

# THE TWO POWERS IN HEAVEN

## THE NATURE OF GOD CONTROVERSY IN FIRST-CENTURY JUDAISM

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### INTRODUCTION

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I've read and studied the book "The Doctrine of the Trinity" and a lot of other material presenting the Unitarian position for some time and seriously considered the arguments contained therein regarding the origins of Yeshua. One of the exercises I did when studying the information was to jot down some of the foundational points that were presented in the book, two of which I'd like to address today. The first of these two points I'd like to address was derived from the following quotes:

Were our minds not clouded by centuries of indoctrination and an unfortunate misunderstanding about *the meaning of the title "Son of God" in the Jewish environment of that time*, we would have little difficulty understanding, as Peter did, that Jesus was the [human] Messiah,  
- The Doctrine of the Trinity, Buzzard & Hunting, p. 64

What were Peter and the rest of Israel looking for? ... *They anticipated a man* who would ascend the restored throne of David... The term *Son of God...designated a human being*.  
- The Doctrine of the Trinity, Buzzard & Hunting, pp. 64-65

*First-century Jews* and Christians *were looking for a human Messiah* to rule a new order on earth from the promised land.  
- The Doctrine of the Trinity, Buzzard & Hunting, p. 83

From these passages and others like it I derived the point that the authors were saying the first-century Jews unanimously anticipated a purely human Messiah to come and liberate them from their Roman oppressors, that they had no concept whatsoever of a preexistent divine Messiah which is the standard belief regarding Yeshua today.

The second point I derived from the following quotes:

The point at which *Greek philosophy* was able to *interfere with biblical teaching* was the Gospel of John and particularly his prologue. A misunderstanding of John's Gospel led to the projection of Jesus back onto the *preexisting "logos"*.  
- The Doctrine of the Trinity, Buzzard & Hunting, p. 130

The notion that Jesus was really alive *and conscious before his birth* in Bethlehem *is also a very un-Jewish idea*. Human beings in Hebrew thought do not exist consciously before they are born. The preexistence of souls belongs to *the world of Greek philosophy* and was held by some Church Fathers... But they did not derive this idea from the Bible.  
- The Doctrine of the Trinity, Buzzard & Hunting, p. 162

The transition [to considering Jesus as the *preexistent* Son of God] occurred when Christology was restated in terms of *Greek philosophy* which was incompatible with the biblical documents.  
- The Doctrine of the Trinity, Buzzard & Hunting, p. 319

According to these quotes, Greek philosophical thought influenced the translation and interpretations of dozens of New Testament passages regarding Yeshua, resulting in divine characteristics being attributed to Him that should only be reserved for Yahweh alone.

As a result of these assertions it is concluded that the concept of a divine messianic figure was totally foreign to the time-period of the NT authors and that the influence of Greek thought has led to the misunderstanding of the nature of Yeshua. Further, any biblical passages that seem to indicate a Messiah with divine qualities such as pre-existence must be a mistranslation or misinterpretation of the text.

After researching these two foundational beliefs of Unitarianism, I found that modern scholarship offers evidence that suggests alternative views. Research shows that there was no one standard view

of the Messiah in first-century Judaism, and that indeed a great number of Jews anticipated a Messiah who was of divine origins, preexistent, and enthroned along with Yahweh in the heavens. These beliefs are not understood to have been tainted by the influence of Greek philosophy but were interpretations based directly on the Hebrew Scriptures themselves. Research also shows that Intertestamental Jewish tradition also provides a solid background for the divine attributes of Yeshua. It can be demonstrated that passages which refer to the preexistent divine nature of Yeshua are not necessarily a result of interpretation rooted in Greek philosophy but that these interpretations are consistent with first-century Jewish traditions regarding a mediatory figure who was referred to as the Word.

What I would like to do is to share some of this research I've done into the backgrounds of these various Jewish beliefs in order to gain a better understanding of the historical and cultural context in which the New Testament was written.

Before going any further, I'd like to make my position on the nature of God clear. I do not adhere to the doctrine of the Trinity and believe it to be a concept derived from pagan influence. Although you could describe my belief-system as Binitarian, there are key areas of distinction between my understanding of Yeshua's nature, such as His origins, and those of a WCG background. However, where my understanding does converge with the WCG offshoots is on the belief in the pre-existence of the Messiah before His virginal birth. I will present an argument today for the pre-existence of Yeshua and defend the position that the divine characteristics attributed to Him are not as a result of Greek philosophical influence but have deep roots in the traditions of first-century Judaism and in the Hebrew Scriptures.

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There were Jews in the Intertestamental period who believed in a second being who was Yahweh's partner, vice-regent or vizier. This belief was considered heretical by Pharisaic Judaism which they referred to as the doctrine of Two Powers.

It's important to note that two separate belief systems were referred to as the doctrine of Two Powers in rabbinic texts:

- Two Complementary Powers – In the Jewish Tannaitic Period (30 B.C. – 200 A.D.) it defined belief in a second being who was Yahweh's partner, vice-regent or vizier, believed to have divine attributes that were thought to be possessed only by the supreme God, Yahweh. Proponents of this belief system included Hellenistic Jews, Mystical and/or Apocalyptic Jews, as well as Rogue rabbis.
- Two Opposing Powers – In the Jewish Amoraic Period (200 A.D. – 375 A.D.) it defined the belief that an evil god was the creator and ruler of all things physical while a second benevolent God was the creator and ruler of all things spiritual. Proponents of this belief system included Gnostic Jews and Gnostic Christians.

For the purposes of our study, we'll be focusing on the earlier defined doctrine. This belief and the rabbinic refutations of it can be found throughout their preserved texts that have been handed down to us today, such as the Talmud, Mishnah, and Midrash. While we won't be going over every single reference to the Two Powers in the rabbinic writings, it is important to note that this belief system is referenced throughout their literature, literally dozens of times. It is also important to note that the people who believed in this doctrine would not have referred to themselves using this terminology; it was considered a derogatory label that was given to them by the rabbis.

At this time I would like to quote one example of where this doctrine of two powers is addressed in the rabbinic texts. This particular one describes what the rabbis believed would be the punishment of those who believed in two powers.

"And meddle not with them that are given to change", (Prov. 24:21). Do not meddle with those who declare that there is a **second god**. Rabbi Judah son of Simon said, "[Scripture says], 'And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, says the Lord, two parts therein shall be cut off and die', (Zech. 13:8). The mouths that declare that there are **two Powers** shall be cut off and die."

- Deuteronomy Rabbah 2:33

This passage shows us the contempt that the rabbis had for those who professed two powers. Why was it called the doctrine of two Powers and not the doctrine of two Gods? It has been suggested that the mere mention of two Gods would have been heretical, thus the designation two powers; it was a safeguard that referred to the doctrine but prevented the one making mention of it from blaspheming.

