



## Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011

---

Volume 14 | Number 1

Article 12

---

2002

### A Response to Paul Owen's Comments on Margaret Barker

Kevin Christensen

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr>

---

#### BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Christensen, Kevin (2002) "A Response to Paul Owen's Comments on Margaret Barker," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011*: Vol. 14 : No. 1 , Article 12.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr/vol14/iss1/12>

This Responses to The New Mormon Challenge is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011 by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact [scholarsarchive@byu.edu](mailto:scholarsarchive@byu.edu), [ellen\\_amatangelo@byu.edu](mailto:ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu).



---

NEAL A. MAXWELL INSTITUTE  
FOR RELIGIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

---

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY • PROVO, UTAH

**Title** A Response to Paul Owen's Comments on Margaret Barker

**Author(s)** Kevin Christensen

**Reference** *FARMS Review of Books* 14/1-2 (2002): 193-221.

**ISSN** 1099-9450 (print), 2168-3123 (online)

**Abstract** Review of "Monotheism, Mormonism, and the New Testament Witness" (2002), by Paul Owen.

## A RESPONSE TO PAUL OWEN'S COMMENTS ON MARGARET BARKER

Kevin Christensen

The reforming Deuteronomists with their emphasis on history and law have evoked a sympathetic response in many modern scholars who have found there a religion after their own heart. Thus we have inherited a double distortion; the reformers edited much of what we now read in the Hebrew Bible, and modern interpreters with a similar cast of mind have told us what the whole of that Hebrew Bible was saying. The fact that most ancient readers of the texts read them very differently is seen as a puzzle.<sup>1</sup>

Why, in an article addressing Latter-day Saint claims, does Paul Owen devote a fifth of his paper to a critique of a book by a Methodist writer, Margaret Barker, on the basis of a few citations by three Latter-day Saint scholars?<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Barker reports that all her

1. Margaret Barker, *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God* (London: SPCK, 1992), 28.

2. Owen refers to quotations by Daniel C. Peterson, Martin S. Tanner, and Barry R. Bickmore (p. 477 n. 107). Future lists of Latter-day Saint authors citing Barker should include myself, M. Catherine Thomas, Kevin Barney, John A. Tvedtnes, Ross David Baron, Mark Thomas, Eugene Seaich, William J. Hamblin, Kerry Shirts, and Terryl L. Givens. A growing number of Latter-day Saint scholars have begun to read and discuss Barker's work, so tracking citations will become both more challenging and more telling.

Review of Paul Owen. "Monotheism, Mormonism, and the New Testament Witness." In *The New Mormon Challenge*, 301–8.

published work to date has been done while knowing “almost nothing”<sup>3</sup> about Latter-day Saint texts and scholarship. In her book *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel’s Second God*, Barker addresses questions of Christian origins, asking, “What would a man from first-century Galilee have understood when he heard ‘Son of God,’ ‘Messiah’ and ‘Lord?’”<sup>4</sup> In *The Great Angel*, she answers such questions with passages like this one:

What has become clear to me time and time again is that even over so wide an area, the evidence points consistently in one direction and indicates that pre-Christian Judaism was not monotheistic in the sense that we use the word. The roots of Christian trinitarian theology lie in pre-Christian Palestinian beliefs about the angels. There were many in first-century Palestine who still retained a world-view derived from the more ancient religion of Israel [that of the First Temple] in which there was a High God and several Sons of God, one of whom was Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel. Yahweh, the Lord, could be manifested on earth in human form, as an angel or in the Davidic king. *It was as a manifestation of Yahweh, the Son of God, that Jesus was acknowledged as Son of God, Messiah and Lord.*<sup>5</sup>

In devoting a substantial portion of his article to responding to a few pages in one of Barker’s books, Owen takes due notice of the profound significance her ideas have for Latter-day Saint claims, and further, by so doing he acknowledges that her work challenges the foundation of his own position. In his essay in *The New Mormon Challenge*, he argues “that the religion represented in the Old Testament is monotheistic” (p. 272) and that the ancient Israelite monotheism is different from the Latter-day Saint reading. He goes further and claims that “the religion of the Bible is monotheistic from start

3. Barker to Christensen, e-mail, August 2002.

4. Barker, *The Great Angel*, 1.

5. *Ibid.*, 3, emphasis in original.

to finish. The New Testament writers included Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit alongside God the Father in their worship and in their view of God's identity" (p. 314). Despite what this claim, if true, would imply about the clarity and consistency of the Bible, Owen admits in a footnote that it remained for the Nicene fathers to settle various tensions that had remained "unresolved." He blames "Middle Platonic assumptions" for the interpretations of Philo and of early Christians such as Justin Martyr and Origen (see p. 481 n. 169).<sup>6</sup> He disputes a few of Barker's readings of texts in the Bible and Philo, but he evades a direct confrontation with the evidence supporting her main thesis. Indeed, her discussion of First Temple traditions shows that these specific readings of Justin, Origen, Philo, and much else descend from the views of earlier Jewish and Christian writers.<sup>7</sup>

### Starting Positions

The occasion for Owen's essay is a book called *The New Mormon Challenge: Responding to the Latest Defenses of a Fast-Growing Movement*. It is the brainchild of Paul Owen and Carl Mosser, who a few years ago wrote an article called "Mormon Scholarship, Apologetics, and Evangelical Neglect: Losing the Battle and Not Knowing It?"<sup>8</sup> It was a call for competent evangelical scholars to engage Latter-day Saint scholars in respectful dialogue, and the current volume comes out of that call. The editors state that the key point of difference is that "while the orthodox Christian traditions all affirm that there is but one God who is the absolute Creator of all other reality, Mormonism has historically denied the absolute creation of the world and has affirmed a plurality of deities" (p. 23). Since we differ on that point and others that derive from it, we are deemed to be non-Christian;

6. Compare Barker's discussions of Justin and Philo in *The Great Angel*.

7. If he is going to describe her work as containing "sweeping and unsubstantiated assertions" (p. 309), he should at least read all of her work and account for the substance behind her assertions.

8. Paul Owen and Carl Mosser, "Mormon Scholarship, Apologetics, and Evangelical Neglect: Losing the Battle and Not Knowing It?" *Trinity Journal*, n.s., 19/2 (1998): 179–205.

this is, however, expressed as politely as possible.<sup>9</sup> A number of LDS scholars have written responses to various chapters, to which mine will be added.<sup>10</sup> The discussion will be endless, as such things tend to be. Still, however endless the discussion, the outlines will no doubt be very clear because the outlines derive from consistent starting assumptions.

