

TIMO ESKOLA

Messiah and the Throne

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*

142

Mohr Siebeck

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Herausgegeben von
Jörg Frey, Martin Hengel, Otfried Hofius

142



Timo Eskola

Messiah and the Throne

Jewish Merkabah Mysticism
and Early Christian Exaltation Discourse

Mohr Siebeck

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Preface

Almost ten years have passed since the days of my doctoral dissertation on the Christology of Romans 1:3-4, published in Finland 1992. The following years were spent on an investigation on the soteriology of Paul, treating the themes of theodicy and predestination in Pauline teaching on justification (published in WUNT 2. series 1998). After that project I wished to return to the study of Christology, since I had been developing earlier ideas by writing articles and giving lectures on the subject in my capacity as a New Testament scholar at the Theological Institute of Finland (Helsinki), and as a docent at the University of Helsinki. I had never yet published any of that material in English.

When I returned to the subject it soon became apparent, however, that quite much had happened in the field of the study of exaltation Christology. Divine agent theory (Hurtado) was quite new when I wrote my dissertation in 1988-1991. Since then it has gained many adherents in scholarship. Also the angelic interpretation (Fossum, Segal, Gieschen) has become rather popular. Furthermore, several publications on a messianic interpretation, and on the significance of Psalm 110, as well as other books on the divine throne, have moved the discussion to a new level.

All these attempts to explain early exaltation Christology are linked with early Jewish merkabah mysticism. Therefore, I could not escape the challenge of approaching the subject of resurrection theology in Rom. 1:3-4 and in several parallel passages from the point of view of the merkabah-throne. This led me to a new investigation of Jewish merkabah texts, as well as to a new study of New Testament exaltation passages.

The research was once again made possible by a research project of the Institute, and it became a real source of joy in my life. I am especially indebted to my colleague, Rev. Eero Junkkaala, General Secretary of the Theological Institute, who has continuously encouraged me in my work. My thanks also go to the staff of the Institute, our librarian Erkki Hanhikorpi, as well as to our secretary, Mrs. Kirsi Sell, who has taken care of many practical matters.

Already in my dissertation I expressed my deep gratitude both to Prof. Dr. Peter Stuhlmacher and to Prof. Dr. Martin Hengel for their hospitality during my stay in Tübingen when writing my dissertation. Now after several more years of work, I wish to renew my thanks while the years have proven that

their instructions have provided for a continuing inspiration in my study of early Christology.

My special thanks go to Prof. Kai Mikkonen at the Faculty of Arts, University of Helsinki. In my studies on literary theory he has patiently guided me through the paths of structuralism, post-structuralism, and intertextual criticism. I hope that the methodological ideas developed in this study will be a credit to this dialogue. I should also like to thank some friends of mine and “fellows” of the Institute: Docent Lauri Thurén (Åbo/Joensuu) for his suggestions and comments, and Prof. Antti Laato (Åbo), with whom I have spent hours discussing new literary methods and their application to biblical study.

Not least, I am deeply indebted to Mr. Michael Cox, Lic. Theol. (Kerava), Mrs. Virpi Hopkins, M.A., and Mr. Michael Hopkins, B.B.A., M.T.S., (Helsinki) for their labours in undertaking the language revision of this manuscript.

Finally, I wish to express my sincere thanks to Professors Martin Hengel and Otfried Hofius of Tübingen for their kind acceptance of my study for publication in this distinguished series, as well as the editorial staff of J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck) for their highly professional assistance in preparing the manuscript for publication.

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Contents

Preface	V
Abbreviations	X

I Introduction

§ 1 Jewish Mysticism and New Testament Exegesis	1
1.1. The relation of merkabah mysticism and early Christology in scholarship	1
a. Merkabah mysticism in Jewish studies	1
b. Merkabah mysticism and Christology: early suggestions	6
c. Angelic interpretation	7
d. The divine agent theory	9
e. The theory of messianic enthronement	11
f. Some later developments of the main theories	13
1.2. Setting the task	15
1.3. Problems of methodology: on discourse and meaning	17
a. The contribution of semiotics and semantics	17
b. The contribution of structuralism and narratology	29
c. The contribution of intertextual criticism	34
d. A linguistic approach and the methodology of Christological study	38

II The Heavenly Throne in the Old Testament, Second Temple Jewish Theology, and the Pseudepigrapha

§ 2 God as King and the Ark of the Covenant as His Throne	43
2.1. The Lord is King	44
2.2. The ark as the throne of God in the Old Testament	50
2.3. The function of the throne in the Temple cult	55
2.4. The enthronement of the anointed king	58
§ 3 The Throne in Early Jewish Mysticism: the Merkabah	65
3.1. Throne visions in Old Testament prophetic literature	65
3.2. The throne in pre-Christian Jewish literature	71
a. The Book of the Watchers (1 Enoch 14)	72
b. Jubilees	75
c. The Testament of Levi	77
d. Qumran	79
e. The Exagoge of Ezekiel	86

3.3. Thrones and enthronements in the literature of the Common Era	91
a. Similitudes (1 Enoch 37-71)	91
b. Philo	96
c. The Fourth Book of Ezra	98
d. The Testament of Job	100
e. 2 Enoch	103
f. The Apocalypse of Abraham	105
g. The Ladder of Jacob	107
h. The Ascension of Isaiah	108
i. The Life of Adam and Eve/The Apocalypse of Moses	111
j. The Testament of Abraham	113
k. The Testament of Isaac	115
l. 3 Baruch	116
m. Hellenistic synagogue prayer 4	117
n. The Sibylline Oracles, Book 3	118
o. Questions of Ezra	119
p. 3 Enoch	120
§ 4 From Merkabah Mysticism to Christology: Suggestions and Refutations	
4.1. Merkabah mysticism and royal metaphors	124
4.2. Is there an exalted Messiah in merkabah mysticism?	127
4.3. Limitations of the angelic interpretation	137
4.4. Throne in a cultic setting	146
4.5. Throne in eschatological judgment descriptions	151
4.6. Conclusions	154
III The Messiah and the Throne in the New Testament Christological Discourses	
§ 5 At the Right Hand of God (<i>enthronement discourse</i>)	158
5.1. Psalm 110 and Christology in early Lukan traditions	160
5.2. Paul and merkabah mysticism	182
5.3. Reception of early enthronement Christology in the letter to the Hebrews and in the Revelation of John	202
§ 6 Resurrection as Enthronement in Rom. 1:3-4 (<i>resurrection discourse</i>)	217
6.1. Early tradition and the kerygmatic formula	217
6.2. The formula and the symbolic world of Jewish Christianity	227
6.3. Enthronement theme in the context of resurrection discourse	244
§ 7 Throne as a Place for the Atonement (<i>cultic discourse</i>)	251
7.1. The throne as a mercy seat	251
7.2. The unity of exaltation and atonement	258
7.3. The emergence of the cultic interpretation	264
§ 8 The Centre of the Last Judgment (<i>judicial discourse</i>)	270
8.1. Son of Man and his throne	270
8.2. The reception of early judgment descriptions in Paul	274
8.3. Judicial discourse and the problem of polarized eschatology	277

§ 9 The History of Influence:	
Enthronement in Jewish Christian Pseudepigrapha	285
9.1. Exalted Christ in the Ascension of Isaiah	285
9.2. Enthroned Davidide in the Sibyllines	289
9.3. Paul and merkabah in the Apocalypse of Paul	293
 IV The Nature of Early Enthronement Christology	
§ 10 Some Problems with the "Theocratic" Theory	
of Adoptionist Christology	295
10.1. The theory of theocratic adoptionism in scholarship	296
10.2. Adoptionism and the Ebionite theory	299
10.3. Defining early Jewish Christianity	309
§ 11 Main Factors in the Emergence of Christology	322
11.1. Divine agents and angels?	323
11.2. Possible features of a Christian merkabah tradition	328
11.3. Merkabah tradition and the search for a "missing link"	331
11.4. Semiosis in early Christian theology	336
§ 12 Theocracy, Exaltation Discourse, and Christology	338
12.1. Three enthroned figures	339
a. Messianic Davidide on the throne of Glory	339
b. New Melchizedek on the mercy seat	344
c. Son of Man on the judgment seat	346
12.2. Four narratives – four ascent stories	347
a. The heavenly enthronement of the seed of David	348
b. Prince of life conquers death	351
c. Eternal high priest enters the debir	356
d. Eschatological entrée of the messianic judge	359
12.3. Intertextual aspect: Christ as the reigning God on the throne of Glory	361
 Conclusion	375
 Bibliography	391
 Index of Ancient Sources	415
 Index of Authors	429
 Index of Subjects	434

Abbreviations

1. Periodicals, Series, Reference Works

AASF	Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae
AGAJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
ALGHJ	Arbeiten zur Literatur und Geschichte des hellenistischen Judentums
AncB	Anchor Bible
ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary
AGSU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Spätjudentums und Urchristentums
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
ANFa	Ante-Nicene Fathers
ANRW	Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt
ASOR	American Schools of Oriental Research
ATD	Altes Testament Deutsch
AThANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
AThD	Acta Theologica Danica
AzTh	Arbeiten zur Theologie
BA	Biblical Archaeologist
BBB	Bonner Biblische Beiträge
BBR	Bulletin for Biblical Research
BDR	Blass/Debrunner/Rehkopf, Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch
BETHL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BEvTh	Beiträge zur Evangelischen Theologie
BHTh	Beiträge zur historischen Theologie
Bib	Biblica
BK	Biblischer Kommentar
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar. Altes Testament
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
BZ	Biblische Zeitschrift
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CB	Coniectanea Biblica
CB.NT	Coniectanea Biblica. New Testament Series
CB.OT	Coniectanea Biblica. Old Testament Series
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
CCWJCW	Cambridge Commentaries on Writings of the Jewish and Christian World 200 BC to AD 200
CJAS	Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity Series
CNT	Coniectanea neotestamentica

DJD	Discoveries in the Judaean Desert (of Jordan)
DMMRS	Duke monographs in medieval and Renaissance studies
EETH	Einführung in die evangelische Theologie
EJ	Encyclopedia Judaica
EJTh	European Journal of Theology
EKK	Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar
EQ	Evangelical Quarterly
EvTh	Evangelische Theologie
EWNT	Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament, ed. H. Balz, G. Schneider
ET	Expository Times
ExpT	Expository Times
FzB	Forschung zur Bibel
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GCS	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte
GNT	Grundrisse zum Neuen Testament
GTA	Göttinger Theologische Arbeiten
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HNT	Handbuch zum Neuen Testament
HR	History of Religions
HThK	Herders Theologischer Kommentar
HThS	Harvard Theological Studies
ICC	International Critical Commentary
ICS	Illinois Classical Studies
IntB	The Interpreter's Bible
Interp.	Interpretation
IVP	InterVarsity Press
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JJS	Journal of Jewish Studies
JR	Journal of Religion
JRS	Journal of Religious Studies
JSJ	Journal for the Study of Judaism
JSNT	Journal for the Study of the New Testament
JSNTS	Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
JSOTS	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series
JSS	Journal of Semitic Studies
JThS	Journal of Theological Studies
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
KEK	Kritisch-Exegetischer Kommentar
LCC	Library of Christian classics
LCL	Loeb Classical Library

MNTC	Moffatt New Testament commentary
MS	Monograph Series
MSSNTS	Monograph Series. Society for New Testament Studies
NAC	New American Commentary
NF	Neue Folge
NIBC	New International Biblical Commentary
NICNT	New international commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NT	Novum Testamentum
NTA	Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen
NTD	Neues Testament Deutsch
NTOA	Novum testamentum et orbis antiquus
NTS	New Testament Studies
NT.S	Novum Testamentum. Supplements
NTTS	New Testament tools and studies
OTL	Old Testament library
OTP	The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha
PVTG	Pseudepigrapha veteris testamenti Graece
RB	Revue biblique
RGG	Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart
RQ	Revue de Qumran
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBL.DS	SBL Dissertation Series
SBLMS	SBL Monograph Series
SBL SBS	SBL Sources for Biblical Study
SBL.SP	SBL Seminar Papers
SBM	Stuttgarter Biblische Monographien
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
ScEs	Science et esprit
SESJ	Suomen eksegeettisen seuran julkaisuja
SEÅ	Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok
SJLA	Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity
SJT	Scottish Journal of Theology
SNT	Schriften des Neuen Testaments
SNTS	Society for New Testament Studies
StANT	Studien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
STAT	Suomalaisen tiedeakatemian toimituksia
STKSJ	Suomalaisen teologisen kirjallisuusseuran julkaisuja
StTDJ	Studies on the texts of the desert of Judah
StTh	Studia theologica (Lund)
StUNT	Studien zur Umwelt der Neuen Testaments
SVT	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
SVTP	Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha

TANZ	Texte und Arbeiten zum neutestamentlichen Zeitalter
TB	Theologische Bücherei
TBLNT	Theologisches Begriffslexikon zum Neuen Testament
TDNT	Theological Dictionary of the New Testament
TDOT	Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament
TEH	Theologische Existenz heute
THAT	Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament
ThBeitr	Theologische Beiträge
ThLZ	Theologische Literaturzeitung
ThR	Theologische Rundschau
ThSt	Theological Studies
ThW	Theologische Wissenschaft
ThWAT	Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament
ThWNT	Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament
ThZ	Theologische Zeitschrift
TRE	Theologische Realenzyklopädie
TPI	Trinity Press International
TS	Theological studies
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum
TToday	Theology Today
TyndB	Tyndale Bulletin
USF	University of South Florida
UTB	Uni-Taschenbücher
VT	Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WTJ	Westminster theological journal
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZAW	Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
ZNW	Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
ZThK	Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche

2. Technical and Other Abbreviations

AV	Authorized Version
cf.	confer
col.	columna
ed(s).	editor(s)
ET	English Translation
f	fragment
FS	Festschrift (Studies in Honour of, etc.)
H	Hebrew text of Sirach
KJV	King James Version

LXX	Septuagint
m	Mishnah tractate
MS(S)	manuscript(s)
MT	Masoretic text
n	footnote
n.d.	no date
NEB	New English Bible
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
o.c.	opus citatum
OT	Old Testament
RSV	Revised Standard Version
v(v)	verse(s)
vol.	volume

I

Introduction

§ 1 Jewish Mysticism and New Testament Exegesis

The study of New Testament Christology has often learned much from the study of Jewish theology, and especially from the study of Jewish mysticism in the Second Temple period and later traditions. When we are attempting to find a relevant interpretation for exaltation Christology in the New Testament, we need to pay special attention to the exhaustive and inspiring study of Jewish mysticism that has taken place over the last two decades. In this introductory chapter we shall first make a short survey of the history of interpretation concerning the relation between Second Temple Jewish mystical tradition and early Christology. In addition, there are certain necessary methodological questions that need to be answered.

1.1. The relation of merkabah mysticism and early Christology in scholarship

Did merkabah mysticism influence the development of Christology? The relation between Jewish mysticism and the emerging Christology of early Jewish Christianity has interested scholars for a long time. Even though merkabah mysticism itself appears not to be very well known in the area of New Testament studies in general, in the history of scholarship we can already now find several different theories explaining that relation. Before proceeding to the definition of the task of this study we shall first treat the major theories that have been proposed as a solution for the basic problem concerning the aforementioned relationship. As a start we need to see how merkabah mysticism has been considered in the area of Jewish studies.

a. Merkabah mysticism in Jewish studies

The concept of merkabah mysticism itself needs some clarification. It is apparent that exaltation Christology has relevant parallels in several themes of apocalyptic Jewish mysticism, for example in themes such as heavenly journeys, ascensions, throne visions and enthronements. In scholarship such Jewish mysticism has most often been defined as merkabah mysticism, because heavenly journeys and throne visions focus on the heavenly

merkabah, the throne chariot of God. Throne descriptions have been regarded as a uniting feature for the passages under consideration. In Jewish studies the throne has further been considered as the main feature of such mysticism. Even though merkabah mysticism has often been regarded as a relatively late phenomenon belonging to Hekhalot literature, we are here interested in its pre-Christian origins and early forms in New Testament times.

What is also interesting, is the close relationship of Jewish mysticism to the traditional Temple-centred faith of Israel. G. Scholem, the writer of *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, connected Jewish mysticism to the main themes of Jewish faith, i.e. to the worshipping of God the King on his heavenly throne.¹

"We know that in the period of the Second Temple an esoteric doctrine was already taught in Pharisaic circles. The first chapter of Genesis, the story of Creation (Maaseh Bereshith), and the first chapter of Ezekiel, the vision of God's throne-chariot (the 'Merkabah'), were the favorite subjects of discussion and interpretation which it was apparently considered inadvisable to make public."

Thus it was Scholem who gave the first, and greatly influential, definition of the nature of early Jewish mysticism:²

"What was the central theme of these oldest of mystical doctrines within the framework of Judaism? No doubts are possible on this point: the earliest Jewish mysticism is throne-mysticism. Its essence is not absorbed contemplation of God's true nature, but perception of His appearance on the throne, as described by Ezekiel, and cognition of the mysteries of the celestial throne-world. The throne-world is to the Jewish mystic what the pleroma, the 'fullness,' the bright sphere of divinity with its potencies, aeons, archons and dominions is to the Hellenistic and early Christian mystics of the period who appear in the history of religion under the names of Gnostics and Hermetics."

For a time Jewish mysticism was associated with Jewish apocalyptic that was popular in the second and first centuries B.C.E. Therefore the writings and different themes in that tradition were interpreted merely in that rather late context. In his innovative study *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* (1975) P. D. Hanson, however, challenged this view. Hanson investigated the relationship between Jewish apocalyptic eschatology and the prophetic tradition of Israel.³

"Our point is this: The origins of apocalyptic cannot be explained by a method which juxtaposes seventh- and second-century compositions and then proceeds to account for the features of the latter by reference to its immediate environment. The apocalyptic literature of the second century and after is the result of a long development reaching back to pre-exilic times and beyond, and not the new baby of second-century foreign parents. Not only the sources of origin, but the intrinsic nature of late apocalyptic compositions can be understood

¹ Scholem, *Major Trends*, 42.

² Scholem, *Major Trends*, 43-44.

³ Hanson, *The Dawn*, 6.

only by tracing the centuries-long development through which the apocalyptic eschatology developed from prophetic and other even more archaic native roots."

Hanson's conclusion is important for our study of the tradition history of the main ideas of merkabah mysticism. We are not dealing with a peculiar second century B.C.E. phenomenon, but instead with a "centuries-long development" of ideas. Therefore, in the present study, we need to take such a background into consideration.

In apocalyptic writings the throne of God is constantly associated with an ascent structure. Throne visions occur in a context where a privileged pious one is making a heavenly journey under the guidance of an angel. Therefore the study of throne mysticism has often focused on such an ascent structure.

A.F. Segal first treated the ascent structure in his monograph *Two Powers in Heaven* (1977), where he investigated a Jewish heresy of a divine heavenly being beside God. Even though the analyses were centred on rabbinic writings, Segal also made some comments on earlier apocalyptic writings and the New Testament.⁴

In his famous ANRW article, *Heavenly Ascent in Hellenistic Judaism, Early Christianity and their Environment* (1980), Segal then made a detailed survey of the ascent structure in apocalyptic writings. In this paper Segal stated that although apocalyptic literature may have many different functions, an underlying ascent structure behind most writings can be isolated.⁵ He paid special attention to angelic figures which performed different functions in heaven. Segal also made some direct suggestions concerning the connection of early Christology to such an ascent structure, and we shall return to these statements later.

Even though the golden era of Jewish mysticism is usually thought to have begun in the first centuries of the Common Era, the data of earlier forms of mysticism have been well known from the very first studies. Segal, for instance, investigates the pre-Christian writings of Qumran, 1 Enoch and the Testament of Levi. Thus the scholarly dating of the earliest phases of Jewish mysticism has not essentially changed over the years.

In the same year, 1980, I. Gruenwald published an important study entitled *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*. Gruenwald first studied various types of biblical theophany and then listed some of the characteristic features of throne visions (here in a somewhat abbreviated form):⁶

- a. God is sitting on a throne;
- b. He has the appearance of a man;

⁴ See e.g. Segal, *Two Powers*, 182ff.

⁵ Segal, *ANRW II* 23.2. (1980) 1358.

⁶ Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic*, 31.

- c. God is sitting in a palace;
- d. Fire occupies an important position in the vision;
- e. God is accompanied by angels who minister to Him;
- f. The angels recite hymns.

It is easy to see that these elements are linked to the Temple theophanies of the prophets, thus revealing a cultic context. Further, as Gruenwald notes, these elements "became major components in the mystical visions found in apocalyptic and later on in the Merkavah visions of *Hekhalot* literature." Gruenwald also investigated apocalyptic writings from 1 Enoch and the Apocalypse of Abraham to the Ascension of Isaiah and the Apocalypse of Paul, detecting the occurrence of those features.

Furthermore, Gruenwald paid attention to the reception of merkavah material in a Christian environment. He noted, for example, that in the Ascension of Isaiah a text that has undergone Christian redaction, several features connected the Christian editorial contribution to the underlying Jewish original. Furthermore he concluded, however, that such features might derive from Gnostic Christianity.⁷ In the Apocalypse of John he found a more "traditional" Jewish teaching. "Although the *Apocalypse of John* received its final shape some twenty years after the destruction of the Temple, its Merkavah material is nevertheless typical of its Jewish counterpart before the destruction."⁸

The transcendent nature of Jewish apocalyptic was brought out in the lengthy study *The Open Heaven* (1982) by Chr. Rowland.⁹

"By the time we reach the apocalyptic writings of the third and second centuries BC and later, we find that a cosmology has developed in which God is enthroned in glory in heaven, and his activities are carried out among men either by angelic intermediaries or other modes of divine operation like the spirit or shekinah. The cosmological beliefs were such that it often became necessary for anyone who would enter the immediate presence of God to embark on a journey through the heavenly world, in order to reach God himself."

In this transcendent scene, according to Rowland, angelic intermediaries played a significant role. Thus the suggestions of Segal concerning the importance of angelology in the interpretation were taken further. Rowland found evidence that the developing angelology "had produced an angelic figure of considerable status, whose position in the heavenly hierarchy set him apart from the rest of the angels". Such a belief in an exalted angel "owed much to the developments of the throne-theophany already inherent in the book of

⁷ Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic*, 61f.

⁸ Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic*, 62.

⁹ Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 80.

Ezekiel itself".¹⁰ In addition, Rowland suggested that there was another development that took a rather different form. In certain apocalyptic writings there appeared an attempt to reinterpret the throne-theophany "by identifying the figure on the throne, not with God but with a man exalted to heaven by God". This was especially the case with the Son of Man ideas of the Similitudes of Enoch.¹¹

As the basic features of the "ascent structure" of Jewish mysticism had been investigated, further studies began to make precise the details in this subject. In *The Faces of the Chariot* (1988) D. J. Halperin studied early Jewish responses to the prophet's vision in the book of Ezekiel. Halperin was interested in throne visions, and one of his main theses was that on the basis of Ezekiel's vision there emerged a "hymnic tradition". This tradition focused on heavenly worship. The seraphs with other heavenly beings eternally sang "Holy, Holy, Holy" before God's throne.¹² According to Halperin, Jewish mysticism building on such a tradition was of a cultic nature.

Therefore, for example in 1 Enoch, the merkabah was located in a heavenly Temple. Halperin pays attention to the fact that heavenly beings were engaged in a heavenly liturgy.¹³

"Daniel and Enoch share an image, perhaps drawn from the hymnic tradition of merkabah exegesis (think of the Angelic liturgy), of God surrounded by multitudes of angels. But, in the Holy of Holies, God sits alone. Even the priests, as Josephus stresses... may not enter this inner shrine... The angels, barred from the inner house, are the priests of Enoch's heavenly Temple. The high priest must be Enoch himself, who appears in the celestial Holy of Holies to procure forgiveness for holy beings."¹⁴

Another interesting field of study is naturally the world of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Especially the publication of the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice inspired scholars in the study of mysticism.¹⁵ In 1982 L. Schiffman suggested in his article that merkabah speculation at Qumran is probably one of the main sources for merkabah mysticism in general. There are similarities in terminology and motifs, even though no mention of a heavenly journey can be

¹⁰ Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 94, 111.