Further characteristics of the complementary Two Power belief included:

- Yahweh was the supreme God who was uncreated from the dawn of time.
- Another divine being was Yahweh's partner, vice-regent, or vizier who was Yahweh's principal agent in creation, communication, and rulership.
- Second power was identified as one of the following two beings that was speculated on extensively in Second- Temple Judaism:
  - Messianic figure
  - Intermediary figure

Proponents to the complementary Two Power belief included:

- Hellenistic Jews:
  - Lived in the Greek Diaspora
  - Influenced in varying degrees by the Greek culture
- Mystical Jews:
  - Jews who gave descriptions of the prophetic visions of God in the heavens
  - Divine entourage of angels, hosts, and heavenly creatures surrounding God detailed
  - Individuals often reported that their knowledge of the celestial realms was as a result of a heavenly ascent.
  - Example: Paul - II Cor 12:2-4; John - Rev
- Apocalyptic Jews:
  - Apocalyptic visions regarding the imminent end of the age
  - Vivid symbolism and typology
  - The destruction of the wicked and the salvation of the righteous.
  - Example: John Rev
- Rogue Rabbis:
  - Warned against adopting the two powers belief system
  - Certain rabbis embraced this doctrinal position
  - Forced to alter their views to comply with the mainstream rabbinic view on the nature of God or face expulsion from the Pharisaic ranks

While this belief-system of Two Powers is identified and condemned in the rabbinic writings, specific clear examples are not detailed there. In order to get a fuller and more complete understanding of what exactly this belief system consisted of, we need to examine the other Jewish writings from the Intertestamental period.

As I said earlier, the condemnation of believing in two powers was directed towards Jews who were in one of two groups:

- Those whose expectations of the Messiah were of a divine preexistent warrior.
- Those who believed in a heavenly mediatory figure who was second only to Yahweh.

In the following sections we will address these two groups separately and examine the evidence for this belief system.

## MESSIANIC EXPECTATIONS IN SECOND-TEMPLE JUDAISM

The Gospels show that the Palestinian Jews, from scholars to peasants, understood the term "Messiah" and that they all greatly anticipated his coming.

- Disciples: Philip, one of the original disciples told Nathaniel that "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets" (John 1:45).
- Samaritan: The Samaritan woman declares, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote" (John 4:25).
- Peasants: The crowds expectations of a Messiah are expressed in John 7:40-42 where they questioned Yeshua's lineage, understanding the Messiah would come from the line of David.

- Scholars: The Pharisees expressed great familiarity with the characteristics of the Messiah when citing prophecies which foretold the location of his birth (Matt 2:5-6).

Their expectancy of the Messiah was based on a number of Old Testament passages which referred to His coming. Some of the expectations all first-century Jews shared regarding the Messiah and the Messianic age that would follow His appearance were universal and included the following:

- He will be of Davidic lineage (Isa 11:1-10).
- The prophet Elijah will herald his coming (Mal 4:5-6).
- A world conflict will rage between Rome, identified most often as Gog, and Israel with the Messiah leading the Jewish people to victory (Eze 38-39).
- Following the great battle, the drama of the Egyptian Exodus will be re-enacted on a world-wide scale (Jer 23:7).
- The Jewish people would be liberated from the Diaspora and led back to their own land; the lost tribes will also return and be re-united with Judah (Eze 37:17-28).
- The Messiah will restore the Temple and rebuild Jerusalem, enjoying divine protection into eternity (Eze 40-48).
- The Messiah will have sovereignty over the entire world and make the Torah the universal law of mankind, becoming a righteous judge who dispenses justice and equity, a champion of the poor and the oppressed (Isa 2:1-4).

Although there were common expectations that were shared about the Messiah and the Messianic age that followed His rule, there existed a wide and varied view of certain specifics, such as the Messiah's origins and unique characteristics. We are able to get a glimpse into the diverse opinions about their expectant Messiah from the rabbinic, Pseudepigrapha and Apocryphal texts that have survived to our day. There were Jewish expectations of a purely human Messiah as well as of a preexistent divine figure.

...there was **no one 'orthodox' notion of 'the Messiah'**.

- Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era, Collins, p. 101

Some Jewish authors got the concept of a preexistent divine messianic figure from OT passages such as the following:

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from **everlasting** [or **eternity**]."

- Micah 5:2

The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool." Your people shall be volunteers in the day of Your power; in the beauties of holiness, **from the womb of the morning** [or **the dawn**], you have the dew of Your youth.

- Ps 110:1, 3

The Lord said to my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. With thee is dominion in the day of thy power, in the splendours of thy saints: I have **begotten thee from the womb before the morning star**.

- LXX Ps 110:1, 3

In addition to these two passages, Daniel 7:9-14 was enormously pivotal for those who believed in a preexistent divine heavenly Messiah. In this passage a mysterious figure is identified as one who appeared like a Son of Man, coming in the clouds of heaven.

"I watched till **thrones** were put in place, and **the Ancient of Days was seated**; his garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame, its wheels a burning fire; A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands ministered to Him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him..." "I was watching in the night visions, and behold, **One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven!** He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.

- Dan 7:9-10, 13-14

Another key point about this passage is in verse 9 where it says thrones were put in place, plural. It was believed by many of the apocalyptic and mystical Jewish authors that one of the thrones put in place was for the Son of Man, the heavenly figure whom they interpreted as the Messiah. Although the rabbis declared it to be heretical, it was commonly believed by those who anticipated a divine Messiah that he would either be enthroned next to Yahweh or share His heavenly throne.

I Enoch is one such book that presents this view. Out of consideration for time, this is the only source that we'll be able to consult. The book of I Enoch is a composite, meaning numerous writers contributed to the work over various periods of time. The passages which discuss the heavenly divine Messiah are chapters 37-71, known as the Similitudes, dated at being written between 105-64 B.C. by an apocalyptic Jew, almost 100 years before the preaching of the Messiah, by conservative estimates.

At that hour, that *Son of Man* was given a name, in the presence of the Lord of the Spirits, *before the beginning of days; even before the creation of the sun and the moon, before the creation of the stars, he was given a name in the presence of the Lord of the Spirits.* He will become a staff for the righteous ones in order that they may lean on him and not fall. He is the light of the gentiles and he will become the hope of those who are sick in their hearts. All those who dwell upon the earth shall fall and worship before him; they shall glorify, bless, and sing the name of the Lord of the Spirits. For this purpose he became the *Chosen One*; he was *concealed in the presence of (the Lord of the Spirits) prior to the creation of the world*, and for eternity. And he has revealed the wisdom of the Lord of the Spirits to the righteous and holy ones, for he has preserved the portion of the righteous because they have hated and despised this world of oppression (together with) all its ways of life and its habits and it is his good pleasure that they have life. ...For they (the wicked kings and landowners) have denied the Lord of the Spirits and *his Messiah*.

- I Enoch 48:2-10

This passage lists various titles for this figure, such as the Son of Man, the Chosen One, and the Messiah, and we are told that this figure was concealed in God's presence since before the creation of the world, an obvious allusion to his pre-existence.

In another significant passage, the pre-existence of this Messianic figure is emphasized.

...pain shall seize them when they see that *Son of Man* sitting on the *throne of his glory*. Kings, governors, and all the landlords shall bless, glorify, and extol him who rules over everything, him who has been *concealed*. For the *Son of Man was concealed from the beginning*, and the Most High One preserved him in the presence of his power; *then he revealed him* to the holy and the elect ones. On that day all the kings, the governors, the high officials, and those who rule the earth shall fall down before him on their faces, and worship and raise their hopes in that Son of Man; they shall beg and plead for mercy at his feet.

- I Enoch 62:5-9

Again the pre-existence of this figure is mentioned, referring to the author's view that He will only be revealed in the last days after being hidden since before the creation of the world. Another key point the author focuses on is that the Son of Man was given a throne of glory from which He would receive worship from all the peoples of the earth.

