

human form (the Glory-Man), the Glory was more frequently veiled in the cloud. Wisdom is cast as female and cocreator in the Hebrew Bible (Proverbs 8:22–31) because of grammatical gender, but Wisdom is never seen by anyone, as far as the text informs us. Wisdom is also never interchanged with any of the other hypostatized figures of Yahweh.

None of these figures is explicitly linked to the Spirit of God, as far as I have been able to determine. The Name is said to be “in” the Angel, and so there is some similarity to the Spirit’s role elsewhere. The Spirit is also interchanged with the God of Israel on occasion.⁶⁷ The data lead me to believe that the various coregent figures cannot neatly be categorized as “Son” and “Spirit,” to use the terminology frequently found in the New Testament. The role of the coregent slot (the COO) was filled by “other Yahweh” figures in whatever way Yahweh chose to appear. Yahweh the Father (the CEO) functioned as High Sovereign over everything. To return to Ugarit as an analogy, the “Son” aspect of the coregent slot derives from the use of the metaphor of the patriarchal house and royal household. Baal’s roles of warrior, administrator, temple occupant, prince, and vizier were carried out by various manifestations of Yahweh’s essence. These manifestations were detectable by the human senses and often included the simultaneous presence of Yahweh the Father, and so they are not mere “modes.” As a result, I would not say that Israelite religion had a Trinity in the way we typically articulate the Godhead. I would say that the notion of a godhead is part of Israelite religion, and this idea becomes clearer in the progress of revelation.

Topic 4: The “Species-Uniqueness” of the Son/Coregent, Jesus, and the Quotation of Psalm 82 in John 10 (items A8, B8)

Significantly, the New Testament writers link all these coregent figures with Jesus. Jesus is the Word (John 1:1), the incarnated Glory (John 1:14; 17:5, 24), and Wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:24; cf. Luke 11:49–

67. See, for example, Isaiah 63:8–10, comparing the context and verb lemmas in verse 10 with Psalm 78:40.

51 and Matthew 23:34–36). He was given/bears the Name (John 17:6–12; Revelation 19:12–16) and was thought to be the delivering Angel (Jude 5; cf. Exodus 23:20–23; Judges 2:1–5).⁶⁸ Jesus was also the “Cloud Rider,” a deity title/description of Baal at Ugarit attributed only to Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible, the lone exception being the son of man in Daniel 7.

Such identifications would mean that Jesus is in the Israelite Godhead. Second Temple Jewish texts abound with speculation as to the identity of the second power. Jewish writers of that time argued for exalted angels (Michael, Gabriel) and certain Old Testament figures (Moses, Abraham, Adam) in the coregent slot. What made Christianity distinct was the claim that the second power had become a human being, vulnerable to death, and that this human being had walked among them in recent days and had suffered crucifixion at the hands of the Jewish leaders and Roman authorities.

All of what we have discussed in this paper to this point was part of the Jewish thought of the Second Temple period, as my own dissertation and the copious scholarly literature on these subjects have established.⁶⁹ By the time of Jesus's ministry,⁷⁰ Jewish writers committed to monotheism, even upon pain of death, could accept that

68. There is a text-critical issue in Jude 5. The scholarly information on the coregent linkages to Jesus is copious. See for example Charles A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence* (Leiden: Brill, 1998); Gieschen, “Baptismal Praxis in the Book of Revelation,” www.iwu.edu/~religion/ejcm/Gieschen.htm (accessed 24 April 2007); Jarl E. Fossum, *The Image of the Invisible God: Essays on the Influence of Jewish Mysticism on Early Christology* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995); Darrell D. Hannah, *Michael and Christ: Michael Traditions and Angel Christology in Early Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999); Ben Witherington III, *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994); Aqila H. I. Lee, *From Messiah to Preexistent Son: Jesus' Self-Consciousness and Early Christian Exegesis of Messianic Psalms* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005); Daniel Boyarin, “The Gospel of the Memra: Jewish Binitarianism and the Prologue to John,” *Harvard Theological Review* 94/3 (2001): 243–84.

