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The Lord Is One

Margaret Barker

This is a lightly edited transcript of a lecture delivered by Old Testament scholar Margaret Barker at Brigham Young University on November 9, 2016. Following the lecture, responses were given by Andrew C. Skinner, David J. Larsen, and Daniel C. Peterson. Edited transcripts of the responses follow in this issue of BYU Studies Quarterly.

“**I**n them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one” (John 17:23).¹

Thus Jesus prayed after the Last Supper. John set these words as the culmination of Jesus’s teaching, and they are about participation in the divine. The chapter is often called “the high priestly prayer,” and Hebrews shows that Jesus was proclaimed as a great high priest (Heb. 4:14). There are several elements in the prayer that suggest a temple setting for Jesus’s imagery here, for example: “Father, glorify thou me in thy own presence, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made” (John 17:5).

The divine presence was located in the holy of holies. This was the innermost part of the tabernacle (Ex. 40:18–21) or of the temple, which was modelled on the tabernacle (1 Kgs. 6:20–21). In the temple, the holy of holies was a golden cube which housed the chariot-throne of the Lord and its flanking cherubim (1 Chr. 28:18), but in the smaller

1. All Bible quotations from the UK Revised Standard Version, second edition, 1971, unless otherwise noted.

tabernacle, the throne was represented by the mercy seat with its cherubim. This is where Isaiah saw the Lord and heard his voice (Isa. 6:1–5), and this is where the Lord spoke to Moses and appeared to Aaron (Ex. 25:17–22; Lev. 16:2). The holy of holies was hidden behind the great curtain, the veil of the temple that separated the holy place from the most holy place (Ex. 26:31–34). The veil, woven from four colours that represented the four elements, represented matter (see, for example, Josephus *Jewish War* 5.212–213; Philo *Questions on Exodus* 2.85). In other words, the divine presence was hidden beyond matter. In Hebrew, “hidden” is written in the same way as “eternal.”²

The distinction between the holy place and the most holy place (also translated “holy of holies”: both translate the same Hebrew words) is central to understanding the biblical view of participation in the divine. “Holy” meant that a person, place, or object had received holiness but could not pass it on; whereas “most holy” meant that a person, place, or object was actively holy and could impart holiness. The most holy place therefore imparted holiness to any person or object that had been beyond the veil (Ex. 30:29). The rituals of the holy of holies affirmed or imparted holiness, and the Most Holy One imparted holiness to others who became holy ones, or, in the more familiar Christian term, saints. The temple priests were angel messengers³ of the Lord of hosts, entrusted with knowledge from the holy of holies (Mal. 2:7). They remained part of the undivided holiness of the divine presence whether they were within the most holy place or without. The Most Holy One was no longer in the temple in the second century BCE; Gabriel told Daniel that the Most Holy One would return at the appointed time (Dan. 9:24). We assume the Most Holy One was absent in that time.

Objects as well as people could be most holy and so impart holiness. The shewbread, literally “the bread of the presence,” was most holy. The prescriptions for making and eating this bread are no longer clear, but it was set out before the Lord each Sabbath. When the fresh bread was set in place, the bread that had been before the Lord for seven days was eaten in the temple by the high priests; it was most holy. In other words, the bread imparted holiness to the high priests (Lev. 24:5–9). Malachi, complaining that the angel priests of his time had betrayed their sacred role, said they had given false teaching and offered impure

2. Pronounced *‘ālûm*, it means hidden; pronounced *‘ôlâm*, it means eternal.

3. The Hebrew word for *angel* also means *messenger*.

bread (Mal. 1:6–7; 2:7–9).⁴ He prophesied a time when the pure offering would be restored, and the Christians claimed that this was fulfilled in the bread of the Eucharist, which had the same role as the ancient shewbread. Those who ate the most holy bread participated in the divine (Mal. 1:11; *Didache* 14; Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 41; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses* 22:5).

The perfumed temple oil imparted “most holiness.” It was the sacrament of *theosis*, which means becoming divine, and so an anointed one, a Messiah, imparted holiness.

You shall make of these [spices] a sacred anointing oil blended by a perfumer; a holy anointing oil it shall be. And you shall anoint with it the tent of meeting and the ark of the testimony, and the table and all its utensils, and the lampstand and its utensils, and the altar of incense and the altar of burnt offering with its utensils, and the laver and its base you shall consecrate them that they may be most holy; whatever touches them will become holy. And you shall anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may serve me as priests. (Ex. 30:25–30)

The holy anointing oil was used only in the temple. Any imitation for personal use was forbidden (Ex. 30:31–33). The meaning of the oil was found only within the teachings of the temple, and any secular use would make no sense. This was because the oil imparted knowledge. The temple understanding of holiness included illumination of the mind. Isaiah said that when the king was anointed, he received the spirit of the Lord, that is, the spirit that transformed him into the Lord. He received the spirit (that is, the angel) of wisdom, of understanding, of counsel, of might, of knowledge, and of the reverence due to the Lord (“the fear of the Lord”). His perfume (not “delight”) would be the reverence due to the Lord (Isa. 11:2–3). In other words, the anointed one retained the perfume of the oil, and this identified him as the Lord. Paul said that Christians were spreading the perfume of the knowledge of the Anointed One, which did not mean knowing about Jesus; it meant having the knowledge that Jesus had because he was the Anointed One (2 Cor. 2:14).



Since the whole temple represented the creation, the divine presence beyond the veil represented the state beyond time and matter from

4. Malachi 1:7, often translated “polluted food,” is literally “polluted bread.”

which the visible world was formed. In temple discourse, this was Day One.⁵ The golden holy of holies represented the precreated light of the glory, in which there was no time, no division, and no change. It was the state before the material world was created and separated into distinct kinds, as described in Genesis 1. The Hebrew storytellers did not speculate about the One and the Many; instead they told the story of Day One⁶ using a cardinal number without any implied sequence, and then they spoke of the second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth days, ordinal numbers, which implied sequence and thus time. The key words in Genesis 1 are “separated” (Gen. 1:4, 6, 7, 14, 18) and “according to its kind” (Gen. 1:11, 12, 21, 24, 25).