In another passage, the Messiah's throne is again mentioned prominently as well as the fact that all judgment was committed to him.

And there was great joy amongst them, And they blessed and glorified and extolled because the name of that Son of Man had been revealed unto them. *And he sat on the throne of his glory, And the sum of judgment was given unto the Son of Man*, And he caused the sinners to pass away and be destroyed from off the face of the earth, And those who have led the world astray. With chains shall they be bound, And in their assemblage-place of destruction shall they be imprisoned, And all their works vanish from the face of the earth. And from henceforth there shall be nothing corruptible; *For that Son of Man has appeared, And has seated himself on the throne of his glory*, And all evil shall pass away before his face, And the word of that Son of Man shall go forth And be strong before the Lord of Spirits.

- I Enoch 69:26-29

In yet another passage, we are told that not only will this Messianic figure be enthroned, but that he will be sharing Yahweh's throne itself.

In those days, the *Elect One shall sit on My throne*, and from the conscience of his mouth shall come out all the secrets of wisdom, for the Lord of the Spirits has given them to him and glorified him.

- I Enoch 51:3

In this extraordinary passage, the Messiah is said to have sat on the throne of Yahweh itself.

The interpretation of Daniel 7 offered by the author of I Enoch and other apocalyptic writings of the period where the Son of Man is presented as a preexistent divine Messiah who would be enthroned either alongside God or on Yahweh's throne itself was considered to be heretical by the Pharisaic rabbis of the Tannaitic period (30 B.C. – 200 A.D.). According to the rabbinic doctrine, to believe, teach,

or write that another preexistent heavenly being was enthroned alongside Yahweh meant that you believed in two Gods or two Powers in heaven.

It is taught as a tradition that on high [or in heaven] there is no sitting [or enthronement other than God's]...  
- Babylonian Talmud, Chagigah 15a

According to the rabbinic tradition, the only throne in the heavens was God's and He alone was seated upon it. Richard Bauckham in his paper on the throne of God summarizes the rabbinic doctrine thus:

...the *only throne in heaven is God's...God alone sits*, while the angels who attend him are regularly described as *standing, the posture of servants*. The prevalence of this image shows how...emphasis on the sole sovereignty of God has functioned to reduce all other heavenly beings to the role of subservience and service, effecting the will of the *one enthroned Being*. Even the most exalted of angels, the archangels, do not participate in God's rule but function as *servants, standing* ready to carry out his orders.

- The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism, Bauckham, p. 52

Because of this rabbinical doctrine, the passage of Daniel 7:9-10 presented a problem since it recorded that thrones, plural, were set into place.

I watched till *thrones* were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated...  
- Dan 7:9

It is implied in the rabbinic texts that those who believed in two powers contended that there were two thrones referenced in this verse, one throne was for Yahweh and the other for the Messiah. This is precisely the view presented by the Jewish author of I Enoch and other apocalyptic authors of the period, the author of I Enoch going so far as to say that the Son of Man sat on Yahweh's throne itself.

The rabbinic discussion regarding the two thrones can be found in the midst of one of the rabbi's teachings on how to refute those who believe in two powers. Apparently, those who believed in two powers used evidence of plural forms of Hebrew words in scriptural passages where God was referred to. During the rabbinic instruction, the question arose, why does Daniel say that more than one throne was setup, what was the purpose of this second throne?

R. Johanan said, "In all the passages which the Minim [or sectarians] have taken [as grounds] for their heresy [of two powers], their refutation is found near at hand. Thus, 'Let us [plur.] make man in our image' (Gen 1:26), 'And God created [sing.] man in His own image' (Gen 1:27); 'Come, let us [plur.] go down and there confound their language' (Gen 11:7), 'And the Lord came down [sing.] to see the city and the tower' (Gen 11:5); 'Because there were revealed [plur.] to him God' (Gen 35:7), 'To God who answers [sing.] me in the day of my distress' (Gen 35:3); 'For what great nation is there that has God so near [plur.] to it, as the Lord our God is [unto us] whenever we call upon Him [sing.]' (Deut 4:7); 'And what one nation in the earth is like your people, Israel, whom God went [plur.] to redeem for himself [sing.]' (II Sam 7:23); '*Until thrones* [plur.] were placed and *one* [sing.] that was ancient *sat*' (Dan 7:9)".

Why were these [plural words] necessary? To teach R. Johanan's dictum; "The Holy One, blessed be He, does nothing without consulting His Heavenly Court, for it is written, 'The matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the sentence by the word of the Holy Ones' (Dan 7:14)." Now, that is satisfactory for all [the other verses], but how [do you] explain "Until *thrones* [plural] were placed" (Dan 7:9)? "One [throne] was for Himself and *one for David* [i.e. *the Messiah*]. Even as it has been taught, 'One was for Himself and one for David', this is R. Akiba's view." R. Jose protested to him, "Akiba, how long will you *blaspheme* the Shechinah? Rather, one [throne] for justice, and the other for mercy." Did he accept [this answer] from him or not? Come and hear! For it has been taught, "One is for justice and the other for charity", this is R. Akiba's view. Said R. Eleazar b. Azariah to him, "Akiba, what have you to do with Haggadah [or non-legal portions of Scripture]? Confine yourself to [the study of] Nega'im and Ohaloth [tractates of the Mishnah dealing with recognizing signs of leprosy and regulations for uncleanness]. But one was a throne, the other a footstool: a throne for a seat and a footstool in support of His feet."

- Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 38b

After demonstrating how to refute the scriptural interpretations where plural words were used as support of the doctrine of two powers, the discussion leads to that of the thrones mentioned in Daniel 7. Interestingly enough, Rabbi Akiba postulates that the second throne was for the Messiah, implying that he would be enthroned next to Yahweh. The other rabbis in the passage rebuke Rabbi Akiba and accused him of blaspheming God! They told him that these thrones were metaphoric, standing for God's attributes of both justice and mercy. Rabbi Akiba was then pressured to accept their interpretation or face reprisal. Under pressure, Rabbi Akiba caves and accepts their interpretation. Akiba is then chided to stick to the areas of the Torah he is expert in and not to meddle in this dangerous speculation.



This passage demonstrates that the rabbis did not believe the Messiah would be enthroned in the heavens alongside God. Indeed to believe so was to acknowledge the doctrine of two powers in heaven and be guilty of blasphemy. Thus, the author of I Enoch and other apocalyptic books depicting a preexistent divine Messiah enthroned beside Yahweh would have been considered as believers in two powers in heaven and therefore accused of blasphemy.

...if Akiba's messianic interpretation of the passage [of Daniel 7:9] is rejected, it is clear that **other groups would also have been rejected...** Both **apocalyptic Jews** and Christians can be shown to combine the angelic or divine interpretations of the passage [in Daniel 7:13] with their messianic candidate. Jews...who give special authority to a second, angelic or metaphysical manifestation of God in heaven could be said to have affirmed **a second power**. ...whenever a second figure, either in the Pentateuch or in Daniel could be identified as a quasi-divine independent angelic figure, the rabbis would fight vociferously against it.