¹¹ Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 104.

¹² Halperin, *Chariot*, 46, 61.

¹³ Other detailed studies concerned for example the nature of the heavenly sanctuary in apocalyptic writings, see especially A.J. McNicol's article "The Heavenly Sanctuary in Judaism", *JRS* 13 (1987) 66-94.

¹⁴ Halperin, *Chariot*, 81-82.

¹⁵ This can be seen already from the first comments of Strugnell in his article "The Angelic Liturgy at Qumran", *VT suppl.* (1960) 318-345.

found.¹⁶ He also paid attention to the connection between earthly worship and heavenly liturgy.¹⁷

Finally C. Newsom's critical edition of the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice (1985) opened the field for scholars in this area. In her analysis Newsom noted the cultic character of these songs which focus on the heavenly Temple and describe the heavenly liturgy of the cherubim in detail.¹⁸

In sum, Jewish mysticism is "throne mysticism". It is especially interested in throne visions. In these visions one can detect an ascent structure, where privileged persons are escorted before God's throne of glory in heaven. Some writings describe a heavenly worship that is located in the heavenly temple. Furthermore, according to certain passages, angelic intermediaries make services to God both in heaven and on earth.

Even though many Jewish apocalyptic writings derive from the Common Era and have apparently been subjected to Christian redaction, certain writings are clearly pre-Christian. Jewish mysticism seems to have a long tradition history, and many of the relevant themes for our study occur in writings that were written centuries before the New Testament.

b. Merkabah mysticism and Christology: early suggestions

As we have seen above, the scholars working on Jewish mysticism noted certain similarities between merkabah mysticism and New Testament Christology. Especially descriptions of heavenly figures were compared with descriptions of the resurrected Christ in New Testament. Further the idea of exaltation soon became important.

In New Testament scholarship several independent analyses were also made concerning this relation. For example, the idea of heavenly visions was taken under consideration. As early as 1971 J.W. Bowker wrote about merkabah visions and the theology of Paul in his JSS article. Bowker focused on Paul's accounts of visions and their similarities with Jewish accounts of ascension.¹⁹ This point of view is important and it poses several important questions. Was Paul a seer himself? What is his relationship to the tradition of merkabah visions? Such questions need to be answered in the investigation later.

In the area of the study of Christology we also need to remember M. Hengel's early work *Der Sohn Gottes* (German 1975; in English, *The Son of God*, 1976). In his study Hengel proposed that the Jewish background for a

¹⁶ Schiffman, *Mystics*, 45-46.

¹⁷ Schiffman, *Mystics*, 17-18.

¹⁸ See e.g. Newsom, *Songs*, 18ff.

¹⁹ Bowker, *JSS* 16 (1971) 157-173. Later the theme was investigated e.g. by Schäfer, *JSS* 35 (1984) 19-35.

Christological description of an exalted Son of God can be found in the exalted figures that appear e.g. in 1 Enoch. In addition to such an ascent structure, Psalm 110 appeared to be decisive for early Christology.²⁰

Hengel commented further on the angelic interpretation that was held in the area of Jewish studies. Even though there was developed angel Christology e.g. in Gnostic circles, which may have been building on a similar tradition as the Melchizedek text from Qumran, New Testament Christology did not embrace such a view. For example, in the Letter to the Hebrews a fundamental distinction is made between the exalted Christ and the angels. Even though the idea of angel veneration was possible at that time, early Christology "left all these intermediary stages behind in a bold move" in Christological thinking.²¹

In addition to these early attempts to clarify the influence of Jewish mysticism on early Christology, there have been three major theories by which that relation has been explained. The first of these has emphasized the angelology found in merkabah texts.

c. Angelic interpretation

One of the first scholars to suggest the angelic interpretation was *A.F. Segal*, whose analyses were described above. In addition to the interpretation of Jewish mysticism, Segal made some quite direct suggestions concerning the nature of early Christology. He noted, for instance, the special significance of Psalm 110 for Christological descriptions.

"The Easter experience of the church was from the earliest time understood and expressed as the fulfillment of Ps. 110 and Dan. 7:13, seen as prophetic scripture. Jesus is proclaimed as a divine figure on the basis of his ascension to heaven and subsequent identification with the 'Lord' (Kyrios = YHWH) of Ps. 110 and the 'son of man' of Dan. 7:13 and Ps. 8:4."²²

Segal was quite optimistic as regards angelic interpretation. "Indeed, it is probable that Jesus' identity was very early associated with the angel of YHWH who is superior to all angels in that he represents God's name on earth."²³ This kind of interpretation was unique, however, since the ascension was closely associated with resurrection. Segal noted that, for example, in the Christ-hymn of Philippians 2 the ascension of Jesus in his resurrection was described by exploiting Old Testament enthronement language (cf. Ps. 97:9 LXX). Furthermore, he concluded that "the Pauline predicates of the exalted Christ in Philippians are divine in character, biblical references referring to

²⁰ Hengel, *Son of God*, 60f.

²¹ Hengel, *Son of God*, 82-84.

²² Segal, *ANRW* 23.2. (1980) 1371.

²³ Segal, *ANRW* 23.2. (1980) 1371.

God used in Jewish liturgy as doxologies."²⁴ According to Segal, the implicit three-fold level of the universe found in the hymn entails further the belief that Christ has surmounted all the various levels to become its ruler.

The enthronement theme was not applied merely to Christology. Segal paid attention to the fact that in Ephesians, for instance, not only Christ is seated at the right hand of God, but believers are enthroned with him. In Christology, however, the enthronement theme found several other lines of interpretation. In Hebrews the enthronement "at the right hand of God" is expressed by the priestly Melchizedek tradition. In the Apocalypse of John, in turn, Segal also found a descent-ascent pattern. Here Christ was a "man-child" who was caught up to God and His throne.²⁵

The Apocalypse of John was also of interest to R. Bauckham, who wrote on the worship of Jesus in apocalyptic Christianity. Bauckham argued that "the highest Christology, including the direct ascription of the title 'God' to Jesus, seems to have occurred earliest in contexts of worship," even though he did not believe that the heavenly liturgy of the Apocalypse would reflect an earthly liturgy practised in the Johannine churches.²⁶ After comparing the Apocalypse to the Ascension of Isaiah, Bauckham stated that apocalyptic Christian circles emphasized a traditional motif "designed to rule out angelolatry." While they at the same time depicted the worship of Jesus in the throne-room of heaven, they deliberately placed Christ "on the divine side of the line which monotheism must draw between God and creatures."²⁷

C. Rowland, whose aforementioned work bore the subtitle "A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity," stressed more the aspect of angelology in the formation of early Christology. He compared the Apocalypse of John with the Apocalypse of Abraham, where the angel Jaël had a primary status. Since in both of these writings the exalted one possessed a divine name and was described in a somewhat similar manner (sapphire, chrysolite, rainbow), Rowland concluded that it was "not easy to differentiate between this angel and the risen Christ who appears to John on the island of Patmos."²⁸ "Both of these works clearly think of the angelic figure as one who possesses divine attributes." In the Apocalypse of Abraham the figure is clearly an angel. In the Book of Revelation Christ is not directly described as an angel but, according to Rowland, "his function is not too different from the angelic

²⁴ Segal, *ANRW* 23.2. (1980) 1373. Later in his *Paul the Convert*, Segal applied several themes of the Jewish mystical tradition to the interpretation of Paul's theology. See especially Segal, *Paul*, 40-52.

²⁵ Segal, *ANRW* 23.2. (1980) 1374-1375.

²⁶ Bauckham, *NTS* 27 (1980-1) 331, 335.

²⁷ Bauckham, *NTS* 27 (1980-1) 335.

²⁸ Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 102.

intermediaries, who guide the apocalypticists on their heavenly journeys and reveal to them the secrets of God."²⁹

It is small wonder that Rowland concludes that modern study of Christology fails to note the "extent of the influence of angel-christology on primitive Christian doctrine." According to Rowland, the letter to the Hebrews, for example, indicates that in the community addressed some were having difficulty separating Christ from other angelic beings.³⁰ This, however, is not self-evident. If Bauckham's conclusions are correct, the matter may be quite the opposite. The earliest Christology may have been expressed by exploiting the difference between the status of Christ and the angels from the very start. In spite of this, Rowland's view confirms the fact that, as we saw already in the writings of Segal, angelology in fact had great influence on the application of merkabah mysticism in the interpretation of early Christology.

d. The divine agent theory

The next of the major theories is the one that speaks of a tradition of divine agency in Jewish mysticism. Previous suggestions and explanations had been based on rather short remarks and even the angelic interpretation in its first stages was not a very comprehensive theory. Such suggestions, however, prepared the way for more extensive analyses.

The study of Christology took a major step forward in 1988 when *L. W. Hurtado* published his monograph *One God, One Lord*. Building on the foundation of new and blossoming Jewish studies Hurtado focused especially on matters related to merkabah mysticism. He highlighted a notion of divine agency in Second Temple Judaism.

"[T]he literature of postexilic Judaism contains many references to various heavenly figures who are described as participating in some way in God's rule of the world and his redemption of the elect. In particular, there are heavenly figures described as occupying a position second only to God and acting on God's behalf in some major capacity. It is these figures which are most relevant for the historical problem of the origin of the cultic veneration of Jesus."³¹

Hurtado argued that many Jews speculated about heavenly beings who were considered to be God's pre-eminent servants and who had a special status in the heavenly hierarchy. He classified three general types of beings who attained this role. There were personified divine attributes such as Wisdom or Logos, exalted patriarchs like Enoch and Moses, and principal angels like Michael. The divine agency category then became crucial for the interpretation of early Christology.

²⁹ Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 103.

³⁰ Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 112.

³¹ Hurtado, *One God*, 17.

"At the earliest stages, Christian experience of and reflection upon the risen Jesus were probably influenced by and drew upon the divine agency category. Jesus was experienced and understood as exalted to the position of God's chief agent. The divine agency tradition was important in providing the resources for accommodating a heavenly figure second only to God in authority and glory."³²

The content of early Christology was, however, no longer consistent with Jewish conceptions. In what Hurtado calls "the Christian mutation", Jewish monotheistic devotion was altered. The risen Christ came to share in the devotional and cultic attention normally reserved for God: "the early Christian mutation in Jewish monotheism was a religious devotion with a certain binitarian shape."³³

Hurtado exploited the new areas of Jewish studies, but he did not accept the suggestion of an angel-christology as the only source explaining early Christology. His conclusions continued on the line of Bauckham underlining the devotional character of Christological statements. In the early dating of the devotional exaltation Christology Hurtado followed Hengel, and once again challenged the widely-accepted "Hellenistic" theory about the formation of the so called high Christology.³⁴

A few years later *P.G. Davis*, accepting the basic idea of Hurtado's thesis, attempted to improve the understanding of the dynamics of both Jewish theology and early Christology. Davis stated that the mere concentration on the status of divine agents does not sufficiently explain the origin of high Christology. Other factors, and especially that of function should be considered, as well.³⁵

In what Davis calls a "triple pattern of mediation" he defined a new pattern for the analysis of the modes of mediation. Precisely when was a particular divine agent acting as a significant mediator? – asked Davis. A neutral distinction between the past, the present, and the future would serve best when searching for an answer to that question.³⁶ According to Davis' analysis, in Jewish theology the legacy pattern, mediation from the past which shapes the present and future, can be seen in the cases of Abraham, Moses and David. The intervention pattern, according to which active mediation might be expected in the present, is characteristic primarily of angels. The consum-

³² Hurtado, *One God*, 123f.

³³ Hurtado, *One God*, 124.

³⁴ In the *Son of God* Hengel had stated that the development in early Christology "progressed in a very short time." (italics his). Hengel, *Son of God*, 75. Hengel's work also openly challenges the history of religions school, see pp. 16ff. In this respect Hurtado follows Hengel completely.

