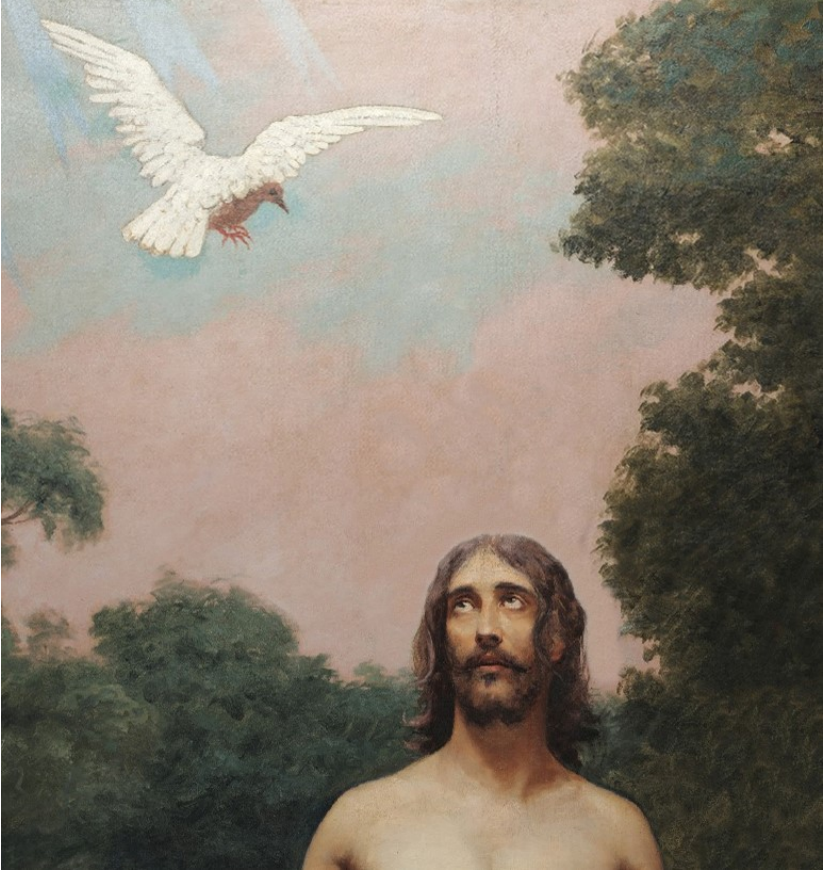


# A Vision of Christ



## An Explication of Ode 36 of the Odes of “Solomon” *by Trent Wilde*

The New Moon Messages  
of the 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> Months  
February 14, March 15,  
and April 14, 2021

## A Vision of Christ

Words sweet as honey  
 as the melodious tweet of birds  
 Taste of morning sunlight  
 with knowledge-giving curds

What beauty is adorning  
 the table where you fed  
 Fruit borne by a living wreath  
 interlaced for your head

The wreath of truth transporting  
 to panharmonic roads  
 the paths of peace and insight  
 the Solomonic Odes

It is difficult to capture with words the beauty and significance of the Odes of Solomon. These poetic masterpieces exhibit a closeness to Jesus – an intimacy with his inner self that is unmatched so far as I can see. For those of you who are not familiar with the Odes of Solomon or why they are so important, please study the material we have produced to explain them. We have [audio studies](#) and [written articles](#). And of course – read them! There are [several translations](#) freely available online, and a [new translation](#) with [annotations](#) was just released for free online last year! I recommend reading the Odes over and over; they really are worth it.

The focus of this article is Ode 36. Let's dive in, using the new translation (called *Nuhra 2020*) as our base. The only thing you need to keep in mind before reading this Ode is that the Odes were written

by a first-century follower of Jesus and that they sometimes include depictions of Jesus that cast him as the first-person speaker. As you will see, this is the case for Ode 36.

## Ode 36

1 The spirit of the Lord rested upon me,  
and she raised me on high  
2 and made me stand on my feet in the height of the Lord,  
before his fullness and his glory.  
While I was praising him by the composition of his odes,  
3 she gave birth to me before the face of the Lord, even while being  
the son of man.<sup>1</sup>  
I was named the enlightened son of God  
4 while I was glorious among the glorious ones,  
and great among the great ones.  
5 For like the greatness of the Most High, so she made me,  
and according to his renewing he renewed me.  
6 And he anointed me from his fullness,  
and I became one of those near to him.  
7 And my mouth was opened like a cloud of dew,  
and my heart gushed out a flood of righteousness.  
8 And a peace offering was mine,  
and I was established in the spirit of governance.  
Hallelujah!

We'll be exploring this in detail - little bit by little bit. But first, let's make sure we understand the overall picture. The first-person speaker of this Ode is called both "the son of man" and the "son of God."

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1 In this one place I have altered the *Nuhra 2020* translation. In place of "son of man" *Nuhra* has "bar nasha" - which is Aramaic for "son of man."

While the phrase "son of man" (Aramaic, *bar nasha*) can simply mean "human," the phrase "son of God" in the Odes can only be one person – Jesus. And, as we will see later on, there is good reason for understanding the phrase "son of man" here to be the messianic title "The Son of Man" rather than the common idiom for "human."

Now that we know generally who the Ode is about, we need to get a basic idea of what it says concerning him. In reading it one or two times you will probably have noticed its major themes: The "I" of the Ode had the Spirit of the Lord rest upon him. The Spirit, who is depicted as a female, raises him on high and stands him before the Lord (the Most High). While standing there composing odes, the Spirit gives birth to him and he is named the son of God. He is made like the Most High, his mouth issues righteousness, and he is established in the spirit of governance. This is the overall picture. But, of course, there is so much to this; we need to sink the shaft into the mine of truth.

**1 The spirit of the Lord rested upon me,  
and she raised me on high  
2a and made me stand on my feet in the height of the  
Lord**

What precisely is this talking about? You can probably guess it - at what point in Jesus' life did the Spirit rest on him? Most would agree that it was at his baptism. The record in the *Gospel of Mark* is

Mark 1:9-11 <sup>9</sup>And it happened that in those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John.

<sup>10</sup>And immediately *as he* was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens being split apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. <sup>11</sup>And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."" (LEB)<sup>2</sup>

There are actually more connections between this account and the Odes than might first be apparent. Both accounts have the Spirit descending on Christ. Both have him being called the "Son." And actually, both use language that indicates a visionary experience. The key phrases are as follows:

"he saw the heavens being split apart"

"she raised me on high"

"[she] made me stand on my feet"

All of these phrases, or phrases of equivalent meaning, were used in ancient Jewish literature to describe visionary experiences. Consider these passages from Ezekiel:

Ezekiel 1:1 And it was in *the* thirtieth year, in the fourth *month*, on the fifth *day* of the month, and I *was* in the midst of the exiles by the Kebar River. **The heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God.**

...

2:2 And *the* Spirit came into me as he was speaking to me, and it

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2 Scripture quotations marked (LEB) are from the [Lexham English Bible](#). Copyright 2012 [Logos Bible Software](#). Lexham is a registered trademark of Logos Bible Software.

[she]<sup>3</sup> set me on my feet, and I heard the one speaking to me.

...

3:12 And **the Spirit lifted me up**, and I heard behind me the sound of a great earthquake when the glory of Yahweh rose from its place.

...

3:14 And **the Spirit lifted me and took me**,

...

3:24 And **the Spirit came into me, and it [she] made me stand on my feet**, ... (LEB)

As you can see, all three of these phrases occur in Ezekiel and they are all in the context of his vision of the glory of Yahweh. Jewish apocalyptic literature also uses these visionary phrases:

Daniel 8:18 And when he spoke with me **I fell into a trance** with my face to the ground, and he touched me and **made me stand on my feet**. (LEB)

1 Enoch 14:8 **In the vision** it was shown to me thus: Look, clouds **in the vision** were summoning me ... and **winds<sup>4</sup> in my vision made me fly up and lifted me upward and brought me to heaven**.

The Testament of Levi 2:6 And behold, **the heavens were opened**, and an angel of the Lord spoke to me: 'Levi, Levi, enter!' 7 And I **entered the first heaven**, ...

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3 The Hebrew uses a feminine pronoun. The same is true for 3:24 below.

4 In Semitic languages, the word for "wind" is the same word as that often translated "spirit."

With our three phrases now understood within their original context as visionary language, we can now see the similarities between Ode 36:1-2 and accounts of Jesus' baptism in the synoptic gospels more clearly. They both present Jesus as having a visionary experience wherein the Spirit rests on him and he is called the Son of God. But the resemblances don't stop there. Elsewhere in the Odes, this same scene is pictured from a third-person perspective:

Ode 24:1 The **dove** fluttered onto the anointed one because his head belonged to her. 2 And she cooed (psalms) about him and her voice was heard. (Nuhra 2020)

That it is the Spirit who is here pictured as a dove is made evident by another Ode:

Ode 28:1 **As the wings of doves** over their nestlings, and as the beaks of their nestlings towards their beaks, **so also are the wings of the spirit** over my heart.

