolutistic theology. He writes that:

the just man shall take his stand, full of assurance, to confront those who oppressed him and made light of all his sufferings ... Filled with remorse, groaning and gasping for breath, they will say among themselves: "Was not this the man who was once our butt, a target for our contempt? Fools that we were, we held his way of life to be madness and his end dishonorable. To think that he is now counted one of the sons of God and assigned a place of his own among God's people. (5:1, 3-5, NEV)

[...] [...] to raise above the heads of the holy ones, and with you to [...] by your hand the men of the council of God and not by the hand of the prince of [...] one to his fellow. You shall be like an angel of the face in the holy residence for the glory of the God of the Hosts [...] You shall be around, serving in the temple of the kingdom, sharing the lot with the angels of the face and the Council of the Community [...] for eternal time and for all the perpetual periods. For [all] your judgments [are truth.] They have made you holy among your people, like a luminary [which lights up] the world with knowledge, and shines on the face of the Many [...] consecrated for the holy of holies. Because [you shall be made holy] for him and give glory to his name and his holy things. (1Q28 IV)

The pseudepigraphal passage 2 Esdras (4 Ezra, 1st century A.D.) includes a vision of Christ placing crowns on the heads of the saints:

Be ready for the rewards of the kingdom, because the eternal light will shine upon you forevermore. Flee from the shadow of this age, receive the joy of your glory; I publicly call on my Savior to witness. Receive what the Lord has entrusted to you and be joyful, giving thanks to him who has called you to heavenly kingdoms. Rise and stand, and see at the feast of the Lord the number of those who have been sealed. Those who have departed from the shadow of this age have received glorious garments from the Lord. Take again your full number, O Zion, and conclude the list of your people who are clothed in white, who have fulfilled the law of the Lord. The number of your children whom you desired is full; beseech the Lord's power that your people, who have been called from the beginning, may be made holy." I Ezra, saw on Mount Zion a great multitude, which I could not number, and they all were praising the Lord with songs. In their midst was a young man of great stature, taller than any of the others, and on the head of each of them he placed a crown, but he was more exalted than they. And I was held spellbound. Then I said to the angel, "Who is that young man who places crowns on them and puts palms in their hands?" He answered and said to me, "He is the Son of God, whom they confessed in the world." So I began to praise those who had stood valiantly for the name of the Lord. Then the angel said to me, "Go, tell my people how great and many are the wonders of the Lord God which you have seen." (OTP 1, 2:35-48)

It is the savior himself who places crowns on the heads of those who remained faithful and confessed Christ while in mortality. Even though each faithful saint is crowned with glory, Christ retains his exaltation and is in no way diminished by man's exaltation. 2 Esdras 2:35-48 contains direct parallels to the Book of Revelations, including: promises of crowns and exaltation (2:10, 3:20), showing multitudes of saints surrounding the throne of God (7:9), and the white clothing of the exalted (3:4, 6:11, 7:13). In 2 Esdras 7 the faithful are also promised that they will see the glory of the Lord. Ezra explains the physical changes they will experience:

How their face is to shine like the sun, and how they are to be made like the light of the stars, being incorruptible from then on... they shall rejoice with boldness, and shall be confident without confusion, and shall be glad without fear, for they hasten to behold the face of him whom they served in life and from whom they are to receive their reward when glorified. (OTP 1, 7:97-98)

2 Baruch deals with the transformation the elect will experience at the resurrection:

Also, as for the glory of those who proved to be righteous on account of my law, those who possessed intelligence in their life, and those who planted the root of wisdom in their heart-their splendor will then be glorified by transformations, and the shape of their face will be changed into the light of their beauty so that they may acquire and receive the undying world which is promised to them. Therefore, especially they who will then come will be sad, because they

despised my Law and stopped their ears lest they hear wisdom and receive intelligence. When they, therefore, will see that those over whom they are exalted now will then be more exalted and glorified than they, then both these and those will be changed, these into the splendor of angels and those into startling visions and horrible shapes ... Miracles, however, will appear at their own time to those who are saved because of their works and for whom the Law is now a hope, and intelligence, expectation, and wisdom a trust. For they shall see that world which is now invisible to them, and they will see a time which is now hidden to them. And time will no longer make them older. For they will live in the heights of that world and they will be like the angels and be equal to the stars. (OTP 1, 51:1-10)

2 Enoch actually describes the exaltation of the prophet Enoch. Enoch is lifted up to the highest heaven where he is brought face to face with God. He is glorified and admitted as a member of the council of the gods:

And Michael, the LORD's archistratig,⁸¹ lifted me up and brought me in front of the face of the LORD. And the LORD said to his servants, sounding them out, "Let Enoch join in and stand in front of my face forever!" And the LORDS's glorious ones did obeisance and said, "Let Enoch yield in accordance with your word, O LORD!". And the glorious ones did obeisance and said, "Let him come up!" And the LORD said to Michael, "Go, and extract Enoch from [his] earthly clothing. And anoint him with my delightful oil, and put him into the clothes of my glory." And so Michael did, just as the LORD had said to him. He anointed me and he clothed me. And the appearance of that oil is greater than the greatest light, and its ointment is like sweet dew, and its fragrance myrrh; and it is like the rays of the glittering sun. And I looked at myself, and I had become like one of his glorious ones, and there was no observable difference. (J 22:6-10)

The Ascension of Isaiah records that Isaiah's face experiences an increase of glory as he ascends to the highest heaven. Isaiah is told that he will see God after his transformation is complete and God matches Isaiah's appearance and likeness. The angel escorting him also tells Isaiah he has a throne, robes, and a crown waiting for him in the highest heaven:

"For above all the heavens and their angels is placed your throne, and also your robes and your crown which you are to see."... And I [Isaiah] said to the angel who (was) with me, for the glory of my face was being transformed as I went up from heaven to heaven... And he said unto me... "and (that) you may see the LORD of all these heavens and of these thrones being transformed until he resembles your appearance and your likeness... Hear then this also from your companion... you will receive the robe which you will see, and also other numbered robes placed (there) you will see, and then you will be equal to the angels who (are) in the seventh heaven... He who is to be in the corruptible world [Christ] has not (yet) been revealed, nor the robes, nor the thrones, nor the crowns which are placed (there) for the righteous..." (7:22, 25, 8:7, 10, 14-15, 26)⁸²

Isaiah is then challenged as he enters the highest heaven with his angelic guide. The angel in charge of

⁸¹ "Archistratig" is a military term, analogous to the title of archangel in Jude 1:9; see OTP 1, 138 n. 1.

⁸² For an analysis of the anthropomorphism and theosis of the Early Judaeo/Christian thought see Roger D. Cook, "How Deep the Platonism, A Review of Owen's and Mosser's Appendix: Hellenism, Greek Philosophy, and the Creedal "Straightjacket" of Christian Orthodoxy," 287-298, in *FARMS Review of Books*, vol. 11, no 2 (1999).

the sixth heaven asks “How far is he who dwells among aliens to go up?” (9:1). Christ himself declares, “The holy Isaiah is permitted to come up here, for his robe is here” (9:2, 5). Isaiah then describes the faithful who have been accepted into the highest heaven:

And he took me up into the seventh heaven, and there I saw a wonderful light, and also angels without number. And there I saw all the righteous from the time of Adam onwards. And there I saw the holy Abel and all the righteous. And there I saw Enoch all who (were) with him, stripped of (their) robes of the flesh; and I saw them in their robes of above, and they were like the angels who stand there in great glory. (9:6-10)

In the Testament of Adam (2nd to 5th century), Adam is told his destiny is to be a god:

“He spoke to me about this in Paradise after I picked some of the fruit in which death was hiding: ‘Adam, Adam do not fear. You wanted to be a god; I will make you a god, not right now, but after a space of many years. I am consigning you to death, and the maggot and the worm will eat your body.’ And I answered and said to him, ‘Why, my Lord?’ “And he said to me, ‘Because you listened to the words of the serpent, you and your posterity will be food for the serpent. But after a short time there will be mercy on you because you were created in my image, and I will not leave you to waste away in Sheol... ““And after three days, while I am in the tomb, I will raise up the body I received from you. And I will set you at the right hand of my divinity, and I will make you a god just like you wanted. And I will receive favor from God, and I will restore to you and to your posterity that which is the justice of heaven.’ (OTP 1, 3:2-4)

Stephen E. Robinson (BYU professor) comments on the Testament of Adam, stating emphatically that:

One striking feature of the Testament of Adam is that Adam is intended from the beginning to become a god; his deification is promised in no uncertain terms (3:2,4). The fall of man is seen as an unfortunate misstep, but the outcome is sure: Adam will become a god... The explicit promise of deification to Adam is unexpected but not without precedent. Cf. Jn 10:33-36. (OTP 1, 991, 994)

In the Testament of Isaac (2nd century A.D.) the face of an angel, which resembles Abraham’s, is compared to the face of God.; Note the superior position of Abraham to the angel, and the fact that Isaac’s throne awaits him in the hereafter:

Then the angel said to him, “ O my beloved Isaac, I have been sent to you from the presence of the living God to take you up to heaven to be with your father Abraham and all the saints. For your father Abraham is awaiting you; he himself is about to come for you, but now he is resting. There has been prepared for you the throne beside your father Abraham; likewise for your beloved son Jacob. And all of you shall be above every one else in the kingdom of heaven in the glory of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. You shall be entrusted with this name for all future generations: The Patriarchs. Thus you shall be fathers to all the world, O faithful elder, our father Isaac.” Isaac answered, saying to the angel, “I am truly amazed concerning you. Are you not my father Abraham?” The said the angel to him, “I am not your Father Abraham, but I am the one who ministers to your father Abraham...” (OTP 1, 2:6-11)

Compare the thesis of the early Judaeo/Christian tradition with that of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints:

And ye shall never endure the pains of death; but when I shall come in my glory ye shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye from mortality to immortality; and then shall ye be blessed in

the kingdom of my Father. And again, ye shall not have pain while ye shall dwell in the flesh, neither sorrow save it be for the sins of the world; and all this will I do because of the thing which ye have desired of me, for ye have desired that ye might bring the souls of men unto me, while the world shall stand. And for this cause ye shall have fulness of joy; and ye shall sit down in the kingdom of my Father; yea, your joy shall be full, even as the Father hath given me fulness of joy; and ye shall be even as I am, and I am even as the Father; and the Father and I are one. (3 Nephi 28:8-10)⁸³

And again, verily, verily, I say unto you, and it hath gone forth in a firm decree, by the will of the Father, that mine apostles, the Twelve which were with me in my ministry at Jerusalem, shall stand at my right hand at the day of my coming in a pillar of fire, being clothed with robes of righteousness, with crowns upon their heads, in glory even as I am, to judge the whole house of Israel, even as many as have loved me and kept my commandments, and none else. (D&C 29:12)

And again we bear record--for we saw and heard, and this is the testimony of the gospel of Christ concerning them who shall come forth in the resurrection of the just-- They are they who received the testimony of Jesus, and believed on his name and were baptized after the manner of his burial, being buried in the water in his name, and this according to the commandment which he has given-- That by keeping the commandments they might be washed and cleansed from all their sins, and receive the Holy Spirit by the laying on of the hands of him who is ordained and sealed unto this power; And who overcome by faith, and are sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, which the Father sheds forth upon all those who are just and true. They are they who are the church of the Firstborn. They are they into whose hands the Father has given all things-- They are they who are priests and kings, who have received of his fulness, and of his glory; And are priests of the Most High, after the order of Melchizedek, which was after the order of Enoch, which was after the order of the Only Begotten Son. Wherefore, as it is written, they are gods, even the sons of God-- Wherefore, all things are theirs, whether life or death, or things present, or things to come, all are theirs and they are Christ's, and Christ is God's. And they shall overcome all things. (D&C 76: 50-60)

God shall give unto you knowledge by his Holy Spirit, yea, by the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost, that has not been revealed since the world was until now; Which our forefathers have awaited with anxious expectation to be revealed in the last times, which their minds were pointed to by the angels, as held in reserve for the fulness of their glory; A time to come in the which nothing shall be withheld, whether there be one God or many gods, they shall be manifest. All thrones and dominions, principalities and powers, shall be revealed and set forth upon all who have endured valiantly for the gospel of Jesus Christ... According to that which was ordained in the midst of the Council of the Eternal God of all other gods before this world was, that should be reserved unto the finishing and the end thereof, when every man shall enter into his eternal presence and into his immortal rest. (D&C 121:27-29, 32)

And again, verily I say unto you, if a man marry a wife by my word, which is my law, and by the new and everlasting covenant, and it is sealed unto them by the Holy Spirit of promise, by him who is anointed, unto whom I have appointed this power and the keys of this priesthood; and it shall be said unto them--Ye shall come forth in the first resurrection; and if it be after the first resurrection, in the next resurrection; and shall inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, all heights and depths--then shall it be written in the Lamb's Book of Life,

⁸³ *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ* (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake: 1989)

that he shall commit no murder whereby to shed innocent blood, and if ye abide in my covenant, and commit no murder whereby to shed innocent blood, it shall be done unto them in all things whatsoever my servant hath put upon them, in time, and through all eternity; and shall be of full force when they are out of the world; and they shall pass by the angels, and the gods, which are set there, to their exaltation and glory in all things, as hath been sealed upon their heads, which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever. Then shall they be gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting, because they continue; then shall they be above all, because all things are subject unto them. Then shall they be gods, because they have all power, and the angels are subject unto them. (D&C 132:19-20)

The thesis of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is virtually identical to that of Early Christian thought. Its belief that men may become as God, however, never means that God is supplanted.