³⁵ Davis, *JTS* 45 (1994) 481.

³⁶ Davis, *JTS* 45 (1994) 483.

Index of Ancient Sources

1. Old Testament

Genesis

5:21-24	72
5:24	72, 120
6:2-4	83, 141
15	105
18:2	66
21:18	66
22:11	66
26:4	88
28:11-22	107
28:11-17	66
31:11-13	66
34	
37:9	88
49:10	85, 234

Exodus

3:2	66
4:16	89, 90
7:1	89, 90
15:11	83
15:17	53
15:17-18	46
19:16-18	66
23:21	106, 140
24:10	66, 87
24:15ff.	57
25	57
25:17-22	55
25:20-22	50
25:22	50
26:33	68
32:13	88
32:20-21	106
40:34	68

Leviticus

16	268
16:2	253
16:11-13	56
16:11-16	265

16:15	254, 357
16:15-16	56
16:15f.	253
16:29-31	189

Numbers

6:14 (LXX)	254
10:35-36	51

Deuteronomy

4:11-15	66
18:15	179
32:43	204, 205
33:20-22	214

Judges

8:23	45
------	----

1 Samuel

2:1-10	70
2:7-8	70
2:10	70
4:4	50, 253
8	58
8:5	58
8:6	58
8:7	45, 58
10:19	178

2 Samuel

7	60, 209, 228, 229, 244, 245
7:10-14	166, 234
7:12	166, 230, 231, 233, 234, 235, 237, 245
7:12-14	59, 86, 165, 167, 228, 231, 243
7:12-16	292
7:13	233
7:14	165, 206, 296
22:6	162
22:12	68

<i>1 Kings</i>		18:10-11	68
22:17-23	48	22:3	53
22:19	66	22:27-28	47
		24	46, 149
<i>2 Kings</i>		24:2	51
2:11	66	24:7	51
19:15	50	24:8-9	51
		27:4	52
<i>1 Chronicles</i>		32	162
6:24	185	33:13-14	53
28:2	51	45:6	53
29:23	59, 92, 131	45:7-8	205
29:25	59	45:8	205
		47:9	47, 50
<i>2 Chronicles</i>		48	149
29	150	48:1-3	46
29:27-28	149	61:6-7	59
		67:18 (LXX)	118
<i>Ezra</i>		68:17	66, 75
4:29	185	68:24	75
		74:12	48
<i>Job</i>		80:1-2	52
1:6-12	48	82	149
2:1-6	48	82:2	129
26:9	68	89	165, 229
36	101	89:3-4	165
36:6-7	70	89:7	83, 141
36:7	101	89:14	53
		89:28	296
<i>Psalms</i>		89:36	292
1	166	89:45	52
2	61, 166, 209, 228, 229,	93	149
	242	93:1	47
2:1-2	233, 234	93:1-2	48, 53
2:2	170	94	149
2:6	59	95:2-3	47
2:7	59, 165, 166, 206, 208,	96:7 (LXX)	205
	228, 234, 244, 296	96:10	47
2:8	60	97:1	47
5:3	46	97:1-3	48
5:6	259	97:2	68
8:4	7	97:7	204, 205
8:7	184	97:8	205
9:7	53	98:1ff.	49
10:4 (LXX)	68	98:6	47
11:4	52, 68, 119	99:1	47, 51, 52, 264
16	162, 163, 166, 167, 171	99:2	52, 264
16:8	162	99:5	51, 52, 264
18:5	162	102:12	52
18:10	119	103:19	68, 119, 148

103:19-21	53, 264	11:1-10	241
109 (LXX)	185	11:2	240
109:1 (LXX)	276	14:13	52
109:3 (LXX)	60	24:21	48
110	7, 78, 79, 85, 101, 130, 131, 134, 157, 160, 162, 163, 166, 167, 170-175, 177, 178, 180, 182-187, 194-196, 201, 202, 206, 208, 209, 215, 216, 217, 228, 242, 245, 246, 248, 258, 259, 260, 261, 262, 267, 268, 269, 271, 283, 287, 288, 289, 325, 326, 328, 331, 334, 335, 343, 344, 345, 352, 356, 358, 362, 363, 366, 367, 370, 373, 378, 379, 380, 381, 388	24:23 26:19 40:55 40:9-10 41:21 42:10f. 43:15 44:6 45:15 45:21 45:21-25 49:1 49:6 52:7 55	48, 50 134, 241 93 49 46 49 46 46, 49 178 178 366 200 273 49, 129, 140 229
110:1	12, 61, 69, 88, 163, 168, 170, 171, 177, 180, 183, 184, 187, 204, 206, 208, 210, 244, 258, 260, 276, 327, 349, 351	55:3-5 55:3 <i>Jeremiah</i> 1:5	241 249, 354 200
110:3	60	3:16-17	54
110:4	79, 207, 234, 258, 260	10:10	46
116:3	162	14:21	54
122:3-5	273	17:12	54
132	163, 165, 166, 167, 170, 173, 378	22:30 23	52 229
132:7	51	23:5	233
132:10	164	23:5	133, 167
132:10-11	170	33:15	133
132:11	163, 164, 292		
146:4 (LXX)	88	<i>Ezekiel</i>	
149:2	46	1	107, 148
		1-2	198, 200
<i>Greek Odes (LXX)</i>		1:4-5	67, 212
2:49	205	1:6-10	67
		1:6-12	106
<i>Isaiah</i>		1:10	253
6	110, 294	1:15	67
6:1	48	1:22	72
6:1-2	66	1:23	106
6:3	67	1:26	67
6:5	48	1:26-28	212
10:34-11:1	85	1:27	68
11	229	1:28	68
11:1	133, 292	2	200
11:1-5	85	2:3	200

8 107
 8:2-4 67
 9:3 53
 10:1-2 54
 10:9-17 67
 10:18 54
 34 229
 34:23 167, 233
 37:12 134
 37:19-24 273

Daniel

4:10 238
 4:14 248
 4:20 238
 4:34 46
 5:12 238
 5:21 233
 6:4 238
 7 87, 92, 93, 271, 272
 7:9 69
 7:9-10 73
 7:10 69
 7:13 7, 325, 326
 7:13-14 179
 7:14 69, 151
 7:22 89, 272
 8:13 118
 12:2 134, 135, 151, 241

Daniel (LXX)

3:54-55 69

Joel

2:32 172

Amos

9:11 167

Micah

2:13 46

Zephaniah

3:15 46

Haggai

2:22 52

Zechariah

3:1-5 48
 3:7 89, 272

3:8 133
 6:12 133
 14 46

2. Jewish Literature

A. Apocrypha

1 Maccabees

3:4 214
 14:41 79

2 Maccabees

7:9 134
 7:14 135, 151

Sirach

4:12 135
 17:28 135
 36:11 273
 47:11 92, 340
 48:10 273
 50 150
 50:1-21 149

Wisdom of Solomon

1:5 238
 2:19-20 135
 3:8 83, 89, 273
 4:7-11 135
 5:1ff. 135
 5:15-16 135
 9:10 54

B. Pseudepigrapha

Apocalypse of Abraham

ApcAbr 126, 376
 1:8 212
 9 189
 10:3 105, 140
 10:8 105, 140, 141
 15 105
 17:1-21 106, 140
 17:8-9a 106
 17:13 106
 18:3 106
 18:12-13 106
 21:6-7 107

Apocalypse of Ezra

1:3-5189

6-11

108

7-8

193

7:21

110, 143, 175, 288

7:22

110

8:7

109

9:6ff.

110

9:6-18

286

9:7-10

111

9:9

111

9:17-18

111

9:24-26

111

9:27ff.

110

9:28-32

286, 320

9:30

286, 288

9:32

288

9:33-36

286

9:36

286

9:40-10:6

286

10:6

286

10:8

286

10:14

287

10:17-11:33

287

11:9

287

11:20-21

287

11:32-33

288

Apocalypse of Moses

19:2

112

22:3

112

22:4

112

28:4

113, 135

32:2

112

39

116

39:1-3

113

39:2-5

112

39:3

135

41:3

102, 113, 135

Life of Adam and Eve

12-17

113

13:1-15:3

138

14:2

143

25:2-3

112

47:3

113

2 Baruch/Apocalypse of Baruch

59:3-4

87

Testament of Abraham (A)

10:1

114

11:4

114

11:5-11

114

11:9

114

12:4

114

12:5

114

12:11

151

13:1

114

13:2

114

13:3

114

13:8

151

20:11-12

115

3 Baruch

126, 376

2:1-2

117

2:2

193

6:14

117

9:3

117

11:2

117

1 Enoch

126, 146, 212, 376

1-5

152

1:3

152

1:4-6

152

1:9

273

9:4

72, 151, 271

10:12

129

14

72-75; 95, 142, 147

14:1

74

14:1ff.

287

14:8ff.

193, 290

14:8-9

72

14:10

72

14:16

72

Ascension of Isaiah

Asclsa

126, 127, 136, 341, 376

1-5

108

6-11

285

2:7-11

189

3:13-4:18

108

4:2f.

109

14:18-20	73	20:3 (J)	104
14:21	73, 141	20:4	104
14:24-25	73	21:1-22:10	139
18:8-9	74	22:1 (J)	104
24:3	74	22:10 (J)	104
24:5	74	24:1 (J)	104, 142
25	212	24:1 (A)	142
25:3	74	30	104
25:4-5	75	30:11	105
26:1	76	71:33-34	104
37-71	91-96		
38:2	93	<i>3 Enoch</i>	
45:3	91, 272	1:1	193
46	229	1:1-2	120
46:1	91, 272	3-15	95
46:2	91	4:3	120
47:3f.	272	4:5	121
51	93	7	120
51:1-3	92, 272	10:1	122
51:3	88, 130	10:3	121, 122
53:6	93	12:5	121, 140
55:4	93	16:3-4	122, 143
60:12-22	292	17:1-3	120
61:8	93, 130, 152	18	120
62	229	18:1-2	120
62:2	94, 152	18:3	120
62:5	152	45	68, 121
62:5b	94	48D:1	89, 140
62:13-14	94	48C:4	121, 122
71:3	95		
71:5-7	95, 212	<i>Exodus of Ezekiel</i>	
71:10	95	6,15	82
71:14	95	6,8-10	87
71:14-17	93	6,15-19	87, 271
71:17	96	7,3-7	88
82:10-14	292	7,9	83, 88
89:45-48	213, 214	9, 8	90
91-93	129		
98:10	152	<i>4 Ezra</i>	
100:4-5	152	7:33-34	100
102-103	241	7:60	153
		7:89-91	99
<i>2 Enoch</i>		7:97	100
1:1	103	8:20-25	99
4-6	292	8:48	135
8:1-3 (J)	103	8:48-55	100
8:8 (J)	103	9:15-25	153
9:1	103	12	229
19:4	292	12:32-33	100
20:3	104	12:32f.	61, 133

Jubilees

2:2	292
4:16	75
4:18	76
4:19	76
4:21	76
4:23	76
4:25	76
8:19	76, 118
10:17	76, 272
31:11	75

Psalms of Solomon

2:30-31	135, 241
3:1-12	152
3:11-12	135, 241
14:1-4	152
14:6-9	153, 241
14:6-10	135
15:10-13	153
15:12-13	135
17	229
17:4	340
17:21	61, 133, 340
17:26	133, 273
17:37	240

Joseph and Aseneth

15:12	142
-------	-----

Prayer of Joseph

A, 1	108
A, 2-3	98
A, 6	141

4. Maccabees

17:18	102
17:22	255

Pseudo-Philo

11:5	87
18:5	105

Sibylline Oracles

1,324	290
1,331	290
1,379-382	290
2,218-219	153
2,218	275
2,238-244	153, 290

3,1	118
3,11-12	119
3,669-673	153
3,741-750	153
3,781-782	89, 273
4,40-43	153
4,180-190	153
6,1-5	291
6,6-7	291
6,15-19	291
7,29-39	292
8,222	153, 275

Testament of Job

TJob	157
33	88, 101, 102
39	101
39:11-12	101
43:7	103
52:8	102
52:11	102
53:8	102