2 My heart is delighted and rejoices, like the embryo who exalts in its mother's womb.

Reading Ode 36:1 in light of Ode 24:1 (itself being read in light of Ode 28:1) reveals that the Odes present the Spirit as being like a dove coming upon Jesus at his baptism just like the synoptic gospels do. The only aspect present in the Odes which the synoptics seem to lack is the Spirit being presented as a female, and even more specifically as the Divine Mother. Yet, when we consider an often neglected part of the (expanded) synoptic tradition, this too is present. I'm speaking of the "Hebrew Gospel" otherwise known as "The Gospel According to

the Hebrews.” It presents the baptism of Jesus thus:

Gospel According to the Hebrews as quoted by Jerome<sup>5</sup> in his Commentary on Isaiah 11:1-3: “But according to the Gospel that is written in the Hebrew language, the Nazarenes read: ‘the whole fountain of the Holy Spirit will descend on him.’ ... Further, in the Gospel that we mentioned above, we find these words written: ‘It happened that when the Lord came up out of the water, the whole fountain of the Holy Spirit descended on him, and rested on him, and said to him, ‘My Son, in all the prophets I awaited you, that you might come and that I might rest in you. For you are my rest, you are my first-born Son, who reigns eternally.’ ”

The Holy Spirit here, refers to Jesus as her Son. And that this Hebrew Gospel is indeed presenting the Holy Spirit as Jesus' Heavenly Mother rather than his Heavenly Father is evident elsewhere in the Hebrew Gospel. For your convenience, here it is:

Origen, in his commentary on John 2:12: “Whoever accepts the Gospel according to the Hebrews, where the Savior himself says, ‘Just now **my mother, the Holy Spirit**, took me by a lock of hair and lifted me up to great Mount Tabor,’...”

Regardless of whether one takes the position that the Hebrew Gospel is based on the “canonical” synoptics, or whether it was a source behind the synoptics (as argued by James Edwards in *The Hebrew Gospel and the Development of the Synoptic Tradition*), it is certainly part of the synoptic tradition in one sense or another. Thus,

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5 Unfortunately, no manuscripts of the Hebrew Gospel survive; we only have quotations of it in the writings of the church fathers.



both the Odes and the Synoptic Tradition (broadly construed) has the Holy Spirit as Jesus' Heavenly Mother.

And actually, there is one other aspect of overlap. Ode 36 presents Jesus' baptismal visionary experience as including his "new birth" by the Spirit. In other words, his visionary new birth occurred at his baptism. While this is not found in the *Gospel of Mark* or the *Gospel of Matthew*, it is found in one copy of the *Gospel of Luke*. Specifically, the voice from the sky says to Jesus, "You are my beloved Son; **today** I have begotten you." Even though this is found in only one extant ancient Greek manuscript of Luke, it evidently used to be found in many Lukan manuscripts since this is the form of this verse in Luke that the church fathers quoted in the early centuries. For this reason, among others, [Bart Ehrman has argued](#) (I think convincingly) that this reading was the original reading of *Luke*.

It is also interesting to note that this phrase ("today I have begotten you") also occurs in Epiphanius' quotation of the Hebrew Gospel's account of Jesus' baptism. *If* this was originally in the Hebrew Gospel and *if* the Hebrew Gospel was indeed one of *Luke's* sources, that may be where Lucky got it (we call the author of *Luke* "Lucky"). In any case, it was most likely originally part of *Luke*.

So where does this leave us? Well, let's summarize the points thus far and see. By comparing Ode 36 to Ode 24 and Ode 28, we have good internal grounds for concluding that Ode 36 is speaking of Jesus' baptism. Further, there are 6 aspects of the way in which the Odes present the baptism of Jesus that are also preserved in the Synoptic Tradition regarding his baptism.

1. Visionary Phrases introducing what Jesus' saw when he came out

of the water

2. The Spirit coming upon Jesus
3. The Spirit being likened to a dove
4. Jesus being called "Son"
5. The Spirit as Jesus' Heavenly Mother
6. Jesus being birthed/begotten as part of his visionary experience

This firmly establishes the conclusion that Ode 36 is indeed speaking of Jesus' baptism. This, in itself, isn't all that shocking given that we have accounts of Jesus baptism in *Mark*, *Luke*, *Matthew*, the *Hebrew Gospel*, and Ode 24. What sets Ode 36 apart, however, is that it is the only one that presents Jesus' baptism from Jesus' own perspective. To be clear, I'm **not** saying that Jesus wrote Ode 36 or that he ever spoke its words. Still, our past studies have shown the close connection between the Odes and the early Jesus-Movement, and even the pre-Jesus line of truth (as present in the Thanksgiving Hymns and Community Rule, for example). The Odes certainly are important for understanding the Historical Jesus and the fact that we have something that claims such intimacy with Jesus together with the fact that these claims clearly have some substance, means that, even without knowing the exact relationship between the Odists and Jesus, we have a lot we can learn and the Odes are indispensable when it comes to learning it – as I hope you will agree we have just seen.

But in order to be sure, let's look a bit more closely at the accounts of Jesus' baptism in the synoptic gospels. Here they are side by side:

Matthew 3:13, 16-17

Mark 1:9-11

Luke 3:21-22

<sup>9</sup>And it happened that in those days

<sup>21</sup>Now it happened that when all the people were baptized,

<sup>13</sup> Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by him....	Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John.	Jesus also was baptized, Jesus also was baptized, Jesus also was baptized,
<sup>16</sup> Now <i>after he</i> was baptized, Jesus immediately went up from the water,	<sup>10</sup> And immediately <i>as he</i> was coming up out of the water,	and <i>while he</i> was praying,
and behold, the heavens opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove coming upon him.	he saw the heavens being split apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him.	heaven was opened, heaven was opened, heaven was opened, <sup>22</sup> and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove,
<sup>17</sup> And behold, <i>there was</i> a voice from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." (LEB)	<sup>11</sup> And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." (LEB)	and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; [today I have begotten you.]" <sup>6</sup> (LEB)

As most students of "the bible" know, both *Matthew* and *Luke* used *Mark* as a major source. It is often interesting, and even enlightening, to see how they changed *Mark's* account. This passage is no exception. Notice first that in *Mark*, when Jesus came up out of the water it says that "he [Jesus] saw" what followed. The only person who sees anything in *Mark's* baptism account is Jesus. It is clear in *Mark* that this experience is a personal vision that Jesus himself had. In fact, there is a well-known theme in *Mark* called "The Messianic Secret" that is constituted of the fact that Jesus' identity as the Messiah is unknown (a secret) to all other humans; that is, until the crucial moment in *Mark* 8:29 when Peter identifies Jesus as the Messiah in the presence of other disciples, but Jesus immediately and strictly warns

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6 I have departed from the LEB (Lexham English Bible) here to give what is likely *Luke's* original wording.

them to tell no one. In light of this theme, it is obvious that in *Mark*, Jesus' visionary experience at his baptism was just that – a vision experienced by Jesus alone.

*Matthew* and *Luke* both take *Mark's* account of Jesus' vision and, in different ways, de-visionize it. *Matthew* changes "he [Jesus] saw the heavens being split apart" to "and behold, the heavens were opened." Thus, the opening of the heavens in *Matthew* is simply part of the author's narration of what happened when Jesus came up out of the water. *Matthew* moves the phrase "he saw" to the beginning of the next clause: "he [Jesus] saw the Spirit of God descending," but the act of Jesus' "seeing" is now de-visionized and recontextualized as Jesus response to the actual opening of the actual heavens. That *Matthew* isn't meaning that only Jesus saw the Spirit (as in a vision) is confirmed by the fact that voice from heaven does not speak to Jesus but instead speaks to the onlookers **about** Jesus, saying, "**This** is is my beloved Son, with **whom** I am well pleased."

*Luke* likewise drops the phrase "he [Jesus] saw" from the description of the opening of heaven, but unlike *Matthew*, *Luke* drops the phrase entirely. *Luke's* opening of the heavens is just part of what happens – not part of a vision. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit does not appear in a vision to Jesus but rather "in bodily form."

As we have seen, both *Matthew* and *Luke* take what was originally an account of a vision in *Mark* and they reify it – they portray the elements of the vision as though they really took place in concrete, material reality. They retain some of the visionary language of their source (such as the opening of the heavens) but they recast it by adding and altering things to make it plain that, for them, this was no vision.

The *Gospel of John* also speaks of the Holy Spirit coming upon Jesus as a dove. This language is still associated with John the Baptist, but interestingly, John does not baptize Jesus in the *Gospel of John*. Here is the relevant passage; it comes immediately after John the Baptist declared that there is one to come after him whose sandals he is unworthy to untie:

John 1:29-34

<sup>29</sup>On the next day he [John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! <sup>30</sup>This one is *the one* about whom I said, 'After me is coming a man who is ahead of me, because he existed before me.' <sup>31</sup>And I did not know him, but in order that he could be revealed to Israel, because of this I came baptizing with water."

