

If the people of God are to be absolutely bound to the Hebrew Masoretic Text and its vowel markings, then *ne'um YHWH l'adoni* should technically be rendered into English along the lines of “The LORD says to my lord” (RSV/NRSV) or “The LORD said to my lord” (NJPS), with *adoni* treated as a human or created supernatural master. Yet, with Psalm 110:1 not only closely associated with Yeshua the Messiah—but notably associated with Yeshua the Messiah as the Son of Man (Mark 14:62; cf. Daniel 7:9-14)—that much more may be involved with the Lordship of Yeshua from Psalm 110:1, is quite fair to deduce. *Is Yeshua more than just some improper “lord” or “master”?* Any reader with a cursory knowledge of the development of the Hebrew Bible is aware of how the vowel markings under Hebrew words came much later, and as such in either Psalm 110:1 or 5, all that originally appeared for either *adoni* or *Adonai* were the consonants *a-d-n-y* (אֲדֹנָי). That Psalm 110:1 can be read as *Adonai*, a reference to the LORD proper, God, is a possibility not to be casually dismissed. Rydelnik draws attention to how a Divine Lord, who rules at the right hand of YHWH, can be detected from Psalm 110:1:

“The oracle is addressed to ‘my lord’ (*‘ādōnī*), using a word that is generally used of a human superior, not deity. Yet...the word is used of the angel of the Lord in Josh 5:14 and Judg 6:13, where He is...identified as the Lord Himself. Furthermore...the psalm was originally written with consonants alone, with the Masoretic vowels added much later (between the eighth and tenth centuries AD). One must be careful, then, not to base one’s interpretation (i.e., whether the addressee is human or divine) solely on a single Hebrew word. There are, in fact, strong reasons to conclude that the original author of the psalm intended to speak of a divine Lord. David, Israel’s most exalted king, was looking forward to the coming of a future ruler even more exalted than himself.”²²²

The Greek Septuagint version, of Psalm 110:1, could notably have had an opportunity to specify a less-than-Divine identity for the second figure. The LXX took *ne'um YHWH l'adoni* (or *l'Adonai*) to be *eipen ho Kurios tō Kuriō mou* (εἶπεν ὁ κύριος τῷ κυρίῳ μου), “The Lord said to my Lord” (LXE). This includes two usages of the title *Kurios*: one for YHWH or God proper, and another for the Lord who sits at His right hand. If an entirely human master, or at least an exalted supernatural yet created agent, were the only options to be taken away from Psalm 110:1, then this passage could have read with the dative (case indicating indirect object) *tē despotē* (τῷ δεσπότη), as the title *despotēs* (δεσπότης)²²³ surely was accessible to the LXX translators.

If Psalm 110:1 has significant Christological implications to it—beyond speaking of a figure like King David being the Messiah’s subordinate, and the significance of the Messiah’s Kingship—then if *ne'um YHWH l'Adonai* is the correct reading, the second figure being a proper “Lord,” **it thus attests to the reality of a plural Godhead, with God, in fact, having a discussion with Himself.** The Father bids the Son to sit at His right hand, similar to the scene of the Son of Man being brought before the Ancient of Days (Daniel 7:9-14).

Proverbs 8:22-31

“Introducing the Figure of Wisdom”

“The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way, before His works of old. From everlasting I was established, from the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills I was brought forth; while He had not yet made the earth and the fields, nor the first dust of the world. When He established the heavens, I was there, when He inscribed a circle on the face of the deep, when He made firm the skies

²²² Rydelnik, 172.

²²³ “one who has legal control and authority over persons, such as subjects or slaves, *lord, master*” (BDAG, 220).

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above, when the springs of the deep became fixed, when He set for the sea its boundary so that the water would not transgress His command, when He marked out the foundations of the earth; then I was beside Him, as a master workman; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him, rejoicing in the world, His earth, and having my delight in the sons of men.”