Testament of Abraham

13:6 (A)	273
20:11-12	102

Testament of Isaac

2:7	116, 128
4:1f.	189
6:4-5	115
6:26-27	116
7:1	116

Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs

TLevi	126, 146, 376
2:5-8	290
2:6-7	77, 193
2:10	78
3:1-5	198
3:4	252
3:6	78
5	294
5:1	212, 256
5:1-2	78
5:3-5	78
5:5-6	142
8:3	78
8:14	262

18	62, 229	<i>IQH</i>	
18:1ff.	262	3	335
18:2	79	3, 21-22	82
18:2-3	61		
18:10	79	<i>IQM</i>	
18:10-11	135	12, 1	81
18:11	238, 240	15, 4	83
<i>TJudah</i>		<i>IQS</i>	
22:3	133	III, 6-9	252
24	136	IX, 3-6	147
25	136, 273	VIII, 5	147
25:1	135	VIII, 5-8	252
<i>TNaphtali</i>		<i>IQSa</i>	
8:2-3	62	II	94
		II, 17-21	62, 132
<i>TBenjamin</i>		<i>IQSb</i>	
9:2	273	3, 25ff.	84, 130
10:3	101	4, 25ff.	84
10:6	101, 128	4, 25-26	83
		5, 20ff.	85
<i>Questions of Ezra</i>		<i>IQapGen</i>	
A, 1	119	19:8	76
A, 19	119		
A, 21	119		
A, 29	120		
<i>Apocalypse of Paul</i>		<i>4Q405 Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice</i>	
11	293	SSS	146
20	293	1, 31-32	83, 141
25	293	1, 44-45	83, 141
29	293	20-21-22, 6-9	148, 265, 344
43	293	22, 8	80
44	293	<i>IQpHab</i>	
45	293	5, 4	89, 273
<i>Hellenistic Synagogue Prayer</i>		<i>4QAaronA</i>	62
(<i>AposCon 7</i>)		<i>4QFlor (4Q174)</i>	
4:1	118	4Qflor.	166, 229, 231, 233, 234
4:8-10	118	1-3, I, 10-11	85
4:11-12	118	1-3, I, 10-12	231
4:15	118	1-3, I, 11	61
4:22	118		
C. Dead Sea Scrolls		<i>4QMMT</i>	194
<i>CD</i>		<i>4QPatr</i>	234
16,3-4	75	3	61
34-38	75		

4Q161 84, 377
 8, III, 8-10 61, 342
 8, III, 18-21 85, 342

4Q204 80

4Q213 80

4Q252 85

4Q285 85

4Q385 80
 4, 5-6

4Q403
 li, 30-34 148
 li, 36-37 148, 265
 li, 44 90

4Q427
 VI 83
 VII 141

4Q471b 83, 141

4Q491 (4QM^a) 88, 90, 92, 130, 141, 142,
 334, 335
 11, I, 12-13a 81
 11, I, 13-14 82
 11, I, 17 83, 271
 11, I, 18 82

4Q503 (13-16)
 VI, 4-10 80

4Q511
 35 83

4Q521
 2, 7 85

11QBer 142

11QMelch 84, 129, 130, 157, 262,
 263, 271, 307

11Q5 (11QPs^a)
 XXVII 149, 150
 XXVII, 5-8 149

D. Josephus

Antiquities
 18.11 197

E. Philo

Commentary on Genesis
 1, 26 96

Vita Mosis
 I, 155-159 89, 97
 II, 99-100 97, 141

De Praemiis et poeniis
 43f. 96

De Confusione Linguarum
 146 98

Questions on Exodus
 40 97

De Legatione ad Gaium
 156 197

De Mutatione Nominum
 223 197

F. Rabbinic

mTamid
 7:3 149, 266
 7:4 149, 266

3. New Testament

Matthew
 5:45 296
 19 274
 19:28 89, 128, 212, 273, 291
 24:30 94
 25 274
 25:31-32 271
 25:31 272, 273
 25:31ff. 291
 27:19 275

<i>Mark</i>		2:36	169, 171, 172, 175, 176, 279, 296, 297, 309, 310, 319, 351, 382
1:10	308		
12:35-37	180		
12:37	180	2:38	175, 176
13:26-27	270	3:15	287, 355
14:24	261	3:20-21	181
14:62	180	3:21	183, 208, 210, 276
		3:22	179
<i>Luke</i>		4:10	287
1:32	171	4:25-28	233
1:35	296	4:28	233
1:47	178	5:30-31	177-178, 287, 343, 349
2:11	171	5:31	177, 330
7:55	287	7:1-56	178-182
9:22	180	7:27	178
20:44	180	7:35	178
21:40-44	180	7:37	179
22:22	233	7:47-49	179
22:30	89	7:52	179
22:69	180	7:52-56	343
		7:55	179
<i>John</i>		7:55-56	180
10:3	296	7:56	179
19:13	275	8:37 (E)	311
		9	200
<i>Acts</i>		10:42	224, 225, 232
1:9	290	13	162, 228
2	201, 209, 215, 217, 218, 226, 228, 230, 233, 234, 245, 246, 247, 248, 279, 300, 378, 380	13:16ff.	163
		13:23	165
		13:33f.	234
		13:35	163
2:22-36	160-177	17:18	197
2:22-36	161, 162, 175, 343, 378	17:31	232, 276, 347
2:21	172, 175	18:12	275
2:22	163, 171	18:16	275
2:23	176, 233	21:27	180
2:23-24	287	25:6	275
2:24ff.	162	25:10	275
2:29	163	25:17	275
2:30	166, 168, 233, 237	26:23	241, 245, 249
2:30-31	163		
2:31	162	<i>Romans</i>	
2:32-33	167	1:1-4	324
2:32-36	352	1:1-6	218
2:33	172	1:2	228
2:33-36	217, 245, 246, 324	1:2-4	201
2:34	163, 168	1:3	166, 213, 218, 219, 224, 225, 226, 230, 231, 235, 236, 237, 239, 243, 247, 296, 297, 311, 379
2:34ff.	161, 170, 287		
2:34-36	168, 213, 367		
2:35-36	349		

1:3-4	217-250; 217, 219, 226, 227, 228, 244, 246, 248, 279, 280, 281, 296, 309, 310, 317, 342, 349, 351, 379, 382	15:20 15:20-21 15:20-25 15:23 15:24 15:24-25 15:25 15:25b 15:25-28 15:27-28 15:35ff. 15:43 15:44-47	249 183 249 249 183 184, 349 182, 183, 208, 210, 283, 343 276 201, 276 184 239 223 238
1:4	197, 201, 219, 224, 225, 231, 233, 235, 236, 237, 243, 247, 296, 297, 300, 317, 379, 380		
2:5	276		
2:16b	275		
3:23-25	255		
3:25	255		
4:24-25	176		
4:25	176, 267, 369		
5:9	255, 276		
5:18-19	223		
5:19	255		
6:4	195		
8	241		
8:1ff.	239		
8:11	240		
8:32	255		
8:33-34	186		
8:34	184-187; 184, 185, 186, 187, 195, 197, 210, 260, 268, 343, 369		
9:3	238, 239		
10:3	172		
10:9-13	319		
10:9	363		
14:10-12	274		
15:26	300		
16:7	227		
<i>1 Corinthians</i>			
4:5	275		
6:2	89, 273		
11:24	261		
12:3	311		
15	197, 238, 239, 241, 312, 313, 368		
15:1-3	314		
15:3	185, 254, 261, 268, 370		
15:3-5	287, 313		
15:4	184		
15:4-5	183		
15:5-7	314		
15:11	314		
		<i>2 Corinthians</i>	
		4:6	199
		5:10	275, 346
		12	199
		12:1-5	198-202
		12:2-4	198, 293
		12:9	199
		13:4	223
		<i>Galatians</i>	
		1	200
		1:8	201
		1:12	200
		1:15	200
		1:16	200
		1:23	200
		2:10	300
		<i>Ephesians</i>	
		1:20	183, 343
		1:21	351
		2:4-6	102
		2:9-11	310
		2:10	169
		4:10	287
		<i>Philippians</i>	
		2	298, 366
		2:3	189
		2:5-11	324, 366
		2:6ff.	311
		2:7-8	351
		2:9	171
		2:9-11	349

2:10	319, 351	5:5-6	234
2:11	171	5:6	358
		6:19	253
<i>Colossians</i>		6:20	259
1	194	7	262
1:9	197	7-8	207
1:13	195	7:1-28	259
1:16	190	7:2-3	263
2:8	196	7:7	261, 345
2:9-10	194	7:11	262
2:11	193, 197	7:11-19	262
2:16-3:1	187-198; 195, 196, 379	7:14	207
2:15	194	7:25	186
2:16	193, 194, 197	7:28	262
2:18	143, 189, 191, 193, 196, 197, 351	8-10	208
2:23	190, 191, 197	8:1	204, 207-208, 259, 261
3	197	8:2	252
3:1	187, 191, 195, 196, 343, 349	8:13	252
		9:5	253
		9:8	252
		9:12	253, 254, 357
		9:14	253, 267
<i>1 Thessalonians</i>		9:19-24	266
1	361	9:22	258
1:9f.	281, 324	9:24	251, 252, 253
1:10	183, 201, 276	10	208
2:19	275	10:12	204, 207-208, 343, 351
3:11-13	183	10:12-13	259, 260, 268, 369
4:14	183, 260	12:2	204, 208-209, 259, 343
5:9-10	183	12:14	208
		12:22-24	204
<i>1 Timothy</i>			
3:16	222	<i>1 Peter</i>	
		3:18	222
<i>2 Timothy</i>		3:21-22	204, 343
2:12	212	5:5	189
<i>Hebrews</i>		<i>1 John</i>	
1	245, 380	2:22	311
1:2	206		
1:2-4	208	<i>Jude</i>	
1:3	204, 258, 288	14-15	273
1:3-4	203-207; 203, 253, 343, 349, 351		
1:4	319	<i>Revelation</i>	
1:5	165, 234	1:5	211
1:6	205, 206	1:5-6	256
1:13	204, 206, 258	1:6	212
2:6	223	3:21	209, 211-212, 288, 343, 349
4:16	253		
5:5	208, 310	4	293

4:1	212
4:1-9	212-213
4:2	256
4:2-3	212
4:5	212
4:6	213
4:7	213
4:9	213
5:5	213, 256
5:5-6	213-215, 343
5:6	213, 214, 256
5:6-12	288
5:10	212
5:11	256
7:9	256
7:9-10	213
7:10	215
7:13-15	102
7:15	213, 256
7:15-17	288
7:17	211
11:15	214
11:16	256
11:19	213, 256
14:1	212
17	214
17:14	215
19:4	256
19:10	110
19:16	215
20:4	89, 212, 273
20:11	256
22:3	211
22:5	212
22:9	110
22:21	214

4. Early Christian

Ignatios

IgnEph.

18:2	300
20:2	227

IgnSm.

1:1	300
-----	-----

IgnTrall.