<sup>32</sup>And John testified, saying, "I have seen the Spirit descending like a dove from heaven and remaining upon him. <sup>33</sup>And I did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water, that one said to me, '*The one* upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon him—this one is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' <sup>34</sup>And I have seen and testify that this one is the Chosen One of God.

In a [past study](#), we showed that *John* chapter 1 contains portrayals of John the Baptist that are designed to downplay him. This downplaying of John skews the historical reality of his importance as well as the historical reality of how Jesus viewed John. The passage we are considering here is part of this unhistorical portrayal. It takes language that originally described Jesus' own vision and turns it into something that John the Baptist saw as a sign to him of who Jesus was. This is historically doubtful since it assumes that John should

know from this point on that Jesus certainly is "the Chosen One." While this is indeed how things are portrayed in the *Gospel of John*, we have historically likely accounts in *Luke 7:18-23* and *Matthew 11:2-6* of John doubting Jesus' messianic identity while he was imprisoned. Given that the historical John did have doubts, it is unlikely that John had a direct revelation from God identifying Jesus as "the Chosen One" as presented here in *John 1:29-34*.

Thus, the gospels *Matthew*, *Luke*, and *John* all, in different ways, take language and images from a vision of Jesus and turned them outward. In each of these gospels, the Holy Spirit coming upon Jesus like a dove was witnessed by people other than Jesus and functioned as a sign to them of Jesus' identity. In *Mark's* account, the event was clearly a vision, experienced by Jesus alone. It did not function as a sign to anyone else, for their sakes, but was rather a sign and message to Jesus, for his own sake.

In *Mark*, this vision is the event of Jesus' calling – it is his appointment to his Messianic role as the King of Israel. The language of what the voice from heaven says to Jesus it taken directly from Psalm 2 and Isaiah 42. Psalm 2 speaks of the appointment of the King of Israel (vs. 6) and to the King Yahweh says "You are my Son." This is just what the promise was to David in 2 Samuel 7. He would bear a son and Yahweh said, "I will be a father to him and he will be a son for me." (2 Sam. 7:14). In *Mark*, it is plain that this vision is a revelation to Jesus that he is appointed as the Son of God – the King of Israel. And the first thing Jesus does publicly after this vision is to proclaim "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mk 1:14). He then immediately begins to gather disciples, twelve of whom he soon appoints as apostles (Mk 3:13-19). Obviously, the apostles numbered

twelve to correspond to the tribes of Israel. Jesus, not being one of the twelve, clearly indicates he didn't view himself as merely a tribal leader, he was the one with authority to appoint tribal leaders – he was the King of all Israel. *Mark* is full of portrayals of Jesus as the Messiah – the King. He and his twelve apostles cast out demons, which was a means of expelling the foreign rule and establishing the Kingdom of God (Lk 11:20; Mt 12:28). He taught parables about the Kingdom (Mk 4:30-32) and performed miracles designed to illustrate the regathering of the tribes of Israel and the establishment of the Kingdom (Mk 6:30-44, 52). And, as I already mentioned, Peter explicitly identifies Jesus as the Messiah in Mk 8:29. This, Jesus does not deny, but warns the disciples to stay quiet about it. Then comes the “transfiguration” when Peter, James, and John are told by a voice from a cloud “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” (Mk 9:7) – clearly confirming his messianic identity. It is obvious that they understand that Jesus is the Messiah – the King, for a little later, James and John ask to be seated at his right and left hand in his glory (Mk 10:35-37). By the end of chapter 10, Jesus' identity is starting to get out to the public. A blind beggar named Bartimaeus cries out “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Mk 10:47). Many tell him to be quiet (Mk 10:48). But by this point Jesus knows the secret can no longer be kept and he doesn't tell him to be quite. The next thing Jesus does is to organize his entry into Jerusalem (Mk 11:1-7). He rode in on a colt in order to enact the events spoken of in Zechariah 9:9 “Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” The crowd with him spread their cloaks and leafy branches on the road before him and they celebrated, shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who

comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!" (Mk 11:9-10). Soon after this, Jesus is arrested and while being interrogated before the High priest, the question at hand is whether he claims to be the messiah. The High Priest asks him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" His answer in the affirmative is enough to have him sent to Pilate for crucifixion. He is crucified under an inscription which read "The King of the Jews;" such inscriptions above crucified victims were common – they indicated the crime for which the victim was crucified. This isn't all that *Mark* says about Jesus as the Messiah. Indeed, it is a major theme in *Mark* that Jesus is the Messiah – the Son of God, but also that the common expectations of what the Messiah should be like were mistaken. Jesus' vision at his baptism is the thing that revealed to him his messianic identity – it is the thing that sprung into action all the events which followed.

There is good reason for concluding that the general outline of *Mark's* portrait of Jesus is generally historically accurate. The fact that Jesus was crucified for the crime of claiming to be the Messiah, the king of the Jews, is multiply attested (Mk 15:26; Jn 19:19). Furthermore, "King of the Jews" doesn't appear to be a title his followers used for him and so there is no reason to think they made it up. It is best explained as a phrase the Romans used on his cross to indicate his crime. Also, there are historically verifiable sayings of Jesus that imply his messianic self-understanding; for example, he said to his twelve apostles that they would sit on twelve thrones ruling the tribes of Israel (Mt. 19:28). Given the fact that Judas was one of the twelve to whom this was spoken and given that he later betrayed Jesus, it is unlikely that any follower of Jesus would make this up after



the fact – because that would make Jesus out to be wrong. More likely, the statement originated with Jesus himself before Judas betrayed him; Jesus would then have been able to say to all twelve (including Judas) that they would rule over the tribes of Israel without reference to the then unknown and then-future betrayal. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, no follower of Jesus would make up that he was the Messiah after his crucifixion. This is because a crucified messiah is a failed messiah; the messiah was supposed to overthrow the Romans, not to be overthrown by them. A crucified prophet could be a true prophet since prophets had a reputation for getting persecuted and even killed. There was thus no inherent conflict with a prophetic identity and getting crucified; such a prophet would be an honored martyr. But a messiah – there is no way the followers of a crucified man would make up the idea that he was the messiah! And even if his opponents were to come up with the idea that he was a messiah in order to make him out to be a failure, there is no way that would have caught on among his followers if he never claimed to be a Messiah. They wouldn't have accepted an idea of a failed messiah given to them by their opponents. The only adequate explanation is that Jesus was understood to be the messiah by his followers before his crucifixion. His crucifixion would of course be a radical disconfirmation of Jesus' messianic identity. On this point, *Luke* has the account of the disciples on the road to Emmaus who after the crucifixion still acknowledged Jesus as a prophet, but considered the idea that he was the messiah a hope of the past (Lk 24:19-21). It is only the resurrection that renewed the belief that Jesus was indeed the Messiah; the challenge now was to understand his Messianic identity in light of such an unexpected series of events (the crucifixion

chief among them) – the *Gospel of Mark* is grappling with just this issue. In sum, Jesus did indeed, in actual historical fact, have a Messianic self-understanding.

The baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist is also a historically verifiable fact. Since I have explained this point [elsewhere](#), I won't go into the evidence here. And as we are now seeing, the earliest evidence indicates that Jesus had a vision accompanying his baptism. And there is good reason for understanding this to be historical as well. First of all, Jesus had to gain his messianic self-understanding somehow – one way would be just such a vision. But the fact that his self-understanding was not only messianic, but also prophetic lends more weight to the historicity of his visionary experience. Prophets were often commissioned through similar visions (Isaiah 6; Jeremiah 1; Ezekiel 1-3). And the fact that Jesus understood himself as a prophet is born out by through many lines of evidence. One being that he understood himself as a sort of second Jeremiah (see our study [The Historical Jesus and the Disturbance in the Temple](#)). Another is that we have multiply attested sayings such as “a prophet is not without honor except in his own country” (Mk 6:4; Jn 4:44) in which Jesus refers to himself as a prophet. As a prophet, he must have received a prophetic commission just as he received a messianic commission/anointing. And lastly, the vision itself is multiply attested in Mark and the Odes. This tells us something about the vision; namely, it is historically likely. But it also tells us something about Ode 36.

This is an important point: Ode 36 portrays Jesus' baptismal vision. It doesn't describe the spirit coming upon Jesus the way *John* does, nor in the way *Matthew* does, nor in the way *Luke* does. In short, it doesn't describe an experience that serves as a sign to others of Jesus'

identity. Ode 36 does not present a de-visionized reification of Jesus' baptismal vision like the above-mentioned gospels do. Instead, it, like *Mark*, describes a vision experienced by Jesus himself, which vision functioned as a revelation to Jesus of his own prophetic/messianic mission and identity. Ode 36 finds resonance, not with the later unhistorical alterations of this experience, but with the earliest, most historically verifiable version of the story.