During the early years of Christianity, there was a debate among the Jewish rabbis about the meaning of “Day One.” There were many suggestions; one was that it meant the Day when the Holy One was One in his creation, or perhaps One with his creation.⁷ The debate was linked to the origin of the angels, who were also divine beings and so participated in the divine state. The rabbis could not agree when the angels originated: on the second day, or on the fifth day? All the rabbis agreed, however, that there were no angels on/in Day One.⁸ The issue was plurality within the divine, participation in the divine; and the response was emphatic: the angels did not originate on/in Day One.

Christianity emphasised the lore of the holy of holies and the angels. They called it the Kingdom because it was the place of the throne and they were the new holy ones, the saints (see, for example, Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Phil. 1:1). This prompted a great sensitivity among Jewish teachers about the term “sons of God” in the Hebrew scriptures,⁹ and about the angels in Day One and their being part of the divine. The matter was complicated by the fact that the Hebrew word “God” is a plural form, *’elohim*, that can also mean gods or divine beings. Psalm 82 begins:

5. See L. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 4 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1909), 1:51.

6. This distinction is observed in the Hebrew and Greek texts of Genesis.

7. Genesis Rabbah 3.8.

8. Genesis Rabbah 1.3; 3.8.

9. See, for example, P. Alexander, “The Targumim and Early Exegesis of ‘Sons of God’ in Genesis 6,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 23 (1972): 60–71.

Elohim has taken his place in the council of El
 In the midst of *elohim* he gives judgement. . . .
 You are all *elohim* and sons of Elyon [the Most High]. (Ps. 82:1, 6)

Here, the first *elohim* has a singular verb, but this *elohim* is in the midst of *elohim*, who must, somehow, be plural. Further, the plural *elohim* were sons of the Most High God, *el elyon*. The psalmist must have known about other divine beings in the heavenly council, and so, we assume, around the heavenly throne that was in the holy of holies. The older belief was that there were angels on/in Day One.

In Genesis 1, there are only echoes of the older belief. God, *elohim*, is the Creator, but the verbs are sometimes singular and sometimes plural in form: “God said [singular], ‘Let there be light’” (Gen. 1:3); but also “God said, ‘Let *us* make a human being, *adam*, in/as our image’” (Gen. 1:26). The story continues: “God created the *adam* in/as his own image, in/as an image of God he created him, male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27). Here, in these few lines, we see the problem that faces any investigation into what the Hebrew scriptures record about participation in the divine. Was God, *elohim*, a plural of majesty used to indicate a singular reality, or was there a memory of plurality within the divine such that a male and a female were necessary to be the image? And who was *el elyon*, God Most High, the father of these divine *elohim*? Gabriel told Mary that her son would be called a son of the Most High (Luke 1:32), so presumably the first Christians thought of Jesus as one of these *elohim*. And how could *adam* be the image of *elohim*, or function as the image of *elohim*?

In temple discourse, Adam, the image of *elohim*, was the original high priest. Just as the temple building represented the creation, so the high priest represented the Creator. He was the image of *elohim* in his temple. The human who was anointed as high priest became the presence/image of the Creator on earth, and anointing, as we shall see, was important for glimpsing how the temple ritualised participation in the divine. The high priest wore the sacred name *Yahweh* on his forehead (Ex. 28:36).¹⁰ In the anointing ritual, he was marked on his forehead with an X, the ancient symbol for the Name. *Participation in the divine also implied incarnation, and so a high priest was regarded as a son of God in human form.* The Jews accused Jesus of blasphemy when he claimed to

10. Exodus 28:36 is better translated “a plate of pure gold, and you shall engrave it like the engraving of a holy seal belonging to the Lord.”

be a son of God, but Jesus reminded them of the sons of God in Psalm 82, and of the one who was consecrated (literally “made a holy one”) and sent out into the world, namely the high priest (John 10:33–36).

In the time of Jesus, Adam was known as a son of God (Luke 3:38), and Paul showed that all Christians were sons of God (Rom. 8:14). All Christians were also anointed—the name means anointed ones—and so they were heirs to the high priestly role: “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation” (1 Pet. 2:9). The issue of plurality within the divine, participation in the divine, and incarnation of the divine underlie all early Christian discourse, and this is why the matter of the angels on/in Day One was sensitive among Jewish teachers at the end of the Second Temple period and into the early years of the Church. The rabbis’ position was clear: the angels did not originate on/in Day One.

Other pre-Christian texts, however, said there were angels on/in Day One. The *Book of Jubilees*, a Hebrew text used at Qumran, says that “the spirits which serve before him” were created at the very beginning (Jub. 2:2). So too, Psalm 104, which describes the creation while praising the Creator. It follows the Genesis pattern from the second day onward: dry land and waters, then plants, the lights of heaven, sea creatures and Leviathan, but the psalmist knew that the angels and spirits existed before the earth and sea were set in place. This implies that they existed on/in Day One. The Lord was clothed in light, his chariot throne was the clouds, and his angels/messengers were spirits/winds (the same word in Hebrew) (Ps. 104:1–4). All these existed before the earth was set on its foundations. In temple discourse, this meant the angels were in the holy of holies, around the chariot-throne of the cherubim, and this is where Isaiah and Daniel saw them (Isa. 6:1–8; Dan. 7:9–10). The Lord asked Job if he had witnessed the creation, when the angels sang as the foundations of the earth were set in place (Job 38:4–7). So too in the song of the three young men in the furnace,¹¹ which became for them the fiery holy of holies. The angel of the Lord came down into the furnace/holy of holies, and the three began a great song of praise to the Creator on his cherub throne. All the works of the Lord were exhorted to praise him, and the order was that of Genesis 1, except that in this song the first half (17 verses) calls on all the powers of heaven in the holy of holies, and only in the second half (17 verses) does it call on the visible creation—earth, plants, waters, sea creatures, birds, animals, and human beings—to praise the Lord.