11. The Anthropomorphic and Corporeal Nature of God

Hebrew, Jewish, and early Christian thought unequivocally understood God to be the celestial archetypal man. He is a physically embodied being of glory, honor, and power; the heavenly man after which all other men are patterned. Throughout the Bible, apocrypha, and pseudepigrapha, God is seen as a being who has physical location, duration in time, and human attributes such as rational discursive thought and emotion. His celestial form, however, is not subject to the same limitations mortal men experience. Whereas man is sinful and can fall to an earthly nature, God is sinless, holy, and morally perfect; man is limited in thought and action, but God's omniscience is such that he even knows when a sparrow has fallen to the ground (Mat 10:20); man is mortal and will die, but God is immortal; man can barely effect his environment, while God's magnificent power is such that he can shake the world.

Gen 3:8 “The man and his wife heard the “sound” [*qol*] of The LORD God walking in the garden...” (NEV).

2 Enoch (1st century A.D.) continues the tradition of God walking in the Garden of Eden. The text relocates Eden to the third heaven:

And the men took me from there. They brought me up to the third heaven. And they placed me in the midst of Paradise. Every tree was in flower... And the four rivers were flowing past with gentle movement ... And the tree of life is in that place, under which the LORD takes a rest when the LORD takes a walk in Paradise. (OTP 1, 8:1-3, recension A)

Ex 25:22 God occupies a specific physical location. God tells Moses he will commune with him from above the mercy seat and between the two cherubim upon the ark of the testimony (covenant).

Mat 18:10 Christ tells the disciples that angels behold the face of the Father continually, meaning that they gaze upon his visage as they abide in his physical presence in the heavenly temple.

Phil 3:21 Our vile bodies will be fashioned like unto Christ's incorruptible one.

1 John 3:2-3 We are the sons of God. When we see Christ we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. (Cf. Origen, *Against Celsus*, 4, 29 below.)

Rev 21:2,10,22-23

The New Jerusalem descends from heaven. God and Christ will personally dwell there.

Rev 21:3-4 God's anthropomorphic action of wiping away tears from the Saints in the New Jerusalem is portrayed.

Rev 22:1 The throne of God will be relocated to the New Jerusalem.

In the Testament of Abraham (1st to 2nd century A.D.): Adam's appearance is like the "Master's." The title of "Master Lord" is given to God in 4:6, making it clear that the reference is to God. Note, then, that a man, specifically Adam, looks exactly like God:

Michael turned the chariot and brought Abraham toward the east, to the first gate of heaven. And Abraham saw two ways. The first way was strait and narrow and the other broad and spacious. [And he saw there two gates. One gate was broad], corresponding to the broad way, and one gate was strait, corresponding to the strait way. And outside the two gates of that place, they saw a man seated on a golden throne. And the appearance of that man was terrifying, like the Master's... And when the wondrous one who was seated on the throne of gold saw few entering through the strait gate, but many entering through the broad gate, immediately that wondrous man tore the hair of his head and the beard of his cheeks, and he threw himself on the ground from his throne crying and wailing. And when he saw many souls entering through the strait gate, then he arose from the earth and sat on his throne, very cheerfully rejoicing and exulting. Then Abraham asked the Commander-in-Chief, "My lord Commander-in-chief, who is this most wondrous man, who is adorned in such glory, and sometimes he cries and wails while other times he rejoices and exults?" The incorporeal one said, "This is the first formed Adam who is in such glory, and he looks at the world, since everyone has come from him. (OTP 1, A, 11:1-4, 6-9)

1 Enoch (ca. 200 B.C.) fully reflects the Jewish understanding of an anthropomorphic Deity:

And I observed and saw inside it a lofty throne-its appearance was like crystal... It was difficult to look at it. And the Great Glory was sitting upon it-as for his gown, which was shining more brightly than the sun, it was whiter than any snow. None of the angels were able to come in and see the face of the Excellent and the Glorious One; and no one of the flesh can see him-the flaming fire was round about him, and a great fire stood before him. And the Lord called me with his own mouth and said to me, "come near to me, Enoch, and to my holy Word." And he lifted me up and brought me near to the gate, but I (continued) to look down with my face. But he raised me up and said to me with his voice ... (OTP 1, 1 Enoch 14:18-22, 24-25, 15:1)⁸⁴

Note that it is not impossible to see the face of God. Enoch sees the brilliant light streaming from God's face, and struggles to describe it. Charlesworth notes the difficulties experienced by scribes as they transcribed texts describing God's physical body:

The state of the [manuscripts] betray the embarrassment of scribes over this attempt to describe the appearance of the Lord. Two tendencies may be observed. One tries to expurgate the physical imagery, especially the comparison with scintillating iron. This has been heavily

⁸⁴ It should be noted that at some strains of Judaism at the time of Christ attempt to make God and the gods more transcendent. 1 Enoch, for example, emphasizes the effulgent glory of the angels to the extent that they are "like the flaming fire" and "when they (so) desire they appear like men" (OTP vol 1, 17:1). In like manner 2 Baruch claims that "holy beings" are "flame and fire" (OTP vol 1, 21:4, 6). 1 Enoch is closely associated with the Essene movement found at Qumran, and so it is no surprise that this emphasis that the gods can be flaming fire is also emphasized in the Dead Sea Scrolls (4Q403 II 2-10, 4Q405 20-22). 3 Enoch (4th-5th centuries) shows how this extreme transcendence continued on in Rabbinic Judaism, as the exalted Enoch is seen to have been given a huge body, with 72 wings and 365,000 eyes, and is transformed into fire (OTP vol 1, 9:1-5; 15:1-2); it would be expected that God in 3 Enoch, although consistently described as anthropomorphic, would be of a like nature. This extreme emphasis on the transcendence of divine beings, however, does not seem to have been demanded by early Christians. 1 John 3:2-3, for example, refuses to speculate about the bodily nature of Christ or the righteous in the resurrection: "what we shall be has not yet been disclosed, but we know that when it is disclosed we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is" (NEV).

censored in short [manuscripts], but V [and] N [manuscripts] have omitted [verses] 1-3 altogether.⁸⁵

Himmelfarb notes that the description of God's white robe in 1 Enoch 14:20 is to be taken literally, and that this anthropomorphism should not be characterized as extreme. She points out that the Jewish rabbis, "do not hesitate to describe God's prayer shawl and phylacteries." She also elaborates on the physical description of God by comparing Ezekiel 1:26-28, particularly the brilliant rainbow surrounding him.⁸⁶ In like manner the apocryphal text 2 Enoch also describes the face of God:

I saw the view of the face of the LORD, like iron made burning hot in a fire [and] brought out, and it emits sparks and is incandescent. But the face of the LORD is not to be talked about, it is so very marvelous and supremely awesome and supremely frightening. [And] who am I to give an account of the incomprehensible being of the LORD, and of his face, so extremely strange and indescribable? ... Who can give an account of his beautiful appearance, never changing and indescribable, and his great glory? (2 Enoch J 22:1-3)

In the Testament of Isaac (2nd century A.D.) the face of an angel, which resembles Abraham's, is compared to the face of God:

It came to pass, when the time drew near for our father Isaac, the father of fathers, to depart from this world and to go out from his body, that the Compassionate, the Merciful One sent to him the chief of the angels, Michael, the one whom he had sent to his father Abraham, on the morning of the twenty-eighth day of the month Misri. The angel said to him, "Peace be upon you, O chosen son, our father Isaac!" Now it was customary every day for the holy angels to speak to him. So he prostrated himself and saw that the angel resembled his father Abraham. Then he opened his mouth, cried with a loud voice, and said with joy and exultation, "Behold, I have seen your face as if I had seen the face of the merciful Creator." (OTP 1, 2:1-5)

The Ascension of Isaiah describes each of the members of the Godhead. Isaiah describes Christ, God, and the Holy Spirit as anthropomorphic beings of great glory. Note the approachableness of God as the faithful surround him in worship:

And I saw one [Christ] standing (there) whose glory surpassed that of all, and his glory was great and wonderful. And when they saw him, all the righteous whom I had seen and the angels came to him... and worshiped him. And then the angel who led me said to me, "Worship this one... This is the LORD of all the praise which you have seen." And... I saw another glorious (person) [Father] who was like him, and the righteous approached him... And then the angels approached and worshiped him. And I saw the LORD and the second angel [Holy Spirit], and they were standing, and the second one whom I saw (was) on the left of my LORD. And I asked the angel who led me and I said to him, "Who is this one?" And he said to me, "Worship him, for this is the angel of the Holy Spirit who has spoken in you and also in the other righteous." (9:27-29, 30-36)

The spiritual embodiment of the Holy Spirit is emphasized by the author as he and the archangel Michael are seen to carry the resurrected Christ triumphantly from the tomb on their shoulders; "the angel of the Holy Spirit and Michael, the chief of the holy angels, will open his grave on the third day, and that

⁸⁵ OTP 1, 136-37 n. c.

⁸⁶ *Himmelfarb*, 18.

Beloved, sitting on their shoulders, will come forth” (3:16-17). The separate nature of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit are distinctly emphasized. Note also the fact that Christ who is anthropomorphic and spiritually embodied throughout the Ascension of Isaiah, is said to have changed his form to be like that of man. This is a significant transformation for the author, but it is essentially a lessening of the glory held by Christ as he becomes mortal. The anthropomorphic attributes held by Christ before and after his mortal experience do not change on a fundamental level. The conclusion: God, Christ, and man are much more alike than they are different:

For Beliar [Satan] was very angry with Isaiah because of the vision, and because of the exposure with which he had exposed Sammael [a fallen angel], and that through him there had been revealed the coming of the Beloved from the seventh heaven, and his transformation, and his descent, and the form into which he must be transformed, (namely) the form of a man ... and that the angel of the Holy Spirit and Michael, the chief of the holy angels, will open his grave on the third day, and that Beloved, sitting on their shoulders, will come forth and send out his twelve disciples, and they will teach all nations and every tongue the resurrection of the Beloved ..., and in his ascension to the seventh heaven from where he came (OTP 2, 3:13, 15-18)

12. The Glory of God

One of the attributes of the anthropomorphic God of the Judaeo/Christian tradition is the *kabod* or “glory” which surrounds his physical form. The belief is that when God does not desire to be seen he surrounds himself with a light so blindingly brilliant that one cannot see him. This light is sometimes further surrounded by a cloud or smoke, and this light or a combination of light and smoke constitute the glory of God.⁸⁷

- Ex 14:24 God, who is personally present in the pillars of fire and cloud which went before Israel during the exodus, looks out from the fiery pillar upon the armies of Pharaoh. A specific physical location for God is indicated, as well as the anthropomorphic action of seeing. The pillars of fire and cloud are evidence of God’s glory, or *kabod*, that masks his body.
- Ex 16:10 Moses and the elders of Israel see the *kabod* of God. This glory is a brilliant light and/or cloud that surrounds the immediate person of God. A prophet who claims to have seen the glory of God has seen the celestial light that surrounds and conceals his physical body. It may also be the case that he has actually seen God’s body surrounded by glory.
- Ex 33:9-11 A pillar of cloud which contains and conceals God descends from heaven after Moses goes into the tabernacle. Moses, then, speaks to God face to face; i.e., each facing the other in the tabernacle.
- Num 12:5-8 The pillar of cloud again descends to the Tabernacle and Miriam, Aaron, and Moses see God. He declares that Moses is his prophet, and that a true prophet will behold his “similitude,” meaning the prophet will be allowed to see his glorious body.
- Num 14:14 “And they will tell [it] to the inhabitants of this land: [for] they have heard that thou LORD [art] among this people, that thou LORD art seen face to face, and [that] thy cloud standeth over them, and [that] thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night” (KJV; Cf. Num 31:15; Neh 9:12; Ps 99:7; 1Ne 1:6; Hel 5:24, 43; D&C 29:12).
- 1 Kn 8:10-11 A cloud fills the temple at its dedication. It masks God from human eyes as he enters the sacred inner rooms. The cloud indicates that God is now physically present in the

⁸⁷ R. Laird Harris, Gleason J. Archer, Jr., Bruce K Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols (Moody Press, Chicago: 1980) vol. 1, 427); Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids: 1985) 178-181.