Since the Ode presents a more historical portrayal of this event than *Matthew*, *Luke*, and *John*, it has to be considered an incredibly important source for the historical Jesus and for this event in particular – it is at least as important as *Mark*. And, as we will see, it actually includes more historically verifiable information that is not present in *Mark*. One aspect we have already mentioned – that being the feminine/motherly nature of the Holy Spirit. Not only is this attested in the Hebrew Gospel and the Odes, but it is also significant that both of these sources come from Semitic language contexts – Jesus' own linguistic context. It is generally recognized among historians of early Christianity that Hebrew and Aramaic-speaking followers of Jesus viewed the Holy Spirit as being feminine – this is natural in Semitic languages and the notion occurs overtly in Semitic sources. And, of course, it is even present in Greek sources (such as Jn 3 and Gal. 4). We'll get to the other historical aspects preserved in this Ode in a bit.

Before moving on, I need to point out the fact that understanding as much as we can about Jesus' commission is immensely important. It is, after all, what framed his understanding of his identity and his mission. We've already seen that this baptismal vision resulted in his prophetic self-understanding and his messianic self-understanding.

But, as you may know, there were different messianic expectations in the Second Temple Period. What type of messiah was he? Is there anything about his vision that could let us know?

We've already seen that both Ode 36 and *Mark* use the language of Sonship Messianism – which is Davidic Messianism. Jesus, as the Messiah was the Son of David, and thus the Son of God since God had promised David to be a father to his son (2 Sam. 7:14). As I already mentioned, Psalm 2 also forms part of the basis for this idea. Mitchell Dahood, author of the Anchor Bible Commentaries on the Psalms dates Psalm 2 to the very early monarchy saying it was written in “probably tenth century” BCE. Here is his translation of the relevant portions:

Psalm 2:6-9

<sup>6</sup> But I have been anointed his king,  
upon Zion his holy mountain.

<sup>7</sup> Let me recite the decree of Yahweh;  
he said to me:

“You are my son,  
this day have I begotten you.

<sup>8</sup> Ask wealth of me and I will give it;  
the nations will be your patrimony,  
and your possessions the ends of the earth.

<sup>9</sup> You will break them with a rod of iron,  
shatter them like a potter’s jar.”

Obviously, *Mark's* account draws on this directly whereas Ode 36 draws on it somewhat indirectly. In both cases, the act of drawing on this passage reveals Jesus' Messianic role as including a fulfillment of

primitive kingly messianism. In other words, the messiah would be Yahweh's anointed king who would be a son to Yahweh. This king would not be merely a national king but would subdue the nations and would rule to the ends of the earth – thus reclaiming the world from the wicked gods and re-assimilating it all back into the kingdom of Yahweh. Later apocalyptic thinkers, such as the Teacher of Righteousness, would understand the fulfillment of this as the end of the reign of darkness (falsehood and wickedness) and the establishment of the reign of brightness (truth and righteousness).

The other passage directly drawn on in *Mark's* account is Isaiah 42:1-7. It reads:

<sup>1</sup>Behold, my servant whom I uphold. My chosen, **in whom my whole being delights. I have put my Spirit upon him** so that he may establish a just order for the nations. <sup>2</sup>He will not shout, and he will not raise his voice, and he will not cause it to be heard in the streets. <sup>3</sup>A bruised reed he will not break, and a dim flax he will not quench for truly he will establish a just order. <sup>4</sup>He will not be quenched and he will not be broken until he has set up a just order in the land. The islands wait for his decree. <sup>5</sup>Thus says the God of the gods,<sup>7</sup> who separated the skies and pitched them, who pounded out the earth and her produce and gave breath to the people upon her and life to those who walk in her: <sup>6</sup>I, Yahweh, have called you in righteousness. I have grasped you by the hand. I keep you and give you for a covenant of the people, for brightness to the nations, <sup>7</sup>to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out from the dungeon those who are bound, and from the prison house, those who dwell in darkness. (my own translation)

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7 1QIsa-A Heb. ha-el ha-elohim (האל האלוהים)

While this passage does not itself call the “servant” a “messiah” - the broader context does just that. Specifically, Isaiah 45:1 says, “This is what Yahweh says to his anointed (messiah).” Also, the Spirit resting upon the servant here in Isaiah 42 can be understood as an “anointing.” This passage contains a lot more information that informs us of how Jesus likely understood his messianic mission. He was to establish a just order for the nations and he was to do so, not through violence or force, but through gentleness combined with determined persistence. In righteousness, and by the leading of Yahweh, he was to bring the brightness of truth to those in darkness. And while the gods of the nations bound people in darkness, he had the backing of the God of gods to set them free.

The opening line of Ode 36: “The spirit of the Lord rested upon me” clearly connects with Isaiah 42:1, but it connects even more closely to Isaiah 11 and 61.

Isaiah 11:1-5

And a shoot will come out from the stump of Jesse,  
and a branch from its roots will bear fruit.

<sup>2</sup>And **the spirit of Yahweh shall rest on him**—

a spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
a spirit of counsel and might,  
a spirit of knowledge and the fear of Yahweh.

<sup>3</sup>And his breath *is* in the fear of Yahweh.

And he shall judge not by his eyesight,  
and he shall rebuke not by what he hears with his ears.

<sup>4</sup>But he shall judge *the* poor with righteousness,  
and he shall decide for *the* needy of *the* earth with rectitude.

And he shall strike *the* earth with the rod of his mouth,  
and he shall kill *the* wicked person with the breath of his lips.

<sup>5</sup>And righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,  
and faithfulness the belt around his loins. (LEB)

Isaiah 61:1-3

***The Spirit of the Lord Yahweh is upon me,***  
because Yahweh has anointed me,  
he has sent me to bring good news *to the* oppressed,  
to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim release to *the* captives  
and liberation to those who are bound,  
<sup>2</sup>to proclaim *the* year of Yahweh's favor,  
and our God's day of vengeance,  
to comfort all those in mourning,  
<sup>3</sup>to give for those in mourning in Zion,  
to give them a head wrap instead of ashes,  
*the* oil of joy instead of mourning,  
a garment of praise instead of a faint spirit.  
And they will be called oaks of righteousness,  
the planting of Yahweh, to show his glory. (LEB)

Ode 36 draws on language from these passages to describe Jesus' first-person account of his vision. From this, it is evident that he understood himself to be the Messianic Branch of Isa. 11 who was to judge justly with the rod (word) of his mouth. And from Isa. 61, he would have understood a major part of his mission to be to proclaim a message of truth and righteousness. This, of course, is exactly what he does in *Mark* and in fact, he even says, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may **proclaim the message** there also; for **that** is what I came out to do." (Mk. 1:38)

Thus far, we have established the fact that Ode 36 depicts a first-person account of Jesus' baptismal vision and that its portrayal matches the earliest and most historically accurate narrative accounts of the event (as found in Mark and the Hebrew Gospel). Further, both Ode 36 and Mark present this as the experience by which Jesus was commissioned to his prophetic and messianic office and the details of his vision have begun to provide us with exactly what sort of Messiah he was commissioned to be. The vision itself has a very compact way of presenting Jesus' role. This is possible due to the rich system of symbols and technical terms with which Jesus himself was already familiar. The book Revelation does something similar in that it is able to use condensed and recognizable language such as "ten horns" or "two olive trees" to draw the minds of its readers and hearers back to previous writings. While this was initially to the advantage of those original readers and hearers, it is certainly to our advantage now since we are able to compare Revelation to previous writings and understand its references through linguistic connections. We are in the same advantageous position when it comes to Ode 36, and as you will see as we progress, it has more insight yet to give us regarding Jesus' vision and his identity and mission.

1a The spirit of the Lord rested upon me,

1b and she raised me on high

2a and made me stand on my feet in the height of the Lord,

**2b before his fullness and his glory.**

For those of you who are familiar with [our studies on ritual purity](#), the meaning of this should be quite plain. The basic idea of ritual



purity is best understood by imagining a series of concentric circles. Each circle represents a conceptual "purity zone." Ritual purity is not a black/white, on/off system – there are levels of purity corresponding to different purity zones. The outermost circle of purity is the least pure and the further in you go, you reach purer and purer zones. The innermost circles are "holy" and the circle in the very center is the "most holy."

These zones have a spatial element to them. Think of the Jerusalem temple: there is the most holy place, then the holy place, then the courtyard; and at different points in Israelite history there was a court of women, a court of the gentiles, etc. Each zone has objects and actions that in many ways characterize it. In order for individuals to enter a given purity zone (or interact with objects belonging to it), they must have a level of purity corresponding to that zone or to a zone further in. In other words, an person's level of purity must match or exceed the purity of a given zone in order for them to be able to inhabit, and operate within, that zone. An individual's purity level is thus a measure of their fitness for a given purity zone.