11. This is better known as the Benedicite, which is not in the Hebrew Bible but is found in the Greek after Daniel 3:23.

The angels and powers on/in Day One, which are listed in texts outside the Hebrew canon—in Jubilees 2 and in the song of the three young men—are not mentioned in Genesis 1:1–5 as a work of Day One, even though their existence is implied in several canonical texts: Psalm 104, Job 38, and the prophets’ visions. In other words, the ancient canonical accounts of the creation included the angels, but the account in Genesis did not. This is because there was a cultural revolution in the seventh century BCE, and the scribes who later shaped the transmission and formation of the Hebrew Bible tried to suppress all knowledge of heavenly matters, such as angels, becoming divine, and union with the divine. Teachings about the holy of holies—matters “within the veil” (Num. 18:7)—were entrusted only to the high priests, and the revolutionaries said that what mattered was keeping the Law of Moses: “The secret things belong to the Lord our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deut. 29:29).

Thus, ancient lore about becoming divine and the incarnation of the divine now lies *beneath the surface text of the Hebrew scriptures and in the writings that were not accepted into the Hebrew canon*. The manifesto of the revolutionaries was Deuteronomy, and their influence was both widespread and long-lasting. They removed key concepts from the older texts: one of them was “the hosts,” the heavenly powers, and another was the belief that the Lord could be seen in human form.

An ancient title for the Lord was “Lord of hosts,” but in the books the Deuteronomists compiled or edited, the hosts disappeared. King Hezekiah’s prayer is a good example of this: Isaiah’s version begins “O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim” (Isa. 37:16), but the Deuteronomists’ version begins “O Lord, the God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim” (2 Kgs. 19:15). The angel hosts have disappeared from the text. A similar process accounts for the beginning of Genesis, although an echo of the angels is found in Genesis 2:1: “The heavens and the earth were finished and *all their host*.”¹² The account in Genesis 1 has not mentioned the hosts, but they appear in the conclusion. The Lord as ruler of the hosts lost its context and meaning. The Christians, however, when they claimed that Jesus was the Lord, also claimed that he was Lord of the angel hosts. This can be seen from the proof texts at the

12. The Greek has “and all their order/ornament,” possibly because the translator read the Hebrew word host, *šb’* as the very similar “beauty,” *šby*.

beginning of Hebrews (Heb. 1:5–14). He was superior to the angels, and when he came into the world, the angels had to worship him.

The Deuteronomists also denied the ancient belief that the Lord was seen in human form, what the Christians would later call incarnation. Isaiah saw the Lord enthroned as the King, the Lord of hosts (Isa. 6:5), and John said this had been a vision of the One who was incarnate as Jesus (John 12:41). Ezekiel saw “the likeness of a human form” enthroned in radiant glory (Ezek. 1:26–28). Daniel saw a man clothed in linen and girded with a golden sash, which was the dress of a high priest (Dan. 10:5; compare Rev. 1:13). When Hippolytus wrote his commentary on Daniel, about 200 CE, he said that the man in linen was the Lord “not yet indeed as perfect man, but with appearance and form of man.”¹³ The Deuteronomists, however, said that no divine form was seen, even when Moses received the Ten Commandments: “The Lord spoke to you out of the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice” (Deut. 4:12). The older account of Sinai was very different: “They saw the God of Israel; and there was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness” (Ex. 24:10). The people who transmitted the texts that became the Hebrew scriptures tried to suppress the older belief that the Lord appeared in human form, despite the testimony of Isaiah and Ezekiel, and yet Christian commentators such as John and Hippolytus knew the significance of the visions of a human form.

Jesus’s high priestly prayer in John 17 had this temple setting. He and his disciples knew of the glory of the holy of holies and what it represented, they knew of the conflicting beliefs about the angels in the holy of holies, and they knew that the Lord had appeared in human form as the king. “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us . . . we have beheld his glory” (John 1:14). Jesus’s prayer assumed the older beliefs: he and his Father were One, he and his disciples would be One, and those whom the disciples brought into the community would also become One (John 17:20). Jesus had almost completed his time as the human presence of the Lord: “I have glorified thee on earth”; “I have manifested thy name to the men whom thou gavest me out of the world” (John 17:4, 6), and he was preparing to return to the state whence he had come: Day One. “The Father and I are one [thing]” (John 10:30).

13. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writing of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, vol. 5 (Buffalo, N.Y.: Christian Literature, 1886), 182.

The divine unity was not broken while the Lord was incarnate. He would return to the holy of holies, as did the high priest, with the self-sacrifice of the Day of Atonement. The One who emptied himself while in the form of the Servant (Philip. 2:7) refers to the high priestly ritual of self-emptying on the Day of Atonement, when “the Servant of the Lord” poured out the blood that represented his own life—the life of the Lord—to cleanse and consecrate the temple/creation (Lev. 16:19; Isa. 53:10). Hebrews explained that the death of Christ was the final act of atonement, in which there was no substitution of a goat to represent the Lord/high priest (Heb. 9:11–14). Hebrews begins: “When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the Name he has obtained is more excellent than theirs” (Heb. 1:3b–4). The Anointed One who emptied himself in atonement did not lose anything of his divinity at his incarnation. This was the high priest who was the Lord of Hosts.