- temple.
- Ps 18:6-19 God masks himself by cloud and travels from his heavenly temple to rescue David. His downward motion “bows” or sweeps aside the skies. His movement forces the earth and water aside as he travels forward. He reveals the "foundations of the world" in his rush to reach David's location. Dahood calls Psalms 18:1-20 “God's intervention in the form of a theophany.”⁸⁸
- Ezek 1:26-28 God is seen sitting on his throne, with his brilliantly glowing *kabod* partially obscuring him.
- Mat 17:1-8 At the Mount of Transfiguration a cloud containing the Father moves toward the mountain where Christ and the disciples see the exalted Moses and Elijah. Christ begins to shine with his own brilliant light, indicative of his own divine nature that has been hidden in mortality, as the Father's physical presence hovers over them in the bright cloud. The Father's voice is also heard by those assembled.
- John 1:1-4,14 The Word, Christ, became flesh. He had achieved the status of God before the world began. Christ displays the same glory/light that accompanies God the Father (cf 17:5; Luke 9:32; Titus 2:13).
- Acts 7:55-56 Stephen sees the glory of God with Christ at his right hand, the premier place of authority in heaven.
- 1 Tim 6:16 God dwells in an unapproachable light, no man has seen nor can ever see God; a reference to the *kabod* and the fact that only those authorized and righteous are invited into the presence of God to see his glorious person.
- Rev 15:8 The heavenly temple fills with smoke and the glory of God, no one can enter until it clears.
- Rev 21:22-23 No light is needed in the New Jerusalem, for the light from Christ and God's physical presence lights the city.

The significant pseudepigraphal text Pseudo-Philo (first century A.D.) shows an author arguing that Moses did see God and speak to him. The children of Israel stand before the mountain, apparently skeptical that man can see and speak with God and live, but become completely convinced as the theophany continues. It is accepted that a man may hear God and live, so the understanding that Moses saw God is required by the text. The text also implies that Moses spends some time in the highest heaven, and he later returns to the level of the moon and sun. Note the later theophany as the cloud of God's glory descends and covers all of the nation of Israel:

And he said to Moses, “Behold I will call you tomorrow; be prepared and tell my people, ‘For three days let no man approach his wife,’ and on the third day I will speak to you and to them. And afterward you will come up to me, and I will put my words in your mouth, and you will enlighten my people . . . And on the third day there were claps of thunder and the brightness of lightning, and the sound of trumpets sounded aloud. Terror came upon all the people who were in the camp. And Moses brought the people out before God. And when the LORD ceased speaking, the people were very much afraid, because they saw the mountain burning with torches of fire. And they said to Moses, “You speak to us, but do not let God speak to us lest perhaps we die. For behold today we know that God speaks to a man face to face and that man may live. . .” And all the people stood far off, but Moses drew near the cloud, knowing that God was there. . . And Moses came down. And when he had been bathed with invisible light, he went down to the place where the light of the sun and the moon are; and the light of his face surpassed the splendor of the sun and the moon; and the light of his face surpassed the splendor of the sun and the moon, and he did not even know this. And when he came down to the sons of Israel, they saw him but

⁸⁸ Dahood, 104.

did not recognize him. But when he spoke, then they recognized him. . . . And afterward, when Moses realized that his face had become glorious, he made a veil for himself with which to cover his face. . . . And Moses hastened and did everything that God commanded him. . . . And when all this was done, the cloud covered them all. Then Moses called to the LORD, and God spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying, “This is the law of the altar . . .” (OTP 2, 11:2, 4, 14-15; 12:1; 13:1-2—italics in original. Cf 14:5)

In the Book of Mormon, the brother of Jared and his extended family have experiences similar to Israel as they travel through the Arabian wilderness. The Lord went “before them,” giving them directions “whither they should travel” as he “stood in a cloud” (Eth 2:5-6). The brother of Jared also sees the Lord on a the top of a mountain (3:1) as he petitions the Lord to touch the stones “molten out of a rock” (3:1-5); compare the account in Exodus where God appears to Moses on Mt. Sinai (19:19-22). From this account it is clear that Christ leads the Jaredites through the wilderness. Note that while Christ is a spiritual being, he is still understood to be embodied in a spiritual body (compare the Ascension of Isaiah 3:16-17; 9:39-42 above):

And it came to pass that when they had come down into the valley of Nimrod the Lord came down and talked with the brother of Jared; and he was in a cloud, and the brother of Jared saw him not... And it came to pass that the Lord commanded them that they should go forth into the wilderness ... And it came to pass that the Lord did go before them, and did talk with them as he stood in a cloud, and gave directions whither they should travel... And it came to pass at the end of four years that the Lord came again unto the brother of Jared, and stood in a cloud and talked with him... And it came to pass that when the brother of Jared had said these words, behold, the Lord stretched forth his hand and touched the stones one by one with his finger. And the veil was taken from off the eyes of the brother of Jared, and he saw the finger of the Lord; and it was as the finger of a man, like unto flesh and blood;... And when he had said these words, behold, the Lord showed himself unto him, and said: Because thou knowest these things ye are redeemed from the fall; therefore ye are brought back into my presence; therefore I show myself unto you... And never have I showed myself unto man whom I have created, for never has man believed in me as thou hast. Seest thou that ye are created after mine own image? Yea, even all men were created in the beginning after mine own image. Behold, this body, which ye now behold, is the body of my spirit; and man have I created after the body of my spirit; and even as I appear unto thee to be in the spirit will I appear unto my people in the flesh. (Eth 2:4-5,14; 3:6, 13, 15-16)

The greatest recorded theophany in Christian history occurs when the corporeal Father and his resurrected Son appear to Joseph in the Sacred Grove. Note the anthropomorphisms and the *kabod* of God—pillar of light—in the account. Note also that the Father and Son are not visible until Joseph was enveloped within the fiery pillar:

But, exerting all my powers to call upon God to deliver me out of the power of this enemy which had seized upon me, and at the very moment when I was ready to sink into despair and abandon myself to destruction--not to an imaginary ruin, but to the power of some actual being from the unseen world, who had such marvelous power as I had never before felt in any being--just at this moment of great alarm, I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me. (JS Hist 16)⁸⁹

⁸⁹ For a list of representative Old Testament scholars who recognize the Hebrew and Jewish belief in an anthropomorphic and corporeal God, see “Cook, How Deep the Platonism,” 294 n. 64, in *FARMS Review of Books* vol. 11, no 2 (1999). .

13. Multiple Heavens

One consistent theme in early Judaeo/Christian thought is that God dwells in the highest or third heaven. In the highest heaven is found his heavenly temple, including a holy place and a holy of holies where he sits enthroned in majestic might.

2 Cor 12:3-4 Paul is caught up to the third heaven, paradise, where God dwells. The belief in multiple heavens is understood.

Eph 4:10 Christ is said to have "ascended up far above all heavens (KJV);" i.e., to the third heaven.

Heb 4:14, 7:26, 9:26

Christ was made "higher than the heavens" (KJV); i.e., he dwells in the presence of God in the third heaven.

The Testament of Levi talks of Levi journeying through three heavens and his seeing God sitting on his throne. Levi falls asleep and with an angelic guide enters the first heaven. He sees the relative darkness of the first heaven (3:2) and compares it to the much brighter second heaven (2:8). The second heaven is described as having, "a measureless height in it" (2:8). Levi is also promised that he will "stand near the Lord" (2:20). The angel finally opens the gates of the third heaven, and takes Levi to a vantage point from which he sees God seated on his throne in the heavenly temple (5:1):

And behold, the heavens were opened ... And I entered the first heaven, and saw much water there suspended. And again I saw a second heaven much brighter and more lustrous, for there was a measureless height in it. And I said to the angel, `Why are these things thus?' And the angel said to me, `do not be amazed concerning this, for you shall see another heaven more lustrous and beyond compare. And when you have mounted there, you shall stand near the Lord'... `Listen, therefore, concerning the heavens which have been shown to you. The lowest is dark for this reason: it sees all the injustice of humankind and contains fire, snow, and ice, ready for the day determined by God's righteous judgment. In it are all the spirits of those dispatched to achieve the punishment of mankind. In the second are the armies arrayed for the day of judgment to work vengeance on the spirits of error and of Beliar [Satan]. Above them are the Holy Ones. In the uppermost heaven of all dwells the Great Glory in the Holy of Holies superior to all holiness. There with him are the archangels, who serve and offer propitiatory sacrifices to the Lord in behalf of all the sins of ignorance of the righteous one... In the heaven below them are thrones and authorities: there praises to God are offered eternally ... and I saw the Holy Most High sitting on the throne. (OTP 1, 2:6,8-10; 3:1-6,8-9; 5:1-2)

Thus it is clear that the Judaism at the time of Christ believed in three heaven, with God living in the highest or third heaven. Sometime in the late 1st or early 2nd centuries A.D.—after the New Testament canon was closed—many Jews and Christians expand the number of heavens from three to seven. This probably reflects the fact that the number seven is holy, and God who is the holiest being must reside in the newly created seventh heaven. H. C. Kee points out that later editors changed the reference in the Testament of Levi from three heavens to seven.⁹⁰ M. D. Johnson's comment is also significant.

In the Vita and ApMos there are both an earthly Paradise, Eden, and a heavenly, which is located in the third heaven. The latter is referred to here and in Vita 29:1 . . . In some popular Jewish and Christian writings there are said to be seven heavens, as in ApMos 35:2 and 2 En 1-20 . . . ; an older view, perhaps, is that there were three heavens, as is implied in 2Cor 12:2-3 (the third

⁹⁰ OTP 1, 789 n 3a; cf. *Himmelfarb*, 31.

heaven is designated “Paradise”) and TLevi 3 . . .⁹¹

Otzen writes about the journey one must take to reach the highest heaven where God dwells. He describes the earthly temple as copy of the heavenly temple, a microcosm of the heavens:

In the temple area one proceeds through sections of increasing holiness until one arrives at the Holy of Holies. And similarly, from the lower heavens one ascends through spheres of increasing holiness until one achieves the highest of heavens, before the throne of God. The temple is microcosm, while heaven is macrosom.⁹²

The Hellenized Church Father Tertullian (ca. 140-202) comments on Paul and indicates his belief in multiple heavens:

But since he (Paul) has described that assumption of himself up to the third heaven as something great and pre-eminent, it cannot be that these men ascend above the seventh heaven, for they are certainly not superior to the apostle. If they do maintain that they are more excellent than he, let them prove themselves so by their works, for they have never pretended to anything like [what he describes as occurring to himself]. (ANF vol 1, “Against Heresies” 2, 30)

The Hellenized Church Father Origen (185-ca. 254) shows that a belief in multiple heavens continues in later Classical Christian thought. He comments on Paul’s ascension to the third heaven:

Ye shall see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." And so Paul was carried away into the third heaven, having previously seen it opened, since he was a disciple of Jesus. It does not, however, belong to our present object to explain why Paul says, "Whether in the body, I know not; or whether out of the body, I know not: God knoweth." (Against Celsus, 1, 48)

But, Origen also seems to indicate that some debate remained on how many heavens existed. He seems to discount the tradition that had developed of seven heavens, and claim that this tradition was “borrowed”:

The Scriptures which are current in the Churches of God do not speak of "seven" heavens, or of any definite number at all, but they do appear to teach the existence of "heavens"... Moses, our most ancient prophet, says that a divine vision was presented to the view of our prophet Jacob, — a ladder stretching to heaven, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon it, and the Lord supported upon its top... Let Celsus know, moreover, as well as those who read his book, that in no part of the genuine and divinely accredited Scriptures are "seven" heavens mentioned; neither do our prophets, nor the apostles of Jesus, nor the Son of God Himself, repeat anything which they borrowed from the Persians or the Cabiri. (Ibid, 6, 22-23)

Cyprian (ca. 200-258 A.D.) also comments on Paul, and explains that entering the highest heaven is also exaltation with Christ:

The blessed Apostle Paul proves; who by the divine condescension, being caught up into the third heaven and into paradise, testifies that he heard unspeakable words, who boasts that he saw Jesus Christ by the faith of sight, who professes that which he both learnt and saw with the greater truth

⁹¹ OTP 2, 267-268 n. 25a

⁹² Otzen, *In the Shelter of Elyon* () 208.

of consciousness, and says: "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the coming glory which shall be revealed in us." Who, then, does not with all his powers labor to attain to such a glory that he may become the friend of God, that he may at once rejoice with Christ, that after earthly tortures and punishments he may receive divine rewards?... how much more excellent and greater is the glory... to accompany Him when He shall come to receive vengeance from His enemies, to stand at His side when He shall sit to judge, to become co-heir of Christ, to be made equal to the angels; with the patriarchs, with the apostles. with the prophets, to rejoice in the possession of the heavenly kingdom! (Treatises of Cyprian 11, "On the Exhortation to Martyrdom")