In addition to there being a ritual purity system for the priesthood of ancient Israel, there is also what we have called "the antitypical ritual purity system." This purity system is centered on the heavenly sanctuary. Within this system, what defiles (what causes impurity) is falsehood, and that which makes things pure is truth. But there are different levels of truth. One may be pure (fit) for one level of truth, but not for levels further in. There is a lot to be said about this, but for that, see [our other studies](#). Still, I'll quote a couple of passages that relate to this heavenly purity system:

<sup>14:8</sup> And behold, I saw the clouds and ... the winds were causing me to fly and [they were] rushing me high up *into heaven*....<sup>14:10</sup> And I ... *drew near* to a great house ...<sup>14:15</sup> And behold there was an opening before me and a second house ...<sup>14:18</sup> And I observed and saw inside it a lofty throne ...<sup>14:20</sup> And the Great Glory was sitting upon it ...<sup>14:21</sup> *None of the angels were able to come in and see the face of the Excellent and the Glorious One; and no one of flesh can see him –*<sup>14:22</sup> the flaming fire was round about him, and a great fire stood before him. *No one could come near unto him from among those that surrounded – the ten thousand times ten thousand that stood before him.*<sup>14:23</sup> He needed no council, *but the most holy ones who are near to him neither go far away at night nor move away from him.*<sup>14:24</sup> Until then I was prostrate on my face covered and trembling. And the Lord called me with his own mouth and said to me, "*Come near to me, Enoch and to my holy Word.*"<sup>14:25</sup> And he lifted me up and brought me *near* to the gate, but I continued to look down with my face.

The Testament of Levi 2:6-10; 3:1-6; 4:2

<sup>6</sup> And behold, the heavens were opened, and an angel of the Lord spoke to me: 'Levi, Levi, enter!' <sup>7</sup> And I entered the first heaven, and saw there much water suspended. <sup>8</sup> And again I saw a second heaven much brighter and more lustrous, for there was a measureless height in it. <sup>9</sup> And I said to the angel, 'Why are these things thus?' And the angel said to me, 'Do not be amazed concerning this, for you shall see another heaven more lustrous and beyond compare. <sup>10</sup> And when you have mounted there, you shall *stand near the Lord*. You shall be his *priest* and you shall *tell forth his mysteries* to men.

...

<sup>1</sup> "Listen, therefore, concerning the heavens which have been shown to you. The lowest is dark for this reason: It sees all the

injustices of humankind <sup>2</sup> and contains fire, snow, and ice, ready for the day determined by God's righteous judgment. In it are all the spirits of those dispatched to achieve the punishment of mankind. <sup>3</sup>In the second are the armies arrayed for the day of judgment to work vengeance on the spirits of error and of Beliar. Above them are the *Holy Ones*. In the *uppermost* heaven of all dwells the Great Glory in *the Holy of Holies superior to all holiness*. <sup>5</sup>There with him are the archangels, who serve and *offer propitiatory sacrifices* to the Lord in behalf of all the sins of ignorance of the righteous ones. <sup>6</sup>They present to the Lord *a pleasing odor, a rational and bloodless oblation*.

...

<sup>2</sup> "The Most High has given heed to your prayer that you be delivered from wrongdoing, *that you should become a son to him, as minister and priest in his presence*. (QIP)

#### 2 Corinthians 12:1-4

<sup>12:1</sup> It is necessary to go on boasting. Though it is not profitable, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. <sup>12:2</sup> I know a man in Christ who, fourteen years ago (whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows), was caught up to *the third heaven*. <sup>12:3</sup> And I know that this man (whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows) <sup>12:4</sup> was caught up into paradise and *heard things too sacred to be put into words, things that a person is not permitted to speak*. (NET)

As you can see, these passages describe various purity zones in the heavens. Even the heavenly beings are not all fit to be in the direct presence of God or to hear the most sacred truths. What is stunning about Jesus' vision as described in Ode 36 is that it has Jesus entering directly into the presence of God - "in the height of the Lord, before

his fullness and his glory." Not just anyone can go into the presence of God. The idea is that Jesus must have been pure – even holy. This experience presents him as "the Holy One of God." It is interesting to note that a little after Jesus' baptism in *Mark* 1, an "unclean spirit" calls out to him, saying, "I know who you are – the Holy One of God!" (Mk 1:23-24). Jesus' holiness, both in *Mark* and in Ode 36, indicates that he is more than a king. Yes, Ode 36 does depict his anointing as the King of Israel (the kingly son of God), but as we just read in *The Testament of Levi*, there was also the idea of one being adopted as God's son to be a priest; again, it said, "*that you should become a son to him, as minister and priest in his presence.*" The fact that by the end of this Ode (vs. 8) Jesus offers a peace offering confirms that this priestly idea is present here in Ode 36. Jesus was not only being commissioned as the king, but as the priest-king – even a new high priest. This is yet another aspect of Ode 36 that accurately reflects the self-understanding of the Historical Jesus. Jesus really did seek to establish a new priestly system (see [A Change in the Priesthood – A Change in the Law](#)) and he denounced the popular priestly system of his day (see [The Historical Jesus and the Disturbance in the Temple](#)).

## **2c While I was praising him by the composition of his odes,**

Saying "While I was praising him by the composition of his odes" instead of "And then I started praising him by the composition of his odes" reveals that Jesus, the Odist, and the original audience of the Odes all shared the understanding that making music is just what one does when before God in the heavenly priestly system. Revelation

bears witness to this same understanding (Rev. 5:8-10; 14:3). There is even a collection of writings found among the Dead Sea Scrolls known as *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* that is full of divine music-making before God in his heavenly sanctuary. Here is a little sample:

*4Q400 Frag. 2.3* from gods and men. And they will recount the splendour of his kingdom, according to their knowledge, and they will extol [... in all]

4 the heavens of his kingdom. And in all the exalted heights wonderful *psalms* according to all [...]

4Q403 Frag 1 Col.1.7 the third of the chief princes. He will exalt the God of the exalted [an]gels seven times, with seven words of wonderful exaltations.

2 *Psalm of praise, on the tongue of the fou[rth]*, to the Powerful One who is above all [the gods] with its seven wonderful powers. He will praise the God

3 of powers seven times, with seve[n] words of [wonderful] praise. [*Psalm of [tha]nks giving, on the tongue of the fif[th]*,] to the [K]in[g of] glory,

4 with its seven wonderful thanks[giv]ings. He will give thanks to the honoured God se[ven times, with se]v[en wor]ds of wonderful thanksgivings. [*Psalm of exultation,*

5 *on the tongue of the sixth*, to the God [of] goodness, with [its] seven [wonderful] exultations. He will exult in the Ki[n]g of] goodness seven times, with s[even words] of wonderful exultation.

6 *Blank Psalm of [singing, on the to]ngue of the seventh* of the [chief] pri[n]ces,] a powerful *song* [to the God] of *hol[iness]* with its se[ven] wo[nd]er[ful songs.]

7 *He will sing* [to the] Kin[g of *holiness* seven times, with [seven wor]ds of [wonderful] *son[gs]. Sev[en] psa[lms* of his blessings. Sev[en]

8 [psalm]s of magnification of [his justice. *Seven psalms*] of exaltation of [his] kingd[om. *Seven*] psalms [of praise of his glory. *Seven psalms*] of thanksgiving]

9 [for his wonders. *Seven psalms* of exu]lt[at]ion in his power. *Seven [psalms of song]* of his holiness.

...

34 For h[e is the God of the gods] of all the chiefs *of the heights*, and king of king[s] of all the eternal councils.

...

36 *Sing with joy*, those of you enjoying [his knowledge, with] rejoicing among the wonderful gods. *Proclaim his glory with the tongue* of all who proclaim knowledge, his wonderful *songs*

37 *with the mouth* of all who proclaim [him. *For he is*] *God of all who sing {knowledge} for ever*, and Judge in his power over all the spirits of understanding.

...

39 *Chant to the powerful God*

40 with the chosen spiritual portion, so that it is [*a melo*]dy with *the joy of the gods*, and celebration with all the holy ones, for a wonderful *song* in eter[nal] happiness.