69. See the sources in note 64.

70. After the second century and on into the rabbinic era, these ideas became heretical to Jewish teachers and writers. The “standardization” of the Masoretic text and rejection of the LXX occurred at the same time (not coincidentally in my view). See Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1977); Daniel Boyarin, “Two Powers in Heaven; Or, the Making of a Heresy,” in *The*

there was a council of *ʿēlōhîm* in Psalm 82 (cf. the Qumran data) and that there was a second power in heaven who “was Yahweh but wasn’t Yahweh the Father.” Again, I am not saying that Judaism had a Trinity. I am only saying that the necessary concepts and categories were in place. The idea that the traditional Christian articulation derives from Greek philosophy is untrue.⁷¹ The key conceptual elements are certifiably Israelite.

This background is important for interpreting the significance of Jesus’s quotation of Psalm 82:6 in John 10:34–35. I have never come across the view I have of this issue in print, and so it seems best to give the full context of Jesus’s quotation in order to clarify my thoughts:

22 And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter. 23 And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon’s porch. 24 Then came the Jews round about him, and said to him, “How long are you going to make us doubt? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” 25 Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you believed not: the works that I do in my Father’s name, they bear witness of me. 26 But you believe not, because you are not of my sheep, as I said to you. 27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: 28 And I give to them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall anyone pluck them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who gave *them* to me, is greater than all; and no one is able to pluck

Idea of Biblical Interpretation: Essays in Honor of James L. Kugel, ed. Hindy Najman and Judith H. Newman (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 331–70.

71. Interestingly, species-uniqueness is the basis for God’s distinction from the other gods in later Jewish writers. For example, 2 (*Slavonic Apocalypse of Enoch* (J) 2:2 affirms that, while other gods are feckless, they exist and are temporary: “And do not turn away from the Lord, and do not worship vain gods, gods who did not create the heaven and the earth or any other created thing; for they will perish, and so will those who worship them.” The same book later has God inform Enoch that “There is no adviser and no successor to my creation. I am self-eternal and not made by hands” (33:4). *Sibylline Oracles* confess that “God is alone, unique, and supreme” since he is “self-generated [and] unbegotten.” Yet in the same text one reads that “if gods beget and yet remain immortal there would have been more gods born than men.” See John J. Collins, “Sibylline Oracles,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 1:470–71 (the citations are from fragments 1:17; 2:1; 3:3).

them out of my Father's hand. 30 **I and my Father are one.**" 31 Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him. 32 Jesus answered them, "Many good works have I shown you from my Father; for which of those works do you stone me?" 33 The Jews answered him, saying, "For a good work we would not stone you; but for blasphemy; and because that **you, being a man, make yourself God.**" (John 10:22–33)

The quotation of Psalm 82:6 follows:

34 Jesus answered them, "**Is it not written in your law: 'I said, you are gods?'** 35 **If he [God] called them gods, to whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken;** 36 **do you say of him whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world, 'You blaspheme!'** because **I said, I am the Son of God?** 37 If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. 38 But if I do, though you don't believe me, believe the works: that you may know, and **believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him.**" 39 Therefore they sought again to take him: but he escaped out of their hand, 40 And went away again beyond Jordan into the place where John at first baptized; and there he abode. 41 And many resorted unto him, and said, John did no miracle: but all things that John spake of this man were true. 42 And many believed on him there. (John 10:34–42)

Here is what we can glean without interpretive disagreement:

1. Jesus prefaced his quotation by asserting that he and the Father were one (John 10:30).
2. This claim was regarded as blasphemy in that Jesus was making himself out to be God (John 10:33).
3. In defense of his assertion, Jesus quoted Psalm 82:6. That is, to establish his claim to be God, Jesus went to Psalm 82:6.
4. He follows the quotation with the statement that the Father was in him, and he was in the Father.

The standard view of this quotation is that Jesus was endorsing the human *ʾēlohîm* view and thereby arguing, "I have every right to

call myself divine—you guys can do it as well on the basis of Psalm 82:6.” The problem, of course, is that this amounts to Jesus saying “you mere mortals can call yourself gods, so I can, too.” If this is a defense of his own deity, it is a weak one.