A portion of the work known as the *Vision of Paul* (ca. 300) further addresses Paul's ascent to the third heaven:

And I followed the angel, and he raised me to the third heaven, and placed me at the entry of the door... the angel turned again to me and said: Blessed art thou, if thou hadst entered into these doors, for it is not allowed to any to enter except only to those who have goodness and innocence of body in all things... And when I had entered the interior of the gate of Paradise, there came out to meet me an old man whose countenance shone as the sun; and when he had embraced me he said: Hail, Paul, beloved of God. And he kissed me with a cheerful countenance... And the angel answered and said to me, Whatever I now show thee here, and whatever thou shalt hear, tell it not to any one in the earth. And he led me and shewed me: and there I heard words which it is not lawful for a man to speak. And again he said, For now follow me, and I will shew thee what thou oughtest to narrate in public and relate. And he took me down from the third heaven, and led me into the second heaven, and again he led me on to the firmament and from the firmament he led me over the doors of heaven... (ANF, vol 10, *Vision of Paul*, 19-21)

The Ascension of Isaiah (200 B.C.-400 A.D.) indicates that one increases in holiness as they approach God's presence. Isaiah is conducted by an angel through the heavens to the highest heaven. Isaiah notes that each heaven and the angels who dwell therein are more glorious than those previous as he ascends. The beings on the right hand are more glorious than the beings on the left, and the angels on the right lead the ones on the left in praise of God who dwells in the highest heaven:

And after this he took me up above the firmament; this is the (first) heaven. There I saw a throne in the middle, and on the right and on the left of it there were angels. And (the angels on the left) were not like the angels who stood on the right, but those who stood on the right had more glory, and they all sang praises with one voice. And the throne was in the middle, and it they praised, and those on the left after them; but their voice was not like the voice of those on the right, nor their praise like the praise of those (on the right). And I asked the angel who led me and said to him, "To whom is this praise directed?" And he said to me, "To the praise of (the One who sits in) the seventh heaven, the One who rests in the holy world, and to his Beloved, from where I was sent to you. To there it is directed. (OTP 2, 7:13-17)

Isaiah witnesses the same pattern in the succeeding heavens as he ascends; in heavens 1 through 5 a throne with an angelic being is placed in the center of the heaven, angels are seen to the right and the left of the throne, those of the right have more glory than those on the left, those on the right lead those on the left in praise of God in the highest heaven, and each heaven is more glorious than that preceding it. No such chorus of angels is seen in the 6th heaven, for praise is given directly to God as he is immediately accessible in the heaven above (7:18-20; 24, 28-31, 32-36, 8:6-7). After Isaiah enters the highest heaven he witnesses Christ's future descent to the earth. Isaiah notes that Christ's glory lessens as he descends to each level and he gets farther and farther from the presence of God. However, when Christ returns to the highest heaven he will ascend in triumph and full glory to the Father:

And I heard the voice of the Most High... as he said to my LORD Christ... “Go out and descend through all the heavens... And you shall make your likeness like that of all who (are) in the five heavens... And none of the angels of that world shall know that you (are) LORD with me of the seven heavens and of their angels... And afterwards you shall ascend from the gods of death to your place, and you shall not be transformed in each of the heavens, but in glory you shall ascend and sit at my right hand...” And thus I saw when my LORD went out from the seventh heaven into the sixth heaven. And the angel said to me, “Understand, Isaiah, and look, that you may see the transformation and descent of the LORD.”... And I saw when he descended into the fifth heaven, that... he made his form like that of the angels there, and they did not praise him, for his form was like theirs... And then he descended into the fourth heaven and made his form like that of the angels there; and when they saw him, they did not praise him or glorify him, for his form (was) like their form. And again I saw when he descended into the third heaven, that he made his form like that of the angels who (were) in the third heaven. And those who kept the gate of the (third) heaven demanded the password, and the LORD gave (it) to them in order that he should not be recognized... And again I saw when he descended into the second heaven, that there again he gave the password, for those who kept the gates demanded (it), and the LORD gave (it)... And again I saw when he descended into the first heaven, that there he gave the password to those who kept the gates. And he made his form like that of the angels who (were) on the left of that throne... And as for me, no one questioned me because of the angel who led me... And I saw when he descended and made himself like the angels of the air, that he was like one of them. (OTP 2, 10:7-9, 11, 14-15, 17-18, 20-25, 27-28, 30)

M.A. Knibb points out that the word “throne” as found in 7:14, and 7:21 “is used absolutely as the name of a class of angels” (see texts related to Colossians 1:16 above).⁹³ Note that Isaiah was never challenged about his presence in the heavens until he reached the 7th heaven, as he was with an exalted angelic being from the highest heaven (see 10:28 above). The angel in charge of the 6th heaven, however, was an equal or near equal of Isaiah’s escort, and had the right and responsibility to make sure that Isaiah was invited to enter the seventh heaven before he allowed Isaiah to proceed. Christ, on the other hand, diminished his glory as he descended, making his appearance equal to the angels of each heaven, and so was rightly challenged at each level as he descended. Parallels showing the importance of the right and left hand are also found in Christ’s parable of the sheep and the goats—where sheep are placed on the right hand of Christ and are exalted, and the goats who are on the left are cast out (Mat 25:31-46). The importance of residing to the immediate right and left of Christ and God is understood in the New Testament story of the mother of James and John, as she requests that her sons be allowed to sit on the right and left hands of Christ—obviously seen as important places of authority and honor in the celestial world (Mat 20:21, Mark 10:37).

The Dead Sea Scrolls also talk of the higher heavens:

[For on the first day he created the] upper hea[vens,] (4Q216 V 4; cf. 4Q298 III 2-3)

The *Testament of Jacob* (2nd to 3rd century A.D.) describes Jacob’s vision of God in the highest heaven, with a reference to the gates of heaven and the heavenly temple:

“Blessed are you also, O Jacob, for you have seen God face to face. You saw the angel of God—may he [God] be exalted!—and you saw the ladder standing firm on the ground with its top in the heavens. Then you beheld the Lord sitting at its top with a power which no one could describe.

⁹³ OTP 2, 166 n. m.

You spoke out and said, 'This is the house of God and this is the gate of heaven.' Blessed are you, for you have come near to God and he is strong among mankind, so now do not be troubled, O chosen one of God. . ." (OTP vol 1, 2:14-18)

1 Enoch 14:9-19 recognizes several structures in heaven that constitute the heavenly temple. It is understood that the earthly temple is an exact but much smaller replica of the heavenly temple. Himmelfarb identifies in 1 Enoch the three major features of the heavenly sanctuary, the vestibule, the holy place, and the holy of holies.⁹⁴ A great wall of marble surrounded by tongues of fire is passed by Enoch, but which is described or a building of hailstones and fire in another recension, and can be equated with the vestibule. Within the walls is a great house of white marble, with floors of crystal, and the ceiling like stars and lightning, and would understood as the holy place. A final more magnificent house, the heavenly holy of holies, is seen which is the abode of God. Inside the holy of holies are a floor and a ceiling which are like fire. Also seen is God's throne which appears as crystal, and is similar to the chariot throne described in Ezekiel 1. God is seen on the throne in verse 20, with streams of fire coming from the throne as is seen in Daniel 7:10 (cf. 1 Enoch 60:1-2):

And behold I saw the clouds . . . , the winds were causing me to fly and rushing me high up into heaven. And I kept coming (into heaven) until I approached a wall which was built of white marble and surrounded by tongues of fire; and it began to frighten me. And I came into the tongues of the fire and drew near to a great house which was built of white marble, and the inner wall(s) were like mosaics of the white marble, the floor of crystal, the ceiling like the path of the stars and lightnings between which (stood) fiery cherubim and their heaven of water, and flaming fire surrounded the wall(s), and its gates were burning with fire. And I entered into the house, which was hot like fire and cold like ice, and there was nothing inside it; (so) fear covered me and trembling seized me. And as I shook and trembled, I fell upon my face and saw a vision. And behold there was an opening before me (and) a second house which is greater than the former and everything was built with tongues of fire. And in every respect it excelled (the other)—in glory and great honor—to the extent that it is impossible for me to recount to you concerning its glory and greatness. As for its floor, it was of fire and above it was lightning and the path of the stars; and as for the ceiling, it was flaming fire. And I observed and saw inside it a lofty throne—its appearance was like crystal and its wheels like the shining sun; and (I heard?) The voice of the cherubim; and from beneath the throne were issuing streams of flaming fire. It was difficult to look at it. And the Great Glory was sitting upon it—as for his gown, which was shining more brightly than the sun, it was whiter than any snow. None of the angels were able to come in and see the face of the Excellent and the Glorious One; and no one of the flesh can see him—the flaming fire was round about him, and a great fire stood before him. . . . And the Lord called me with his own mouth and said to me, "come near to me, Enoch, and to my holy Word." And he lifted me up and brought me near to the gate, but I (continued) to look down with my face. But he raised me up and said to me with his voice, "Enoch." I (then) heard, "Do not fear, Enoch, righteous man, scribe of righteousness; come near to me and hear my voice. . . ." (OTP vol 1, 14:18-22, 24-25; 15:1)

1 Enoch 71 contains more description of the holy of holies and God seated upon his throne:

(Thus) it happened after this that my spirit passed out of sight and ascended into the heavens. And I saw the sons of the holy angels walking upon the flame of fire; their garments were white—and their overcoats—and the light of their faces was like snow. Also I saw two rivers of fire, the light of which fire was shining like hyacinth. Then I fell on my face before the Lord of the Spirits.

⁹⁴ Himmelfarb, 14-15 ; cf. Cross and Collins, 300.

And the angel Michael, one of the archangels, seizing me by my right hand and lifting me up, led me out into all the secrets of mercy; and he showed me all the secrets of righteousness. . . . He carried off my spirit, and I, Enoch, was in the heaven of heavens. There I saw—in the midst of that light—a structure built of crystals; and between those crystals tongues of living fire. . . . Michael, Raphael, Gabriel, Phanuel, and numerous (other) holy angels that are in heaven above, go in and out of that house—Michael, Raphael, Gabriel, Phanuel, and numerous (other) holy angels that are countless. With them is the Antecedent of Time: His head is white and pure like wool and his garment is indescribable. I fell on my face, my whole body mollified and my spirit transformed. (OTP 1, 71:1-3, 5-11)

John 14:2 God has prepared many mansions for the faithful in the highest heaven.

In the Apocalypse of Elijah (1st to 4th century A.D.) the angelic Thrones can administer punishment, but those redeemed by Christ are free from their punishment. Being escorted by angels to the presence of God, to the beings who surround God in the highest heaven, is a common theme throughout the Pseudepigrapha. The habitations of God, the angels, and the elect is described as Christ's "city."]

Remember that he [Christ] has prepared thrones and crowns for you in heaven, saying. "Everyone who will obey me will receive thrones and crowns among those who are mine." The Lord said, "I will write my name upon their forehead and I will seal their right hand, and they will not hunger or thirst. Neither will the son of lawlessness prevail over them, nor will the thrones hinder them, but they will walk with the angels up to my city." Now, as for the sinners, they will be shamed and they will not pass by the thrones, but the thrones of death will seize them and rule over them because the angels will not agree with them. They have alienated themselves from his dwellings. . . . Hear, O wise men of the land, concerning the deceivers . . . , making themselves strangers to the covenant of God and robbing themselves of the glorious promises. (OTP 1, 1:8-13)⁹⁵

Fragments from the Dead Sea Scrolls also contains references to the many mansions found in the highest heaven.

The spirits of God around the residence [...] in the holy of the holy ones [...] ... [...] ... [...] the sound of [...] they shall cause to hear (4Q405 6, 11)

[...] he will hide me [...] [...] among his holy ones [...] [...] together with his holy ones [...] [...] giving thanks to God. Because [...] [...]in] the houses of their glory will they be gathered [...] [...] You are the God of gods [...] (4Q511, 7-12)

And they will recount the splendor of his kingdom, according to their knowledge, and they will extol [his glory in all] the heavens of his kingdom. And in all the exalted heights [they will sing] wonderful psalms according to all [their knowledge,] and they will tell [of the splendor] of the glory of the king of the gods <malak 'elohim> in the residences of their positions. And [...] how will he be regarded amongst them? And how will our priesthood (be regarded) in their residences? (4Q400 1-21)

. . . the angels of the king in their wonderful residences. (4Q403 II 2-26)

⁹⁵ O. S. Wintermute comments on the passage: "My city" is the heavenly Jerusalem.. Cf 4Ezra 8:52; 10:27; 2 En 55:2; Heb 11:16; Phil 3:20" (OTP 1, 737 n j2).