Owen bases his response on two fundamental assumptions:

- He assumes the authority of the received Old and New Testament texts—at least those passages and versions that he cites as proof texts—to be substantially accurate and without significant change.<sup>11</sup>
- He assumes the authority of “orthodox” interpretations of the Old and New Testaments (that is, as articulated in the councils of the third to fifth centuries), *even when in explicit contradiction to the beliefs of earlier Christians* (see p. 481 n. 169).<sup>12</sup>

9. Craig L. Blomberg, “Is Mormonism Christian?” in *The New Mormon Challenge: Responding to the Latest Defenses of a Fast-Growing Movement*, ed. Francis J. Beckwith, Carl Mosser, and Paul Owen (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002), 315–32, esp. 489 n. 69. See also p. 278, where he comments that philosophical monotheism is “a logical extension of the biblical doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. The same God who created the world exercises absolute sovereign providence over it.” Contrast Margaret Barker, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven: Temple Symbolism in the New Testament* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1995), 34–35: “Genesis 1 does not describe a creation out of nothing. It is one of the commonest misreadings of the text to think that it does. It describes the ordering and transforming of an existing chaos. The word translated ‘created’ is a Hebrew word only used to describe the activity of God. . . . The Aramaic version of Genesis, which is thought to be the oldest we have giving the traditions of the Palestinian Jews, translates the opening verses of Genesis thus: ‘From the beginning with Wisdom the Son of the LORD perfected [not created!] the heavens and the earth’” (bracketed material in the original).

10. For example, Blake Ostler has some responses at [www.angelfire.com/az3/LDC/Philosophy.htm](http://www.angelfire.com/az3/LDC/Philosophy.htm).

11. While he acknowledges the possibility of editing (for example, pp. 274, 470 n. 22), he allows for no substantial losses or changes (pp. 470 n. 19, 480 n. 154). He treats a favorable assessment of Josiah in 2 Kings 23:25, likely written to honor Josiah during his lifetime, as a decisive rebuttal of Barker’s thesis. However, 2 Chronicles 35:20–23, a post-exilic composition, does not flatter Josiah.

12. Owen acknowledges “unresolved” tensions until “the Nicene fathers clearly identified the Son as a distinguishable relation within God’s own substance” (p. 481 n. 169). From here, Owen reads back into the Old and New Testaments. Barker starts from the first century in order to read forward into the New Testament, rather than backward.

Barker's work deals directly with these assumptions in ways that undercut Owen's foundations:

- Barker questions the authority of several key texts and readings, starting her arguments by identifying unresolved tensions in the scriptures as we have them, including variant readings and corrupt passages, and by searching widely through relevant literatures in order to account for these tensions.
- She undercuts the authority of late "orthodox" interpretations by citing a wide range of earlier but neglected Christian texts and their Jewish antecedents, always working from a position of faith, not of skepticism.

In her first book, *The Older Testament*, Barker describes the problem she wants to explore: What was the background for the origins of Christianity? She then spells out her method of inquiry:

We have to find something appropriate for a group of Galileans, relevant to their needs and aspirations, but sufficiently coherent (and even recognizable) to draw the hostility of Jerusalem Judaism, as a threat to the Law. . . . Our task is to reconstruct a background *quite independent of New Testament considerations*, appropriate to the world of Jesus' first followers, and *known to exist as a single set of ideas* which threatened the Law. . . .

In order to reconstruct such a background, it is necessary to dig deep, and to work back through the writings of several centuries. I shall begin with the pseudepigraphon known as I Enoch (Ethiopic Enoch), and shall then devote the rest of this book to establishing the antecedents of this work, which is known to have been used by the earliest Christians. . . . This mythology underlies the creation theology of Romans 8, the exorcisms and miracles of the Gospels, the heavenly archetypes of Hebrews, and the first Temple imagery of the Fourth Gospel. It is the imagery of Revelation, Jude and the Petrine Epistles, and the song of its angels became the Sanctus



of the eucharistic liturgy. Little of this is derived directly from Enoch; the process rather has been one of following the Enochic stream to its source, and seeing what other waters have flowed from it.<sup>13</sup>

This is Barker's method. Her project is one of restoration, and it leads her to conclude that the origins of Christianity were linked to the First Temple traditions that had been opposed by the activities of the Deuteronomist reformers (starting with Josiah and continuing into the exile) but retained in the "evidence of pre-Christian texts preserved and transmitted *only by Christian hands*."<sup>14</sup> The picture that emerges from Barker's inquiries involves her identification of a distinct constellation of related ideas that she can track through a broad range of writings, including Enoch and the New Testament, particularly Revelation. Owen barely acknowledges the existence of such key ideas or their antiquity. Indeed, his degree of reluctance inversely reflects their importance:

Temple theology is the original context of the New Testament insofar as the hopes, beliefs, symbols and rituals of the temple shaped the lives of those who came to be called Christians. Temple theology knew of incarnation and atonement, the sons of God and the life of the age to come, the day of judgement, justification, salvation, the renewed covenant and the kingdom of God. When temple theology is presented, even in barest outline, its striking relevance to the New Testament becomes clear.<sup>15</sup>

Of *The Great Angel*, Owen admits that it "covers a vast body of material from the Old Testament to the early church fathers" (p. 301). But of that vast body of material, he restricts his direct response to just a few passages in the Old Testament (one page of four actually

13. Margaret Barker, *The Older Testament: The Survival of Themes from the Ancient Royal Cult in Sectarian Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1987), 5–6, emphasis in original.

14. Ibid., 6, emphasis in original.

15. Barker, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, ix.



addressing her readings), Philo (four pages), and the New Testament (one page). In every case in which he chides her for reading without regard to context, he neglects the overall context that she develops in her work, which in turn provides her context for the readings he questions. "Barker's reconstruction," he maintains, "could be questioned on numerous points of detail—nearly every paragraph contains assertions that require more argumentation than she provides" (p. 302).

Everyone's opinions can be questioned, and scholarship necessarily involves ongoing discussion. But Owen not only fails to confront most of what Barker does provide in *The Great Angel*, but he also does not even mention the existence of her six other books, all of which provide abundant arguments and evidences to support her reconstruction. Barker states exactly this in her introduction: "My first three books have been, in effect, an extended introduction to *The Great Angel*."<sup>16</sup>

Objecting to her basic premise in *The Great Angel*, Owen writes:

It only becomes necessary to identify the Angel of the LORD as a second God if one postulates (as Margaret Barker does) a linguistic and conceptual distinction between the Most High God (*El Elyon*) and the LORD (*YHWH*)—a distinction which itself rests on an entirely dubious reconstruction of Israel's religious history. (p. 280)

Yet, reading the first chapter of *The Great Angel*, we find that Barker's actual argument builds on existing distinctions in the text.

All the texts in the Hebrew Bible distinguish clearly between the divine sons of Elohim/Elyon and those human beings who are called sons of Yahweh. This must be significant.

16. See Barker, *The Great Angel*, xiii. For titles, see the bibliography in Kevin Christensen, "Paradigms Regained: A Survey of Margaret Barker's Scholarship and Its Significance for Mormon Studies," *FARMS Occasional Papers* 2 (2001): 89. Owen cites only *The Great Angel*, her fourth book, and one journal article. Her recent journal articles form the basis of her ninth book, *The Great High Priest*, which, at this writing, is in the hands of her publisher. She completed a commentary on Isaiah in 1997.