Although Latter-day Saints agree with me that the *ʾēlohîm* in Psalm 82:6 are in fact divine beings, they prefer the human *ʾēlohîm* view for Jesus’s use of Psalm 82:6.⁷² Recall that Latter-day Saints argue that humans are the children of God, who is embodied, based on their understanding of the image of God.⁷³ If Jesus is in fact *not* claiming to be ontologically different than the Jews who were assailing him, the Mormon position is bolstered. This might strike evangelicals as odd, given Jesus’s claim that he and the Father were one (John 10:30), but Latter-day Saints insist that Jesus was claiming to be *a* god, not the Father, citing the absence of the definite article before θεός in verse 33: “you, being a man, make yourself God” (σὺ ἄνθρωπος ὡν ποιεῖς

72. With respect to the disconnect between the psalm’s original meaning and Jesus’s understanding of it, Mormon scholarship rescues Jesus from being in error by appealing to material in the Book of Abraham that resolves the tension (see the discussion in Peterson, “Ye Are Gods,” 541–42). Latter-day Saint scholars reason that the human *ʾēlohîm* view is supportive of their doctrinal affirmation that humans are *ʾēlohîm*. This idea is based on the Mormon understanding of the image of God, and so it would be unfair to say that Mormon theology desperately needs Jesus’s endorsement of the human *ʾēlohîm* view. It certainly helps, though.

73. The reasoning is that since we are created in God’s image and likeness, that must mean we are divine, like him, and he is embodied, like us. Latter-day Saints seek to draw support for this understanding from certain passages that refer to human beings as *ʾēlohîm* or as God’s children (for example, Moses is spoken of as *ʾēlohîm* in Exodus 4:16; 7:1, and the nation of Israel is referred to as Yahweh’s “son” in Exodus 4:23; Hosea 11:1). The trajectories on which this doctrine is built, supposedly bolstered by Barker’s work, are flawed. Mormon writer Brant Gardner notes: “When Margaret Barker describes the nature of the heavenly council, she also notes the key that resolves our problems in understanding Nephi and the subsequent Nephite theology. ‘There are those called sons of El Elyon, sons of El or Elohim, all clearly heavenly beings, and there are those called sons of Yahweh or the Holy One who are human’” (citing Margaret Barker, *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel’s Second God* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1992], 5 [4]). Barker’s argument proceeds on the assumption that when the Hebrew Bible refers to sons of an El-derivative deity (El, Elyon, Elohim), those sons are heavenly beings. When the text speaks of Yahweh or the “Holy One” having sons, those sons are human beings. Barker’s “crucial distinction” (p. 4) is incorrect since she misses Hosea 1:10, where “sons of the living God (El)” are clearly human beings. The Mormon material I have read has not caught the error and proceeds to make apologetic points on a flawed assumption.

σEAUΤὸν θεόν). That Jesus was claiming to be *a* god would be acceptable for Latter-day Saints since we are all gods by virtue of being created in God's image. But if Jesus held that the Father had ontological superiority, that is another story.

I propose, however, that the *ʾēlōhîm* of Psalm 82 were not human and that Jesus was in fact asserting his *own* unique ontological oneness with the Father. Before defending that thesis, let me first address the notion that John 10:33 has Jesus only claiming to be *a* god. A syntactical search of the Greek New Testament reveals that the identical construction found in John 10:33 occurs elsewhere in contexts referring specifically to God the Father.⁷⁴

The absence of the article, therefore, does not prove the Mormon interpretation. The absence of the article may point to indefiniteness when the subject complement is the lemma θεός (especially when it is plural), but it can also point to a specific, definite entity. Building an interpretation on this argument is a poor strategy.

Returning now to the quotation, the human *ʾēlōhîm* view derives from two assumptions brought to the text: (1) that it is required by the impossibility of there being other *ʾēlōhîm* because of Judeo-Christian monotheism, and (2) that the phrase *to whom the word of God came* refers to the Jews who received the law at Sinai—that is, the Pharisees' forefathers. This paper has already dispensed with the first assumption, so we will move to the latter.

I would suggest that what first needs to be done is to come to terms with what is meant by “the word of God” and who it is that receives that word in Psalm 82:6–7:

74. The search is accomplished via the OpenText.org syntactically tagged Greek New Testament database in the Libronix platform developed by Logos Bible Software, Bellingham, Washington. The search query asks for all clauses where the predicator of the clause can be any finite verbs except εἰμί where the subject complement is the lexeme θεός with no definite article present. Any clause component can intervene between these two elements. Other than John 10:33, the following hits are yielded by the query: Acts 5:29; Galatians 4:8, 9; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; 4:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:8; Titus 3:8; Hebrews 9:14. It is incoherent within the immediate and broader context of the book in which each hit occurs to translate θεός as “a god.”