- Two Powers in Heaven, Segal, pp. 49-50, 51-52

The Pharisaic expectations of a Messiah did not agree with those of the apocalyptic Jewish sects in that the former anticipated a purely human redeemer to deliver them from their Roman conquerors. As a result, their teaching was that it was impossible for a human to sit on a heavenly throne, much less share Yahweh's throne. An example of their expectations of the Messiah can be seen in Shimon Bar-Kokhba, declared to be the Messiah by one of Judaism's most highly esteemed rabbis, Akiba, in approximately 132 A.D. The rabbis' view of the Messiah was one who would utilize guerilla tactics against their Roman oppressors, eventually defeating them and sitting enthroned in Jerusalem.

The apocalyptic texts, on the other hand, depicted a preexistent divine Messiah who would destroy His enemies from the heavens, afterward being enthroned with Yahweh Himself.

...I dreamed a dream in the night; and behold, a wind arose from the sea and stirred up all its waves. And I looked, and behold, this wind made something like the figure of a man come up out of the heart of the sea. And I looked, and behold, **that man flew with the clouds of heaven**; and wherever he turned his face to look, everything under his gaze trembled, and whenever his voice issued from his mouth, all who heard his voice melted as wax melts when it feels the fire. ...After this I looked, and behold, all who had gathered together against him, to wage war with him, were much afraid, yet dared to fight and behold, when he saw the onrush of the approaching multitude, he neither lifted his hand nor held a spear or any weapon of war; but I saw only how he sent **forth from his mouth as it were a stream of fire, and from his lips a flaming breath, and from his tongue he shot forth a storm of sparks**. All these were mingled together, the stream of fire and the flaming breath and the great storm, and fell on the onrushing multitude which was prepared to fight, and burned them all up so that suddenly nothing was seen of the innumerable multitude but only the dust of ashes and the smell of smoke. When I saw it, I was amazed.

- 4 Ezra 13:1-4, 8-11

We've reviewed the Pharisaic expectation of a human Messiah and contrasted that with the apocalyptic Jewish anticipation of a divine Messiah. So now the crucial question arises, how can we tell what expectations the New Testament authors themselves may have had regarding the Messiah? Should we believe that the first disciples and believers had no concept whatsoever of a preexistent divine messianic figure or would they have in fact been exposed to these ideas contained in certain apocalyptic and mystical books that were authored before, during, and after the appearance and preaching of Yeshua? Let's look to the NT itself for our answer:

Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him", (I Enoch 1:9).

- Jude 1:14-15

This quote from the book of Jude, believed to have possibly been a brother of Yeshua Himself, proves that Palestinian believing Jews living during the NT era were familiar with Messianic expectations of a divine preexistent redeemer such as the one presented in I Enoch. Yeshua identifies Himself as the Son of Man a number of times throughout the Gospels, an undoubted reference to Daniel 7 and a title referenced time and time again in I Enoch that the NT authors were undoubtedly familiar with.

"When the **Son of Man** comes in His glory, and **all the holy angels with Him**, then **He will sit on the throne of His glory**. "All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.

- Matt 25:31-32

And **he sat on the throne of his glory**, and the sum of judgment was given unto the **Son of Man**...

- I Enoch 69:26-29

Throughout the book of Revelation, the lamb is depicted as being seated and sharing in the same throne as Yahweh Himself.

And there shall be no more curse, but the *throne of God and of the Lamb* shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him.

- Rev 22:3

These two verses indicate that John viewed Yeshua as being enthroned along with Yahweh, denounced by the rabbis as the heretical doctrine of Two Powers.

The assertion that the terms Son of God and Son of man only designated a human being and that the first-century Jews were exclusively looking for a purely human Messiah are untrue. It is clear that the portrait of the Messiah as a preexistent Divine warrior coming down from the heavens, did not originate with misguided Christians who were under the influences of Greek philosophy. It had already been established in the works compiled by Jews before, during and after the time of Yeshua, based on interpretations of OT texts, especially Daniel.

Just as it would be incorrect to say that every first-century Jew had an exclusive messianic expectation of a preexistent divine warrior, so too is it wrong to say that every single first-century Jew had an expectation of a purely natural human typological king. As we had noted earlier, there was no one orthodox view of the Messiah in second-temple Judaism.

However, the expectation of a divine Messiah is confirmed by scholar after scholar as being thoroughly rooted in first-century Jewish apocalyptic thought and is not the result of Greek philosophical influence.

The sublime [or divine] conceptions of Christ the Messiah in the New Testament are, in most cases, not the direct result of Christian belief, but *adaptations and modifications of Jewish beliefs which were current in certain circles*...the celestial biography [of the Messiah] found in the New Testament consists *entirely of Jewish motifs*: Jesus the Messiah had *existed before the creation of the world*; he entered the world...even *created it*; he became flesh - this is an innovation - and then brought about redemption; he is the Messiah - Bar Enash (Aramaic: Son of Man), the Last Adam; and he atones for sins just like those who had atoned for the sins of Israel [through martyrdom] and then comes back to life.

- Jewish Sources in Early Christianity, Flusser, pp. 58, 59

## THE MEDIATORY FIGURE OF SECOND-TEMPLE JUDAISM

Upon His first visitation, Yeshua came in the role of the mediatory figure between man and Yahweh. Interestingly enough, the Jews of the second-temple period had a number of traditions about a preexistent heavenly mediatory figure whom they believed was second only to God and who was also enthroned along with Him in the heavens.

Before getting into quotes from the primary sources themselves regarding these Jewish traditions, we must investigate the OT passages regarding the Angel of Yahweh from which these beliefs originated. Although He most often goes unnoticed, the Angel of Yahweh makes his appearance almost exclusively in the recorded theophanies documented throughout the OT. The word theophany describes where God appeared to men.

And the *Angel of Yahweh* appeared to him [Moses] in a flame of fire *from the midst of a bush*... So when *Yahweh* saw that he turned aside to look, *God called to him from the midst of the bush* and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."

- Exod 3:2, 4

In verse 2, the narration tells us the Angel of Yahweh appeared to Moses in the burning bush then, in verse 4 it tells us God called to Moses from the burning bush. Although this may appear to be a mistranslation at first glance, there are literally dozens of similar examples throughout the OT where Yahweh makes contact with or appears to the patriarchs through His Angel.



"Then the **Angel of God** spoke to me in a dream, saying, 'Jacob.' And I said, 'Here I am.' ... '**I am the God of Bethel**, where you anointed the pillar and where you made a vow to Me..."

- Gen 31:11, 13

Here, the Messenger of Yahweh calls to Jacob and tells him that He is the "God of Bethel" whom Jacob has made a vow to. However, referring back to the passage where Yahweh appeared to Jacob in Bethel reveals that the narration gives no indication it was actually the Angel who appeared to Jacob.

Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, **Yahweh** stood above it and said: "**I am Yahweh, God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac**; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants.

- Gen 28:12-13

In this passage, Yahweh establishes His covenant with Jacob, swearing to multiply his descendants. However, as we learned from Gen 31, this was not Yahweh Himself speaking but the Angel or Messenger of Yahweh. In this passage, the Angel of Yahweh, assumes the role of Yahweh and swears to deliver the land of Israel to Jacob's descendants.

Similarly, Jacob struggles with a mysterious man in Genesis 32, only to be revealed later that it was God whom Jacob wrestled with.

Then Jacob was left alone; and **a Man wrestled with him** until the breaking of day. And He [the Man] said, "Let Me go, for the day breaks." But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!" So He [the Man] said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." And He said, "**Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel**; for you have **struggled with God** and with men, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked, saying, "Tell me Your name, I pray." And He said, "Why is it that you ask about My name?" And **He [the Man] blessed him there**. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: "For **I have seen God face to face**, and my life is preserved."