It must mean that the terms originated at a time when Yahweh was distinguished from whatever was meant by El/Elohim/Elyon. A large number of texts continued to distinguish between El Elyon and Yahweh, Father and Son, and to express this distinction in similar ways with the symbolism of the temple and the royal cult. By tracing these patterns through a great variety of material and over several centuries, Israel's second God can be recovered.<sup>17</sup>

While Owen wants to lock the canonical and traditional barn door, insisting that nothing is missing, Barker not only follows the hoofprints, but she also finds, saddles, and rides the missing horses. She invites us to join her exploration of the concept that "from the beginning Christians have claimed that Jesus was the fulfillment of the hopes expressed in the Old Testament. Our problem is to know exactly what those hopes were, and how they were expressed in first-century Palestine."<sup>18</sup>

### The Authority of the Received Text

Owen assumes the authority of traditional texts and orthodoxy. Barker does not make this assumption but observes:

Recent work on the transmission of the New Testament has shown convincingly that what is currently regarded as "orthodoxy" was constructed and imposed on the text of the New Testament by later scribes, "clarifying" difficult points and resolving theological problems. . . . It may be that those traditions which have been so confidently marginalised as alien to Christianity on the basis of the present New Testament text, were those very traditions which later authorities and their scribes set out to remove.<sup>19</sup>

17. Barker, *The Great Angel*, 10, emphasis in original.

18. *Ibid.*, 2.

19. Barker, "The Secret Tradition," *Journal of Higher Criticism* 2/1 (1995): 50. She is citing Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University

Owen also takes a conservative attitude toward the received Old Testament text and contends “that the religion of the Old Testament was explicitly monotheistic and that this monotheistic outlook was inherited by Jesus and the apostles” (p. 272).<sup>20</sup> However, it is one thing to argue that “the religion represented in the Old Testament is monotheistic” and quite another to argue that the religion represented in the current Old Testament completely represents ancient Israelite and early Christian thought. Notice that Owen builds his case for a strict monotheistic orthodox outlook by citing exactly those passages in Isaiah 40–48 and Deuteronomy 6:4 that Barker attributes to exilic editing and composition (pp. 272–75).<sup>21</sup> That is, he builds his foundation upon the very passages that are in question. He avoids the question of whether the state of the received Old Testament provides grounds for questioning the authority of the received texts and orthodox readings. Barker observes:

In Exodus 24.9–11 there is an account of how Moses received the Law on Sinai. He saw the God of Israel and he saw the sapphire pavement beneath the throne. . . .

In complete contrast we have the teaching of Deuteronomy, which emphasizes very strongly that the Lord was not seen when the Law was given. Deuteronomy 4.12 says that only a voice was heard, cf. Exodus 33.18–23, where Moses asks to see the glory of God and is told that nobody can see God and live. Now the Deuteronomists played an important part in collecting and transmitting the Old Testament texts,

Press, 1993). For other evidence, see Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 84–104, and *Mormonism and Early Christianity* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 168–322; John A. Tvedtnes, *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar* (Salt Lake City: Cornerstone, 1999), 99–103; and Barry R. Bickmore, *Restoring the Ancient Church: Joseph Smith and Early Christianity* (Ben Lomond, Calif.: Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research, 1999), 25–62.

20. Compare Barker, *The Older Testament*, 30: “No simple map of this process is possible, but the whole area has been considerably muddled by the twin assumptions of Old Testament primacy and Old Testament purity.”

21. Compare Barker, *The Older Testament*, chapters on “Deuteronomy” and “Second Isaiah,” 142–83.

and it would seem that they were opposed to some of the traditions in Isaiah, Ezekiel, Enoch and, later, Revelation. This may mean that the type of Jewish religion in which Christianity had its root was seen by some Jews as heretical even before the time of Jesus.<sup>22</sup>

Owen dismisses scholars who substitute “hypothetical and speculative reconstructions of Israel’s religious history for the words of the biblical text” (p. 274), but Barker perceives that what Owen accepts as an orthodox view of Israel’s history is itself a reconstruction. Which reconstruction best accounts for the Bible and other relevant materials? When the question is Which is best? rather than Which is the most orthodox? then genuine comparison and risk enter in. Owen sidesteps the risk by neglecting relevant comparisons. Of her own position, in comparison to orthodox suppositions, Barker says,

Enormous developments took place in the wake of enormous destruction [that is, the destruction of the temple and the monarchy by the Babylonians], and these two factors make certainty quite impossible. They make *all* certainty impossible, and this too must be acknowledged, for the cus-

22. Margaret Barker, *The Lost Prophet: The Book of Enoch and Its Influence on Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1988), 51–52. Incidentally, Owen spends two pages discussing the “Son of Man” passages in the New Testament, but although he includes a reference to Barker’s *Great Angel*, he does not address Barker’s readings and suggestions for an Enoch background, beyond the canonical reference to Daniel 7:13–14 (pp. 288–90). Her *Lost Prophet* also includes a chapter on “The Son of Man.” Owen claims that “the influence of Daniel 7 played a role in helping the earliest Christians to articulate their belief in Jesus’ divine status—that is, his inclusion within the unique identity of the One God” (p. 288). Here Owen’s note refers to *The Great Angel*, 225–28, with the caveat that he would “differ with some of the details of her reading of the evidence” (p. 474 n. 77). Barker comments, “I have heard this phrase ‘Including Jesus in the unique identity of God.’ What does it mean??? It seems to me to be devoid of content, a fudge. A common misunderstanding among evangelicals is that the Second Person ‘began’ in Bethlehem, i.e., that God somehow divided at that point and Jesus was born. The Christian teaching is that the Second Person is eternal and became incarnate at Christmas, not that the Second Person originated at that time. The early Christian understanding was that the Second Person appeared in the OT ‘not yet fully incarnate’” (Barker to Christensen, e-mail, August 2002).



tomary descriptions of ancient Israel's religion are themselves no more than supposition.<sup>23</sup> What I shall propose . . . is not an impossibility, but only one possibility to set alongside other possibilities, none of which has any claim to being an absolutely accurate account of what happened. Hypotheses do not become fact simply by frequent repetition, or even by detailed elaboration. What I am suggesting does, however, make considerable sense of the evidence from later periods.<sup>24</sup>

Given that the Bible contains texts that demonstrate comparative variants, along with internal and theological differences, how do we account for such differences?<sup>25</sup> Accepting the existence of variant texts (such as the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Targums) and corrupt passages (see Barker's comments on Proverbs)<sup>26</sup> that demonstrate conscious editing and selection, what theologies and historical processes account for such editorial trends? While the Jews and Christians of the early centuries accused one another of changing the scriptures, what are the implications of those accusations, particularly when they provide examples of such changes?<sup>27</sup> Both Jewish and Samaritan

23. She gives her arguments in *The Great Angel*, 20–27, with reference to the debates that followed on the publication of John Van Seters, *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983). She also cites R. N. Whybray, *The Making of the Pentateuch* (Sheffield, Eng.: JSOT Supplements Series, 1987). More recently, Richard Friedman has responded to Van Seters, arguing for at least the antiquity of the source materials for the Bible, though Friedman too sees the final form of the Old Testament histories as products of a redaction by Ezra after the return from exile. See Richard E. Friedman, "The Antiquity of the Work," appendix 2 in *The Hidden Book in the Bible* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999), 350–60, for a defense of the age of the sources of the Torah, and "'Late for a Very Important Date,'" appendix 3 in *ibid.*, 361–89, for arguments against exilic composition.