Sing favored ones, sing to the king of [glory, be happy in the assem]bly of God, exult in the tents of salvation, praise in the [holy] residence, exalt together with the eternal hosts. (*4Q427 Frag 7 I 8-18*)

The Testament of Abraham makes reference to the many mansions available to the faithful in highest heaven:

And immediately Michael the archangel stood beside [Abraham:] with multitudes of angels, and ... the angels escorted his precious soul, and ascended into heaven ... to God, the master of all, and they set it (down) for the worship of the God and Father. And after great praise in song and glorification had been offered to the Lord, and when Abraham had worshiped, the undefiled voice of the God and Father came speaking thus: "Take, then, my friend Abraham into Paradise, where there are the tents of my righteous ones and (where) the mansions of my holy ones, Isaac and Jacob, are in his bosom, where there is no toil, no grief, no moaning, but peace and exultation and endless life." [Let us too, my beloved brothers, imitate the hospitality of the patriarch Abraham and let us attain to his virtuous behavior, so that we may be worthy of eternal life, glorifying the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; to whom be the glory and the power forever. Amen.] OTP 1, A, 20:10, 12-15)

Compare this passage with 2 Baruch (early 2nd century A.D.)

You [Lord] command the number which will pass away, and which will be preserved. And you prepare a house for those who will be. (OTP 1, 48:6)

4th Ezra (late first century A.D.)

. . . and he who is above the heavens can understand what is above the height of the heavens. (OTP 1, 4:21)

"O Lord who inhabits eternity, whose eyes are exalted and whose upper chambers are in the air, whose throne is beyond measure and whose glory is beyond comprehension, before whom the hosts of angels stand trembling . . . (OTP 1, 8:20-21)

1 Enoch also describes the residences of the angels of heaven in the same manner that God lives in the heavenly temple.

In those days, whirlwinds carried me off from the earth, and set me down into the ultimate ends of the heavens. There I saw other dwelling places of the holy ones and their resting places too. (OTP 1, 39:4)

A belief in a graded salvation is also found in later Christian texts. The early Christian Bishop Papias (ca. 70-155 A.D.) explains that the meaning of Christ's parable of the sower is a graded salvation:

As the presbyters say, then those who are deemed worthy of an abode in heaven shall go there, others shall enjoy the delights of Paradise, and others shall possess the splendor of the city; for everywhere the Savior will be seen, according as they shall be worthy who see Him. But that there is this distinction between the habitation of those who produce an hundredfold, and that of those who produce sixty-fold, and that of those who produce thirty-fold; for the first will be taken up into the heavens, the second class will dwell in Paradise, and the last will inhabit the city; and that on this account the Lord said, "In my Father's house are many mansions:" for all things belong to God, who supplies all with a suitable dwelling-place, even as His word says, that a

share is given to all by the Father, according as each one is or shall be worthy... this is the gradation and arrangement of those who are saved, and that they advance through steps of this nature; and that, moreover, they ascend through the Spirit to the Son, and through the Son to the Father... (ANF vol 1, *Fragments of Papias*, 5 (also quoted by Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 5, 36)

The work entitled the *Shepard of Hermas* (ca. 140 A.D.) also shows the belief in a graded salvation:

"Listen," he said: "they whose branches were found withered and moth-eaten are the apostates and traitors of the Church, who have blasphemed the Lord in their sins... These, therefore, at the end were lost unto God... And they who gave them in withered and undecayed, these also were near to them; for they were hypocrites, and introducers of strange doctrines... These, accordingly, have a hope of repentance... But all who will not repent have lost their lives; and as many of them as repented became good, and their dwelling was appointed within the first walls; and some of them ascended even into the tower. "You see, then," he said, "that repentance involves life to sinners, but non-repentance death." (Book third, *Similitudes*, 8, 6)

14. The Image of God and Theomorphism

It is an established fact within Hebrew thought that God created man after his own image and that of the other members of the council. The term anthropomorphism is often used to describe how God is to be pictured, but the emphasis of Hebrew and Christian thought should not be misunderstood. They believe that it is not God that is created in man's image, but man who is patterned after God's. God first had the attributes that are now possessed by man. Mark Smith recognizes that it is not God who is diminished in biblical language, but man who is elevated:

Genesis 1 presents a vision of the human person in the likeness of the divine. Rather than reducing Yahweh [Jehovah] to human terms through an anthropomorphic portrait, Genesis 1:26-28 magnifies the human person in divine terms.⁹⁶

Von Rad points out that the scriptural emphasis is the image of God, not the image of man. He uses the term 'theomorphic' to describe man; meaning that we are created after the image of God and not the reverse; "It cannot be said that Israel regarded God anthropomorphically, but the reverse, that she considered man as theomorphic."⁹⁷ Von Rad's point is well taken. God's image is the original pattern. Because God wants to give man honor and respect he created him after his-the highest-form. Von Rad illustrates the importance of man to God by comparing the creation to a pyramid, with man being the pinnacle of creation. He suggests that God created the heavens and the earth as a foundation. Higher and more important are plant and animal life. Man is at the top of the creative pyramid:

On the topmost step of this pyramid stands man, and there is nothing between him and God: indeed, the world, which was in fact made for him, has in him alone its most absolute immediacy to God. Also, unlike the rest of creation, he was not created by the word; but in creating him God was actuated by a unique, solemn resolve in the depths of his heart. And in particular, God took the pattern for this, his last work of Creation, from the heavenly world above. In no other work of Creation is everything referred so very immediately to God himself as in this.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ *Smith*, 102.

⁹⁷ *Von Rad*, 145. Theomorphic comes from the Greek *theos*, 'God,' and *morphe*, 'form.' To say that man is theomorphic means that he carries God's form.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 144.

Clyde Holbrook recognizes that the Hebrew belief of God making man in his own image, found in Gen 1:26-27, 5:1-2, and 9:6, is to be taken literally. He suggests that it is "all but impossible" to conclude anything else but that the image of God given to man includes the belief that God mirrors man's image as well. He also points out that scholars stress the "physical resemblance between God and Man." Holbrook echoes other Old Testament scholars, stressing that a case of theomorphism is being presented, not anthropomorphism.⁹⁹ G. Ernest Wright shows that the Hebrew understanding is that God has a tangible corporeal form:

The Hebrew word "image" means primarily a definite material object which is made to look like or to represent something else... How can man be an "image" of God in this sense? Does it mean that man physically resembles the corporeal form of God? Or is the word given an extended meaning and intended to convey only a spiritual resemblance? A moment's reflection of the nature of man, as the Bible conceives it, will make it evident that we are not permitted to phrase in this way ... Man "in the image of God" means, therefore, that there is a correspondence between the total being of God and the total being of man.¹⁰⁰

Von Rad suggests that the words 'image' and 'likeness' in Genesis are meant literally:

The words image ... and likeness ... the second interprets the first by underlining the idea of correspondence and similarity—[they] refer to the whole of man and do not relate solely to his spiritual and intellectual being: they relate equally, if not first and foremost, to the splendor of his [God's] bodily form.¹⁰¹

Gen 1:26-27 God creates man after the image of himself and the gods on the council, "Let us make man in our image" (KJV).

Gen 3:22 The man has become as one of "us," an indication that man, who is in the image of God, has become even more like God and the members of the council, in that they "know good and evil" (KJV).

In Genesis 3:22, God, according to Professor Wright, recognizes that man "has asserted himself to possess a knowledge like that possessed by a member of the heavenly council."¹⁰² 2 Enoch records that after Enoch's ascension into heaven that his ability to process and expound upon complex subjects has become equal to that of the gods:

And the LORD summoned Vereveil, one of his archangels, who was wise, who records all the LORD's deeds. And the LORD said to Vereveil, "Bring out the books from the storehouses, and give a pen to Enoch and read him the books." And Vereveil hurried and brought me the books mottled with myrrh. And he gave me the pen from his hand. And he was telling me all the deeds of the LORD, the earth and the sea, and all the elements and the courses and the life... and

⁹⁹ Clyde A. Holbrook, *The Iconoclastic Deity* (Associated University Presses, London and Toronto: 1984) 39.

¹⁰⁰ G. Ernest Wright, ed., *Interpreter's Bible*, 12 vols (Abingdon, New York: 1951-57) vol. 1, 367-368.

¹⁰¹ *Von Rad*, 144-145.

¹⁰² *Wright, Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 1, 360 n. 29.

everything that it is appropriate to learn. And Vereveil instructed me for 30 days and 30 nights, and his mouth never stopped speaking. And, as for me, I did not rest for 30 days and 30 nights, writing all the symbols. And when I had finished, Vereveil said to me, “ you sit down; write everything that I have explained to you.” And I sat down for a second period of 30 days and 30 nights, and I wrote accurately. And I expounded 300 and 60 books. And the Lord called me; and he placed me to the left of himself closer than Gabriel. And I did obeisance to the Lord. (2 Enoch 22:10-24:1, recension A)¹⁰³

- Gen 9:6 No innocent blood is to be shed, for man is in the sacred image of God.
Deut 4:15-16 One should not create a masculine or feminine image of God, for he withheld his form from Israel at Mt. Sinai, and any graven image created by man cannot do justice to his supreme majesty.¹⁰⁴
Num 23:19 God is not as mortal man, since he cannot lie, as he is the archetypal celestial man.

In the History of the Rechabites (1st to 4th centuries A.D.) the Rechabites are described as a people who are individually surrounded by a *kabod*. After their creation Adam and Eve resemble God so much that they even have their own glory. After the fall their glory is removed:

But we are covered with a stole of glory (similar to that) which clothed Adam and Eve before they sinned. (OTP 2, 12:3-4)

A well known theme in Judaeo/Christian literature is that Adam shares God’s exact likeness. In the Life of Adam and Eve (first century A.D.) Adam and Eve are clothed with glory/light. After the fall they are stripped of their coverings of light. Eve recounts her sorrow as she reflects upon her loss of the *kabod*:

And at that very moment my eyes were opened and I know that I was naked of the righteousness with which I had been clothed. And I wept saying, “Why have you done this to me, that I have been estranged from my glory with which I was clothed?” (OTP 2, Apocalypse 20:1-2)

3 Baruch (Greek; 1st to 3rd century A.D.) shows how Adam lost the glory (Hebrew *kabod*, Greek *doxa*, Jewish *shekinah*) of God. Also suggested is that man chooses to become carnal and divorce themselves from the glory of God. See also the Life of Adam and Eve above.]

Then know, Baruch, that just as Adam through this tree was condemned and was stripped of the glory of God, thus men now who insatiably drink the wine deriving from it transgress worse than Adam, and become distant from the glory of God, and will secure for themselves eternal fire. (OTP 1, 4:16)

The relationship between God, the members of the council, and man is explained in Psalms 8:4-5. The KJV indicates that man “is a little lower than the angels,” or of slightly lesser status than the gods (*’elohim*). Mitchell Dahood claims that the *’elohim* in this passage are, “members of the heavenly court of Yahweh.”¹⁰⁵ Other versions of the Bible translate Psalms 8:4-5 as follows:

¹⁰³ Tabor writes, "These characteristics: not wanting food or anything earthly, knowing all things ...; having a transformed face ... and not needing to sleep ..., are those of a divine being" (85).

¹⁰⁴ Brian B. Schmidt, "The Aniconic Tradition: On Reading Images and Viewing Texts," in *Edelman*, 86.

¹⁰⁵ Dahood, 51.

- NEV “What is man that thou shouldst remember him, mortal man that thou shouldst care for him? Yet thou hast made him a little less than a god (*'elohim*), crowning him with glory and honor. Thou makest him master over all thy creatures; thou hast put everything under his feet.”
- RSV “What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him? Yet thou hast made him little less than God (*'elohim*), and dost crown him with glory and honor.”
- Anchor “What is man that you should think of him, or the son of man that you should care for him? Yet you have made him a little less than the gods (*'elohim*), with honor and glory you crowned him.”

It is understood in the Old Testament—particularly as God rules with the gods on the heavenly council—that the gods are similar in nature to, but of a slightly lesser status than God. If they had drastically power, honor, glory, and might they would not merit the title of ‘gods.’. Psalms 8 teaches that the difference between man and the gods is also relatively minor, man being of the same ‘genus’ or ‘species,’ as they. The difference between man and the gods, then, is one of class, not type! Man is, therefore, a special and unique creation in the universe, sharing enough similarity to the gods as to be only “a little less” than them. But if the gods are beings who closely mirror God’s image, holiness, and power, and man is only a little less than the gods, then man is correspondingly similar to God as well!