41 With them *praise* all the fou[ndations] of the *holly of holies*, the supporting columns of the most exalted dwelling, and all the corners of his building. *S[ing]*

42 *to Go[d, aw]esome* in power, [all you spirits of knowledge and of light], to [exal]t together *the most pure* vault of [his] *holy sanctuary*. ([The Dead Sea Scrolls: Study Edition](#))

The fact that the vision of Ode 36 portrays Jesus as composition odes rather than merely singing them shows that he was creating new songs (Ps. 33:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; Isa. 42:10). While we aren't told exactly what these odes were that he was composing in his vision, we

can say on the basis of vs. 7 that they conveyed righteousness and peace. The reason why vs. 7 can inform us of the general tone of the compositions referenced here in vs. 2 is because of the general chiasmic structure of Ode 36. Let's take a few moments to understand the structure before moving on. Here is the full ode again, formatted to reveal the chiasm:

- A- 1 The spirit of the Lord rested upon me,  
and she raised me on high  
2 and made me stand on my feet in the height of the Lord,  
before his fullness and his glory.
- B- While I was praising him by the composition of his odes,  
C- 3 she gave birth to me before the face of the Lord.<sup>8</sup>  
Even while being the son of man,  
I was named the enlightened son of God  
D- 4 while I was glorious among the glorious ones,  
D- and great among the great ones.
- C- 5 For like the greatness of the Most High,  
so she made me,  
and according to his renewing he renewed me.  
6 And he anointed me from his fullness,  
and I became one of those near to him.
- B- 7 And my mouth was opened like a cloud of dew,  
and my heart gushed out a flood of righteousness.  
8 And a peace offering was mine,

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8 I have departed from *Nuhra's* punctuation here to give a punctuation more in line with that found in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Charlesworth) and the *Hermeneia translation* by Michael Lattke. The punctuation here seems to better represent the flow of ideas in the ode and better match the chiasmic structure.

A- and I was established in the spirit of governance.

Hallelujah!

The chiastic structure of the Ode can help us to understand each aspect by reference to its parallel. Yet, the chiasm isn't completely rigid or exact and it's important to keep in mind that the ode is still telling of an experience in general sequential order. The first thing that happened in the experience was the Spirit coming upon Jesus (1a) which was followed by her raising him on high (1b); she then placed him on his feet (2a) after which he started composing odes (2c). While composing odes (after he had started), he was "birthed" by the spirit (3a) and then named the son of God (3c). Verses 4-8 are not as clearly sequential. For example, being made like the greatness of the Most High (5a) may just be referring back to being proclaimed His Son (3c). Likewise, being "renewed" (5c) seems to be referring back to being (re)born by the spirit (3a). Yet, being established in the spirit of governance (8b) doesn't seem to be merely referring back to what happened in vs. 1-2. It does indeed parallel those verses, but it also seems to be summarizing the whole experience and indicating the new reality that has resulted.

We'll address each aspect more as we come to it, but this overview of the chiastic structure should be helpful to keep in mind.

### **3a she gave birth to me before the face of the Lord.**

Obviously, we have already dealt quite a bit with the subject of Jesus being begotten as the son of God in this vision. It is one of the points that establishes the connections between this Ode and the



baptismal accounts in Luke and the Hebrew Gospel in particular and, of course, Psalm 2. But this passages speaks not only of Jesus being birthed by the Spirit, but also this happening “before the face of the Lord” in the heavenly sanctuary as part of being anointing as both king and high priest. The particular constellation of elements in this Ode make it clear that it draws upon another Psalm: Psalm 110. Here is the relevant passage:

1 The Declaration of Yahweh to my lord: Sit at my right hand until I place your enemies as a stool for your feet.

2 Yahweh will send the staff of your strength out from Zion. Rule in the midst of your enemies!

3<sup>9</sup> Free-will offerings<sup>10</sup> are with you<sup>11</sup> in the day of your power, in the splendor of the holy ones.<sup>12</sup>

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9 This verse is notoriously difficult to translate, as is apparent from its many widely varying translations. Many translators solve the difficulty by suggesting conjectural emendations. While this isn't always unreasonable, it is far to easy to step beyond the available evidence. I think it is best to only suggest emendations when the evidence indicates that the current form of the text resulted from specific explainable changes. As it stands, I think it is possible to make sense of the verse without conjectural emendation; one only needs to vocalize the consonants differently from the MT.

10 Heb. *ndbt* נְדָבָה. While not usually translated “free-will offerings” in this verse; that is its usual translation in other verses.

11 “With you” is a translation of consonants that can also be read as “your people.” The latter reading is found in the vowel pointing of the MT whereas “with you” is assumed by the LXX.

12 Following LXX

<sup>13</sup>Go forth <sup>14</sup>from the womb at dawn, <sup>15</sup>  
with <sup>16</sup>dew I have begotten you.

4 Yahweh has sworn and will not regret it: You are a priest forever according to the manner of Melchizedek. - Psalm 110:1-4 (my translation)

Considering the fact that this Psalm is the most quoted, and alluded

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- 13 The latter half of this verse is often translated according to the MT to read something like, "From the womb of the dawn belonging to you is the dew of your youth." There are several reasons why this translation (and the MT) are inadequate. First, the word underlying "your youth" can also be vocalized as "I have begotten you," as in the LXX. This reading is more likely original since it occurs together with the phrase "from the womb." But now there is a new problem. There are simply too many words between "from the womb" and "I have begotten you" for the meaning of this passage to be "from the womb I have begotten you." Thus, it is better to understand the second half of this verse to be two phrases that form a parallelism rather than one long complicated phrase.
- 14 Though usually translated as "for you," "to you," or "(belonging) to you" based on the MT vowel pointing, the same consonants can be read as the imperative "Go forth." The parallelism seems to demand a verb in its first half and this is the most likely candidate, not only because it is a common verb, but also because it makes good sense in the context of the second half of the parallelism.
- 15 This is the usual word for "dawn" other than having a ׀ at its beginning. Some take this as an alternate spelling, but if so, it is otherwise unattested. Others emend the text to get rid of it, but that is too easy and there isn't any real evidence that it is a secondary addition; in fact, it is the more difficult reading which often indicates the more original reading. The better solution is to take the ׀ as a prefixed preposition, which is extremely common. When prefixed to a noun indicating a time of day, ׀

to, "Old Testament" passage in the New Testament, it isn't at all surprising that the Odes relate to it as well. Let's consider some of the thematic parallels: Both passages place their primary figure in the presence of God. Both describe him being birthed and anointed and having some sort of relationship with dew. He also presents offerings and is in the company of "holy ones" or "glorious ones." Both passages also describe him as being a figure who is being installed as king and priest.

As you can see, the connections between Ode 36 and Psalm 110 are even stronger than between Ode 36 and Psalm 2 or the passages in Isaiah that we have considered. And once again, we have good reason to think that Jesus actually did consider Psalm 110 to be a mirror for himself. As we already discussed, there is ample evidence that Jesus considered himself to be the kingly messiah and also the priestly messiah. This fact already connects itself with Psalm 110 and explains why Psalm 110 became the most quoted "Old Testament" passage within the New Testament. Jesus is the central figure of the New Testament, and Psalm 110 was a central passage for Jesus. Indeed, we even have a passage in *Mark* that depicts Jesus as using Psalm 110 to probe into the question of just who the messiah was supposed to be.

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seems to mean "when (the time of day) comes/begins" (e.g. 2 Sam. 2:27).  
 16 I understand the meaning "with" here to be implied, though the text lacks a word for "with." It isn't odd for Hebrew to imply the meaning "with" while lacking an explicit word for it. The following are just such cases: Gen. 6:11 "the earth was filled *with* violence;" Ex. 3:8 "to a land flowing *with* milk and honey;" Ps 45:7 "therefore elohim, your elohim has anointed you *with* oil of rejoicing among your companions."

Mark 12:35-37

<sup>35</sup>And continuing, Jesus said *while* teaching in the temple *courts*,  
 “How can the scribes say that the Christ is David’s son? <sup>36</sup>David  
 himself said by the Holy Spirit,  
 ‘The Lord said to my Lord,  
 “Sit at my right hand,  
 until I put your enemies  
 under your feet.” ’  
<sup>37</sup>David himself calls him ‘Lord,’ and how is he his son?” And the  
 large crowd was listening to him gladly. (LEB)

Here, Jesus complicates the notion that the Messiah is the son of David. The clear conclusion of his argument is that the Messiah must be more than just the son of David. The Messiah would be a king, yes, but he would also be a priest – and not just any priest – but a heavenly priest begotten by God. We’ll come back to certain details in Psalm 110 in connection with later parts of this Ode, but first let’s continue with the Ode itself to see what else we can learn about just what kind of Messiah Jesus was.