- Gen 32:24, 26-30

However, Hosea reveals that this was not Yahweh Himself as Genesis 32 implies, it was the Angel or Messenger of Yahweh with whom Jacob fought.

He [**Jacob**] took his brother by the heel in the womb, and in his strength **he struggled with God**. Yes, he struggled with the **Angel** and prevailed; he wept, and sought favor from Him. He found Him in **Bethel**, and there He spoke to us.

- Hosea 12:3-4

In addition to these examples, the Angel of Yahweh:

- Swears to multiply the descendants of Hagar, being referred to by Hagar as Yahweh (Gen 16:7-13; Gen 21:17-18)
- Speaks to Abraham in place of Yahweh when Abraham 'sacrifices' Isaac (Gen 22:15-16)
- Is asked by Jacob to bless Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen 48:14-16)
- Appeared as a pillar of fire and of cloud, leading the Israelites from Egypt (Exod 14:19)
- Recounts His role as the one who led the Israelites out of Egypt and made the covenant with patriarchs (Judg 2:1-5)
- Appeared to Gideon as Yahweh (Judg 6:11-24)

This list is by no means comprehensive. Investigate for yourself these passages and the others in the OT where the Angel of Yahweh turns up and you will see just how central the role was that He played throughout the Hebrew Scriptures.

So how was it possible for the Angel of Yahweh to fulfill all these roles that have usually been attributed exclusively to Yahweh Himself? The answer is this Messenger was Yahweh's shaliach or representative agent, an ancient Middle Eastern function in which the sender's most trusted servant would be dispatched to carry out business in the name of the sender. Evidence that this shaliach relationship existed between Yahweh and this special Messenger can be found in Exodus.

"Behold, I send **an Angel** before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. "Beware of Him and obey His voice; do not provoke Him, for **He will not pardon your transgressions**; for **My name is in Him**. "But if you indeed **obey His voice** and **do all that I speak**, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. "For **My Angel** will go before you and bring you in to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites and the Hivites and the Jebusites; and I will cut them off.

- Exod 23:20-23

Throughout the Israelites' wilderness journey, the Angel of Yahweh is shrouded in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night and at various times Yahweh would communicate to Moses through this Angel (Exod 16:7, 10-12). Thus the Jews concluded the following information regarding the Messenger of Yahweh:

- The Angel speaks as Yahweh.
- The Angel identifies Himself with Yahweh.
- The Angel exercises the responsibilities of Yahweh, such as:
  - Forgiving transgressions
  - Multiplying seed
  - Making covenants
  - Blessing people
- The Angel bears the image of Yahweh.
  - In many cases, the OT characters who saw the Angel of Yahweh feared for their lives because in their own words, they had "seen Yahweh".

If you're not familiar with the role the Angel of Yahweh played throughout the OT, this function may seem somewhat confusing. However this mediatory arrangement between a god and his subjects was customary to the Middle Eastern culture, it was not derived from Greek philosophy.

*...other [Mesopotamian] nations had a high god with a second god as vice regent in their council structure... the general structure of the Canaanite (Ugaritic) divine council was a high God (El) at the top, under whom was a second god (Baal) who was called "king of the gods". This second god served as the vice-regent of the sovereign god...Israel adopted but adapted the High God/vice regent structure of the council...*

- Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism?, Heiser, p. 24

In other words, just as the Canaanite religion had a supreme god and a lesser god as the vice-regent, serving in all mediatory functions, so too did the Israelites have Yahweh as their supreme God and the Angel as the vice-regent, the mediator between men and God.

The precise identity of the Messenger of Yahweh is never given anywhere in the OT, which led to much speculation on the part of the second-temple Jews. When reading the Intertestamental Jewish writings you will see that this Angel is referred to a number of times by various names and titles. Some of the names include the following:

- Yahoel
  - Apocalypse of Abraham (1<sup>st</sup> Cent. A.D.)
- Angel whose name cannot be given
  - Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah (1<sup>st</sup> Cent. A.D.)
- Wisdom
  - Wisdom of Ben Sirach (180-175 B.C.)
  - Wisdom of Solomon (38-41 A.D.)
- Word
  - Ezekiel the Tragedian (2<sup>nd</sup> Cent. B.C.)
  - Works of Philo (20 B.C. - 50 A.D.)
  - Wisdom of Solomon (38-41 A.D.)
  - Palestinian Targums (1<sup>st</sup> - 7<sup>th</sup> Cent A.D.)
- Metatron; Prince of the Universe; Prince of the world; the Youth; Yahweh Hakaton (the lesser)
  - Rabbinic literature

Why were these titles used as references to the Angel of Yahweh? The title Word being used as a reference to the Angel of Yahweh is believed to have its origins in Exodus where Yahweh declared that Aaron would be Moses' spokesman to Pharaoh.

*You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth - I will be with you and with him as you speak, and tell both of you what to do - And he shall speak [dabar] for you to the people. Thus he shall serve as your spokesman [peh], with you playing the role of God to him.*

- Exod 4:15-16 - Jewish Publication Society

In this passage, it is explained that Aaron is designated as Moses' PR representative to the Pharaoh. The fact that Moses was said to be as God and Aaron as his Word seemed to allude to something more significant to many second-temple Jews. It is suggested that it was interpreted as the relationship that existed between Yahweh and His Angel.

The name Metatron was a title for the Angel of Yahweh used exclusively by the rabbis, meaning “the one who stands after or behind the throne.” In the last section I had mentioned the importance of the rabbinic doctrine that only Yahweh was enthroned in the heavens, all other beings, no matter how powerful they may be, were to stand, showing their subservient status. This rabbinic title for the Angel of Yahweh emphasized that although he may have been Yahweh’s most trusted servant He stands in the presence of Yahweh and does not share in God’s divinity by being seated in a throne alongside the supreme God.

At this point I’d like to start reading examples of where the Angel of Yahweh is referred to in the Intertestamental Jewish literature. The book Wisdom of Solomon was authored by a Hellenistic Jew, probably in Alexandria, Egypt, in around 50-0 B.C. Although the Angel of Yahweh is addressed as Wisdom and Word in this book, the following passage depicts the Angel of Yahweh as Yahweh’s all-powerful Word, a stern and powerful warrior who is enthroned along side Yahweh.

For while gentle silence enveloped all things, and night in its swift course was now half gone, your all-powerful **Word** leaped from heaven, **from the royal throne**, into the midst of the land that was doomed, a **stern warrior** carrying the sharp sword of your authentic command, and stood and filled all things with death, and touched heaven while standing on the earth.

- Wisdom of Solomon 18:14-16

The text affirms that the Word is enthroned in the heavens; no doubt the rabbis would declare the writer to be a Two Powers heretic.

Moving forward, we come to the works of Philo which were authored from 20 B.C. to 50 A.D. Philo was an influential Jew who lived in Alexandria Egypt where a large community of Hellenistic Jews lived and penned his writings just before the NT documents were written.