When most Bible readers consider “wisdom,” they consider it to be a virtue which is best embodied in the demonstrated character of the Creator God. Sentiments such as those of Proverbs 4:5, 7 might immediately flash up in our minds: “Acquire wisdom! Acquire understanding! Do not forget nor turn away from the words of my mouth...The beginning of wisdom is: Acquire wisdom; and with all your acquiring, get understanding.” Yet, it is not difficult from any survey of the Book of Proverbs, to see wisdom take on a more personified, feminine role, in fact. Proverbs 1:20-23, among other passages, communicates,

“Wisdom shouts in the street, she lifts her voice in the square; at the head of the noisy streets she cries out; at the entrance of the gates in the city she utters her sayings: ‘How long, O naive ones, will you love being simple-minded? And scoffers delight themselves in scoffing and fools hate knowledge? Turn to my reproof, behold, I will pour out my spirit on you; I will make my words known to you.’”

Still, even with some personification of “wisdom” present in a text like Proverbs, it is most common for Bible readers to conclude that “wisdom,” along with “knowledge” or “understanding” or “righteousness”—and various other similar qualities—are simply austere character traits which originate from a Perfect God, and are demonstrative of His majesty and excellence. Proverbs 3:19-20 would be most probably taken by most Bible readers, to be an exclaim of how our Creator in His perfect intelligence and insight, made the universe:

“The LORD by wisdom founded the earth, by understanding He established the heavens. By His knowledge the deeps were broken up and the skies drip with dew.”

While most of us are probably conditioned to think of “wisdom” (Heb. *chokmah*, חֵכְמָה) entirely in abstract, philosophical terms—it is undeniable that in Second Temple Jewish literature, mainly that seen in the Apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon and in the works of Philo of Alexandria, that Wisdom (Grk. *sophia*, σοφία) is an actual figure or entity. On the whole, such Wisdom (perhaps even described by some as “Lady Wisdom”) is a supernatural force which was present with God at the creation of the universe, and participated in the creation of the universe along with Him. The *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* details,

“Wisdom was pictured as a woman as early as Proverbs 8 and 9, and the figure continued to develop in later Jewish writings, such as the Wisdom of Solomon. In writings such as those of Philo of Alexandria, it moves on further to become a hypostasis and interchangeable with the Logos. The origin of the figure of Wisdom is much debated. Wisdom in Proverbs 8 and 9 seems more than just a personification of an abstract quality.”²²⁴

Recognizing the qualities of the figure of Wisdom, from a passage like Proverbs 8:22-31, is actually quite imperative for discussions about the nature of Yeshua the Messiah in the Apostolic Writings. Proponents of a low Christology of Yeshua being created, will not just draw upon the Wisdom traditions of Proverbs, the Wisdom of Solomon, and Philo, as a frame of reference for understanding Yeshua; proponents of a low Christology will often conclude that Yeshua is Wisdom. A theologian like James D.G. Dunn, who broadly holds to a low Christology, is not entirely incorrect in informing us, “The claim that Wisdom christology provides us with the main bridge from the earliest belief in Christ as exalted to the belief that Christ also pre-existed with

²²⁴ “Wisdom, figure of,” in *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period*, 671.

God prior to his life on earth is a substantial one.”²²⁵ Any inquiry into the nature of the Messiah, has to take into some account the figure of Wisdom.

It is not surprising why the figure of Wisdom is often appealed to by those who hold to a low Christology, but who also recognize that it would be entirely insufficient to claim that before Yeshua was born in Bethlehem, that He did not exist. The figure of Wisdom, a supernatural force of God, was present with Him at the creation of our universe, and is stated to actually take some significant delight or satisfaction in seeing the world and the human race come into being:

“He had not yet made earth and open land, and the world’s first clods of soil. When He founded the heavens, I was there, when He traced a circle on the face of the deep, when He propped up the skies above, when He powered the springs of the deep, when He set to the sea its limit, that the waters not flout His command, when He strengthened the earth’s foundations. And I was by Him, and intimate, I was His delight day after day, playing before Him at all times, playing in the world, His earth, and my delight with humankind” (Proverbs 8:26-31, Alter).