24. Barker, *The Great Angel*, 12.

25. For a general survey, see Richard E. Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989). See also Kevin L. Barney for the most detailed Latter-day Saint comments on the Documentary Hypothesis to date, "Reflections on the Documentary Hypothesis," *Dialogue* 33/1 (2000): 57–99.

26. Barker, *The Older Testament*, 1 and 91–92.

27. Tvedtnes, "Jeremiah's Prophecies of Jesus Christ," 99–103; compare Tvedtnes, "The Messiah, the Book of Mormon, and the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *The Most Correct Book*, 328–43.

traditions describe a complete rewriting of the Bible by Ezra; what then are the implications of the existence of such a story, particularly since the Samaritan version accuses Ezra of tampering?<sup>28</sup> Barker never claims proof for her ideas but rather that “the more material which can be illuminated by the hypothesis, the more it deserves consideration.”<sup>29</sup> And regardless of whether she is correct in every single detail,<sup>30</sup> it is her overall hypothesis that is in question and should be tested.

### How Firm a Foundation?

Owen introduces Barker’s view that “during and after the exile, the Deuteronomists instituted wide-ranging religious reforms that carried on the earlier program of King Josiah (cf. 2 Kgs 22–23; 2 Chr 34–35). These reforms involved the elevation of Law and demotion of Wisdom, the quenching of heavenly ascents and visions of God, and the enforcement of strict monotheism.” But in his view, “the whole hypothesis” is questionable “on methodological and historical grounds” (p. 302). Notice that he says that the hypothesis is questionable, but not the program. Indeed, *The New Mormon Challenge* manifests much the same agenda in dealing with Latter-day Saint claims. So how does Owen question her hypothesis?

If one wishes to follow Barker, it must be assumed that Josiah’s reforms had a *negative* influence on the religion of Judah—which is precisely the opposite of what the Bible states: “Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the LORD as he did—with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses” (2 Kgs 23:25). (p. 303)<sup>31</sup>

28. Barker, *The Older Testament*, 191–92. John A. Tvedtnes, *The Book of Mormon and Other Hidden Books: “Out of Darkness unto Light”* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2000), 178–81.

29. Barker, *The Older Testament*, 261.

30. See Margaret Barker, *The Risen Lord: The Jesus of History as the Christ of Faith* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1996), xii.

31. Compare the discussion of this passage in 2 Kings 23:25 with Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* 108–16; and William J. Doorly, *Obsession with Justice: The Story of the Deuteronomists* (New York: Paulist, 1994), 37–45.



Owen oversimplifies the situation, leaving out mention that Josiah's reform foundered at his unexpected death in 609 B.C. (2 Kings 23:29–30; 2 Chronicles 35:20–27), some twenty-four years before the fall of Jerusalem. Josiah's successors are all condemned as wicked (2 Kings 23:31–33, 37; 24:8–9, 18–19; 2 Chronicles 36:1–14). Barker also observes that “the Dead Sea Scrolls and later Jewish tradition all recalled the post Josiah period as one of ‘wrath.’”

The devastation wrought by Josiah was never forgotten as can be seen in the later Jewish sources. The first temple ended at that time. He “hid away” the symbols of temple worship and people believed that they would be restored in the time of the Messiah. In other words, the Messiah would restore the true worship of the first temple. The sacred calendar of Deut. 16 has no place for atonement. Can the Deuteronomistic system introduced by Josiah have been the basis of Christianity?<sup>32</sup>

From a Latter-day Saint perspective, we should note that the Deuteronomist reform was not a single, static movement based solely on the rediscovery of the Book of the Law during Josiah's time thirty-seven years before the destruction of the temple, but it occurred in a succession of waves, several decades apart, most likely involving entirely different generations of editors responding to changing situations.<sup>33</sup> The Deuteronomist response to the destruction of the First Temple and monarchy took place during the exile, long after Josiah's death and long after Lehi left. In overgeneralizing about the success and virtue of the whole Josiah/Deuteronomist reform, based on a single passage written by those reformers about their hero and patron, Owen shows the trust of the farmer who tells his wife that the fox he left to guard the chickens has assured him that the hens just have not been laying lately. Why would those who reformed Israel's religion say that what they were doing had a negative effect on the

32. Barker to Christensen, e-mail, August 2002.

33. See Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* 136–49; and Doorly, *Obsession with Justice*, 46–55.

religion of Israel? Why would they describe themselves as corruptors?<sup>34</sup> (As though they would write, “Lo, and we did corrupt the scriptures in our care, excising things most precious that happened to conflict with our agenda.”) But perhaps the fox really has been guarding the henhouse. All the farmer needs to do is to look. Does the picture the fox gives match what is inside? We can ask, How were Josiah’s reforms remembered? Is there any evidence for exilic editing of the Deuteronomist histories?<sup>35</sup> If so, what are the themes that they suppressed? Is there any evidence that the exilic efforts of the Deuteronomists had a negative effect? All these questions can be asked without reference to the Book of Mormon, though it happens that comparison to the Book of Mormon is profoundly illuminating.

### Meet the Deuteronomists

Notice that of two passages in the second chapter of *The Great Angel* that summarize the Deuteronomist agenda, Owen chooses to quote the second, which restates most of the information in the first (p. 303). The chief difference in content between the two passages is that the earlier quotation ties the agenda of the Deuteronomist movement to specific passages in Deuteronomy.

First, they were to have the Law instead of Wisdom (Deut. 4.6). . . . [W]hat was the Wisdom which the Law replaced? Second, they were to think only of the formless voice of God sounding from the fire and giving the Law (Deut. 4.12).<sup>36</sup> Israel had long had a belief in the vision of God, when the glory

34. For a discussion of methods, see Hugh Nibley, “The Way of the Church,” in *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, 209–66.

35. See, for example, any of Barker’s books and, for comparisons, Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* and Doorly, *Obsession with Justice*. See also David Noel Freedman, *The Nine Commandments: Uncovering a Hidden Pattern of Crime and Punishment in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), which argues that the Bible contains a structure designed specifically to explain the destruction of the temple, the fall of the monarchy, and the exile. All three authors cite evidence that older texts were subordinated to an exilic redaction. See also Barney, “Reflections on the Documentary Hypothesis.”