9:1	300
-----	-----

Hermas

9:9-10:1	
10	189

Polycarp

6:2	275
-----	-----

5. Church Writings

Irenaeus

Against Heresies

1.24.3-7	303
1.25.1-3	301
1.26.1-2	301
1.26.2	300, 302
3.11.7	302
3.16.3	300
3.21.1	301, 302
3.22.1	300
5.1.3	301

Hippolytus

Refutatio omnium haeresium

7.34	303
7.35	303
7.35.2	306

Eusebius

Preparatio Evangelica

IX, 28-29	86
-----------	----

Church History

3.27.1-6	305
5.28.6	303

Origen

Contra Celsum

5.61	304
------	-----

Sermons on Matthew

16.12	305
-------	-----

Tertullian

Treatise on the Soul

48.4	189
------	-----

Epiphanius

Panarion

30.3.1-7	306
----------	-----

30.16.4	305	<i>Apocalypse of Peter</i>	
30.18.5-6	306	6	288
30.13.7	306	7.81.3-24	304
<i>Pseudo-Clementine Homilies</i>		<i>Second Treatise of the Great Seth</i>	
III.20	306	VII.51-56	304
		VII.51.30f.	304
6. Nag Hammadi		VII.56.14-20	304
<i>Apocryphon of James</i>			
14:30	288		

Index of Authors

- Albright, W.F., 272, 273
 Alexander, P., 95, 120, 131, 189, 191, 193
 Allen, L.C., 205, 206, 233, 234, 340
 Allegro, J.M., 166
 Althaus, P., 230
 Andersen, F.I., 103
 Anderson, H., 359
 Attridge, H.W., 204, 206, 207, 208, 209, 253, 258
 Aune, D., 211, 214, 256
 Bakhtin, M., 34, 35, 36
 Balz, H.R., 38, 40, 41, 279
 Bandstra, A.J., 188, 191
 Barr, J., 21, 22
 Barrett, C.K., 162, 220, 221, 254, 299, 314
 Barthes, R., 35, 36
 Bartsch, H-W., 240, 241, 249
 Bauckham, R., 8, 110, 286, 288, 319, 320
 Baur, F.C., 278, 280
 Beasley-Murray, P., 217, 244, 281, 317
 Becker, J(oachim), 60
 Becker, J(ürgen), 62, 248, 250
 Beker, J. Chr., 182
 Benveniste, E., 20, 21
 Berger, K., 39, 364
 Berger, P.L., 28
 Betz, O., 59, 166, 229, 230, 234, 245, 317
 Black, M., 26, 27, 238
 Blank, J., 244, 317
 Blomberg, C.L., 273
 Bloom, H., 36
 Boccaccio, G., 30
 Bock, D.L., 14, 76, 93, 94, 95, 104, 106, 108, 110, 114, 120, 142, 152, 162, 163, 164, 168, 172, 174, 179, 291
 Boismard, M-E., 217, 220, 228, 229, 234, 299
 Bornkamm, G., 188, 197
 Bousset, W., 38, 39, 40, 41, 171, 174, 230, 278, 280, 298, 348, 364
 Bowker, J.W., 6, 200
 Brettler, M.Z., 28, 45, 46, 52, 53, 54, 61, 62
 Brooke, G.J., 129
 Brooker, P., 30, 32, 36
 Bruce, F.F., 164, 166, 181, 205, 209, 254
 Brueggemann, W., 45, 47
 Buchanan, G.W., 252, 258, 260
 Bultmann, R., 18, 39, 160, 161, 174, 221, 223, 226, 231, 270, 278, 280, 283, 298, 364
 Burger, C., 217, 225, 226, 230, 246
 Capes, D.B., 14, 172, 323, 325, 330, 332, 363, 366, 367, 370
 Carr, W., 190, 287
 Carrell, P.R., 15, 142, 191, 334
 Carroll, J.T., 163, 167
 Casey, P.M., 39, 175, 246, 278, 315, 364
 Charlesworth, J.H., 132, 134, 247, 331, 350, 367
 Chatman, S., 22, 32
 Chester, A., 13, 85, 98, 104, 105, 111, 113, 115, 200, 343, 349, 367
 Cockerhill, G.L., 301
 Cohn, D., 33
 Collins, J.J., 62, 69, 74, 75, 78, 79, 81, 82, 83, 84, 93, 96, 106, 114, 118, 131, 132, 133, 140, 231, 271, 272, 290, 291, 292, 335, 341, 342, 362
 Colpe, C., 39, 364
 Conzelmann, H., 171, 183, 184, 254, 276, 313, 314
 Cooke, G., 53, 59, 60, 67
 Craigie, P.C., 46, 51, 52
 Cranfield, C.E.B., 230
 Cross, F.M., 251
 Culler, J., 31, 34, 336
 Cullmann, O., 161, 171, 311, 312, 348, 358
 Dahood, M., 46

- Dahl, N.A., 221
 Davies, W.D., 188, 194, 197
 Davis, P.G., 10, 11, 367
 Dean-Otting, M., 125, 127, 151, 340, 341
 Delcor, M., 258
 Dibelius, M., 188, 192
 Donahue, J.R., 270
 Duling, D.C., 59, 132, 164, 165, 166, 177, 229, 234, 245, 340
 Dumbrell, W.J., 60
 Dunn, J.D.G., 39, 165, 168, 170, 178, 179, 185, 186, 190, 192, 195, 219, 220, 221, 226, 227, 230, 232, 238, 240, 255, 257, 260, 275, 295, 299, 305, 308, 309, 310, 311, 312, 317, 346, 364, 370
 Eagleton, T., 29
 Eco, U., 336
 Eissfeldt, O., 75, 77, 109
 Eskola, T., 74, 99, 147, 197, 217, 252, 265, 310
 Eslinger, L.M., 58
 Evans, C.A., 273
 Fabry, H.-J., 50
 Fairclough, N., 23, 24, 25, 34
 Fee, F.D., 314
 Filson, F.V., 273
 Fitzmyer, J.A., 129, 164, 171, 174, 178, 180, 219
 Fletcher-Louis, C.H.T., 14, 83, 91, 129, 138, 139, 140, 142, 145, 168, 172, 191, 330, 353, 354, 365
 Flusser, D., 263
 Fohrer, G., 60
 Ford, J.M., 214, 256
 Fossum, J.E., 14, 113, 142, 191, 198, 365
 Foucault, M., 22, 23, 24
 France, R.T., 319, 363
 Francis, F.O., 188, 189, 190, 193, 196, 197
 Frankemölle, H., 312, 352
 Freundlieb, D., 23
 Froitzheim, F., 217, 222, 240, 244, 317
 Fuller, R.H., 222, 223, 231, 235, 279, 281
 Furnish, V.P., 199, 275
 Garnet, P., 129
 Gärtner, B., 147, 252
 Gaylord, H.E. Jr., 117
 Genette, G., 35, 37
 Gese, H., 50, 55, 57
 Georgi, D., 199
 Gieschen, C.A., 14, 83, 95, 109, 129, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 145, 286, 307, 326, 329, 334, 353, 354, 365
 Gnika, J., 190, 191, 271, 272, 273
 Goranson, S., 300, 301
 Goulder, M., 295, 306, 308
 Gourgues, M., 168, 185, 206, 341, 370
 Gray, G.B., 48, 66, 67
 Grappe, C., 12, 273
 Grässer, E., 203, 205
 Green, W.S., 339, 348
 Greenberg, M., 67
 Greimas, A.J., 18, 30
 Gruenwald, I., 3, 4, 66, 73, 74, 103, 106, 109, 110, 121, 212, 287, 293, 294, 341
 Gunkel, H., 47
 Gunther, J.J., 188, 204
 Haacker, K., 229, 234
 Haenchen, E., 160, 172, 179
 Hagner, D.A., 262, 263, 271, 272, 273, 357
 Hahn, F., 11, 39, 40, 161, 217, 221, 223, 226, 240, 248, 249, 278, 279, 280, 281, 317, 360
 Hall, R., 108, 109, 110, 285, 289
 Hall, S., 22
 Halperin, D.J., 5, 67, 73, 80, 105, 106, 112, 120, 127, 142, 212, 213, 214
 Hanson, D.D., 2
 Harris, R., 19
 Hartman, L., 74
 Hasel, G., 44
 Hawkes, T., 20, 29, 30, 336
 Hay, D.M., 79, 101, 171, 173, 177, 183, 184, 186, 187, 195, 202, 206, 210, 334, 350, 366
 Hayes, J.H., 165, 166, 177, 234, 244, 245, 317
 Hays, R.B., 17
 Headlam, A.C., 230, 231, 238, 240
 Hegermann, H., 259

- Heitmüller, D., 278
 Hengel, M., 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 40, 69, 81, 84, 87, 90, 91, 92, 101, 121, 130, 134, 144, 168, 183, 185, 186, 195, 197, 202, 204, 207, 210, 211, 214, 217, 229, 233, 234, 236, 254, 260, 276, 279, 283, 291, 310, 312, 327, 329, 341, 343, 348, 350, 353, 354, 365, 370
 Herrmann, K., 120, 121
 Hill, D., 241
 Himmelfarb, M., 73, 78, 104, 111, 121, 126, 147, 150, 285, 286, 335, 341, 345
 Hirsch, E.D., 32
 Hofius, O., 68, 203, 252, 267, 366
 Holladay, C.R., 86, 87, 88, 90
 Hollander, H.W., 62, 77
 Holleman, J., 183
 Holtz, T., 162
 Hooke, S.H., 240
 Hooker, M.D., 188, 194
 Horst, P.W. van den, 88, 89, 90, 144, 366
 Hunter, A.M., 222
 Hurst, L.D., 203, 210
 Hurtado, L.W., 9, 10, 38, 39, 40, 92, 93, 95, 97, 128, 136, 140, 142, 169, 262, 278, 279, 318, 320, 323, 324, 325, 329, 330, 332, 333, 343, 353, 363,
 Häkkinen, S., 300, 303
 Iersel, B.M.F. van, 217, 222, 230
 Isaac, E., 95
 Isaacs, M.E., 251, 258, 266
 Jacobson, H., 86, 87, 88, 90
 Jakobson, R., 19, 20, 24, 32
 Janowski, B., 56, 57, 252
 Jenny, L., 36
 Jewett, R., 217, 219, 241, 249, 298
 Johnson, M., 27
 Jonge, M. de., 62, 77, 178, 206, 207, 217, 249, 250, 263, 361, 371
 Juel, D., 162
 Karrer, M., 369
 Käsemann, E., 203, 209, 210, 226, 295, 311, 312
 Keck, L.E., 38, 40, 41, 279
 Kee, H.C., 77
 Kegel, G., 241, 248
 Kelly, J.N.D., 300, 313
 Kim, S., 270
 Klijn, A.F.J., 301, 302, 305, 306, 309
 Klinzing, G., 252
 Knibb, M.A., 108, 109, 111, 285
 Knox, J., 298
 Kobelski, P.J., 129, 263
 Koskeniemi, E., 364
 Kraft, R.A., 311
 Kramer, W., 217, 221, 226, 235, 279, 313, 317
 Kraus, H.-J., 47, 49, 51, 53, 59, 60
 Kreitzer, L.J., 319, 363, 370
 Kristeva, J., 35, 36
 Kuss, O., 230, 298
 Kümmel, W.G., 187, 278
 Laato, A., 37, 45, 50, 60, 61, 85, 366
 Lakoff, G., 27
 Lane, W.L., 203, 204, 205, 207, 254, 258, 261, 262, 345
 Lang, B., 57
 Langevin, P.-É., 217, 240
 Legrand, L., 228, 229, 232, 317
 Lieberman, S., 121
 Lietzmann, H., 230, 235, 240
 Lightfoot, J.B., 188
 Lincoln, A.T., 192, 196, 198
 Lindars, B., 258, 268, 270, 274, 358
 Linnemann, E., 217, 223, 226, 239, 240
 Loader, W.R.G., 170, 171, 177, 183, 187, 202, 204, 253, 261, 266, 267, 276, 345, 357
 Locke, J., 19
 Lohse, E., 190, 191, 192, 193, 195
 Longenecker, R.N., 200
 Luckmann, Th., 28
 Lunt, H.G., 107, 108
 Lührmann, D., 152
 Lyonnet, S., 188
 Löhr, H., 11, 12, 267
 Lövestam, E., 163, 234
 MacRae, G.W., 78, 252, 267, 344
 Maier, J., 150
 Mann, C.S., 272, 273