Should we take issue with the Biblical fact of some supernatural force of God, present at Creation, witnessing and to some degree participating in Creation? Probably not. That God, in His Creation of the cosmos, would have seen that members of His celestial court and Heavenly host, performed various functions in building the universe, is hardly unreasonable to fathom. That God would send out angels, for example, to monitor the formation of our Solar System, and then report back to Him in some capacity, is fair to deduce. The figure of Wisdom is detailed to be *etzlo amon* (אֶצְלוֹ אָמוֹן), “with Him as a confidant” (NJPS), the term *amon* (אָמוֹן) meaning, “artificer, architect, master-workman” (BDB).²²⁶

The descriptions of the figure of Wisdom in Proverbs 8:22-31, certainly can provide examiners a selection of descriptions and functions to be applied to a pre-existent Yeshua, present alongside of His Father, at the creation of the universe. Indeed, there are many descriptions and functions of the Heavenly host of angels, which could be applied to Yeshua—just as there are many descriptions and functions of demons and dark spiritual forces, which could be applied to Satan or the Adversary. Yet, when it comes to the figure of Wisdom, it is not necessarily those areas of *commonality* or *continuity* which should gather our attention; it is instead those areas of *discommonality* or *discontinuity*. In Proverbs 8, it is hard to avoid the fact that Wisdom is a created force of God.

Proverbs 8:22 directly asserts, “The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old” (RSV). While a version like the NASU has, “The LORD possessed me,” there is sufficient scholarship on the Hebrew verb *qanah* (קָנָה) and its Semitic cognates, to allow for the translation “created.” As HALOT summarizes,

“[S]ome say that there is only one vb. קָנָה [*qanah*] (Gesenius-B.; König *Wb.*; Zorell *Lex.*) :: *Fschr. Humbert* 166, 174 and subsequently KBL: I קָנָה [*q-n-h*] (Semitic) to acquire, buy, II קָנָה [*q-n-h*] (Ug., Canaanite) to create. However, the distinction is still uncertain, see THAT 2:651, 652, not least because the verb in Ugaritic has already come to mean both to acquire and to possess as well as to create.”²²⁷

²²⁵ James D.G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry Into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1980), 163.

He goes on to make light of a number of passages, where the figure of Wisdom perhaps plays some factor (John 1:1-8; 1 Corinthians 8:5-6; Colossians 1:15-17; Hebrews 1:1-3).

²²⁶ BDB, 54.

²²⁷ HALOT, 2:1111.

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Various Jewish versions indeed render *qanah* in Proverbs 8:22 as “create”: “The LORD created me at the beginning” (NJPS); “The LORD created me as the beginning” (Jerusalem Bible-Koren); “The LORD created me at the outset” (Alter). There might be some ambiguity, still, in renderings such as “The LORD formed me” (NLT) or “ADONAI brought me forth” (TLV), but there is no ambiguity in how *YHWH qanani reishet dar’ko* (יְהוָה קָנָנִי רֵאשִׁית דַּרְכּוֹ) was translated in the Septuagint as *Kurios ektisen me archēn hodōn autou* (κύριος ἔκτισέν με ἀρχῆν ὁδῶν αὐτοῦ), “The Lord created me as the beginning of his ways” (NETS). The Greek verb *ktizō* (κτίζω) means “to bring someth. into existence, create” (BDAG),²²⁸ and the LXX vocabulary and terminology involving the figure of Wisdom, would be widely employed by figures such as Philo, and most certainly does play some factor in the Greek Apostolic Scriptures.