36. A printing error is here in *The Great Angel*, which I have corrected. Deuteronomy 4:12 is the correct reference.

had been visible on the throne in human form, surrounded by the heavenly hosts. What happened to the visions of God? And third, they were to leave the veneration of the host of heaven to peoples not chosen by Yahweh (Deut. 4.19–20). Israel had long regarded Yahweh as the Lord of the hosts of heaven, but the title Yahweh of Hosts was not used by the Deuteronomists. What happened to the hosts, the angels?<sup>37</sup>

So there is a biblical basis for Barker's inquiries, and Owen appears to be reluctant to acknowledge that this is so. Why is the Old Testament at odds with itself, describing the heavenly ascents and vision of God with acceptance in some places and rejecting them elsewhere? If these prohibitions in Deuteronomy 4 were original to Moses and authoritative, why do we have the throne visions of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and others? Why does Revelation, which as Barker notes is the only New Testament book that expressly claims divine inspiration,<sup>38</sup> contain exactly the things that the Deuteronomists condemn? Why does the book of Enoch appear to contain exactly the things that the exilic Deuteronomists condemn, and why in turn does that book appear to condemn the returning exiles as apostate?<sup>39</sup> Why did the early Christians value the book of Enoch when it contains what the Deuteronomists condemned and when it appears to condemn the Deuteronomists?<sup>40</sup> Was there a relationship between the attitude about the Second Temple that appears in Enoch and what Jesus expressed when he "cleansed" the temple? Owen dodges the questions, but Barker has the answers:

37. Barker, *The Great Angel*, 13.

38. Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: Which God Gave to Him to Show to His Servants What Must Soon Take Place (Revelation 1.1)* (Edinburgh: Clark, 2000), 63.

39. "And they began again to build as before, and they reared up that tower, and it was named the high tower; and they began again to place a table before the tower, but all the bread on it was polluted and not pure. . . . And after that in the seventh week shall an apostate generation arise, And many shall be its deeds, And all its deeds shall be apostate' (1 Enoch 89.73; 93.9)." Cited in Barker, *The Lost Prophet*, 19. Also see her discussion in *The Older Testament*, 19: "If the roots of all this mythological material do lie in the Old Testament, and what we read in Enoch is a legitimate development, we find new significance in the claim that all who returned from the exile were impure and apostate."

40. Barker, *The Lost Prophet*, 16–32.

The Deuteronomists rewrote the tradition: “Then Yahweh spoke to you out of the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of the words but saw no form; there was only a voice” (Deut. 4.12). With this one should compare the contemporary Ezekiel, a temple priest who was able to describe “one like a man” on the fiery throne (Ezek. 1.26), or the tradition that Moses was permitted to see the “form” of the Lord (Num. 12.8).<sup>41</sup>

Curiously, early in his paper Owen cites another scholar who acknowledges that “the Deuteronomic reform was apparently not only a matter of where and how the God of Israel should be worshipped, but also a matter of the divine nature” (p. 274). Nevertheless, Owen shows a distinct uneasiness about acknowledging any issues that might be raised against the authority of any part of the Bible. “If one wishes to maintain with Barker that the Deuteronomistic movement had a negative impact on the religious faith of Israel, then one is compelled to reject the teaching of a large body of biblical literature” (p. 303).

On the contrary, we are not compelled to reject the teaching of a large body of biblical literature. We simply read with an awareness of the editorial slant in those books, accepting the Bible as “a record of the Jews, which contains the covenants of the Lord . . . [and] many of the prophecies . . . wherefore, they are of great worth” (1 Nephi 13:23), despite the notion that “they have taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious” (1 Nephi 13:26). Since Lehi was a contemporary of Josiah’s reform, which has been associated with the recovery of the Book of the Law, the Book of Mormon should and does show a profound influence from Deuteronomy.<sup>42</sup> Owen claims that “The Book of Mormon itself plainly indicates that Deuteronomy was written prior to the time of the exile (1 Nephi 5:11; 3 Nephi 20:23)” (p. 274). He cites only 1 Nephi 5:11, which describes the brass plates as containing “the five books of Moses,” and 3 Nephi 20:23, which cites a prophecy from Deuter-

41. Barker, *The Great Angel*, 100.

42. See my discussion and references in “Paradigms Regained,” 9–10.



onomy 18:15. He might also have cited various studies showing Deuteronomistic influence throughout the Book of Mormon in terms of a profoundly nuanced understanding of the Law, a complex and subtle use of literary allusion and type scenes that reference the Deuteronomist history, sophisticated references to the politics in the Deuteronomist history, and so forth.<sup>43</sup> However, none of this excludes the possibility that the exilic editors changed, removed, or added things to the text.

Owen himself accepts the possibility of some exilic editing and does so without feeling compelled to reject the Old Testament altogether. He writes, "It is, of course, possible that the book of Deuteronomy underwent editing by later scribes, but there are good reasons for maintaining that the substance of Deuteronomy goes back to the time of Moses himself" (p. 274). He refers the reader to a number of books, which we may presume contain the good reasons.<sup>44</sup> From my perspective, the Book of Mormon provides additional evidence that the exilic phases of the Deuteronomist reforms proceeded just as Barker claims, reacting to the loss of the monarchy and the destruction of the temple:

The Deuteronomists had not favoured the monarchy, as can be seen from their surviving writings; they said that the wickedness of a king had caused the destruction of Jerusalem (2 Kings 24.3).<sup>45</sup> They were to reformulate Israel's religion in such a way that the monarch was no longer central to the cult. In addition, the exile of so many people to Babylon meant

43. Ibid.

44. Appendices B and C in Friedman's *Hidden Book of the Bible* give some good reasons for the antiquity of the source materials in the Pentateuch, though he also describes evidence for redaction and editing during the exile. I located a short but interesting study on the Web as of October 2002 ([www.robibrad.demon.co.uk/deut.htm](http://www.robibrad.demon.co.uk/deut.htm), section 7.1) that asserts that Hosea, a preexilic prophet, shows an awareness of Deuteronomy. None of this precludes the activities of editorial redaction of old materials.