The claim is often made that Philo’s concept of the Word is not rooted in OT interpretation but rather a result of a strong Greek philosophical influence. This argument is supported by scholarship from decades ago when theologians did not consult the Intertestamental Jewish writings for insight into the mindset and culture of second-temple Judaism. However, contemporary scholarship demonstrates the contrary:

The problem with Philo’s writings is that he is not expounding the faith of his fathers in terms of his own culture but rather is **transposing it into the world of contemporary Hellenism**. He uses the language of the philosophers and yet **time and again what he writes is not their philosophy... Philo was presenting the Judaism of his day in Greek terms**, but what **he was presenting was Judaism** and not a vague [Hellenistic] syncretism. He used Greek terms for something which was **essentially Jewish**.

- The Great Angel, Barker, pp. 114-116

In the following passages, Philo’s use of the term Logos or Word is almost entirely confined to being a title or name for the Angel of Yahweh, a character firmly rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures.

...it was **the Angel who altered the name of Jacob**, being the **Word**, the minister of God...

- Philo, On the Change of Names 87

Here, Philo identifies the Angel of Yahweh who renamed Jacob to Israel in Gen 32 as the Word.

...see whether there are really **two Gods**. For it is said: “I am the God who was seen by you” (Gen 28:13); not in my place, but in the place of God, as if he meant of **some other God**. ...what **he here calls God is his most ancient Word**...

- Philo, On Dreams - Book I 228, 230

Philo identifies the Angel of Yahweh who appeared in Jacob’s vision of the ladder as a second God known as the Word.

...For God, like a shepherd and a king, governs...the earth...and living creatures that are on it...and he regulates the nature of the heavens...appointing, as their immediate overseer, his own wise **Word**, his **first-born son**, who is to receive the charge of this sacred company, as **the lieutenant of the great King**; for it is said somewhere, “Behold, I am he! I will send my messenger before your face, who shall keep you in the road” (Ex 23:20).

- Philo, On Husbandry 50

Philo again identifies the Angel of Yahweh as the Word, adding that He is Yahweh’s first-born Son and the lieutenant or second-in-command in the heavens.

...the Father who created the universe has given to his *archangelic* and *most ancient Word* a pre-eminent gift, to stand on the confines of both, and separate that which had been created from the Creator. And this same *Word* is continually a petitioner to the immortal God on behalf of the mortal race ...and is also *the ambassador*, sent by the Ruler of all, to the subject race [mankind]. And the *Word* rejoices in the gift, and, exulting in it, announces it and boasts of it, saying, "And I stood in the midst, between the Lord and you" (Ex 14:9).

- Philo, Who is the Heir of Divine Things 205-206

In this passage, Philo interprets Exodus 14:9 allegorically, where the Angel of Yahweh stood between the Israelites and the pursuing Egyptian armies. Philo believed that just as the Angel was between the Egyptian army and the Israelites, so too is the Angel between mortal men and God.

"Behold, a man whose name is the Branch" (Isa 4:2; 11:1; Jer 23:5; 33:15). A very novel name indeed, if you consider it was spoken of a man ... but if you look upon it as applied to that intangible being [the *Word*] *who in no respect differs from the divine image*, you will then agree that the name of the Branch has been given to him with great pleasure. For the Father of the universe has caused him to spring up as *the eldest son* whom in another passage, he calls the *firstborn* (Ps 89:27) ...[the *Word*] *has shaped the different species*, looking to the typical patterns which that Father supplied.

- Philo, On the Confusion of Tongues 62-63

In this passage, Philo relates how the Word, the Angel of Yahweh, bears the exact image of Yahweh, whom he also calls the firstborn and the eldest son. Philo then goes on to state that it was the Word who created all things, according to the plans laid out by Yahweh.

Clearly Philo used the term Word as a title for the Angel of Yahweh, believing Him to possess the following characteristics:

- ON HUSBANDRY – 50
  - The Word is the immediate overseer of creation
  - The Word is firstborn son of God
  - The Word is the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament
- ON THE CONFUSION OF TONGUES - 62, 146
  - The Word is the "Branch" of the Prophets
  - The Word is eldest son, the firstborn
  - The Word bears the image of God
  - The Word has created all things, according to the blueprints supplied by the Father
  - The Word bears the name of God
- WHO IS THE HEIR OF DIVINE THINGS? – 203
  - The Word is the angel who guided the Israelites in the wilderness
  - The Word is the mediator between man and God
  - The Word is God's ambassador
- ON FLIGHT AND FINDING – 108-111, 137-139
  - The Word is the High Priest of God
- ON THE CHANGE OF NAMES – 87
  - The Word appeared in the likeness of God in the Old Testament
- ON DREAMS, BOOK I - 228, 230
  - The Word is a second God

Was the term Word used exclusively by Jews living in the Greek world who had been influenced by Greek philosophy or did Jewish writings within Israel also use the term in this way? There are literally hundreds of examples where the term Word is used to describe a mediatory figure throughout the Aramaic Targums authored within Israel. Targums are essentially very old Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Scriptures with an interpretational commentary interwoven throughout the translation. The teachings contained in the Targums were considered authoritative, and were spoken aloud in the synagogues along with the Hebrew translation of the Torah and Haftarah readings.

When referring to the Targums, there are primarily four that are being spoken of:

- Targum Onkelos (0-200 A.D.) - Torah
- Jerusalem or Fragmentary Targum (600-700 A.D.) - Torah
- Targum Pseudo-Jonathan (400-500 A.D.) – Torah
- Targum of Jonathan (400 A.D.) - Prophets

Although finalized as late as the sixth century, almost all scholars date the vast majority of the content of these four Targums as originating during or before the first-century.

...The **Word** of the Lord was revealed upon the world as it was created; when the world was without form and void, and darkness was spread upon the face of the deep, and the **Word of the Lord illuminated and made it light**; and he called it the first night.

- Exodus 12:42 - Jerusalem Targum

It was the Word that created the world and illuminated it when Yahweh said, "let there be light".

And the **Word of the Lord created man in His likeness**, in the likeness of the presence of the Lord He created him, the male and his yoke-fellow He created them. In the day that the Lord created man, in the likeness of the Lord He made him. Male and female He created them, and blessed them in the name of His **Word**.

- Gen 1:27 - Targum of Pseudo-Jonathan

It was the Word that created the first man and woman.

And the **Word** of the Lord said to Moses, He who spoke to the world, "Be", and it was; and who will speak to it, Be, and it will be. And he said, "Thus shall you speak to the sons of Israel, YAHWEH has sent me unto you."

- Exod 3:14 - Jerusalem Targum

It was the Word that called to Moses from the midst of the burning bush.

And the Lord was revealed in His **Word** unto Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as the God of Heaven; but the Name of the **Word** of the Lord was not known to them.

- Exod 6:3 - Jerusalem Targum

It is explained in the Targums that it was the Word of Yahweh that was revealed to the Patriarchs, not Yahweh Himself.

And the **Word** of the Lord said to Mosheh, Behold, **My Word will be revealed to thee in the thickness of the cloud**, that the people may hear while I speak with thee, and may also believe for ever in the words of the prophecy of thee, My servant Mosheh. And Mosheh delivered the words of the people in prayer before the Lord.

- Exod 19:9 - Targum of Pseudo-Jonathan

It was the Word of Yahweh that was revealed to Moses in the midst of the pillar of cloud and of fire.

"My Glory I shall put among you, **My Word shall be unto you for a redeeming God**, and you shall be unto My Name a holy people"

- Isa 64:13 - Targum Jonathan

In this passage as well as in many others, the Word of the Lord was called a God.