Jesus prayed that his disciples would see him in the glory of Day One to which he was returning after his atonement self-sacrifice: “Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24). Jesus had shared the glory of Day One: he had come forth from Day One—“He was in the beginning with God” (John 1:2); the Father had consecrated him and sent him into the world (John 10:36); in other words, he had come forth as the high priest anointed in the holy of holies. As he prepared to die, he prayed that his disciples would also see him restored to glory in the holy of holies. The hymn in Philippians 2:5–11 celebrated the enthronement, when heaven and earth recognised the exalted Jesus as the Lord, the Anointed One.

It was this vision that John recorded at the end of Revelation. The title of the book shows that John was preserving and interpreting Jesus’s own visions: “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him to show his servants what must soon take place” (Rev. 1:1). In John’s stylised arrangement of the material, the great revelation opens with Jesus’s vision of the Servant/Lamb¹⁴ enthroned, receiving the sealed book that symbolised the heavenly knowledge, and being worshipped by all creation (Rev. 5:1–14). It culminates in the vision set in the holy of holies with the golden throne and the tree of life (Rev. 22:1–5). Both the

14. Wordplay on the Aramaic word *talya*, which means both lamb and young servant.

throne and the tree had been removed from the temple in the cultural revolution more than six hundred years previously,¹⁵ but people had not forgotten the older ways. In fact, they cherished them and looked for the Messiah to restore them. Jesus prayed that his disciples would see him in that restored glory: “The throne of God-and-the-Lamb shall be in [the holy of holies/Day One], and *his* servants shall worship *him*; they shall see *his* face, and *his* name shall be on their foreheads. And night shall be no more, they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light and they shall reign for ever and ever” (Rev. 22:3b–5, italics added).

The disciples, “his servants,” would wear the Name on their foreheads; in other words, they would all be, or would collectively be, the high priest. When the high priest was anointed, he was marked on his forehead with the sign of the Name, X,¹⁶ and here the servants all bear the X and see the glory of his face/presence, the same word in Hebrew. Bearing the Name in the divine presence meant that the servants had become divine, and even while they still lived on earth, they were part of the divine. It was not an exclusively postmortem state. John described how the transforming glory came to earth: “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; and we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father” (John 1:14). This holy of holies state of unity underlies such familiar lines as “You are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). Paul’s emphasis was setting out the practical implications of participation in the divine state of the holy of holies: that after baptism, when the Christian was washed, anointed, and marked with the Name as a high priest, there was neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, because they were all one in Christ Jesus.

“God-and-the-Lamb,” here “the throne of God-and-the-Lamb,” was one of the ways that Hebrew storytellers and visionaries indicated the human participating in the divine. The divine and the human¹⁷ were listed, always in that order, but followed by singular verbs and adjectives. Thus, in the Chronicler’s account of Solomon’s coronation, *but not in the Deuteronomists*, “the people bowed their heads and worshipped

15. In the Deuteronomists’ account of the revolution, the tree of life was called the Asherah, and this was taken from the temple and burnt. The chariot throne was the chariot(s) of the sun which was also burned (2 Kgs. 23:6, 11).

16. Babylonian Talmud *Horayoth* 12a.

17. It was the convention in visionary texts to describe humans as animals and angels as men (for example, Matt. 25:32), the nations as sheep and goats, and (Rev. 21:17) the man/angel who measured the heavenly city.

the-Lord-and-the king” (1 Chr. 29:20). This is what the Hebrew actually says. *The Lord and the human king were One*. It is stated but not explained. Modern translations such as the RSV alter the Hebrew text to “They bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord, and did obeisance to the king,” implying two distinct actions: one for the Lord and another for the king. By changing the text, such translations remove one of the most important pieces of evidence in the Hebrew scriptures for how the king became divine.¹⁸ “To him-who-sits-upon-the-throne-and-to-the-Lamb” (Rev. 5:13) is another divine and human singular, as is the Greek text chosen for the AV of Revelation 6:16–17: “Hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of *his* wrath has come, and who can stand before it?”¹⁹ The phrase “Lord-and-Christ” is similar: he was both the divine Lord and the transformed human anointed one. The ancient kings were known as “the Lord and his anointed” (Ps. 2:2). When the seventh angel blew his trumpet, the voices in heaven proclaimed, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ” (Rev. 11:15); and Peter preached, “God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36). The heavenly Lord and the earthly Messiah were One.



In his high priestly prayer, Jesus was interpreting the Shema: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God one Lord” or “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One” (Deut. 6:4). This text is known only in Deuteronomy and understood as a proclamation of monotheism within Deuteronomy’s characteristic scheme that allowed no angels and no human form of the Lord. But Deuteronomy, the manifesto of the revolutionaries, gave a new meaning to many of the older temple concepts, and it is possible that the Shema was also reinterpreted. In the world of the Deuteronomists, the Law of Moses replaced the older wisdom teachings (Deut. 4:5–6). Covenant was transformed from the older creation covenant based on loving-kindness²⁰ into the Moses/Sinai covenant, a very

18. The Authorized Version is accurate, apart from the comma: “They bowed their heads and worshipped the Lord, and the king.”