45. According to Doorly, this assessment of King Manasseh is one stage in a searching process, not the final conclusion of the Deuteronomist school. Also, note that a century later, the Chronicler claims that Manasseh had repented (2 Chronicles 33:15–16; see Doorly, *Obsession with Justice*, 62–64).

that they were physically separated from the temple which had been the centre of their life. These two circumstances combined to alter radically the perception of the presence of God in the temple. The events of history necessitated an idea of God not located in the one holy place, but rather of God travelling with his people, and the Deuteronomists rejected all the ancient anthropomorphisms of the royal cult. Theirs was to be a God whose voice was heard and obeyed, but who had no visible form.<sup>46</sup>

Clearly, this aspect of the Deuteronomist reform responds to the destruction of the monarchy and the loss of the temple. That dates these specific efforts to the exilic phase of the reform, and this is where we see an immediate contrast with the picture in the Book of Mormon. Lehi's vision in 1 Nephi 1 demonstrates exactly the themes that the Deuteronomist movement suppressed in their response to the exile.<sup>47</sup> Further, the Book of Mormon shows an in-depth awareness of the preexilic Wisdom traditions that Barker reconstructs based on "the evidence of pre-Christian texts preserved and transmitted *only by Christian hands*."<sup>48</sup> While Barker's reconstruction stands apart from the Book of Mormon (again, her concerns have to do with Christian origins, and she would not necessarily endorse any Latter-day Saint claims), the degree of fit is profound. One of the most important elements of the preexilic religion that the Deuteronomists changed involved the role of the high priest. For example, Barker observes that

The anointed high priest of the first temple cult was remembered as having been different from the high priest of the second temple cult since the latter was described simply as the priest who "wears many garments," a reference to the

46. Margaret Barker, *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem* (London: SPCK, 1991), 134–35.

47. Christensen, "Paradigms Regained," 15.

48. Barker, *The Older Testament*, 7, emphasis in original. Christensen, "Paradigms Regained," 37–50.



eight garments worn by him on Yom Kippur: "And who is the anointed [high priest]? He that is anointed with the oil of unction, but not he that is dedicated with many garments." (m. *Horayoth* 3.4). It was also remembered that the roles of the anointed high priest and the high priest of many garments differed in some respects at Yom Kippur when the rituals of atonement were performed. The anointed high priest, they believed, would be restored to Israel at the end of time, in the last days.<sup>49</sup>

Why does this matter? The Hebrew *Messiah* and the Greek *Christ* both mean "anointed one." The implication is that during the exile after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., the role of the anointed one was changed as part of a Deuteronomist reform. Barker shows that the early Christians saw Jesus as this anointed high priest and that this is the theme of John, Hebrews, and Revelation.

While Owen argues that "Mormons cannot consistently appeal to scholars who would explain the monotheism of Deuteronomy by appealing to a later exilic editor" (p. 274), he obviously did not foresee the kind of fit I describe in "Paradigms Regained."<sup>50</sup> It won't do to cite the passages from Deuteronomy 4 to condemn the Book of Mormon on these points because, as Barker shows, the same things were originally part of the Israelite tradition, and they do reemerge in Christianity. The affinity is remarkable, given that the separate bodies of work came through vastly different methods and without collusion.

### Isaiah Seconds the Motion

Indeed, even the apparent conflict between the Book of Mormon quotations and the notion of a Second Isaiah, written during the exile (p. 470 n. 19), fits better than might appear at first glance. The seven chapters containing the Second Isaiah's arguments for monotheism do not appear in the Book of Mormon Isaiah quotations.<sup>51</sup> And most

49. Barker, *The Great Angel*, 15.

50. Christensen, "Paradigms Regained," 24–28.

51. *Ibid.*, 77–81, and Barker, *The Older Testament*, 161–83.

of the Second Isaiah chapters that do appear in the Book of Mormon have ties to preexilic festival liturgies and could, therefore, be older, even if parts of Isaiah 40–55 had been edited, composed, or reinterpreted later.<sup>52</sup> The Isaiah situation cannot be said to be completely resolved, nor can it said to be less than very promising.<sup>53</sup>

For example, regarding the state of the texts of Isaiah 53, the fourth of Isaiah's Servant songs, Barker observes that

The subject of the fourth Song is atonement; this much at least is clear. What is not clear is the exact process by which this atonement was effected and it is these disputes which led to distortions in the Hebrew text and the wide variety of renderings in the versions. Since the Qumran Hebrew is substantially the same as the Masoretic, the problems in the Hebrew must have arisen before the major text families became distinct.<sup>54</sup>

Barker here addresses the question of troublesome variants in a key text. Do such variants matter? Barker writes that

On the road to Emmaus, Jesus explained to the two disciples that it was necessary for the Anointed One to suffer and enter his glory (Luke 24.26); this must refer to the Qumran version of the fourth Servant Song [Isaiah 53], *since there is no other passage in the Hebrew Scriptures which speaks of a suffering Anointed One*.<sup>55</sup>

### Variations on Themes

The existence of such a key Isaiah variant again raises the question of whether the Old Testament as it stands comprehensively and

52. See Christensen, "Paradigms Regained," 77–81.

53. See Andrew C. Skinner, "Nephi's Lessons to His People: The Messiah, the Land, and Isaiah 48–49 in 1 Nephi 19–22," in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 95–122.

54. Barker, *The Risen Lord*, 121–22.

55. Barker, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 136.

accurately represents the religion of Israel, particularly when such a key textual version had been lost for almost two thousand years. Discussing a forthcoming book on the versions of the books of Samuel found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Donald W. Parry reports, "The scrolls teach us much about the formation of the Bible and how the scribal process of transmitting the text often changed it, affecting the version we have today. . . . I have found between 300 and 400 discrepancies in the book of Samuel alone, including a whole missing verse. Sometimes it's only a word or two that's changed, but it alters the entire meaning of the verse or chapter."<sup>56</sup>

Owen does mention the much-discussed Deuteronomy 32:8–9 with its notable variants: *sons of Israel* in the Masoretic text (which underlies the King James translation) and *sons of El* in the Septuagint and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Here is the Revised Standard Version:

When the Most High [that is, Elohim] gave to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of men, he fixed the bounds of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God [the KJV has children of Israel].

For the LORD's portion [that is, Yahweh's portion] is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage.

Forced to deal with this passage, Owen confidently tells us what it means (see pp. 298–99). However, he does not inform the reader that early Christian readers read the passage quite differently—indeed, very much as Latter-day Saints do. The omission is particularly conspicuous since both Barker and Barry Bickmore discuss this issue.<sup>57</sup> For example, Barker observes:

Eusebius, writing about A.D. 320, shows in his *Proof of the Gospel* that the distinction between the two deities was still remembered in his time and that the second God was identified with Christ. Having quoted Deut. 32.8 he says of it: "In

56. Quoted in Todd R. Condie, "Reviving the Dead Sea Scrolls," *BYU Magazine*, spring 2002, 16.

57. See Barker, *The Great Angel*, 190–207; and Bickmore, *Restoring the Ancient Church*, 106–18.



these words surely he [Moses] names first the Most High God, the Supreme God of the Universe, and then, as Lord, His Word, Whom we call Lord in the second degree after the God of the universe . . . to One beyond comparison with (the angels), the Head and King of the Universe, I mean to Christ Himself, as being the Only Begotten Son, was handed over that part of humanity denominated Jacob and Israel." . . . (*Proof of the Gospel*, IV.9)<sup>58</sup>

In discussing the Wisdom tradition as it currently appears in our Old Testament, Barker discusses clues to the origins of the apocalyptic traditions:

How are we to explain [Daniel's] dealings with heavenly beings, and his use of an inexplicable mythology? The elaborate structures of the book suggest that it was using a known framework, and not constructing imagery as it went along, but there is no hint of such imagery in Proverbs, *except in passages where the text is now corrupt*. This suggests that the wisdom elements in the non-canonical apocalypses which have no obvious roots in the Old Testament may not be foreign accretions, but elements of an older wisdom which reformers have purified.<sup>59</sup>

It is patterns drawn from the symbolism of the First Temple that lie behind Barker's readings. Owen charges that she reads "into texts ideas that simply are not there" (p. 303)—but he does so without reference to that background context that she builds. For example, she writes:

The most vivid temple imagery to describe the presence of God is found, as a result [of the Deuteronomist reforms], in

58. Barker, *The Great Angel*, 192.

59. Barker, *The Older Testament*, 92, emphasis in original. See *ibid.*, 1: "Add to this the fact that a high proportion of the opaque texts of the Old Testament seem to be dealing with the same subject matter, namely angels, stars, and the elements which surface in later apocalyptic, and we have grounds for taking a fresh look at the Old Testament and those who transmitted it." See also Barker, "Beyond the Veil of the Temple: The High Priestly Origins of the Apocalypses," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 51/1 (1998): 1–21.

books which were not included in the Old Testament, even though many of them were known to the first Christians and used by them. To understand what they were really saying when they used temple language, we are very much dependent on these little-known books.<sup>60</sup>

Owen, in contrast, prefers interpretations of the Nicene fathers, post-Christian Judaism, and late Christianity for his authoritative texts, for the most part excluding from the discussion just those texts that disappear around the time of the Nicene fathers. Against this, Barker asserts that “The roots of Christianity can be seen to go deep into the religion of Israel, and will not be properly recovered and understood simply by reading the authorized version of what that religion was.”<sup>61</sup> Indeed, John Tvedtnes’s essay “The Messiah, the Book of Mormon, and the Dead Sea Scrolls” provides some excellent examples of just the kinds of things that have been missing from the authorized versions of Christian roots.<sup>62</sup>

### Owen on Barker’s Readings

Owen claims that “Barker’s handling of specific Old Testament texts is sometimes rather naive for a scholar of her reputation.”<sup>63</sup> For instance, we are told that Yahweh is an angel, since he is called ‘the Holy One of Israel,’ and the angels are also called ‘holy ones’” (p. 303).<sup>64</sup> Not only does he grossly oversimplify her argument on the

60. Barker, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven*, 5.

61. Barker, *The Great Angel*, 231.

62. Tvedtnes, *The Most Correct Book*, 330–34.

63. Educated at Cambridge, Barker has authored nine books and has published articles in a variety of academic journals in England and America. She is a recognized expert on temple symbolism and in 1998 served a term as the president-elect of the Society for Old Testament Study ([www.trinity-bris.ac.uk/sots/pastconferences.html](http://www.trinity-bris.ac.uk/sots/pastconferences.html)). A number of her articles appear at Marquette University’s page at [www.marquette.edu/maqom/](http://www.marquette.edu/maqom/). Notice too how carefully Owen hedges (both here and elsewhere), introducing a discussion by saying “sometimes” and then generalizing as though “sometimes” is representative.

64. Notice again the important rhetorical hedge/qualification of “sometimes.” This permits Owen to skate only where he chooses and to let the generalizations fall where they may, whether or not the sampling is representative or his reading actually is better.

pages he references, but he argues as though he has not previously observed passages in the Bible that describe Yahweh as an angel (see pp. 279–80).<sup>65</sup> For example, “And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush *was* not consumed. . . . And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses” (Exodus 3:2, 4).

Owen does not read Barker carefully, I would venture to guess, because his ideological commitments interfere with the possibility of taking her seriously. For example, “Barker overlooks the fact that ‘no sexual behavior of God has been described in the Old Testament’” (p. 302).<sup>66</sup> On the contrary, she does not overlook this: “Such similarities as do exist [between the mythologies of Canaan and Israel] show that many Canaanite elements, such as the ribald revelries of the heavenly court and the birth of the gods, have not been used.”<sup>67</sup>

Owen claims that “Barker continually cites isolated passages from Philo, without due regard for their contexts, in the attempt to prove her case” (p. 304). Yet Owen continually neglects Barker’s overall context. She writes that “Philo shows by this imagery that his Logos originated in the royal cult and it corroborates what we have deduced from other texts about the nature of that cult.”<sup>68</sup> Regarding Philo, she observes:

What is said here about the Logos is very like what has been said by others of the Name in Deuteronomy. When we add to this the whole catalogue of significant titles which Philo gives to the Logos, of which King, Shepherd, High Priest, Covenant, Rider on the Divine Chariot, Archangel, and First-

65. Compare Barker’s richer discussion in *The Great Angel*, 28–47, 70–96.

66. But compare Raphael Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess*, 3rd enl. ed. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990).

67. Barker, *The Great Angel*, 23–24.

68. *Ibid.*, 122.



born Son can give a context for all the others, it seems more than likely that Philo drew his ideas of the mediator from his people's most ancient beliefs, and only *adapted* them to Greek ways of thinking.<sup>69</sup>

While Owen builds from the settled conclusions of classical trinitarian monotheism,<sup>70</sup> Barker looks back to the untidy controversies that predate the Christian councils:

The battle against the "two powers" heretics began with the exegesis of Scripture, especially with [the] vision of Dan 7; . . . and the debates were always associated with Palestine. *All this points to a crisis precipitated by the rise of Christianity.* . . . The problem of the Memra, the problems of the Logos and the problem of the two powers are all one problem, caused by our losing sight of the Great Angel, and by the curiously perverted refusal on the part of Christian scholars to believe the claims of the first Christians.<sup>71</sup>

One of these first Christians is Justin, who remarks to Trypho "That there both is, and that we read of, another God and Lord under the Creator of all things who is also termed an angel in that he bears messages to men, whatever the Creator, above Whom there is no other god, wills to be borne to them."<sup>72</sup> If such things were as

69. Ibid., 116.

70. Stephen E. Parrish, with Carl Mosser, "A Tale of Two Theisms," in *The New Mormon Challenge*, 193–218; Owen also comments: "Middle Platonic assumptions caused similar problems for early Christian apologists such as Justin Martyr and Origen, whose understanding of the Son's identity was similar to Philo's Logos. The tension remained unresolved until the Nicene fathers clearly identified the Son as a distinguishable relation within God's own substance" (p. 481 n. 169). Here again Owen shows his commitment to the late councils and consciously dismisses the explicit teaching and belief of the early Christians.