The Testament of Abraham reflects the similarities and differences between the gods and man. Anthropomorphism is attributed to both God and Michael, including the reference to the heavenly city, Michael's conversation with God, and his a descent from God's presence. Michael is anthropomorphic, but with glory and great beauty. It is seen that Michael has feet, and they get dusty, hence the washing his feet by Abraham. The nature of an "incorporeal one" is different than that of men, for they do not have the same bodily functions (A 4:5, 7-11), but Michael shows a need for rest (as is seen in after God's creative effort in Gen 2:2). It should also be noted that the meaning of "incorporeal" here is not immaterial, rather non-mortal:

Abraham lived the measure of his life ... But even to him came the common and inexorable bitter cup of death and the unforeseen end of life. Therefore the Master God called his archangel Michael and said to him, "Commander-in-chief Michael, go down to Abraham and tell him about his death, so that he may arrange for the disposition of his possessions... But you, archangel Michael, go to Abraham, my beloved friend, announce his death to him ... So the Commander-in-Chief left the presence of God and went down to Abraham at the oak of Mamre, and he found the righteous Abraham ... When Abraham saw the Commander-in-Chief coming from afar, in the manner of a handsome soldier, then Abraham arose and met him, just as was his custom to greet and welcome all strangers. And the Commander-in-chief saluted him and said, "Hail, honored father, righteous soul elect of God, true friend of the heavenly One." And Abraham said to the Commander-in-chief, " Hail, honored soldier, bright as the sun and most handsome, more than all the sons of men. Well met! Therefore I ask your presence whence and from what army and from what road your beauty has come here." The Commander-in-chief said, "Righteous Abraham, I come from the great city. I have been sent from the great king to provide for the succession of a true friend of his, for the king summons him." ... Then they came near the house and sat in the courtyard. And when Isaac saw the face of the angel he said to Sarah his mother, "My lady mother, behold: The man who is sitting with my father Abraham is no son of the race which dwells upon the earth." And Isaac ran and did obeisance to him and fell at the feet of the incorporeal one. And the incorporeal one blessed him and said, "The Lord God will bestow upon you his promise which he gave to your father Abraham and his seed ... Then Abraham said to Isaac his son, "Isaac, my child, draw water from the well and bring it to me in the vessel so that

we may wash this stranger's feet; for he is tired, having come to us from a long journey. " ... And then Abraham went forward and washed the feet of the Commander-in-chief Michael. Then Abraham said to Isaac his son, "My beloved son, go into the guest room and beautify it. Spread out for us there two couches, one for me and one for this man who is staying as our guest today. Prepare for us there a dining couch ... and a table with an abundance of everything good. Then the Commander-in-chief rose up and went outside ... and he ascended into heaven in the twinkling of an eye and stood before God and said to him: "Master, Lord, let your might know that I cannot announce the mention of death to that righteous man ... Then the Lord said, "Michael, Commander-in-chief, go down to my friend Abraham, and whatever he should say to you, this do; and whatever he should eat you also eat with him..." And the Commander-in-chief said, "Lord, all the heavenly spirits are incorporeal, and they neither eat nor drink..."¹⁰⁶ The Lord said, "Go down to him, and do not be concerned about this. For when you are seated with him I shall send upon you and all-devouring spirit, and ... it will consume everything which is on the table..." (A 1:1, 3-4, 6; 2:1-6; 3:5-9; 4:1-2, 57, 9-11)

2 Enoch describes Adam after his creation. He is given an honored position as the image of God, with the title of "second angel" given to him. In other words, Adam is essentially like the angels. Note God's anthropomorphic thought process taking place as he creates and recites the following poem:

Behold, I have thought up an ingenious poem to recite:
 From invisible and visible substances I created man.
 From both his natures come both death and life
 And (as my) image he knows the word like (no) other creature.
 But even at his greatest he is small,
 and again at his smallest he is great.

And on the earth I assigned him to be a second angel, honored and great and glorious. And I assigned him to be a king, to reign [on] the earth, [and] to have my wisdom. And there was nothing comparable to him on the earth, even among my creatures that exist... And I created for him an open heaven, so that he might look upon the angels singing the triumphal song. (OTP 1, J 30:10-12; 31:2)

Rom 8:29 Christ is conformed to be in the image of God's son, the firstborn among a large family.
 1 Cor 11:7 Men (masculine gender) carry the image of God in their facial features. They must not cover their faces or they will dishonor the divine image of God stamped on their own features. In the belief of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints it is understood that men and women are created after the image of their Heavenly Father and Mother.

Just as Jewish thought declared Adam to look exactly like God (page 2 above), so Christ is also thought to be in God's exact image. The author of Hebrews records that Christ is so honored by God that he is in God's exact image; i.e., there is no difference between the physical image of Christ and God. Christ's exaltation is so complete that he now rules with God over the angels of the council:

GOD, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by [his] Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of [his] glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; Being made so much

¹⁰⁶ E. P. Sanders points out that there was wide debate over whether angels eat or drink in Jewish thought (OTP 1, 884, n. e).

better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. (Heb 1:1-4)

The Epistles of the Apostles (c. early to mid 2nd century A.D.) reflects a Christianity battling the Gnostic heresy. Christ was born of Mary, and was divinely incarnated as the Son of God. The text makes it clear that Christ is God, but demonstrates the separate nature of the Father and Son. Note that Christ is in the exact image of the Father:

Then we said to him, "Will you really leave us until your coming? Where will we find a teacher?" And he answered and said to us, "Do you not know that until now I am both here and there with him who sent me?" And we said to him, "O Lord, is it possible that you should be both here and there?" And he said to us, "I am wholly in the Father and the Father in me after his image and after his form and after his power and after his perfection and after his light, and I am his perfect word." (NTA, Ethiopic 17)

2 Enoch also elaborates on the image of God given to man. The text speaks of God's actual face and the honor with which the image of God placed on each of our faces must be given. The preface to the text records that, "Enoch teaches his sons so that they might not insult the face of any person, small or great." The text continues:

The LORD with his own two hands created mankind; in a facsimile of his own face, both small and great, the LORD created [them]. And whoever insults a person's face, insults the face of a king, and treats the face of the LORD with repugnance. He who treats with contempt the face of any person treats the face of the LORD with contempt. He who expresses anger to any person without provocation will reap anger in the great judgment. He who spits on any person's face, insultingly, will reap the same at the LORD's great judgment. Happy is the person who does not direct his heart with malice toward any person, but who helps [the offended and] the condemned, and lifts up those who have been crushed, and shows compassion on the needy. (OTP 1, J 44:1-4)

There can be no clearer declaration. God's face is divine and holy. It characterizes the ultimate perfection any being can achieve, and contempt for the face of any man is contempt for the very face of God! F. I Anderson makes the comment:

The idea is remarkable from any point of view. The universal kinship of the human race is both biological and theological. Whatever the diversity ... every individual is "the face of the LORD." Here the *imago dei* is the basis for the universalistic humane ethics.¹⁰⁷

Joseph Smith considered also considered man to be theomorphic. He believes that God's image is archetypal, and that he shares it with man:

God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret. If the veil were rent today, and the great God who holds this world in its orbit, and who upholds all worlds and all things by his power, was to make himself visible,—I say, if you were to see him today, you would see him like a man in form—like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form as a man; for Adam was created in the very fashion, image and likeness of God, and received instruction from, and walked, talked and conversed with him, as one man talks and communes with another.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ OTP 1, 171, n b.

¹⁰⁸ Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, (Deseret Book,

15. 'El and 'Elohim as Titles of Divinity and Personal Names of God

As noted earlier 'elohim is a plural title meaning 'gods,' but it has other meanings as well. Conrad L'Heureux indicates that 'elohim can be translated as "God" a "god" or "gods."¹⁰⁹ There are three general meanings of 'elohim and its singular counterpart 'el.

1. A title meaning God or gods.

- a. 'el is a singular title translated either as 'God' or 'a god.' Psalms 42:2-3 translates 'el as God:

For the living God ['el]. (Anchor)

Genesis 1:1 records that "In the beginning God created," (*bereshit bara 'elohim*). The Hebrew *bara* is a singular masculine verb that means 'organize,' or create by organization, and when used with 'elohim is appropriately translated as the singular "God created."

- b. 'elohim is a plural title translated 'gods' and refers to members of the council. Psalms 47:6 is a good example of 'elohim translated as the plural "gods:"

Sing praises you gods ['elohim], sing praises, sing praises to our king, sing praises. For he is king of all the earth, O gods ['elohim], sing a skillful song. (Anchor)¹¹⁰

2. Plurals of majesty and unity.

- a. The magnificence of God is also depicted by the use of 'elohim as a plural of majesty. The plural of any noun in Hebrew can represent the magnificence of the object it represents. The plural 'Elohim then refers to the enormity of the holiness, power, and majesty inherent in God. A good example of the use of the plural of majesty is found in Exodus 3:15:

The God ('elohim) of your father, the God ('elohim) of Abraham, the God ('elohim) of Isaac, and the God ('elohim) of Jacob.

- b. It is also thought that 'elohim can represent God and the council members as a plurality of unity. T. J. Meek, in discussing the development of Hebrew religion, indicates that the title 'elohim in the Old Testament and other cultures in Canaan "came to designate the totality of the gods, and so could mean 'god' as well as 'gods.'"¹¹¹ 'Elohim, with the use

Salt Lake: 1976) 345.

¹⁰⁹ Conrad L'Heureux, "Searching for the Origins of God," 37, 38-44, in Baruch and Halpern, John D. Levenson, eds., *Traditions in Transformation, Turning Points in Biblical Faith* (Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, Indiana: 1981).

¹¹⁰ Dahood, 286.

¹¹¹ Meek, 196.

of plural verbs and/or adjectives, could thus be seen as a plurality of unity among God and the gods. For example, Genesis 1:26 uses the plural verb *na'aseh*, "Let us make," as God speaks to members of the heavenly assembly. As a result *'elohim* in Gen 1:27 should be understood as a plural of unity; i.e., the gods in concert acted with God in the creation of man. Von Rad interprets the verse and its use of *'elohim* as follows:

How is *'elohim* in [Genesis 1:27] to be interpreted? Does it refer to God himself or to the heavenly beings who surround his throne, or to both together? In his resolve [Yahweh] associates himself with his heavenly court ... and in so doing at the same time hides himself in their plurality. The term "let us" [Gen 1:26] prevents the image being referred directly to God alone.¹¹²

c. Parallels are found in the Book of Abraham and in Joseph Smith's Nauvoo sermons:

And the Gods took counsel among themselves and said: Let us go down and form man in our image, after our likeness... So the Gods went down to organize man in their own image, in the image of the Gods to form they him, male and female to form they them. (Ab 4:26-27)

In the beginning, the head of the Gods called a council of the Gods; and they came together and concocted a plan to create the world and people it.¹¹³

3 *'El* is also used as a personal name of Deity:

a. Evidence for the use of *'el* as a personal name is found in Israel and other neighboring cultures. *'El* is recognized as a personal name for God in Israel, Canaan, Phoenicia. Mark Smith claims that "the original god of Israel was El."¹¹⁴ The remnants of the tradition of the use of *'el* as a personal name is found in such names as *Samuel*, *Bethel*, *Israel*, *Peniel*, etc.¹¹⁵ The somewhat controversial scholar Mitchell Dahood in the Anchor Bible actually restores *'el* as the personal name of God to many passages in the Psalms where he believes editors have removed it:

Ps 7:11 God is a righteous ruler, and El is a vindicator at all times. (Anchor)

Ps 10:11 He says to himself, "El forgets, he turns away his face and never looks."
(Anchor)

¹¹² Rad, 145; cf. H. H. Rowley, *The Faith of Israel: Aspects of Old Testament Thought* (SCM Press, London: 1956) 50-51.

¹¹³ Smith, *Teachings*, 349. For an examination of Joseph Smith's use of Hebrew in the Genesis account see *Ehat and Cook*, 397 n. 69-70; 399 n. 107; 409 n. 15.

¹¹⁴ Mark Smith, 7; cf. Schmidt, "Aniconic Tradition" in *Edelman*, 87; *L'Heureux*, 3, 49ff, 54-55; Mullen, 1ff.

¹¹⁵ Cross 47; Dahood (all three of his volumes on the Psalms); cf. Thomas L. Thompson, "The Intellectual Matrix of Early Biblical Narrative: Inclusive Monotheism in Persian Period Palestine," in *Edelman*, 120 n 15; Arvid S. Kapelrud, G. W. trans., *The Ras Shamra Discoveries and the Old Testament* (Univ of Oklahoma Press, Norman: 1963) 56ff. For use of Yahweh, *'el*, and *'elohim* as personal names see, Ulf Oldenburg, *The Conflict Between El and Ba'al in Canaanite Religion* (E. J. Brill, Leiden, Netherlands: 1969) 164-182. .