6 I said, “you are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you.”
 7 Therefore you shall die as humans do, and you shall fall as one of the princes.

The speaker (“I”) in the passage is the God of Israel, the God who is standing in the council in Psalm 82:1 among the *ʾēlohîm*. God announces that the *ʾēlohîm* of the council are his sons, but because of their corruption (vv. 2–5), they will lose their immortality. I believe that Jesus was referring to this utterance when he quoted the psalm, not the Jewish nation receiving the law at Sinai or the revelation that would become the Old Testament. To illustrate the difference in the views:

Table 4. Interpretations of the Word of God

Common Interpretation/ Jesus’s strategy assumes <i>ʾēlohîm</i> are human	My view/ Jesus’s strategy assumes <i>ʾēlohîm</i> are divine
The “word of God that came” = revelation from God at Sinai, or the entire OT	The “word of God that came” = the utterance itself in Psalm 82:6 – the pronouncement from God
“to whom the word of God came” = the Jews at Sinai, or the Jews generally	“to whom the word of God came” = the <i>ʾēlohîm</i> of the divine council in 82:1
Result: the Jews are the “sons of the Most High” and <i>ʾēlohîm</i> so Jesus can call himself an <i>ʾēlohîm</i> as well.	Result: The Jews are not <i>ʾēlohîm</i> , and Jesus reminds his enemies that their scriptures say there are other <i>ʾēlohîm</i> who are divine sons.

Nowhere in Psalm 82 do we have any hint of the Mosaic law, Sinai, a Jewish nation, or the canonical revelation given to the Jews. Every element in the commonly held view must be inserted into the passage. My view is that Jesus, who just said he and the Father were one, is quoting Psalm 82:6 in defense of his divine nature, reminding his Jewish audience that there were in fact other *ʾēlohîm* besides the God of Israel, and those *ʾēlohîm* were his sons. Because he calls himself the son of God in the next breath, this at the very least puts him in the class of the sons of the Most High of Psalm 82:6—divine *ʾēlohîm*.

If this were all that was written by John in his Gospel about the divine Sonship of Jesus, there would at best be a stalemate with Latter-day Saint scholars about the ontological nature of Jesus. He would be one of the *ʾēlōhîm*; seen one, seen them all. But we all know that is not the sum total of what John says about Jesus's Sonship. I would suggest that the statement of John 10:36 be viewed in tandem with Jesus's own declaration in John's Gospel that he was the *μονογενής* Son. It is well established, of course, that this term does not derive from *μόνος* + *γεννάω* ("only begotten"), but from *μόνος* + *γένος* ("only kind; one of a kind; unique").⁷⁵ As Fitzmyer points out:

That *unique* is the actual meaning of *μονογενής* can be seen in Heb 11:17, where it is used of Isaac, whom Abraham was ready to sacrifice, even though God had promised Abraham abundant descendants. The word here means *only* (son) *of his kind*, i.e., the only son of the promise (Gen 21:12). Abraham in fact had already begotten Ishmael through Hagar (Gen 16:3f.; 17:22–25) and later had six other sons by Keturah (Gen 25:1).⁷⁶

We are left then with a situation: How can Jesus be the unique son of God and yet there be abundant testimony to many heavenly sons of God in the Hebrew Bible? The answer is straightforward—this Son is one with the Father. He is utterly unique. Jesus is the coregent *ʾēlōhîm*, and no other *ʾēlōhîm* can say that. Putting all the Johannine discourse together and taking the quotation in context of Jesus's claim to oneness with the Father makes this a powerful witness to the fact that Jesus was of the same essence as the Father. The Jewish authorities got the message, too. One wonders why, if the Mormon view is correct—that Jesus was just claiming to be one of many species-equal *ʾēlōhîm* because of the divine image—the Jews charged him with blasphemy.

75. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, eds., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. John W. Medendorp (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 2:440.

76. Balz and Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary*, 2:440, emphasis is Fitzmyer's.

Conclusion

I am under no delusion that this paper will persuade Latter-day Saints to abandon or adjust their viewpoint. I also expect that many evangelicals will balk at embracing my arguments. Ironically, both sides may take solace in mutually disagreeing with me. That would be fine. What is more important in my mind is to clearly articulate the text and to contextualize the Hebrew Bible on its own terms. I leave the Spirit to work in each heart as he sees fit.