19. There are two versions of the Greek text here: one has “his” and the other has “their.”

20. This was the eternal covenant or covenant of peace, based on *hesedh*, a word with no exact English equivalent. See my book *The Mother of the Lord* (London: T and T Clark, 2012), 206–30.

different idea, but the word itself was unchanged. The fundamental concept of righteousness, *ṣedheq/ṣedhāqâ*, almost disappeared, and where it did survive it had a new meaning. Their heirs changed the way texts were read; the ancient calendar texts, for example, that commanded all men to go to the temple to see the face of the Lord were read differently and became a commandment that all men should present themselves before the Lord. The expression “seeing the face of the Lord” disappeared, because this implied a human form.²¹

Crucial for our investigation is how they changed the meaning of *dābhaq*, a verb that originally meant “to join closely to,” “to cleave.” In Job, the tongues of distressed people “cleaved to the roof of their mouth” (Job 29:10). In Genesis, “a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife and they become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). Here, “one” means the close union of two parts. The same word is used for “the Lord our *elohim* is one Lord,” and so the Shema could imply the union of manifold *elohim* as the Lord. In Deuteronomy, however, *dābhaq* means “obey” (Deut. 10:20; 11:22), but one cannot imagine Adam being commanded to obey his wife. The meaning had changed. The Deuteronomists took the older idea of serving and cleaving to the Lord, and made it part of their emphasis on obeying the law: “You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear him, and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and you shall serve him and cleave to him” (Deut. 13:4). “Serving and cleaving” had once described the beings in the holy of holies, the servants who had entered the divine presence and become part of it, joined to the Lord.

The meaning of “cleave” was still an issue in the time of Jesus and focused on the meaning of Deuteronomy 4:4: “You who cleaved to the Lord your God are all alive this day.” The reference was to an incident during the Israelites’ time in the wilderness, when some of them bound themselves to another deity, Baal Peor, and Moses condemned them to death (Num. 25:1–4). Those who held fast (*dābhaq*) to the Lord remained alive. Describing the same incident, Hosea says the apostates *dedicated* themselves to Baal Peor (Hos. 9:10), so “cleaving” at that time meant an exclusive attachment. The rabbis debated the meaning of “cleaving to the Lord,” and they did not agree. Some said it meant only attachment to the Lord, others that the bond was closer, that it meant

21. See Frances Brown, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 816, 908.

literally cleaving. Yet others—clearly the heirs of the Deuteronomists—said it meant doing good deeds.²² This “cleaving” became a model for the relationship between Christ and the Church, based on Adam cleaving to his wife: “We are members of [Christ’s] body. ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to²³ his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:30–32). The claim to a bond of union between Christ and the Church may have been a factor in the rabbis’ debate.

Since the Deuteronomists are known to have changed the meaning of several older concepts, it is possible that they changed an older meaning of the Shema. “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One” could once have been an acclamation for the king, affirming his divine status as the Lord in human form. In the older temple, the royal high priest represented the Lord, but this was more than simply acting a part. In a way that is no longer clear, the king *was* the Lord. He and the Lord were One. One of his titles was Immanuel, God with us (Isa. 7:14; 8:8). Solomon was worshipped as the Lord when he sat on the throne of the Lord, and the psalmist had seen “my God, my king” going in procession into the temple (Ps. 68:24).

The earlier meaning would have included: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our angels, the Lord is One,” with the plural form *’elohim*, “God” is, understood as “angels.” Josephus, a Jewish historian writing towards the end of the first century CE, understood the Lord to be a group of angels. He came from an aristocratic priestly family, and so his unexpected views must be those of an educated Jew of his time. In his *Antiquities of the Jews*, he paraphrased the stories in the Hebrew scriptures, and in his retelling of the appearance of the Lord at Mamre, he said that three angels appeared to Abraham, but he does not mention the Lord (Ant. I.11.2). The original story in Genesis 18 has the Lord appearing to Abraham as three men (Gen. 18:2), but two of them are later described as the angels who went on to Sodom (Gen. 19:1). We assume that the theophany was the Lord and two angels, all in human form. This was the Hebrew text Josephus knew, and yet he did not mention

22. For detail and discussion see M. Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 38–39 and notes.

23. This is the same verb as in the Greek text of Genesis 2:24, although the rest of the quotation is a free translation from the Hebrew.

the Lord. Later Jewish versions of the story are similar: not the Lord but three angels appeared to Abraham at Mamre: Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael (Babylonian Talmud *Baba Metzia* 86b, Genesis Rabbah L.2). We assume that a Jew reading those texts knew that the Lord was a group of angels.

The plurality of the Lord is apparent in the Greek translation of Isaiah. When the angels in the holy of holies announced the heavenly birth of the new king, the Hebrew text says they proclaimed his titles: Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father [better translated “father of booty”], Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6). These would later become the four archangels, respectively, Uriel, meaning divine illumination; Gabriel, meaning divine strength; Michael, the warrior, meaning who is like God?; and Raphael, meaning divine healing. The high-priest-king in Jerusalem, Immanuel, “God with us,” embodied the four archangels. The Greek translation, however, chose just one title for all four: Angel of Great Counsel. The Jewish community in Egypt who made the Greek translation knew that the four titles/archangels were One. The Christians claimed this for Jesus: “He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation [Adam]. . . . For in him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (Col. 1:15, 19).

Both meanings of the Shema, or perhaps we should say the full meaning of the Shema, underlies Jesus’s teaching about the great commandment in response to a question from the scribes. After reciting the Shema, he interpreted it to mean loving the Lord, and loving your neighbour (Mark 12:28–31). The unity of the one Lord was a bond of love that united a person to the Lord, and people to each other; in other words, it was the older covenant based on loving-kindness. This understanding of the Shema also underlies Jesus’s high priestly prayer: Jesus and the Father were One—the claim of the ancient kings in Jerusalem; and the unity of the angels in heaven was the unity of the disciples in earth, who were collectively the presence of the Lord. “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20) shows that the Christians shared this belief. Gathering in the name of the Lord meant gathering as his presence, being his angels on earth. The unity of the disciples on earth would be proof that Jesus had been sent from heaven: “I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me” (John 17:23). The bond was love, the sign that they were already living life within the ancient covenant, the life of the holy of holies (John 13:34–35; 1 John 3:13–14).

This declaration is repeated: the first concerns the shared glory of the holy of holies, and the second concerns the shared love.²⁴

hina that they may all be one;

kathōs even as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee,

hina that they may also be in us,

hina so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.²⁵

The glory which thou hast given to me I have given to them. (John 17:21–22a)

hina that they may be one,

kathōs even as we are one, I in them and thou in me,

hina that they may become perfectly one,

hina so that the world may know that thou hast sent me . . .