Ps 16:1 Preserve me, O El, for I have sought refuge in you. (Anchor)¹¹⁶

God's personal name of 'El 'Elyon is also found in Genesis 14:18-20, 22 and in the original text of Deuteronomy 32:8. Deuteronomy 32:8, in fact, shows that 'El 'Elyon, "God most High," was understood to be the supreme God and not Yahweh. The author of the passage recognizes that God is not alone in the heavens, and that Yahweh is the second of two great powers in heaven. God is known as 'El, and Yahweh is his second in command and the premier member of the council who is given stewardship over the nation of Israel. This likely resulted in a later conflict in Israel over who was God, 'El or Yahweh, with the eventual identification of Yahweh with 'El. Deut 32:8, however, clearly presents Yahweh as subordinate to 'El, and it is later editors who modified the passage so that references to a subordinate Yahweh is obscured and references to the stewardship of the gods is removed. Hayman translates Deut 32:8 as follows:

When the Most High ('El 'Elyon) gave to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of men, he fixed the bounds of the peoples according to the number other the gods (bene 'el/ bene 'elim). And Yahweh's portion was his people Jacob, Israel his allotted heritage.¹¹⁷

Other passages in the Old Testament also preserve the name of 'El in 'El Shaddai. Genesis 17:1, 49:25, and Exodus 6:3 records God's name as 'El Shaddai, or "God almighty," with Exodus 6:3 indicating that the patriarchs knew God only by this designation.

- b. The Church of Jesus Christ also treats 'el and/or 'elohim as a personal name of God the Father. The use of 'elohim is understood to include the meaning of God who sits at the head of the council of the gods. Jehovah, or Yahweh, is his son, the head of the council of the gods, as is the God who generally appeared and spoke to Israel. Joseph Smith said on 16 June 1844:

The head God organized the heavens and the earth... In the beginning the heads of the Gods organized the heavens and the earth ... If we pursue the Hebrew text further, it reads, "The head one of the Gods ['elohim] said, Let us make a man in our own image." ... In the very beginning the Bible shows there is a plurality of Gods beyond the power of refutation.¹¹⁸

16. Judaic and Early Christian Beliefs in a Pre-Existence

Jubilees (2nd century B.C.) is a significant source on the pre-existence which clarifies the Judaic belief in a storehouse of souls. Jubilees clearly shows that the notion of a pre-existence is a widely held belief of this time:

And the angel of the presence spoke to Moses by the word of the LORD, saying, "Write the

¹¹⁶ "The poet uses the ancient Canaanite and patriarchal designation of the chief deity" (Dahood, 87).

¹¹⁷ Hayman, 6. For an extensive analysis of the Canaanite pantheon, and the relationship of 'El 'Elyon and Yahweh in Early Hebrew thought, see Daniel C. Peterson, "Ye are Gods," 490-496.

¹¹⁸ Smith, Teachings, 372.

whole account of creation, that in six days the LORD God completed all his work and all that he created. For on the first day he created the heavens, which are above, and the earth, and the waters and all of the spirits which minister before him: the angels of the presence, and the angels of sanctification, and the angels of the spirit of fire, and the angels of the spirit of the winds, and the angels of the spirit of the clouds and darkness and snow and hail and frost, and the angels of resoundings and thunder and lightning, and the angels of the spirits of cold and heat and winter and springtime and harvest and summer, and all of the spirits of his creatures which are in heaven and on earth. (OTP 2, 2:1-3)

2 Baruch (early 2nd century A.D.) also speaks of the pre-existence. The Lord speaks to Baruch in a passage assuring him of his vast knowledge of mankind's past and future:

For as you have not forgotten men who exist and who have passed away, I remember those who will come. For when Adam sinned and death was decreed against those who were to be born, the multitude of those who would be born was numbered. And for that number a place was prepared where the living ones might live and where the dead might be preserved. No creature will live again unless the number that has been appointed is completed. (OTP 1, 23:3-5)

Compare 4 Ezra's (late first century A.D.) claim that all souls must complete a mortal journey before the end comes:

Then I answered and said, "How long and when will these things be? Why are our years few and evil?" He answered me and said, "You do not hasten faster than the Most High, for your haste is for yourself, but the Highest hastens on behalf of many. Did not the souls of the righteous in their chambers ask about these matters, saying, 'How long are we to remain here? And when will come the harvest of our reward?' And Jeremiel the archangel answered them and said, 'When the number of those like yourselves is completed; for he has weighed the age in balance, and measured the times by measure, and numbered the times by number; and he will not move or arouse them until that measure is fulfilled.'" . . . He said to me, "In Hades the chambers of the souls are like the womb. For just as a woman who is in travail makes haste to escape the pangs of birth, so also do these places hasten to give back those things that were committed to them from the beginning. (OTP vol 1, 4:33-39, 41-42)

It is not only the Judaism contemporary with Christ that believes in the pre-existence, this belief survives in Judaic thought for more than the next seven centuries. 3 Enoch (5th or 6th century A.D.) deals with a clearly defined pre-existence. According to the text all souls will pre-exist before they are created. The Jewish rabbi Ishmael is guided to see the pre-existent souls by Metatron, the fully transformed Enoch, who is now God's chief archangel. Later he also sees the righteous souls above the throne of God:

Come and I will show you the souls of the righteous who have already been created and have returned, and the souls of the righteous who have not yet been created... Then I went and expounded this verse, and found with regard to the text "The spirit shall clothe itself in my presence, and the souls which I have made," that "the spirit shall clothe itself in my presence" [Isaiah 57:16] refers to the souls of the righteous which have already been created in the storehouse of beings and have returned to the presence of God; and "the souls which I have made" refers to the souls of the righteous which have not yet been created in the storehouse. (OTP 1, 43:1, 3)

P. Alexander comments:

According to 3 Enoch the human soul not only survives the body, and, at least in the case of the

righteous, goes up to the heavenly regions, but it pre-exists the body as well and descends from the heavenly storehouse of souls to enter the body at birth.¹¹⁹

P. Alexander also quotes Rashi, who explains the meaning of the "storehouse of beings:"

There is a treasure-house [*osar*] called *gup*, and at the time of creation all souls destined to be born were formed and placed there.¹²⁰

In the Odes of Solomon (Late 1st to early 2nd century A.D.) a pre-existence is implied:

For the right hand of the Lord is with you, and he will be your Helper... For I turn not my face from my own because I know them. And before they had existed, I recognized them; and imprinted a seal on their faces... (OTP 2, 8:6, 12-13; cf. 4 Ezra 4:33-39)

In the Prayer of Joseph (1st century A.D.) it is seen that Jacob, Abraham, and Isaac were pre-existent angelic beings who entered earthly bodies and became mortal. The text explains why Jacob was renamed Israel. The reason given is that he is Israel, a pre-mortal angelic being of great power and glory:

I, Jacob, who is speaking to you, am also Israel, an angel of God and a ruling spirit. Abraham and Isaac were created before any work. But, I, Jacob, who men call Jacob but whose name is Israel am he who God called Israel which means, a man seeing God, because I am the firstborn of every living thing to whom God gives life.

And when I was coming up from Syrian Mesopotamia, Uriel, the angel of God, came forth and said that 'I [Jacob-Israel] had descended to earth and I had tabernacled among men and that I had been called by the name of Jacob.' (OTP 2, Fragment A)

Jer 1:5 Before Jeremiah was conceived God knew and ordained him a prophet.

John 9:2 "Who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (KJV).

Gal 1:15 Paul speaks of being set apart before he was born.

17. The Hellenization of Christianity and Paul's Warnings about Greek Metaphysical Absolutism

Contact with the Hellenized world of the Roman empire was inevitable for Christianity as it emerged from the backwaters of Palestine. Indeed, the influences of Hellenized civilization had long been a fact of life for Jews since the Greek Seleucid and Ptolemaic empires fought over Palestine, and as the Hellenized Roman empire took control of the western Mediterranean in 63 B.C. The hellenization of Palestine began with its conquest by Alexander the Great in 332 B.C. After his death in 323, Alexander the Great's empire broke up into smaller hellenized empires, including the Seleucid in the east and the Ptolemaic in Egypt, Palestine and Syria. After years of warfare between these two, the Ptolemies were pushed back into Egypt (198)¹²¹ and the Seleucids made a serious effort to force hellenization on their new Jewish subjects. The most nefarious Seleucid emperor was Antiochus Epiphanes IV (mentioned in connection with Daniel 7, above), who burned copies of Hebrew scripture, abolished Jewish ritual and sabbaths, killed those who would not publicly worship Zeus, and violated the sacred temple. He

¹¹⁹ OTP 1, 245.

¹²⁰ OTP 2, 294 n. 1.

¹²¹ Cary, 93-94.

desecrated the holy of holies in the temple by sacrificing a pig—an unclean animal according to Jewish law—to on an altar dedicated to Zeus erected over the altar of Yahweh (168 B.C.);¹²² all in an effort to hellenize his subjects and prop up his sagging empire.

This forced hellenization caused conservative Jewish elements in Palestine to band together under the leadership of Mattathias and later his son Judah Maccabee. The Maccabean revolt pushed the Seleucids out of Jerusalem in 164, and in 142 the Seleucids ceased efforts to reconquer their former subjects. The Maccabean family then established the independent Jewish Hasmonean kingdom, which lasted until Rome took Jerusalem in 63 and made Palestine a province of its Hellenized empire, thus ending the only period of Jewish independence since the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon in 586.

As one might imagine, there was resistance to the influence of hellenism from the time that Alexander the Great first took Palestine in 332. Hengel suggests that with the defeat of the Seleucid empire the Jews would have tended to push hellenistic influence out of Judea.¹²³ Indeed, during this brief 79 year period of Jewish independence, Palestine became a Jewish theocracy, with the high priest of Israel acting as its chief religious and political officer. Jewish law, custom, and mores were spread throughout the kingdom, and many outlying areas that had partially slipped from Judaic influence were forced into the Hasmonean state. We see, in fact, the emergence of a Judaization of Palestine as pronounced as any effort made to Hellenize it. However, some aspects of Greek civilization were not overtly rejected, such as governmental institutions, economic innovations, and the adoption of Greek names by many Jews.¹²⁴

Evidence of this Jewish retrenchment can be found in the rise of Pharisaism, the establishment of the Jewish synagogue, the study of the Torah, and the rise of Jewish sages. The Pharisees appear sometime before the defeat of the Seleucid empire as a response to hellenization, and with the Seleucid defeat they became the greatest advocates of a Judaism which should allow neither changes to the law of Moses nor toleration of pagan influence. They adhered to a strict moral code and an exacting observance of the written and oral Laws of Moses. They also believed in angels, spirits, and the resurrection from the dead (unlike their Sadducee counterparts who rejected all three, Acts 23:8). As equally important is the rise of the synagogue and the associated study of the Torah by Jews. Most Jews in urban centers—both in Palestine and in the diaspora—would have built a synagogue. This became the center of Jewish communal and social life, with daily prayer and instruction in the Torah being some of its most prominent features. With the rise of the Pharisaism and the study of the Torah in the synagogue came also an explosion of pseudepigraphal and apocalyptic literature from Jewish sages.¹²⁵ Two of the earliest products of the sages are 1 Enoch and 1 Maccabees. They remain Judaic in character, with a strong national identification and focus on the history of Judea, despite years spent under Greek rule.¹²⁶

With the advent of the Roman takeover of Judea in 30 B.C. one would expect the return of

¹²² 1 Maccabees 1:41-55, OTP vol 2.

¹²³ Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism, Studies in Their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period*, 2 vols (Fortress Press, Philadelphia: 1974) vol 1, 107-114.

¹²⁴ Menahem Stern, "The Period of the Second Temple," in H. H. Ben-Sasson, ed., *A History of the Jewish People* (Univ. Press, Harvard: 1976) 233-238.

¹²⁵ Stern, 217-230, 277-290

¹²⁶ Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, vol 1, 78-83, 100-102.

hellenization. Hengel points out that the Jewish aristocracy quickly opted for greek education and culture in Jerusalem, while attempting to not interfere with the operation of the Mosaic law, the priestly rites of the temple, or other orthodox factions in Judea. The Herodian dynasty was able to carry out this process with little but token opposition from the most conservative of Jews.¹²⁷ Herod (and, later on, his sons) purposely hellenized the aristocracy of Judea, but this process was also well underway in various parts of the world. This is especially true in the large community of Jews in Alexandria, where the radically hellenized Philo artfully applied the metaphysical speculations of Greek Middle Platonic philosophy to his own theology. Eventually this radical hellenization took hold in areas of Palestine which would have overtly rejected it several generations earlier. Thus, there is some cultural hellenization found in all of Judaism at the time of Christ, with some small groups of Jews who allow themselves to radically hellenize.

The majority of Jews at the time of Christ, who were greatly inspired by Pharisaism, would have resisted any change to the law and foreign pagan influences coming into Judaism.¹²⁸ This means that most Jews and pagans in Palestine would generally have little to do with each other. Jews would frequent their own cities, the Jerusalem temple, and the synagogue, while Greeks and Romans would stick to Hellenistic cities—such as Ceasaria on the coast—and the baths, temples and gymnasiums dedicated to the gods. But this does not mean that there was no contact between orthodox Jews and pagans in Palestine. To get along in the empire even conservative Jews would have to know Greek, the language of the eastern half of the Roman empire, and a considerable number of Jews in Palestine would have spoken Greek during the time of Christ. Even Christ was most likely able to hold a conversation in Greek.¹²⁹ They would also have had to understand how to barter with Greeks and Romans, meaning that the rudimentary aspects of hellenistic culture would rub off on them. Thus, even orthodox Jews in Palestine would have experienced a very mild *cultural* hellenization. Despite the numerous intrusions from the Roman world, the hellenization of Jews who were soon to become Christians was negligible. Hengel suggests that no overt hellenistic influence can be seen in the teachings of Christ, and mentions that the New Testament writers were not acquainted with Greek ideas.