71. Barker, *The Great Angel*, 158, emphasis in original.

72. Ibid., 193, quoting Trypho 58. Also Barker, *Gate of Heaven*, 175. Contrast Owen, "If Barker's reading of the New Testament is correct, then why is the Son never described as a 'second God'?" (p. 308).

unthinkable as Owen imagines, why does such an important early Christian writer from a Palestine background express exactly what Barker claims?<sup>73</sup> Would Justin and Eusebius agree with Owen's claim that "Therefore, for Jews who were familiar with the Hebrew Bible, the identification of Jesus as Yahweh would have implied, not that he was a *second* God, but that he was somehow to be included within the identity of the *One* God (Deut 6:4). As Jesus said, 'I and the Father are one' (John 10:30)" (p. 308)? It happens that neither Justin nor the New Testament contains a phrase about Jesus being included within the "unique identity" of God (p. 288), Owen's favorite phrase. John 17:21-22 does report Jesus' prayer: "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: . . . that they may be one, even as we are one." Owen should know that Latter-day Saint writers favor these passages as an explanation of the oneness of God.

Owen accuses Barker of interpreting "with wooden literalness what Philo is attempting to imaginatively depict through philosophical contemplation" (p. 480 n. 165) in dealing with the Logos, yet she writes, "In all his philosophizing and allegorizing, Philo uses Logos in both its senses; it was the title of the Angel who appeared in human form but also the philosophers' Reason or divine order apparent in the creation. . . . One by one in the roles of the Logos we recognize the ancient Yahweh."<sup>74</sup> She recognizes that Philo is involved in demythologizing Hebrew traditions but that his commentaries nevertheless witness to what those traditions originally described. This is particularly evident when reading Philo in the sweeping context that she provides in *The Great Angel* in the chapters that Owen bypasses.<sup>75</sup>

73. Compare Owen, "Barker contends that the earliest Christians identified Jesus as Yahweh" (p. 308). She's not only contending; she's demonstrating through quotation.

74. Barker, *The Great Angel*, 121.

75. Early on, Owen defines polytheism as the "belief in and worship of a plurality of gods, even if these gods are believed to be emanations of a supreme High God" (p. 272). Later he quotes Alan F. Segal as saying, "Philo allows for the existence of a second, principal, divine creature, whom he calls a 'second God,' who nevertheless is only the visible emanation of the High, ever-existing God" (p. 307). So, according to Owen's definition, Philo is a polytheist.

## Conclusion

Margaret Barker's work restores lost truths about the origins of Christianity and its roots in the First Temple traditions of preexilic Israel. She recovers and displays fossils of that tradition and, in searching widely through an immense variety of writings, fleshes out those fossils and breathes life into them to show their relevance for contemporary Christians. In her works, Barker writes primarily to defend Christian faith from the corrosives of secular scholars who attempt to strip Christianity of its inspiration and Jesus of his divinity. In resisting her findings, Owen unconsciously reenacts the role and agenda of the ancient Deuteronomists all too precisely.

In criticizing Latter-day Saint scholars for citing Barker's work, Owen claims that "it is inconsistent to cite the conclusions of Barker's study while paying no attention to the arguments and methods used in arriving at those views" (p. 303). My monograph "Paradigms Regained" provides significant attention to her arguments and methods and good reasons for LDS scholars to continue to cite and explore Barker's work. In contrast, the most conspicuous thing missing from Owen's discussion of Barker's studies is any substantive discussion of the arguments and methods that she uses to arrive at her views. While her efforts may not demonstrate perfection—something that is now beyond our reach in any case—she does demonstrate a profound range and depth of scholarship and, above this, a most remarkable vision.

I am appending some brief comments by Margaret Barker herself, which I would title "A Demonstration of the Art of Self-Defense."

## Appendix: Some Comments by Margaret Barker

The first question to ask those who do not like *The Great Angel* is Why did Jesus read the OT that way and why did *all* the early Christian fathers (I have checked as far as the mid-fourth century) also read the OT that way? Then ask why the Dead Sea Scrolls and later Jewish tradition all recalled the post-Josiah period as one of "wrath." The whole question needs to be set in as wide a context as possible. Just to quote a couple of verses here and there is not a responsible use of scripture.

The first issue concerns the definition of the canon of scripture. When was the Hebrew canon defined and by whom? Tradition says by a group of rabbis at Jamnia in about A.D. 95—that is, after the origin of Christianity. We do not know exactly what Jesus deemed to be scripture, especially which he deemed to be prophets. There is no list of book titles. Josephus speaks of holy books but gives no list of titles, and there were books mentioned at Qumran (for example, the book of Hagu) that were clearly of great importance for them but that we no longer have. Enoch was also as “popular” as Isaiah there, and we do know that Ezekiel only got into the Hebrew canon after much debate. The Ezra legend in 2 Esdras 14 says that Ezra dictated the scriptures to his scribes but was only permitted to make public twenty-four of the books; the other seventy were to be secret, only for the wise. Something must lie behind this legend! The Hebrew canon represents the choice of a particular group of Jewish people, and it was a smaller collection of books than the Greek canon adopted by the church. Special reverence has always been given to the Hebrew canon, but it has never been exclusive.

There is also the question of the history of the text of the OT and the differences between the Hebrew text we presently use and the one known at Qumran, which differs in significant places (for example, in having no mention of the sons of God/angels in Deuteronomy 32:8 and 43). Why did these passages disappear?

The way the first Christians understood the OT to refer to the Second Person cannot be disregarded by Christians, even though few Christians are aware that the OT was read this way. This is one of the strongest pieces of evidence for the “Second God.” There is also the mysterious figure of Wisdom, to whom the great church in Constantinople was dedicated. Who was she? She appears in Proverbs, but mainly in the longer Greek OT that includes Wisdom of Solomon and Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sirach—Wisdom there being the alternative name for the Second God. This is what the first Christians must have believed. Do we nowadays know more about the faith than those who first received it?



Do not allow Philo to be dismissed as a Hellenizer. He had a good grasp of the priestly traditions at the end of the Second Temple period and was chosen by the Jews of Alexandria as their spokesman before the Roman emperor. He cannot have been a heretic. Philo is clear about the Second God and exactly what was understood by that term.

I had a student ask me once: What happened to Yahweh in the NT? The Name simply disappears from Christian discussion. Try asking an evangelical Christian what he or she means by saying "Jesus is Lord."

I cannot understand why the claim that Jesus was Yahweh incarnate is held by them to be a threat. They presumably are happy to have a Trinity after the time of Jesus. If God does not change, the Trinity cannot have "begun" with Jesus. What happened was that the mediator of the Trinity came among us. Trinity/plurality must have been eternally a part of the way humans understood the unity of God. Ask what the Shema actually says: "The Lord our elohim (plural) is one Lord" (Deuteronomy 6:4).

It is very important to read the OT texts as Jesus' contemporaries read them. Try reading Josephus's *Antiquities* version of Genesis 18, where Yahweh and the two others become simply three angels, or of Genesis 22, where the angel of the Lord becomes God. They simply did not distinguish. An angel was the way that the Divine was perceived by the human.

Margaret Barker  
August 2002