Thou hast loved them even as thou hast loved me. (John 17:22b–23).

Participation in the divine was sharing in the divine love and receiving the divine glory; and so Jesus prayed, “May [they] be with me where I am, to behold my glory which thou hast given to me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24).

The disciples would become perfectly one. The Greek verb here is *teleioō eis hen*, complete/make perfect into one. The Hebrew equivalent would have been *tāmam*, make complete into one. The words of Jesus here are very similar to the Community Rule at Qumran (1QS), which describes the covenant of *ḥesedh* that bound the members together “to be joined as one by/in the wise counsel of God,” *’el*, and to conduct themselves in/as his presence *tāmîm*, a word that has no single equivalent in English. It implies perfection and unity, completeness. There is an ambiguity, maybe intentional, in the word translated “before his presence,” since it can also mean “as his presence.” The community were to live in a unity of perfection, and they had to love all the sons of light, those who enjoyed divine illumination and so shared the light of the holy of holies. They were the divine presence.

Those who walked *tāmîm* would see the face/presence of the Lord in the holy of holies, just as Jesus prayed that his disciples would see him in glory (John 17:24; compare Rev. 22:4). The Community Rule expands the high priestly blessing: “May the Lord bless you and keep you. May

24. Based on R. E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John, XIII–XXI* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 769.

25. The word *hina* means “so that”; *kathōs* means “as.”

the Lord make his face/presence shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up his face/presence upon you and give you peace” (Num. 6:24–26). For the community/unity of *tāmîm*, the divine presence would enlighten their heart/mind with the wisdom that gave life and would graciously bestow the knowledge of eternity (1QS II). Those who walked *tāmîm* were part of the covenant of eternal unity (1QS III); they would learn the knowledge of the Most High and the wisdom of the sons of heaven. God had chosen them for/as the everlasting covenant, and all the glory of Adam would be theirs (1QS IV).

John emphasised that the transforming glory had been seen among them: “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only-begotten (*monogenēs*) Son from the Father” (John 1:14). “Only-begotten” here could be seen as a problem. If Jesus really was the only divine son, that would exclude others from participation in the divine. John himself shows that this was not what he meant: he said that all who believed were able to become children of God (John 1:12). Paul taught that all who were led by the Spirit of God were sons of God, and that Jesus was the Firstborn among many brethren (Rom. 8:14, 29). Understood literally, Jesus could not have been the only-begotten and the firstborn. “Only-begotten” here translated the Hebrew *yāhîdh*, the word used to describe Isaac (Gen. 22:2, 12, 16). The Greek translated the word as “beloved,” *agapētos*, but Hebrews chose *monogenēs* (Heb. 11:17). The Son whose glory was seen incarnate was therefore the *yāhîdh*, the beloved, the ancient royal title that became the name David. It is also a form of the word that means unity or community, suggesting that unifying was part of the role of the beloved.²⁶

The beloved, unitary Son brought the glory to earth, and those who saw the incarnate glory were transformed into sons of God, angels, in the way that those who had entered the glory of the holy of holies became holy ones. Jesus’s words about this have not survived well the translation from Hebrew into Greek, and the original nuance has been lost. “For their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth” (John 17:19) means “I will show myself as holy” or perhaps “I will show my holiness.” “I consecrate myself” represents the *niph’al* form of the verb *qādhaš*, to be holy, and means “show oneself to be holy.” Thus,

26. See N. Wyatt, “‘Jedidiah’ and Cognate Forms as a Title of Royal Legitimation” in *Biblica* 66 (1985): 112–25; and my book *King of the Jews* (London: SPCK, 2014), 162–63.

the Lord said to Moses, “I will show myself holy among those who are near me, and before all the people I will be glorified” (Lev. 10:3). When Jesus showed his holiness to his disciples, they were consecrated and became divine. Jesus sent out his disciples as holy ones on earth, just as he had been sent out from heaven (John 17:18). Their role was to join all things together.

An early Christian hymn celebrated this (Col. 1:15–20), and teaching that was later labelled “Gnostic” shows how the first Christians understood joining all things together into the divine. There is an early explanation of this unity of the angels written by Theodotus. He was a disciple of Valentinus, a brilliant Christian teacher in mid-second-century Rome who almost became bishop there. It is unlikely that his contemporaries labeled him a Gnostic. “Now they say that our angels were put forth in unity, and are one, in that they came out of the One. Now since we existed in separation, Jesus was baptised that the undivided should be divided until he should unite us with them in the Pleroma [fullness] that we the many, having become one, might all be mingled in the One which was divided for our sakes.”²⁷

This was no Gnostic innovation, nor is the idea of the Son uniting all into the divine unity a sign of Gnostic influence among the Colossian Christians. It was temple lore from the holy of holies, Day One when the Creator was One with his creation. The Enoch tradition preserves some of this lore, and in *1 Enoch* there is a summary of one of his visions of wisdom (*1 En.* 37:1). Enoch was taken up among the angels, and there he learned the hidden things, the matters within the veil that were known only to the high priests (Num. 18:7). Since this was the place of the throne, he was learning the secret things of the Kingdom: how the Kingdom, Day One, was divided, and how the actions of men were weighed in a balance (*1 En.* 41:1). He saw all parts of the creation moving in their appointed ways, “keeping faith with each other in accordance with the oath, i.e. covenant, that they observe” (*1 En.* 41:5). This was the eternal covenant, covenant as it was understood before the Deuteronomists changed the emphasis and applied it only to people keeping the Law of Moses rather than to the whole creation functioning within the bonds of the eternal covenant. This is why they wrote, “The secret things belong to the Lord our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever; that we may do all the words of this law”

27. Clement of Alexandria, Excerpts from Theodotus 36, in R. P. Casey, *The Excerpta ex Theodoto of Clement of Alexandria* (London: Christophers, 1934).