### **3b Even while being the son of man, I was named the enlightened son of God.**

As I mentioned near the beginning of this article, “son of man” is a translation of the Aramaic phrase *bar nasha* (actually *bar ansha*). While “the son of man” is a quite literal translation, it is important to recognize that this was a common idiom simply meaning “human.” Yet, it doesn’t always simply mean “human.” Sometimes, it is used as a

title.<sup>17</sup> "The Son of Man." This title is most well-known from the NT Gospels where it is used to refer to Jesus. For example, in *Mark's* account of Jesus' trial, the high priest asks him if he is the Messiah, "the Son of the Blessed One." To this, Jesus responds, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven." (Mark 14:62). To this, the high priest responds by tearing his own clothes and accusing Jesus of blasphemy, making it evident that he understood Jesus to be referring to himself. Even more interestingly, Jesus' language here combines wording from Psalm 110 with wording from Daniel 7. "Sitting at the right hand of the Power" is based on Psalm 110:1 while "the Son of man" "coming with the clouds of heaven" is taken from Dan. 7:13. This makes it obvious that he (or at least the author of *Mark*) understood the Son of Man of Daniel 7 to be the figure who was anointed as the kingly-priestly Messiah in Psalm 110. Psalm 110 portrays this figure in highly exalted terms – he is pictured in the heavens at the right hand of God, sitting enthroned next to him. And some manuscripts of Psalm 110:5 actually say "Yahweh at your right hand" indicating that the one at the right hand of Yahweh in verse 1 is also called Yahweh. This

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17 Scholars debate whether the phrase is properly a "a title" and if so, in what texts. In Daniel 7, for instance, a figure who comes before God is called "one like a son of man" which isn't really a title, but instead a descriptive phrase. In the NT gospels, on the other hand, "the son of man" appears more like a title. In this article, I'm using "title" loosely. It doesn't matter, for the purposes of this article, whether it was a fixed title or not. The distinction I'm making is between the idiomatic usage of "bar nasha" as a generic term for "human" and its usage as a designating phrase (or collection of similar phrases) for a heavenly being known in apocalyptic literature.

wording was most likely the original wording and was probably changed because the idea of [multiple Yahwehs](#) eventually became considered a heresy. Yet, there are plenty of passages where [multiple Yahwehs](#) are present; it is evident that at least some ancient Israelites understood multiple deities to go by that name.

Connecting the “second Yahweh” of Psalm 110 to the Son of Man in Daniel 7 further reinforces the view that this figure was understood as some sort of divine being. While the term “son of man” points to humanity, other factors lead us to the conclusion that the figure was also “divine.” Here is the passage from Daniel:

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14

<sup>9</sup>“I continued watching until thrones were placed and an Ancient of Days sat; his clothing *was* like white snow and the hair of his head *was* like pure wool and his throne *was* a flame of fire and its wheels *were* burning fire. <sup>10</sup>A stream of fire issued forth and flowed from his presence; thousands *upon* thousands served him and ten thousand *upon* ten thousand stood before him. The judge sat, and *the* books were opened.

...

<sup>13</sup>“I continued watching in the visions of the night, and look, with the clouds of heaven *one* like a son of man was coming, and he came to the Ancient of Days, and was presented before him. <sup>14</sup>And to him was given dominion and glory and kingship that all the peoples, the nations, and languages *would* serve him; his dominion *is* a dominion without end that will not cease, and his kingdom *is one* that will not be destroyed. (LEB)

The “Ancient of Days” here is clearly God – the Judge in the courtroom of heaven. But the “one like a son of man” is also

presented as a sort of divine figure, though clearly subservient to the Ancient of Days. Not only is he given glory and kingship so that all nations and peoples will serve him in an unending kingdom, but he comes before the Ancient of Days upon the clouds of heaven. Throughout extant ancient Israelite writings, only Yahweh is said to ride upon the clouds (Ps. 68:4; 104:3). But this prophecy in Daniel has its roots in a time before the Israelites.

In [past studies](#), we have discussed the fact that the Israelites were largely a subgroup of Canaanites and that many facets of "Israelite religion" have their roots in older "Canaanite religion." By comparing *Daniel* and other Israelite literature to Canaanite literature, it becomes evident that the Ancient of Days here in Daniel 7 is none other than El. El is one of the titles of the God of Israel (hence Isra-EL), but El was around long before the Israelites; El was the chief God of the Canaanites, and he is described in *some* Canaanite literature as having the same characteristics that were later ascribed to him by the Israelites. Among the Canaanite titles for El, the one most relevant for understanding Daniel 7 is "the Father of Years," which obviously is quit similar to "the Ancient of Days." Here are a couple of quotations from Canaanite literature that describe El as the "Father of Years" and depict him as head of the council of the gods.<sup>18</sup>

KTU 1.4:4:22–24 (KTU 1.1:3:23–24 and KTU 1.3:5:7–8 are almost identical)

She [Anat] comes to the mountain of El and enters the tent of the king, the Father of Years.

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18 All quotations of Canaanite literature are from Smith, M. S., & Parker, S. B. (1997). [Ugaritic Narrative Poetry](#) (Vol. 9). Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press unless otherwise indicated.

KTU 1.1:4:2-4

Aloud they summon the assembly of the gods, they summon the distant ones, the assembly of El they summon.<sup>19</sup>

The Ancient of Days in Daniel is the figure El, the Father of Years in Canaanite literature. But what of the son of man? A comparison with the same Canaanite literature reveals unmistakably that Daniel's "one like a son of man" is the figure that was known by Israel's Canaanite forebears as Baal. A common designation for Baal in Canaanite literature is "cloudrider" - which forms the basis for the son of man coming on the clouds. He is also said to take "eternal kingship" and an "everlasting dominion" just as the son of man does in Daniel 7. Consider these Canaanite texts from Ugarit:

KTU 1.2:4:7-10

7 And Kothar wa-Hasis speaks:  
 7-8 "Indeed, I tell you, Prince Baal,  
 I reiterate, O Cloudrider:  
 8-9 Now your enemy, Baal,  
 Now smash your enemy,  
 Now vanquish your foe.  
 10 So assume your eternal kingship,  
 Your everlasting dominion."

KTU 1.2:4:28-29

28-29 "Scatter, O Mighty Ba[al],  
 Scatter, O Cloudrider.

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19 Psalm 82:1 is very similar to this; it says, "Gods stand in the assembly of El; in the midst of gods he judges."



KTU 1.3:37–38

What enemy rises against Baal,  
What foe against the Cloudrider?

KTU 1.4:3:10–11

10–11 “Mightiest Baal [answers (?),]  
The Cloudrider testifies:

Furthermore, Baal obtains his everlasting dominion by defeating the sea (Yamm) and at least one beast from the sea – Leviathan.<sup>20</sup> In Daniel 7, the source of enemy powers is the sea; from it emerge four beasts who must be defeated in order for the son of man to obtain his everlasting kingdom. The parallels are clear and demonstrate quite conclusively that the apocalyptic vision in Daniel 7 has its roots in the earlier Canaanite stories of Baal and El. While this may be surprising to modern readers, in another way it isn't surprising at all considering that the Israelites lived in the land of Canaan and, to a large degree, had their roots in Canaanite culture and religion – as is evidenced by the many [continuities between Canaanite literature and Israelite literature](#) (among other things).<sup>21</sup>

I'm not pointing out these parallels just because they are interesting. There is a lot we can learn from understanding the Canaanite roots of the images in Daniel 7. One thing is that it puts

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20 All this is in [The Baal Cycle](#).

21 Namely, the archaeological data. See the following videos:

[Stroum Lecture 1985: Israelite Settlement in Canaan II- William Dever](#)  
[“Origins of Ancient Israel” - Carol Meyers](#)  
[The Origins of the Israelites \(Aren Maeir\)](#)

beyond question the fact that the son of man is not simply a human, nor is he a symbol for humanity in general; rather the son of man is the Lord (ba'al).<sup>22</sup> He is a divine being. And in light of the Canaanite texts, we can better understand the relationship between this son of man and the Ancient of Days. Baal is identified in some Canaanite texts as "the son of El" "who begot him."

KTU 1.17:6:28–29<sup>23</sup>

I shall make you number (your) years with Baal,  
with the son of El you shall number months.

KTU 1.3:5:35–39

Groaning he [Baal] cries to Bull El his father,  
to El the king who begot him.

El, the Father of Years, is an old deity who is the head of all the gods of the divine council. Baal is his son who at one time had no kingdom over which to rule but who gained a dominion and became king over his kingdom under El. The same is true of Daniel's son of man and Ancient of Days.

In the Gospels, the term "son of man" occurs in a number of different contexts. It is used not only in the sense of the common idiom meaning "human" but more significantly in the sense of the heavenly Son of Man. And as we've already seen, *Mark's* Jesus (Mark 14:62) combined Daniel's son of man with the king-priest of Psalm

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22 The word "ba'al" isn't really a proper name; it just means "lord" or "master."

23 This and the quote that follows are from Wyatt, N. (2002). *Religious texts from Ugarit (2nd ed.)*. London; New York: Sheffield Academic Press.

110 as part of informing his conceptualization of the Messiah. But Daniel 7 doesn't actually call the son of man a/the "Messiah." So why does Jesus make this connection? Did he come up with the idea that Daniel's son of man is the Messiah or did he get it from somewhere else? Thankfully, there are surviving documents from antiquity that enable us to answer this question. And the answer is the latter: he got the idea from somewhere else.