Proverbs 8:23, while obviously establishing some ancient, extra-terrestrial, and perhaps even inter-dimensional origin for the figure of Wisdom, would still imply some sort of definite point of origin for Wisdom: *m’olam nisak’ti m’rosh m’qad/mei-eretz* (מִיְעוֹלָם נִסְכַּחְתִּי מִרֵאשִׁית מִקְדַּמֵי-אֶרֶץ), “from-eternity I-was-appointed from-beginning from-beginnings-of world” (Kohlenberger)²²⁹; “From eternity I was appointed, from the beginning, from before the world existed” (NET Bible).

The place of the figure of Wisdom in the Hebrew Tanach, and later in the Apocrypha and Philo, has to be noted in any discussion on the nature of Messiah. Unlike angelic figures such as Metatron²³⁰ or Yaeol²³¹, both appearing in the Pseudepigrapha—the figure of Wisdom appears within more normative materials to Second Temple Judaism, later employed by some of the early Christians of the Second-Fourth Centuries C.E. The venerable *Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament*, notes on Proverbs 8:22, old controversies in emerging Christianity which involved the figure of Wisdom, and how close some ancient groups identified Wisdom with the Messiah:

“Wisdom appears also as created, certainly not without reference to this passage, Sir. 1:4...1:9...24:8...In the christological controversy this word gained a dogmatic signification, for they proceeded generally on the identity of σοφία ὑποστατική [*sophia hypostatikē*] (*sapientia substantialis*) with the hypostasis of the Son of God. The Arians used [much of this]...as a proof of their doctrine of the *filius non genitus, sed factus, i.e.,* of His existence before the world began.”²³²

In the Apocrypha, Sirach 1:4 straightforwardly states, “Wisdom was created before all things²³³, and prudent understanding from eternity.” Sirach 24:8 further specifies how “the Creator of all things gave me a commandment, and the one who created me assigned a place for my tent. And he said, ‘Make your dwelling in Jacob, and in Israel receive your inheritance.’”

Surely, if you wanted to affirm a significant supernatural nature for Yeshua the Messiah, as a figure which pre-existed our universe and perhaps even was responsible for creating our universe—but was nonetheless created, even as the first created being—the figure of Wisdom provides some background material to be employed. Those who hold to a low Christology of Yeshua as a created being, believe that this is the way that monotheism can be preserved, that Yeshua’s distinct supernatural abilities and functions can be recognized, and that He can be more appealing to Jews. Indeed, in various Jewish resources, such as Alter’s specialty translation *The Wisdom Books*,²³⁴ as well as the ecumenical *Jewish Annotated New Testament*,²³⁵ it is seen that Yeshua as the Word or *logos* (λόγος) is to essentially be equated with the figure of Wisdom.

²²⁸ BDAG, 572.

²²⁹ Kohlenberger, 3:525.

²³⁰ Cf. “Metatron,” in *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period*, pp 427-428.

²³¹ Cf. “Yaeol,” in *Ibid.*, 681.

²³² E-Sword 10.1.1: Keil & Delitzsch *Commentary on the Old Testament*. MS Windows 7/8/et. al. Franklin, TN: Equipping Ministries Foundation, 2010-2012.

²³³ Grk. *protera pantōn ektistai sophia* (προτέρα πάντων ἐκτίσται σοφία); “Wisdom was first of all created things” (REB).

²³⁴ Robert Alter, trans., *The Wisdom Books* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2010), 230.

Is Yeshua to be equated with the figure of Wisdom? There are passages in the Apostolic Scriptures, where various examiners have suggested some comparison *or* contrast between Yeshua and Wisdom (i.e., Matthew 11:18-20; John 1:1, 11; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 1:3). As will be seen, there are areas of overlap between the descriptions given of Wisdom in Second Temple Jewish literature, and Yeshua the Messiah. It will be in those *areas of difference* between the figure of Wisdom and Yeshua the Messiah, which should grab our attention.

²³⁵ Adele Reinhartz, "The Gospel According to John," in Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, NRSV (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 155.