For what people so great, to whom the Lord is so high in the Name of the **Word** of the Lord? But the custom of (other) nations is to carry their gods upon their shoulders, that they may seem to be nigh them; but they cannot hear with their ears, (be they nigh or) be they afar off; but the **Word of the Lord sits upon His throne high and lifted up**, and hears our prayer what time we pray before Him and make our petitions.

- Deut 4:7 - Targum of Pseudo-Jonathan

The Targums even record that the Word of God was enthroned in the heavens.

What was the opinion of the Pharisees and later rabbis regarding this mediatory figure who was the subject of so much speculation in the Intertestamental literature? Although they did not deny that this mediatory Word existed, they contended:

- The Word and the Angel were not one in the same being.
- The Angel of Yahweh was the most highly exalted archangel, whom they referred to as Metatron.
- The Word was a hypostasis, meaning an extension or projection of God in human form that He used to communicate with mankind.
- It was necessary, they believed, for Yahweh to communicate in this strange manner so that anthropomorphisms or human attributes would not be directly attributed to Yahweh.

The differences between the rabbis and the proponents of the Word as Yahweh's second power are exemplified in numerous passages throughout the rabbinic writings:

R. Nahman said, "He who is as skilled in refuting the Minim [sectarians] as is R. Idith, let him do so, but not otherwise". Once a Min [sectarian] said to R. Idith, "It is written, 'And unto Moses He said, Come up to the Lord' (Exod 24:1). But surely it should have stated, 'Come up unto me!'". "It was Metatron [who said that]", the lesser



Yahweh, he replied, “whose name is similar to that of his Master, for it is written, ‘For my name is in him’ (Exod 23:21)”. “But if so, [he retorted,] we should worship him!” “The same passage, however,” replied R. Idith says, “‘Be not rebellious against him’ (Exod 23:21), i.e., exchange Me not for him”. “But if so, why is it stated, ‘He will not pardon your transgression’ (Exod 23:21)?” He answered, “We hold the belief [the Israelites] would not accept him even as a messenger, for it is written, ‘And he said to him, ‘If Your presence does not go...’” (Exod 33:15).”  
- Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 38b

In this passage of the Talmud, the dispute between a Two Powers proponent and Rabbi Idith provides fascinating insight into how many of the Jews interpreted the passages where the Angel of Yahweh appeared in the Hebrew Scriptures.

In this passage, Rabbi Idith was confronted by a Jew who believed in Two Powers, using Exodus 24:1 as support for his position where it appears in the text that there are two Yahweh's according to the original Hebrew. In response, Rabbi Idith says that the Angel of Yahweh, whom he calls Metatron, was actually speaking, not Yahweh, reasoning that the Angel carried the name and title of Yahweh. The proponent of Two Powers then responds by saying that if the Messenger of Yahweh carried the title and name of Yahweh then He is worthy of worship along with God. However, Rabbi Idith explains his interpretation of Exodus 23:21 as meaning the Angel does not have the same status as Yahweh and should therefore not be worshipped. The Two Powers proponent then responds by saying that the Angel of Yahweh has the power to forgive sins (Exod 23:21), implying He has many powers equivalent to God and should be worshipped. Rabbi Idith responds by interpreting Exodus 33:15 as meaning the Israelites rejected the Angel as their guide and insisted that Yahweh Himself lead them throughout their wilderness journey. This final retort by Rabbi Idith is interesting, to say the least, considering the Hebrew Scriptures clearly show that it was the Angel of Yahweh who led the Israelites throughout the wilderness, not Yahweh Himself. This passage demonstrates that the proponents for the belief in Two Powers based their beliefs on the Scriptural examples of the Angel of Yahweh.

In another famous passage of the Talmud, it is recorded that one rabbi broke ranks with his fellow scholars and was converted to the belief in two powers. This rabbi was Elisha Ben Abuyah, born in Jerusalem sometime before 70 A.D., a contemporary of the Apostles, including Paul. Because his name was forbidden from being spoken verbally among the Jews, he was referred to as simply Aher, literally "another person" or "a vile thing". According to the Talmudic legend, Elisha Ben Abuyah had a vision of the heavens where he saw another being enthroned besides Yahweh, whom he identified as Metatron or the Angel of Yahweh.

...Aher... saw that **permission was granted to Metatron** [the Angel of Yahweh] **to sit** and write down the merits of Israel. He said, “It is taught as a tradition that **on high there is no sitting...** Perhaps, God forbid, **there are two powers!**” ...After his apostasy, Aher asked R. Meir, saying to him, “What is the meaning of the verse, ‘**God had made even the one as well as the other**’” (Gen 2:20)? He replied: It means that for everything that God created He created [also] its counterpart. He created mountains, and created hills; He created seas, and created rivers.  
- Babylonian Talmud, Chagigah 15a

The Talmud states that in his vision of the heavens, Elisha saw a great being enthroned that was clearly not the Supreme God. This being was none other than Metatron, the Angel of Yahweh, whom was also known as the Word among those believing in two powers. Rabbinic Judaism emphatically taught that there was only one in the heavens that was permitted to be seated on a magnificent throne and that was Yahweh Himself. Rabbi Meir's explanation that God created counterparts for everything led Elisha to conclude that his vision meant God had a partner comparable to Him as did Adam. When Elisha shared this vision and his interpretation with his contemporaries he was rejected as an apostate and shunned in the rabbinic community.

The Talmud contains many stories and illustrations that are probably more fiction than fact and this may indeed be the case with this story of Elisha Ben Abuyah. However, the key points in this passage are that those who believed in two powers believed that Metatron was enthroned in the heavens along with Yahweh. In addition, it proves that some rogue rabbis were converted to the belief-system despite the stern warnings of their peers.

It is clear that there were two opposing belief-systems regarding the importance and nature of the mediatory figure of the OT between the Pharisaic rabbis and the Jewish proponents of Two Powers. Our task as modern believers both in Yeshua and in the inspiration of the New Testament texts is to ascertain what the original authors were trying to convey regarding the nature of our Messiah. Did the NT authors side with the rabbinic view that the Word was a hypostatic ghostly projection of a man or did they believe the Messiah to be the preexistent Word as the proponents of the Two Powers belief system did?

In the beginning was the **Word**, and the Word was with God, and the **Word** was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it... There was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. ...And the **Word** became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. ...**No man has seen God at any time**; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

- John 1:1-5, 9-10, 14, 18

Although the OT texts state that Yahweh appeared face to face with Adam and Eve, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Gideon, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and many others John recorded in his prologue that no man has ever seen God. As we know from various OT passages John's statement is confirmed, it wasn't God that these characters saw it was the Angel of Yahweh representing God. There is no indication anywhere in these passages that this Angel is some kind of hypostatic impersonal man-like projection of Yahweh.

The idea of a hypostasis itself originated in Greek philosophy and I submit that it was the rabbis who resorted to using a Greek pagan concept of the Word, rationalizing their idea of how monotheism was to be understood. The OT Scriptures, on the other hand, present the Angel of Yahweh as an independent being who was delegated the power to forgive sins, give blessings, and confirm covenants on behalf of the Supreme God, Yahweh. The only other character in the entire Bible who bears these same attributes is our Messiah, Yeshua.