- Marshall, I.H., 174, 270
 Martin, R.P., 198
 McNicol, A.J., 5
 Meeks, W.A., 88, 97, 144, 365, 366
 Merklein, H., 247
 Mettinger, T.N.D., 46, 51, 53, 54, 60
 Michel, O., 59, 185, 186, 208, 220, 221,
 227, 232, 235, 240, 245, 253, 255,
 261, 262, 275, 298, 346, 357
 Milik, J.T., 251, 262
 Minde van der, H.-J., 230
 Montgomery, J.A., 69
 Moo, D.J., 186
 Morray-Jones, C.R.A., 121, 335, 354
 Moule, C.F.D., 175, 346, 361
 Mounce, R.H., 273
 Mowinckel, S., 47
 Neufeld, V.H., 220, 313
 Newman, C.C., 13, 14, 18, 31, 73, 93
 Newsom, C., 6, 80, 89, 90, 148, 149, 150,
 204, 266
 Nickelsburg, G.W.E., 72, 75, 91, 95, 100,
 131, 135, 152, 270, 271, 286
 Norden, E., 219
 Nygren, A., 240
 O'Brien, P.T., 188, 190, 191, 192, 196
 Orr, W.R. - Walther J.A., 184
 Osborne, G., 38
 Patte, D., 18
 Peirce, C.S., 20, 37
 Pelikan, J., 306, 307
 Pesch, R., 163, 168, 169, 178, 180, 217,
 249, 317
 Peterson, E., 238
 Phelan, J., 32
 Philonenko, M., 11
 Plöger, O., 69
 Plummer, A., 184
 Pokorny, P., 39
 Porton, G.G., 311
 Poythress, V.S., 217, 225, 226, 234, 237,
 239
 Propp, V., 30
 Qimron, E., 194
 Rad von, G., 49, 60, 340
 Rehm, M.D., 56
 Reinink, G.J., 301, 302, 305, 306, 309
 Rengstorf, K.H., 59
 Rese, M., 162, 171
 Richards, I.A., 26
 Ricoeur, P., 20, 21, 22, 24, 26, 27
 Riesner, R., 361
 Rimmon-Kenan, S., 30
 Ringgren, H., 129
 Rissi, M., 206, 252, 262, 267, 345
 Robertson, A., 184
 Robinson, J.A.T., 181
 Robinson, J.M., 298
 Rowland, C., 4, 5, 8, 9, 14, 66, 67, 70, 72,
 78, 104, 107, 126, 137, 138, 142,
 287, 326
 Sanday, W., 230, 231, 238, 240
 Sanders, E.P., 113, 310
 Sanders, J.T., 203
 Saussure de, F., 18, 19, 20, 31
 Schade, H.-H., 248, 281, 282
 Schelkle, K.H., 300
 Schenke, J.-M., 203, 263
 Schiffman, L.H., 5, 6, 80, 85, 86, 132, 149
 Schlier, H., 200, 217, 222, 260, 283, 313
 Schmidt, H.W., 299
 Schmithals, W., 220, 240, 298
 Schneider, B., 162, 165, 168, 172, 177, 179,
 217, 223, 227
 Schneider, C., 151
 Scholem, G.G., 2, 65, 125, 315
 Schüpphaus, J., 152, 153
 Schürer, E., 56
 Schweizer, E., 165, 166, 177, 191, 195,
 217, 220, 221, 226, 229, 234, 235,
 239, 249, 298, 317
 Schwemer, A.M., 11, 12, 81, 204, 266
 Schäfer, P., 6, 120, 121, 198
 Scott, E.F., 190
 Scott, J.M., 217, 219, 234, 243
 Searle, J.R., 27
 Seeborg, A., 312, 313
 Segal, A.F., 3, 7, 8, 14, 72, 73, 74, 78, 91,
 96, 99, 102, 105, 106, 113, 121, 127,
 138, 169, 182, 190, 199, 200, 201,
 319, 325, 326, 329, 343, 350, 353,
 366

- Selden, R., 30, 32, 36
 Seow, C.L., 51, 57
 Seybold, K., 45, 47, 48, 51
 Simon, M., 300, 302, 305, 309
 Sjöberg, E., 95
 Slingerlander, H.D., 77
 Smith, M., 82
 Soggin, J.A., 46
 Soskice, J.M., 26, 27
 Stauffer, E., 219
 Stegemann, H., 80, 194
 Stinespring, W.F., 115
 Stone, M.E., 72, 92, 93, 116, 119, 133, 152
 Strauss, D.F., 228, 296, 297, 298, 320, 382
 Strugnell, J., 5, 149, 194
 Stuckenbruck, L.T., 14, 15, 106, 142, 143, 145, 188, 189, 191, 288, 365, 368
 Stuhlmacher, P., 11, 49, 186, 200, 201, 217, 230, 238, 240, 268, 277, 283, 363
 Szikszai, S., 45
 Talmon, S., 132, 311, 342, 348
 Taranovsky, K., 35, 37
 Tate, M.E., 47, 49
 Theisohn, J., 270
 Theobald, M., 250, 317
 Thiselton, A.C., 21, 22
 Thüsing, W., 244, 281, 317
 Todorov, T., 30, 35
 Tödt, H.E., 270, 283
 Tournay, R.J., 52, 148
 Trocmé, E., 12
 Unnik, W.C. van, 230
 VanderKam, J.C., 76, 85, 194
 Vermes, G., 81, 147, 252
 Veijola, T., 46, 58
 Vielhauer, Ph., 38, 40, 41, 187, 279
 Volz, P., 49
 Walker, W.O.Jr., 270, 271, 274
 Walther J.A., 184
 Watts, J.D.W., 48
 Wegenast, K., 217, 221, 226, 227
 Weiss, J., 160, 228, 231, 270, 296, 297, 298, 309, 310, 314, 315, 320, 382
 Wengst, K., 217, 220, 226, 230, 298
 Whitsett, C., 217, 219, 229, 243
 Widdowson, P., 30, 32, 36
 Wilckens, U., 175, 178, 219, 221, 222, 240, 255, 260, 317
 Wildberger, H., 48, 67
 Williamson, R., 89, 203, 210
 Wilson, R. McLachlan, 301
 Wilson, S.G., 301, 305
 Winnige, M., 152
 Wintermute, O.S., 76
 Witherington (III), B., 17
 Wittgenstein, L., 26
 Woude van der, A.S., 62, 85, 167, 206, 207, 234, 263
 Zahn, T., 230
 Zeller, D., 352
 Ziesler, J.A., 220, 221, 238
 Zimmerli, W., 54
 Zimmermann, H., 223, 225, 237
 Zwiep, A.W., 169

Index of Subjects

- Aaron, 66
- Abel, 88, 110, 111, 114, 115, 128
- Abraham, 10, 66, 88, 93, 96, 101, 105, 106, 115, 128, 135, 261, 262, 263, 306, 322, 345
 - burial, 115
 - exaltation, 114
- Adam, 88, 110, 112, 113, 128, 139, 322
 - burial, 113
 - exaltation, 112
- Adoption, 59, 60, 208, 219, 296
- Adoptionist Christology, 160, 177, 223, 226, 228, 231, 279, 296, 304, 309, 315, 317, 320, 321, 364, 382
 - and the Church Fathers, 300-303, 306
- Angel Christology, 7, 9, 137, 307
- Angelic interpretation, 7-9, 14, 137-146, 154, 166, 211, 286, 306, 307, 319, 325-327, 333, 354, 365
- Angelic liturgy, 5, 192
- Angel of God, 66.
- Angelology, 4, 8, 104, 105, 106, 190, 205, 263, 292
- Angelomorphic Christology, 14, 137, 138, 154, 307, 326, 327, 354, 377
- Angel veneration, 142, 190-192, 195
- Anointment, 171, 172, 175
- Apocalyptic
 - literature, 3,
 - theology (Jewish), 8, 67, 68, 69, 89, 99, 135, 189, 194
 - Christology, 8, 13, 173, 194, 195, 353
- Aramaic Christianity, 185
- Archaeology of knowledge, 23
- Ark (of the Covenant), 50, 51, 52, 54, 57, 63, 70, 97, 119, 175, 213, 253, 254, 261, 264, 340
- Ascent story, 347, 372
- Ascent structure, 3, 5, 75, 79, 86, 109, 110, 111, 122, 202, 288, 333, 355, 376
- Atonement, 55, 57, 63, 129, 150, 156, 253, 254, 255, 267-268, 369
- Atonement and resurrection, 259-261, 268
- Baal, 46
- Baruch, 116, 117
- Basilides, 303
- Belial, 140
- Binary oppositions, 30
- Bogomil, 71, 105
- Carpocrates, 301, 302, 303
- Cerinthus, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305, 306
- Change in the priesthood, 262, 345
- Cherubim, 50, 54, 92, 141, 265, 266
- Cherub-throne, 51, 54, 56, 67, 68, 98, 112, 118, 294, 344
- Christ, 171
 - resurrection, see: Christology, resurrection
 - enthronement, 110, 170, 174, 181, 185, 201, 209, 242, 244, 245, 261, 329, 349
 - parousia, 151, 180, 183, 276, 277
- Christ and the kingship of God, 368, 370
- Christ and Spirit, 172
- Christ as the object of faith, 368, 370
- Christ's heavenly journey, 285, 286
- Christology
 - method, 38-42, 278-281, 375
 - and discourse, 41, 158
 - formulas, 218, 220, 222, 223, 236
 - emergence of, 159, 170-174, 196, 228, 243, 318, 319, 322, 331, 338, 353, 363, 366
 - resurrection, 16, 162, 183, 229, 235, 236, 240, 241, 244, 245, 260, 313, 349, 351, 355
 - exaltation, 162-163, 168, 177, 185, 194, 195, 201, 207, 209, 224, 287, 290, 319, 349, 362
 - Savior, 177, 178, 330
 - Leader, 177, 330
 - judge, 151, 152, 153, 272, 276, 284, 290, 359
 - High Priest, 252, 255, 259, 260, 266, 267, 356, 357, 358, 370, 380
 - titles, 38, 40, 170, 174, 178, 228, 230, 280, 350

- worship of Jesus, 320, 330, 363, 367, 368
- "missing link", 176, 247, 331-335
- enthroned figures, 339, 344, 346
- Christological narratives, 347, 348, 351, 356, 359, 372, 385, 386, 387
- Christological predestination, 232, 233
- Christian merkabah tradition, 328-330, 337, 347, 366, 384, 386
- Colossians, letter to the
 - authorship, 187, 196-198
- Communication theory, 20, 32
- Consistent eschatology, 297
- Crucifixion, 177, 200, 259, 287, 303
- Cultic discourse, 177, 251, 257, 269, 356, 358, 378, 380
- Cultic soteriology, 253, 258, 261, 263, 267-268, 318, 345, 359, 369

- David, 10
- Davidic covenant, 354
- Davidic kingship, 58, 59, 60,
- Davidic Messiah, see: Messiah
- Day of atonement, 55, 56,
- Day of Wrath, 276
- Dead Sea Scrolls, 5, 79
- Death and resurrection, 354, 355
- Deep structure, 31
- Deification, 82, 97, 106, 142, 143, 144, 155, 176, 318, 363, 364, 373
- Designation, 231, 232
- Dialogism, 34
- Discourse, 21-24, 25, 34, 37, 158, 324, 330, 338, 375
- Discourse analysis, 23
- Discursive formation, 22, 24, 332
- Discursive practice, 24
- Divine agent theory, 9-11, 13, 91, 128, 136, 173, 321, 323-325, 377
- Dream visions,

- Ebion, 303
- Ebionites, 299
 - the appellation, 300
 - and Qumran, 301, 307
 - and Virgin birth, 301, 304, 305
 - and Gnosticism, 301, 303, 304, 305, 307
- Ebionite theory, 299, 321, 382
 - dualistic anthropology, 301, 307
 - dualistic Christology, 303, 304, 305, 306
 - docetism, 302, 304
- ascetism, 301
- possessionism, 306, 309, 320
- and angelology, 307
- Ebionites and Jewish Christianity, 305, 308, 309, 310
- Egyptian religion, 60
- Elect One, 91, 92, 93, 272
- Enoch, 9, 72, 75, 76, 101, 103, 110, 111, 120, 128, 142, 272, 322
- seer, 76
- priest, 76
- Son of Man, 95
- Metatron, 95, 120
- Enthronement, 7, 8, 11, 15, 61, 70, 83, 91, 102, 103, 110, 121, 132, 151, 156, 164, 180, 181, 195, 209, 213, 231, 242, 246, 259, 290, 292, 316, 342, 352, 362, 368, 378
- Enthronement and the deity of Christ, 366-368, 388
- Enthronement and resurrection, 167, 180, 181, 183, 196, 217, 232, 235, 244, 246, 317, 329, 352-353, 366, 380
- Enthronement discourse, 43, 156, 158, 167, 173, 177, 181, 202, 216, 244, 283, 294, 343, 378
- Enthronement in the parousia, 277, 280, 281, 282
- Enthronement of the patriarchs, 101, 110, 111, 114, 127, 128, 130, 134, 155, 174, 322, 329
- Enteschatologisierung, 248, 283
- Entpolitisierung, 250
- Epicureans, 197
- Eschatological entrée, 94, 153, 155, 272, 276, 359, 360, 361, 372
- Eschatology
 - Judaism, 2, 49, 92, 94, 111, 151
 - Paul, 241, 249
- Essenes, 188
- Eve, 111
- Exaltation and atonement, 258-264
- Exaltation discourse, 179, 322
- Exalted patriarchs, 138, 139, 154, 365
- see also: Enthronement of the patriarchs
- Exodus, 86