(Deut. 29:29). Jesus restored the wisdom of the holy of holies, which Paul taught the Christians at Corinth: “We impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification” (1 Cor. 2:7). “Secret,” “hidden,” and “before the ages” all indicate the teachings of the holy of holies, matters beyond the veil (Num. 18:7). “For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph. 1:9–10).

Like Enoch, Isaiah saw the whole creation. He was taken up to see the throne, and he heard the seraphim calling out that the whole world was full of the glory of the Lord. His reaction was to recognize that he was not teaching the truth, that he was “a man of unclean lips” (Isa. 6:5); and the revelation in his vision was the threefold holiness of the King, the Lord of Hosts, whose glory filled the world. This vision can be dated to 742 BCE,²⁸ and so this is the earliest known example of the temple mysticism of the holy of holies: participation in the divine. Isaiah saw the glory and the Lord of Hosts, he heard of the triple holiness—presumably meaning the degree of holiness that imparted most holiness—and was then purified as a messenger/angel. Isaiah’s vision offers a glimpse of the royal cult at that time: the king was enthroned amid his angel priests and sat upon the throne as Lord-and-King (1 Chr. 29:20).

Isaiah recorded other aspects of the temple cult. The king was the child of his heavenly mother, the hidden/eternal Lady (the word often translated “Virgin,” Isa. 7:14); he was born among the angels and given the fourfold angel names (Isa. 9:6); and he was anointed with the Spirit that made him the Lord and endowed him with manifold heavenly wisdom (Isa. 11:2–3). With the government upon his shoulder (Isa. 9:6), he became the human presence of the Lord, and Isaiah recorded this role too. A later disciple reused these poems, and so they are now found in a later part of the book of Isaiah, but they originated in the time when there was still a divine king in Jerusalem. The Servant-King was the covenant (Isa. 42:6); in other words, he was himself the focus and the means of unity. The Servant-King was the one in whom the Lord glorified himself (Isa. 49:3), just as Jesus had glorified him, that is, had been his glory on earth (John 17:4). In the same way, Jesus would be glorified in his disciples (John 17:10).

28. The year that King Uzziah died (Isa. 6:1).

The Servant-King was raised up and given understanding,²⁹ he was anointed,³⁰ he saw the light of the glory,³¹ and the knowledge he acquired enabled him to put right/restore many people or things. The clearest description of his role as the means and focus of unity is hidden under the familiar words of Isaiah 53:5, which are an example of temple word-play and double meanings. The line “Upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed” (Isa. 53:5) can also be read “Our covenant bond of peace was upon him/his responsibility, and by his joining us together, we are healed.”³² This is the central line of the poem,³³ because this was the main role of the Servant-King, and this is the prophecy expounded by Jesus on the road to Emmaus when he explained his suffering and resurrection to his disciples. The original has to be reconstructed from texts that were not transmitted by the spiritual heirs of the temple revolutionaries,³⁴ who managed to obscure so much of the ancient temple wisdom.



We now turn to the most important evidence for the ritual of *theosis*, the human becoming divine, and it is a text that has suffered from the scribes who sought to obscure the older ways. They were the spiritual heirs of the revolutionaries opposed to the sacral kingship of the first temple, which was restored in Christianity. The Hebrew scriptures were finally formed after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE and so after the advent of Christianity; and there are places where this seems to have influenced which texts were included in the Hebrew scriptures. Significantly different pre-Christian versions of the Hebrew texts were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, and many of the differences suggest that the Jews adopted a form of the Hebrew text that excluded material important for Christian claims.³⁵ The two most-quoted texts in the New

29. Reading the better-preserved text in the Greek of Isaiah 52:13.

30. Reading Isaiah 52:14 as in the Qumran text, 1QIsa^a.

31. Reading Isaiah 53:10 as in 1QIsa^a.

32. For detail, see my book *Temple Mysticism* (London: SPCK, 2011), 157–59.

33. The symmetry is restored when verse 12 is recognized as an addition to apply the ritual pattern to Hezekiah and his recovery from the plague. See my “Hezekiah’s Boil,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 95 (2001): 31–42.

34. See above, notes 28, 29, and 30.

35. For example, the text used by Jesus in his Emmaus-road discourse (Luke 24:26–27) is not in the current Hebrew text but *is* in the Qumran version of Isaiah 52–53, which says that the servant figure was anointed and saw

Testament (Isa. 52:13–53:12 and Psalm 110) are examples of this: the text of Isaiah is now perfectly readable, but there was a different version used at Qumran; and the text of Psalm 110, not found at Qumran, is now damaged and in places impossible to read. Both texts deal with the Messiah: Isaiah 52–53, as we have seen, is about the anointed and exalted Servant who sees the glory and receives heavenly knowledge; Psalm 110 is about the anointing and heavenly birth in the holy of holies. These two texts—and there are many more—are an illustration of why it is necessary to read beneath the current Hebrew text in order to recover the temple tradition about participation in the divine.

Psalm 110 describes the anointing and heavenly birth of the king as the Son, that is, the incarnation of the Lord. This is the temple precedent for John's claim: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." The most damaged verses in this psalm are 3 and 7, but the setting is clear: it was the MelchiZedek ritual (Ps. 110:4), and since Jesus was proclaimed as MelchiZedek returned (Heb. 7:1–25), the process of his anointing and heavenly birth was important for the Christians. The two damaged verses once gave the vital information. Reconstructed, Psalm 110:3 is about the heavenly birth of the king. By reading the words with different vowels,³⁶ "On the day you lead your host upon the holy mountains" becomes "on the day of your birth in the glories of holiness/in the glorious garments of a holy one"; "Like dew your youth will come to you" becomes "With dew, that is, the holy oil, I have begotten you." The Greek translation has "I have begotten you," showing that this was indeed the royal birth text. The king was not born from the womb of the morning, as many English translations say, but born from the gracious Lady as the Morning Star. "Morning Star" was a Davidic title used by Jesus: "I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright Morning Star" (Rev. 22:16).