With the possible exceptions of Luke and the author of Hebrews, the New Testament authors, who were overwhelmingly Jewish Christians, had no deeper acquaintance with secular Greek writings. They either completely lacked real Greek education, obtained through well-known ‘classical literature,’ as in the case of Mark, Matthew or John (and probably also Paul), or their knowledge was very fragmentary.¹³⁰

Diaspoc Jews, however, lived in areas dominated by Hellenistic thought, and would have experienced an education of the empire *and* the synagogue, one where a more than a mild *cultural* hellenization would be necessary. For example, orthodox Jews would have found it imperative to learn Greek since they lived in a Greek speaking environment. Diaspora parents might also arrange for their

¹²⁷ Martin Hengel, *The 'Hellenization' of Judaea in the First Century after Christ* (SCM Press, London: 1989) 30-44.

¹²⁸ Hurtado, in referring to Gal 1:13-14, explains that “Saul/Paul refers to his vigorous efforts in support of *ioudaismos* (Gal 1:13-14), making it clear that the term represents the sort of concern for tradition-loyalty that is variously manifested among Roman-period Jewish groups.” (*Hurtado*, xx n 7)

¹²⁹ Hengel, *The 'Hellenization' of Judaea*, 7-8.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 44-50.

children to have private tutelage in Greek grammar and rhetoric.¹³¹ And it would have been virtually impossible for the tremendous influence of Greek philosophy—especially Cynic and Stoic ethics—to be entirely ignored by even the most orthodox diaspora Jews.¹³² These Greek influences would have been countered by private education in the Torah and in Synagogue instruction, where the idolatry, immorality, and other offensive aspects of the pagan world would have been emphasized and renounced.

Paul was a Pharisee, a self-proclaimed zealot for the law of Moses (Gal 1:14, Phil. 3:6) who never turned his back on his conservative Pharisaic roots. He was educated at the feet of the Gamaliel, the most celebrated Pharisee of the day (Acts 5:34, 22:3). He believed in the angels, spirits, and the resurrection, as would be required of a good Pharisee in his day (Acts 23:6). And while Paul—as well as the other Apostles and Elders—struggled to work out how much of the law of Moses should be imposed upon gentile converts (Acts 15:19-29; 1 Cor 7:17-20; 8:7-13; 10:28; Gal 2:11-21), he never embraced the heathen worship of idols (1 Cor 10:19-21) or the immorality that was rampant in the Roman world (1 Cor 5:1-5). Hurtado points out that with the mild Hellenization taking place, Jews such as Paul, and even the drastically Hellenized Philo, considered Judaism as superior to that offered by the gentile world:

Certainly ancient Judaism was not immune to the larger Greco-Roman environment. Both Philo of Alexandria and Paul himself, to take but two examples, show the adaptation of concepts and literary conventions circulating in their time. But both authors also show strong reserve toward the specifically religious beliefs and practices of the pagan world and illustrate the tendency of most Jews in the Greco-Roman setting to hold themselves aloof from and superior to other religious groups. It is therefore appropriate to think of Judaism as distinguishable in some ways within the Greco-Roman setting.¹³³

Paul was a Jew partially hellenized in language and culture, but his main influence was the Old Testament and Judaism of his day.¹³⁴ He is a Christian who is culturally Hellenized, but strictly adheres to the doctrines and beliefs of the early Church.

Paul is also the outstanding example of an educated early Christian in the Roman world. He was a diaspora Jew turned Christian and a Roman citizen of Tarsus, located on the southern coast of Asia Minor (Acts 9:1-30). He would have spoken both Greek and Aramaic, and was well educated in Hellenistic styles of writing and rhetoric. He was also very familiar with Cynic and Stoic moral philosophy, and had some knowledge of the various Greek metaphysical philosophies of his day.¹³⁵ In

¹³¹ Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, vol 1, 103-106.

¹³² Abraham J. Malherbe (*Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (Fortress Press, Minneapolis: 1989)) shows convincing evidence that Paul and many of his Greek converts were thoroughly familiar with Stoic and Cynic moral philosophy, as well as Hellenistic styles of writing and exhortation; cf. Troels Engberg-Pedersen, ed., *Paul in His Hellenistic Context* (Fortress Press, Minneapolis: 1995).

¹³³ Hurtado, 5.

¹³⁴ Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, vol. 1, 58-65.

¹³⁵ Paul shows some familiarity with hellenistic metaphysics as he quotes a passage from *Phaenomena*, a poem by the Stoic philosopher Aratus, at the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17:28; cf. 17:16-34). Paul even uses allegory, a well-known Greek—and more particularly Stoic—philosophical device used to find hidden non-literal interpretations of ancient texts (Gal 4:21-31). However, David Runia points out that Paul's use of allegory in Galatians 4:21-31 varies from the radically hellenized Jew Philo of Alexandria in that he "is not philosophically motivated. He does not try to exploit difficulties in understanding the literal text of scripture as Philo does." (David T Runia, *Philo in Early Christian*

fact, Paul uses Cynic and Stoic moral philosophy in his exhortation to his converts in Asia, with good evidence that his converts were familiar enough with these ethical systems that they could understand his arguments.¹³⁶ However, even though Paul was more hellenized than his Christian counterparts, being familiar with the sights, sounds, and ideas of the Roman world, he was not completely at ease in the Hellenistic world. He may have been familiar enough with the Roman world that he was able to function in the environments of Greece and Asia Minor, but at his core he is a conservative to moderate Jew who uses his hellenistic education to preach his new Christian faith and preserve it against those who would seek to undermine it. Malherbe writes that Paul was essentially a moral philosopher, and uninterested in the metaphysical speculations heralded by the Greek philosophic systems of his day:

During the last hundred years, New Testament scholars have shown that many aspects of Paul's life and letters are illuminated when they are examined in the light of Greco-Roman culture. There can no longer be any doubt that Paul was thoroughly familiar with the teaching, methods of operation, and style of argumentation of the philosophers of the period, all of which he adopted and adapted to his own purposes. This is not to argue that he was a technical philosopher; neither were his philosophical contemporaries. The philosophers with whom Paul should be compared were not metaphysicians who specialized in systematizing abstractions, but, like Paul, were preachers of and teachers who saw their main goal to be the reformation of the lives of people they encountered in a variety of contexts, ranging from the imperial court and the salons of the rich to the street corners.¹³⁷

This, in fact, is the message of Colossians 2:8. One of the major concerns of the major Greek philosophies of his day is an explanation of the nature of reality. But Paul does not care for this metaphysical speculation at all, for if one is trying to explain which element is the ultimate principle of reality, then they spend time on idle speculation and not on Christ. He writes:

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy [*philosophia*] and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments [*stoicheia*, or “elementary principles”] of the world, and not after Christ. (KJV Col 2:8)

James Shiel translates this passage:

Take care that no one comes to take you captive by the empty deception of philosophy, based on a man-made tradition of teaching concerning the elements of the material world, and not based on Christ.¹³⁸

Paul understands that Christ is in the very image of God, and is the creator and preserver of both the earth and the higher heavens (Col 1:15-17). He wants his converts to focus on Christ, the cause of all organized things, rather than on the effects of the organization. Why focus on the material world when one can personally know the image of God who took chaotic element and placed order on it? Thus Paul shows his contempt for the metaphysical speculations of philosophy, considering it to be a deception that kept

Literature (Fortress Press, Minneapolis: 1993) 86; cf. 66-86.)

¹³⁶ Malherbe, 25-89.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, 68.

¹³⁸ James Shiel, *Greek Thought and the Rise of Christianity* (Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd., London & Harlow: 1968) 2.

philosophers ignorant of Christ and God.

Paul has a difficult time with Greek metaphysics because it causes potential converts to reject his words without sincere investigation. The Greeks, who judged all things through philosophy, or the love of wisdom (*sophia*), commit grave error and folly when they allow metaphysical speculation to destroy any hope of faith in Christ. The metaphysical speculations of the Greeks would reject that any deity could be embodied, die, or (horror of horrors) be resurrected in a physical body once it had escaped from it. Matter is generally thought to be evil, or, at the least, the very least real thing in the universe, being patterned after the fully real immaterial world where God resides. It is sheer foolishness, then, when Christians preach of the resurrection of Christ, the Son of God, for in the philosophic Greek mind a God would never be able to enter into the mortal realm and enter a physical body. The material and immaterial realms are completely incompatible, and it would be nonsense for a Greek to believe that divine beings are persons in the normal sense. This incompatibility of early Christian thought and Greek metaphysical speculation is seen in the dramatic meeting of philosophy and Christianity at the Areopagus in Athens. Paul, who is preaching to all in Athens who will listen, encounters Greek philosophers:

So he argued in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the market place every day with those who chanced to be there. Some also of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers met him. And some said, "What would this babblers say?" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities"—because he preached Jesus and the resurrection. And they took hold of him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is which you present? For you bring some strange things to our ears; we wish to know therefore what these things mean."... Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. (NEV Acts 17:17-20, 32)

Consider also Paul's diatribe against the metaphysical speculations of Greek philosophy in 1 Corinthians.

Where is the wise man (*sophos*)? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of the age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom (*sophia*) of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom (*sophia*), but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom (*sophia*) of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For consider your call, brethren; not many of you were wise (*sophoi*) according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth; but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise (*sophoi*), God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong... And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom (*sophia*) but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit. The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. (NEV 1 Cor 1:20-27; 2: 12-14)

Thus the abstract metaphysics of Greek philosophy has no appeal for Paul. He is a devoted Christian, with strong Jewish foundations, and unwilling to compromise his beliefs with major philosophical systems of his day.

Paul also warns of the polytheism generally acceptable under philosophical systems, and the hedonistic rationalization advocated by Epicurean philosophy. He is simply aghast when he sees the wise who are also idolaters; those who prefer to lifeless images to the eternal archetypal man. How can one who claims to be wise worship a dead graven image when the universe itself proclaims that God lives? (Rom 18-21). Paul continues:

Claiming to be wise (*sophoi*), they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator. (NEV Rom 1:22-26)

Paul simply cannot understand the Greek logic here. One should worship that which is alive and eternal, rather than the lifeless images which can never do justice to God's glorious form. Thus, in every way Paul rejects the metaphysical speculations of the philosophers. He considers Greek metaphysics to be an impediment to right thinking, and warns his converts to stay away from it.

Compare Paul's rejection of Greek metaphysical speculation with that of the later Church Fathers. The Church Fathers of the 2nd and 3rd centuries began to borrow some of the metaphysical speculations of the Greeks, despite the warnings of Paul. They accepted Greek metaphysics because it was the 'rocket science' of the ancient world, supposedly able to answer the difficult questions of the day, but by doing so they turned their backs on the simple doctrines Christians had first held. The Church Father Justin Martyr (110-165) writes:

I am proud to say that I strove with all my might to be known as a Christian, not because the teachings of Plato are different from those of Christ, but because they are not in every way similar; neither are those of other writers, the Stoics, the poets, and the historians. For each of them, seeing, through his participation of the seminal Divine Word, what was related to it, spoke very well. But, they who contradict themselves in important matter evidently did not acquire the unseen (that is, heavenly) wisdom and the indisputable knowledge. The truths which men in all lands have rightly spoken belong to us Christians. For we worship and love, after God the Father, the Word who is from the Unbegotten and Ineffable God, since He even became Man for us, so that by sharing in our sufferings He also might heal us. Indeed, all writers, by means of the engrafted seed of the Word which was implanted in them, had a dim glimpse of the truth. For the seed of something and its imitation, given in proportion to one's capacity, is one thing, but the thing itself, which is shared and imitated according to His grace, is quite another. (Apology 2. 13. 2)

Clement of Alexandria (153-217) recorded:

. . . Philosophy has been given to the Greeks as their own kind of Covenant, their foundation for the philosophy of Christ . . . The philosophy of the Greeks . . . contains the basic elements of that genuine and perfect knowledge which is higher than human . . . even upon those spiritual objects. (Miscellanies 6. 8)

Augustine (354-430) also credits Platonic philosophy with teaching fundamental truth:

But when I read those books of the Platonists I was taught by them to seek incorporeal truth, and so I saw your 'invisible things, understood by the things that are made' (Confessions 7. 20)¹³⁹

¹³⁹ For an extended discussion of the Hellenization of Paul, other Early Christians, and the Early Christian Fathers, see Daniel W. Graham and James L. Siebach, "Philosophy and Early Christianity," 210-220, and Cook, "How Deep the Platonism?," 269-286 in *FARMS Review of Books*, vol. 11, no 2 (1999).