The Angel of Yahweh was referred to in a variety of Intertestamental Jewish texts using such names as Yahoel, Wisdom, and most importantly the Word. Is it mere coincidence that the apostle John also used the term Word to describe the preexistent state of the Messiah, a concept his Jewish audience was very familiar with? The Word that John presents throughout his Gospel is not a personification, He was and is an individual entity unto Himself.

Yeshua Himself told his opponents time and time again of His preexistent nature, that He was of the same kind as Yahweh, and that He had been delegated the authority to do things that were previously only regarded as being within Yahweh's command.

Throughout the Gospels:

- The Pharisees wanted to stone Yeshua because they understood His statements regarding Abraham as though He pre-existed (John 8:56-59)
- The Pharisees wanted to stone Yeshua because He said He was at one with the Father, a statement they took as meaning He declared Himself to be a God (John 10:30-33; 19:7)
- The Pharisees accused Him of making Himself a God because He, like the Angel of Yahweh, demonstrated His ability to forgive sins (Mark 2:4-7)
- The Pharisees understood Yeshua's statements that God was His father as meaning that He was equal or of the same kind as Yahweh (John 5:14-18).

Are we to believe that these conclusions the Pharisees reached were a series of blunders, resulting from simple misunderstandings? I submit that the Pharisees were in a far superior position than we are to understand exactly what the Messiah meant when He spoke these words, especially when it concerns nuances of their own native languages and concepts.

To view the Pharisees as the Keystone Cops of the Gospels is in my opinion a serious error. These men were the pre-eminent scholars of their time and included among them such rabbis as Gamaliel, the direct disciples of Hillel and Shammai, and many other scholars who are venerated by modern Jews as the greatest Jewish minds of all time. Is it really conceivable that the Messiah was crucified as a result of the Pharisees' mistaken impression that Yeshua declared Himself to be preexistent and of the same nature as Yahweh?

It was the Messiah's own declaration that He was the Second Power which led to His crucifixion.

And the high priest arose and said to Him, "Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?" But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, "I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!" Jesus said to him, "It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the **Son of Man sitting** at the right hand of the **Power**, and **coming on the clouds of heaven**." ... "**He has spoken blasphemy!** What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His **blasphemy!** "What do you think?" They answered and said, "**He is deserving of death.**"

- Matt 26:62-66

There are several key points we need to take notice of in this verse:

- First, the Messiah referred to Himself as the Son of Man and referred to His coming on the clouds of heaven, an undoubted reference to Daniel 7. As we saw previously, Daniel 7 was a hotly contested passage among the rabbis and the proponents of the Two Powers belief system. The title Son of Man was also used extensively in the book of I Enoch which we reviewed earlier, containing the concept of a preexistent divine messianic figure who would share Yahweh's throne and defeat Israel's enemies through the use of heavenly apocalyptic powers.
- Secondly, Yeshua refers to Yahweh as the Power. This is the only place in the NT scriptures where God is referred to as the Power. The only other places it can be found in the Scriptures are in the parallel accounts in Mark and Luke. Is it a mere coincidence that Yeshua uses the selfsame word which was used to identify this doctrine perceived as heretical by the rabbis?
- Thirdly, the Messiah said He would be seated on the right hand of God. This was central to the rabbis' declaration that the belief in Two Powers was heretical. They maintained that no one was enthroned in the heavens except God Himself.

Yeshua's declaration that He would be enthroned with Yahweh, the Power, in the heavens as the Son of Man meant to the rabbis that He was declaring Himself to be the Second Power! Inspecting this passage in light of the rabbinic and Intertestamental writings leaves no room for doubt. The Pharisees' frenzied reaction to Yeshua's declaration of being the Second Power resulted in the accusation of blasphemy and that He should be executed.

***He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy! "What do you think?" They answered and said, "He is deserving of death."***  
- Matt 26:62-66

The Scriptures plainly depict the Messiah's crucifixion as a result of the rabbis' accusation of Two Powers blasphemy.

The New Testament documents consistently present Yeshua as the preexistent Word of God who will strike the nations with the sword of His mouth in the tradition of the apocalyptic and mystical Jews who believed in Two Powers in heaven.

## CONCLUSION

In the introduction to this presentation we reviewed two foundational arguments made in the Doctrine of the Trinity, namely that the first-century Jews only anticipated a human Messiah and that attributing divine characteristics to the Yeshua such as pre-existence are a result of Greek philosophical influence. Although we've only scratched the surface with the information I've shared, I think the evidence I presented today adequately proves that this was not the case.

Yeshua being considered a divine, preexistent Messiah is consistent with the Jewish apocalyptic and mystical messianic expectations contained in numerous Intertestamental writings of second-temple Judaism. As we saw, the book of I Enoch depicted a Messiah who was both preexistent and enthroned in the heavens along with Yahweh. The significance of I Enoch being quoted in the NT itself provides very strong evidence that the very first Jewish believers were familiar with and endorsed this conviction.

The belief that Yeshua was preexistent, the instrument through which Yahweh created the worlds, and the intermediary between Yahweh and mankind is consistent with Jewish traditions of the mediatory figure whom they referred to as the Word. As we saw in Philo and the Aramaic Targums, this belief had its origins in their interpretation of the OT Angel of Yahweh whom they regarded as being enthroned with Yahweh in the heavens. John's use of the term Word in his prologue and in Revelation in light of its Jewish background demonstrates that he believed Yeshua to be the preexistent mediator between man and the Supreme God.

Second-Temple Jews who believed in either a preexistent Messiah enthroned along with Yahweh or in a preexistent mediatory figure based on the Angel of Yahweh were considered Two Powers heretics by the Rabbis before Christianity was even founded. These belief-systems were rooted in Jewish OT

interpretation, not in Greek philosophical influences. All the descriptions in the New Testament epistles which refer to Yeshua's divine qualities are consistent with the characteristics attributed in second-temple Jewish tradition to the anticipated divine Messiah and the preexistent heavenly mediator.

Yeshua's own testimony regarding His pre-existence and His unequivocal claim to be the Second Power resulted in His execution. I'd like you to consider what the likelihood is that every single time Yeshua spoke about His preexistent divine status that these pre-eminent rabbinic scholars came away drawing incorrect conclusions based on their failure to understand nuances of their own language. The rabbis were clearly not mistaken in their ability to understand Yeshua's declarations regarding His origins. He was crucified because of who He was, the preexistent Son of Yahweh, the King of the Jews, and the self-declared Second Power.

Although there were undoubtedly problems with WCG's presentation of the nature of Yeshua, to deny His pre-existence and adopt a Unitarian position is, in my opinion, comparable to swinging to the other side of the proverbial pendulum. The Messiah's statements regarding His relationship of subservience to the Father in the Gospels can be explained quite adequately while still maintaining a belief in His pre-existence. The Unitarian position is not the only alternative to reconciling these passages regarding the Messiah's submissive position to the Father.

...the Bible should be studied in the light of its own context and often with the help of those whose business it is to be informed about its background.

- *The Doctrine of the Trinity, Buzzard & Hunting, pp. 76-77*

I agree wholeheartedly with this admonishment and implore you to look into the Jewish background of the New Testament documents, especially in regards to the nature of Yeshua. There are a number of books authored on this subject that I'd be happy to recommend if you're interested. However, although all of this information is interesting and of great value, I'd like to emphasize that I don't believe it takes scholarship to believe in the Messiah's position of the preexistent second Power, it takes faith and belief in what Yeshua plainly states about His own identity.