- Fall, 111,
- Flesh and Spirit, 221, 236, 237-240
- Functional Christology, 316, 317, 318, 321

- Futurist eschatology, 181, 277, 278, 282
- Gabriel, 104, 142, 154
- Gerizim, 34
- German idealism, 39, 40
- Glory, 199
- Gnosticism, 4, 7, 71, 193, 203, 209, 301, 303, 304, 305, 307
- heavenly redeemer, 203, 209
- God
- king, 2, 43, 44-49, 54, 63, 125, 150, 154, 265, 315, 362, 368, 375
- warrior, 46
- shepherd, 46
- lordship, 52
- Gods of the Holy of Holies, 82, 130, 141, 156
- Hagar, 66
- Heavenly court of law, 274, 275
- Heavenly journey, 5, 72, 77, 78, 87, 91, 95, 103, 109, 112, 114, 115, 116, 119, 120, 123, 127, 169, 192, 212, 285, 290, 376
- Heavenly liturgy, 6, 53, 67, 69, 76, 80, 103, 106, 110, 118, 120, 147, 148, 150, 192, 193, 213, 265, 266
- Heavenly palace, 46, 63, 72
- Heavenly Temple, 68, 72, 73, 78, 107, 119, 123, 251, 252, 254, 257, 265, 266, 290, 293, 340, 345, 351
- Hebrews, letter to the
- and gnosticism, 203
- and Jewish apocalyptic, 203, 205, 209
- enthronement Christology, 203, 204, 206, 209, 345, 357
- cultic Christology, 208, 253, 260, 264, 266, 267
- Priest-king, 207, 208, 262, 264, 344, 345
- Temple symbolism, 252, 345, 357, 358
- atonement, 253, 254, 261, 357
- angels, 205, 206, 210
- Hekhalot literature, 4
- Hellenism, 39
- Hellenistic Christianity, 40, 161, 278, 279
- History-of-religions school, 39, 40, 161, 203, 277, 280, 364, 366, 387
- Holy of Holies, 50, 53, 55, 56, 67, 73, 121, 141, 156, 253, 356
- Homologies, 182, 311, 312
- and acclamations, 312, 313
- Humility (self-abasement), 189, 199
- Humiliation and exaltation, 208, 210, 355
- Hymnic tradition, 5
- Hymn of Moses, 204, 205
- Individuation, 36
- Intertextual criticism, 34-38
- Intertextuality (see also: sub-texts), 162, 338, 348, 361, 367, 373, 385
- Intertextual strategy, 350
- Intertextual transformation, 42, 216, 274, 289, 324, 327, 332, 343, 361, 367, 368, 370, 374, 385, 388
- Isaac, 102, 115, 128, 135
- exaltation, 116
- Isaiah, 88, 109, 110, 111, 128
- Jacob, 66, 96, 102, 107, 108, 128, 135, 306
- Jacob's ladder, 66, 107
- Jaël, 8, 89, 105, 106, 107, 139
- Jesus, 9, 122
- see also: Christ
- Jewish Christianity, 202, 227, 279, 310, 314
- Jewish mysticism, 1, 2, 43, 188
- Job
- ascension, 102
- exaltation, 101, 128, 157
- Joseph, 88
- Joshua, 272
- Judaism
- Premonarchic period, 45
- Judges
- holy ones, 83, 89, 272
- twelve tribes, 273
- Jesus' disciples, 128, 273
- Judgment
- eschatological, 93, 100, 133, 135, 151, 152, 153, 270, 346
- final judgment, 48, 92, 93, 100, 271, 272, 275, 282, 361
- Judgment seat, 151, 346, 359
- Judicial discourse, 186, 270, 274, 275, 283, 347, 359, 360, 378, 381
- King (of Israel), 58, 62
- Kingship-of-Yahweh psalms, 47,
- Kyrios, 9, 131, 169, 226, 242, 247, 279, 335, 363
- Kyrios-Christology, 161, 242, 247, 248

- Langue, 18, 20, 21
 Levi, 75, 77, 96
 Levitical singers, 148, 149
 Literary theory, 17, 375
 Liturgical celebration of Yahweh's kingship, 46, 47
 Liturgical cycles, 149, 150
 Logos, 9, 98
 Lord, 97, 170, 171, 180, 214, 326, 363

 Maccabees, 134
 Marcionism, 204
 Melchizedek, 8, 84, 96, 104, 129, 130, 140, 157, 177, 186, 191, 207, 258-264, 271, 307, 331, 337, 344, 345, 356, 357, 358, 370, 371
 Mercy seat, 55, 57, 63, 70, 251, 255, 358, 374
 Merkabah (throne), 2, 12, 65, 68, 80, 105, 110, 116, 125, 146, 148, 315, 362, 374, 389
 Merkabah literature, 24
 Merkabah mysticism, 1, 2, 5, 9, 15, 37, 48
 - and Christology, 172, 173, 175, 181, 188-196, 201, 202, 207, 209, 213, 215, 246, 250, 257, 269, 288, 289, 328, 330, 334, 336, 366, 371, 373-374, 377-378, 388, 389-390.
 Merkabah visions, 6,
 Messiah, 61, 62, 84, 90, 92, 155, 169, 171, 214, 334
 - eschatological atonement, 253, 255
 - exaltation of, 127, 132, 156
 - priestly Messiah, 61, 84, 130, 186, 207, 208, 253, 258, 259, 344, 356
 - king, 92
 - judge, 151, 152, 153, 272, 276, 284, 290, 359
 - and resurrection, 136, 174
 - see also: Son of David (the Davidade)
 - see also: Son of Man
 Messianic enthronement, 11-13, 327, 334, 335, 377
 Messias designatus, 171, 175, 351, 355
 Metaphor, 25-29, 49, 74, 125, 172, 229, 242
 - live metaphors, 27
 Metaphor-as-myth, 27
 Metatron, 95, 120-122, 192
 Michael (archangel), 9, 11, 81, 115, 117, 262, 271, 323
 Monotheism, 10,
 Moses, 9, 10, 51, 66, 86, 87, 88, 93, 128, 178
 - enthronement, 88
 - problem of deification, 89, 90, 97, 144, 145
 - ascension, 96
 Moses-typology, 178, 179
 Mount Qater, 76
 Mount Sinai, 66, 74, 87, 96
 Mount Zion, 46
 Mystery religions (Hellenistic), 193, 197, 278, 280, 364, 366
 Mystical ascension, 96

 Narrative, 348, 358, 360, 375
 Narrative discourse, 22
 Narrative syntax, 30, 31, 33, 347
 Narratology, 29-33
 Nero, 109
 New history of religions school, 16
 Noah, 128, 322

 Pantextualism, 34, 35, 38
 Parallelismus membrorum, 220, 221, 222, 223, 224, 225, 235, 237, 242
 Pargod speculation, 68, 119, 123, 376
 Parole, 18, 20, 21
 Paul
 - Christology, 182, 194, 197, 199, 201, 216, 219
 - and Judaism, 188
 - and merkabah mysticism, 182, 198, 201, 202, 242, 246, 379
 - and early Christian tradition, 218, 219, 226, 242
 - visionary experience, 198-201
 - Damascus road, 199, 200
 - Colossian heretics, 187-196
 - pagan mystery cult, 188, 193
 - judgment descriptions, 274, 275
 - theology of the law, 198
 - boasting, 199
 - persecution, 200
 - resurrection body, 238
 Paul's heavenly journey, 293
 Pharisees, 194
 Polarized eschatology, 277-283, 360, 373

- Prince of life, 355, 356, 372
 Promise tradition, 165, 229, 236
- Qumran community
 - apocalyptic, 82
 - eschatology, 85, 132, 147
 - messianology, 84-86, 132
 - priesthood, 67, 79, 84, 89, 216
 - salvation, 132
 - Teacher of Righteousness, 81, 83, 174
 - Temple, 80
 - Temple symbolism, 80, 147, 252, 265
 - atonement, 147, 252
 - throne visions, 79, 81
- Resurrection,
 - of the dead, 100, 113, 135, 240, 241, 245, 329, 352
 - of the body, 162
 - and raising up, 233, 234, 235
 - semantics, 166-167
 - see also: Christology
- Resurrection discourse, 217, 244, 248, 351, 356, 378
- Revelation, book of
 - Christology, 211, 215
 - Lamb, 213, 214
 - Lion, 213, 214
 - enthronement, 212
 - heavenly Temple, 212, 256
 - cultic soteriology, 256
 - and Jewish apocalyptic, 212, 213, 214
- Royal metaphors, 124, 125, 218, 340
- Salvation history, 354
- Semantic fields, 26
- Semantics, 17, 19, 21
- Semiosis, 336-337, 384
- Semiotics, 17, 18, 19, 336
- Seth, 102
- Sethian Gnosticism, 303, 304
- Shem, 128
- Shiloh, 50
- Signified, 18
- Signifier, 18
- Sociology of knowledge, 278
- Sola fide, 107
- Son of David (the Davidide), 61, 84, 85, 86, 92, 95, 131, 132, 133, 156, 157, 164, 165, 166, 173, 176, 180, 201, 207, 213, 215, 228, 229, 230, 241, 258, 261, 292, 318, 326, 339, 342, 343, 348, 370, 379
- Son of Man, 69, 70, 91, 94, 130, 151, 152, 153, 154, 270, 271, 272, 297, 346, 347, 359, 360
- Sonship, 59, 206, 207
- Spirit of holiness, 222, 223, 238, 239, 242
- Spirit of Light, 11
- Stephen, 178, 179, 180
- Stoicism, 197
- Structuralism, 18, 29-33
- Submetaphors, 28, 184
- Subtexts, 35, 43, 161, 166, 168, 172, 173, 184, 205, 358, 366, 373
- Symbolic universe, 28, 154, 156, 159, 341
- Symbolic world, 63, 211, 218, 227, 242, 250, 283, 289, 332, 335, 336, 339
- Synagogue liturgy, 117
- Temple criticism, 126, 146, 179, 251-252
- Temple cult, 55-57, 146, 252, 254, 257
- Temple liturgy, 51, 52, 148, 149, 150, 266
- Temple structured universe, 252, 253, 269
- Textual surfaces, 35, 36
- Theocracy, 45, 49, 57, 58, 63, 125, 131, 175, 215, 315, 318, 362, 367
- Theocratic adoptionism
 - theory, 295, 296, 308, 309, 320
 - history, 296-298
 - and early Christology, 296, 309
 - see also: Ebionite theory
- Theodicy
 - in apocalyptic, 99, 108
 - problem of, 126
- Theodotus, 303
- Theophany, 4, 5,
- Throne, 48, 50-54, 63, 71, 87, 117, 118, 127, 151, 169, 213, 253, 264, 291, 340-341
 - place for the atonement, 265
 - judgment seat, 151, 274, 275
- Throne of Glory, 44, 99, 107, 121, 169
- Throne visions, 3, 4, 65, 66, 69, 73, 87, 95, 99, 105, 106, 115,
- Transformational mysticism, 335
- Transtextuality, 35
- Triple pattern of mediation, 10,
- Typological interpretation, 25, 324, 332, 333, 335, 350, 365, 383, 387
- Two-stage Christology, 221, 239, 249

Victor (bishop of Rome), 303
Wicked Priest, 62
Wrath of God, see: God

Yahweh, see: God
Zaphon, 46

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