The newly born MelchiZedek then drank from the stream in the holy of holies. The usual translation is "He will drink from the stream by the way; therefore he will lift up his head" (Ps. 110:7), but a simple restoration of the text, replacing one letter with another that looks almost the same, reveals "He will drink from the stream in the holy of holies." The scribes

the light. The proof text about the angels worshipping the Lord as he comes to earth (Heb. 1:6) is in a Qumran text of Deuteronomy 32:43 but not in the current Hebrew text.

36. Which were added to "fix" the text after the advent of Christianity.

often obscured an older text by exchanging two letters or replacing one letter with another that was similar.³⁷ Here “the way” concealed “the holy of holies.” A stream features in many visions of the holy of holies, and so presumably there was at some time a stream or fountain in the holy of holies. It was not water in a bowl or bath; it was flowing water, “living” water, and it gave life. “With thee is the fountain of life,” sang the Psalmist (Ps. 36:9). “There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High” (Ps. 46:4). Enoch saw fountains in his vision of the holy of holies: the fountain of righteousness and the fountains of wisdom (1 En. 48:1), and “wisdom flowing like water . . . before him for ever and ever” (1 En. 49:1). The end time visions of Ezekiel (Ezek. 47:1–12), Zechariah (Zech. 14:8), Joel (Joel 3:18), and John (Rev. 22:1–2) had water flowing out from the temple. Solomon was anointed king by the gushing Gihon spring (1 Kgs. 1:38) before the temple was built. Wisdom described herself as water flowing out of the temple where she was established on Zion, pouring forth her teaching (Ben Sira 24:30–33). Water from the temple symbolised wisdom, the hidden knowledge of the holy of holies that flowed forth to irrigate the land. The newly born MelchiZedek drank this water, and the letters “therefore he will lift up his head” can also be read “therefore he had been exalted as leader.” In Psalm 110 alone, the heavenly birth, ritualised in the holy of holies by the anointing oil, the holy garments of glory, and the water of wisdom have all been obscured, and thus the temple ritual of *theosis* has almost disappeared from the Hebrew scriptures.

The heavenly birth in the holy of holies was no longer familiar to the Jewish teachers in the time of Jesus. John opens his gospel by showing how this fundamental of old temple lore had been forgotten. Nicodemus simply did not understand when Jesus spoke of being born from above/born again, *anōthen* (John 3:3), and seeing the kingdom. John described him as “the teacher of Israel” (John 3:10), and yet he did not recognise what Jesus was saying. The traditions preserved outside the texts that eventually formed the Hebrew scriptures did recall this heavenly birth in detail. Enoch, recording what must have been the inner experience of the anointed one, said this:

I saw the Lord. . . . And I fell and did obeisance to the Lord. . . . And Michael, the Lord’s greatest archangel, lifted me up and brought me in front of the face of the lord. . . . And the Lord said to Michael, “Take

37. Here, *bdbr* has become *bdrk*, *b* and *k* looking very similar in Hebrew.

Enoch, and take him from the earthly clothing, and anoint him with the delightful oil and put him into the clothes of my glory.” And Michael took me from my clothes. . . . He anointed me with the delightful oil, and the appearance of that oil is greater than the greatest light, its ointment is like sweet dew, its fragrance like myrrh and its shining like the sun. And I gazed at myself, and I had become like one of the glorious ones. (2 En. 22)

The early Christians shared this experience and sang of it. *The Odes of Solomon* are a collection of Syriac hymns identified in 1909, but at first they revealed no obvious context because their content was so strange.³⁸ It is now clear that their setting was early Christian initiation, and the *Odes* show how they understood baptism and anointing. These Christians were temple mystics, and they continued to use the *theosis* ritual of the temple.

And speaking waters touched my lips
From the fountain of the Lord generously.
And so I drank and became intoxicated
From the living water that does not die. . . .
And the Lord renewed me with his garment,
And possessed me by his light. . . .
My eyes were enlightened,
And my face received the dew;
And my breath/soul was refreshed
By the pleasant fragrance of the Lord. (Ode 11:6–7, 11, 14–15)

I rested on the Spirit of the Lord,
And She lifted me up to heaven;
And caused me to stand on my feet in the Lord’s high place,
Before his perfection and his glory,
Where I continued glorifying him by the composition of His Odes.
(The Spirit) brought me forth before the Lord’s face.
And although I was a man,
I was named the Light, the Son of God;
Because I was the most glorified among the glorious ones,
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.

38. J. R. Harris, “An Early Christian Hymn-Book,” *Contemporary Review* 95 (1909): 414–28.

And my mouth was opened like cloud of dew,
And my heart gushed forth like a gusher of righteousness.
And my approach was in peace,
And I was established in the Spirit of Providence. Hallelujah. (Ode 36)

The roots of these hymns and of so much in the New Testament and other early Christian texts is the world of the holy of holies, where human beings could enter and be transformed by the most-holiness that surrounded them. In the old temple, this was a privilege of the high priesthood, which included the king. The experience empowered them with wisdom and bound them into the covenant of loving-kindness. They became part of the Lord, and on earth, they continued to be the presence of the Lord, using their wisdom to uphold the covenant of loving-kindness. Jesus extended the ancient priesthood to his followers, empowering them to share his role as the Lord on earth. To those who recognised in him the transforming glory of the beloved Son, he gave power to become children of God.

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