The key text is known as *The Parables of Enoch*, alternatively *The Similitudes of Enoch*, though it might better be called [\*The Beginning of the Words of Wisdom\*](#).<sup>24</sup> This work is currently embedded in chapters 37-71 of *1 Enoch*, though it was originally a separate writing. Currently, it is only found in Ethiopian manuscripts of *1 Enoch* and, in its present form, it contains many additions designed to integrate it with the other sections of *1 Enoch*. Still, scholars studying this text have been able to determine that it is an ancient text dating to around the turn of the millennium (from BCE to CE) and there is a growing consensus that it is an important text for studying the background of the early Jesus-Movement.<sup>25</sup> Here, we'll just go over a few of the connections between this text and the Jesus-Movement and it will become obvious why this is relevant for Ode 36.

*The Beginning of the Words of Wisdom* (henceforth BWW) is largely focused on "The Head of Days" (yet another title connected with "the Ancient of Days" and "the Father of Years") and "the Son of Man" (who it also calls "The Righteous One," "The Chosen One" and

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24 Ancient writings often drew their titles from their opening lines; in this case "This is the beginning of the words of wisdom ..."

25 [This article](#) contains an overview of the basic facts about the "*Parables of Enoch*" as well as an excellent summary of the history of scholarship on it.

“The Anointed One”/“Messiah”). It clearly builds on Daniel 7, but develops the ideas further. Here is a small sample of what it says to give you some basis for comparison with the teachings of Jesus:<sup>26</sup>

1 Enoch 39:6

6 And in that place my eyes saw the Chosen One of righteousness and faith, and righteousness will be his days,<sup>27</sup> and the righteous and chosen will be without number before him forever.

1 En. 46:1 There I saw one who had a head of days, and his head was like white wool.

And with him was another, whose face was like the appearance of a man;

and his face was full of graciousness like one of the holy angels.

2 And I asked the angel of peace who went with me and showed me all the hidden things, about that son of man – who he was and whence he was and why he went with the Head of Days.

3 And he answered me and said to me, “This is the son of man who has righteousness, and righteousness dwells with him, and all the treasures of what is hidden he will reveal; For the Lord of Spirits has chosen him,

1 Enoch 48:8 In those days, downcast will be the faces of the kings of the earth, ...

10 ... and there will be no one to take them with his hand and raise them.

For they have denied the Lord of Spirits and his Anointed One,

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26 All quotes from 1 Enoch from this point forward are from the [Hermeneia translation](#) by Nickelsburg and VanderKam unless otherwise indicated.

27 This wording is derived from Jer. 23:5-6; a prophecy regarding the coming “Branch” - the Messiah.

Blessed be the name of the Lord of Spirits.

1 Enoch 49:4 And he will judge the things that are secret,  
and a lying word none will be able to speak in his presence;  
For he is the Chosen One in the presence of the Lord of Spirits  
according to his good pleasure.

1 Enoch 61:8 And the Lord of Spirits seated the Chosen One upon  
the throne of glory; and he will judge all the works of the holy ones  
in the heights of heaven, and in the balance he will weigh their  
deeds.

1 Enoch 62:2 And the Lord of Spirits seated him upon the throne  
of his glory,  
and the spirit of righteousness was poured upon him.  
And the word of his mouth will slay all the sinners,<sup>28</sup>  
and all the unrighteous will perish from his presence.

...

5 And one group of them will look at the other;  
and they will be terrified and will cast down their faces,  
and pain will seize them when they see that Son of Man sitting on  
the throne of his glory.

...

13 And the righteous and the chosen will be saved on that day;  
and the faces of the sinners and the unrighteous they will  
henceforth not see.

14 And the Lord of Spirits will abide over them,  
and with that Son of Man they will eat,  
and they will lie down and rise up forever and ever.

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28 This wording is taken from Isaiah 11:4 – another prophecy about the  
“Branch” - the Messiah.

There are quite a number of elements here and in the rest of BWW that demonstrate its relevance for studying Jesus. As you can see, the Son of Man in this text is identified as the "Anointed One" - the Messiah. Since this identification isn't known from any other pre-Jesus source and since we know BWW originated shortly before Jesus' life or ministry and in generally the same area,<sup>29</sup> it is most likely that Jesus obtained this idea, either directly or indirectly, from BWW. In other words, the dating of the text and its geographical provenance show that it is credible that Jesus *could* have been influenced by the teachings of BWW. That alone is enough to make the idea that Jesus was influenced by BWW a hypothesis worth testing. If one wanted to test this hypothesis, what you would do is to see whether anything distinctive and unique from BWW shows up in Jesus' teaching. If the only common points between BWW and Jesus were points also common between them and the rest of Judaism, for example, that wouldn't demonstrate any influence of BWW upon Jesus. But if there is an idea that is unique to BWW and that idea subsequently shows up in Jesus' teachings, that demonstrates an influence. And that is exactly what we find with the idea that the Son of Man is the Messiah. Daniel doesn't make that connection, nor does any other text prior to BWW. All the evidence indicates that this was an idea unique and original to BWW and that it was picked up by Jesus;<sup>30</sup> again, either directly or

29 Some scholars argue specifically for a [Galilean origin](#), but anywhere in Palestine is sufficient to make the point.

30 Even if one doubts whether the Historical Jesus combined Dan. 7 and Psalm 110 using the words ascribed to him in Mark 14:62, there is other evidence that the Historical Jesus understood the Son of Man to be the Messiah, as we will see.

indirectly from BWW. This one instance of influence is pretty decent confirmation of our hypothesis. At a minimum, one would have to at least admit that it strengthens the hypothesis. For more confirmation, though, one would hope to find more cases where there is an idea unique to BWW that then also shows up in Jesus' teachings. And this is exactly what we find.

In a saying of Jesus that is [most likely authentic](#), he speaks of the Son of Man sitting on his throne of glory and judging the righteous and the wicked (Matt. 25:31-46). This is so strikingly similar to BWW – as we quoted above, both in language and ideas, that it can hardly be coincidence. And again, this isn't a common idea. In fact, in pre-Jesus sources, it is only known from BWW. In most Jewish tradition, the Judge is God, but in BWW and in Jesus' teaching, judgment is given to the Son of Man and he judges the righteous and the wicked while seated on the throne of his glory.

As I mentioned earlier, there are more connections between BWW and Jesus than we will be able to cover in this article. But there is one more that we will cover – the connection between BWW and Ode 36 itself in the very verse we are considering:

Ode 36:3b “Even while being the Son of Man, I was named the enlightened Son of God.”

We have already seen that the early Jesus-Movement used the term “son of man” not only in its common idiomatic meaning as “human,” but also in its apocalyptic sense as a title for a heavenly figure – The Son of Man. This verse is yet another attestation to that usage, but the basis upon which we know it is using the term in its apocalyptic sense is even more significant; that is, we know this verse is speaking of the

apocalyptic Son of Man since it alludes to BWW. And we know that it is alluding to BWW since it speaks of the “naming of the Son of Man” - which is found only in BWW. Here is the passage:

1 Enoch 48:2 And in that hour that son of man was named in the presence of the Lord of Spirits, ...

3... his name was named before the Lord of Spirits.

Naturally, there are differences between the passages, as is always the case with allusions. The key point, however, is that these are the only two passages that speak specifically of the “naming” of the Son of Man. Additionally, the link between Ode 36 and BWW is strengthened by the fact that they both interact with the same texts (Ps. 2; Dan. 7; Isaiah's “servant” passages) while describing the Son of Man.

Now – the differences: As you can see, BWW does not say what his name would be while Ode 36 says he was named “the enlightened Son of God.” What is the best way to understand this difference? Well, since we know both the Odist and the author of BWW were using overlapping groups of texts while authoring their own works, it makes sense that the Odist would be interpreting BWW in light of those earlier texts. The Odist is speaking of Jesus being called the Son of God, as also attested in *Mark* – both being based on Psalm 2 and Psalm 110. The Odist, in reading BWW would find the Son of Man spoken of in language taken from Psalm 2 and Daniel 7; so the Odist would undoubtedly understand BWW's Son of Man to be the same figure as in these passages – for the Odist, Jesus. So, when the Odist read BWW's description of the Son of Man being in the presence of the God and being named, it would be natural in the light of these



Psalms, and Jesus own experience, to add that he was named "the Son of God." And the "enlightened" aspect could easily be derived from the next verse here in BWW since it says, "he will be the light of the nations," clearly based on Isa. 42:6 and Isa. 49:6. I should also mention that different translations of the Odes render this part of the verse differently.

"the illuminated one, the son of God" - J.H. Bernard

"the Light, the Son of God" - J.H. Charlesworth

"the Shining One, the Son of God" - J.A. Emerton

"the Shining One, the Son of God" - M. Lattke

The other main difference between BWW's "naming" passage and Ode 36 is that BWW speaks of the Son of Man in 3<sup>rd</sup> person, while Ode 36 speaks of him in 1<sup>st</sup> person. As we have already seen, this is because Ode 36 is written as from Jesus' own 1<sup>st</sup> person perspective. Thus, all the differences between Ode 36 and BWW regarding the naming of the Son of Man are explicable in terms of the Odists interpreting BWW in light of 1) its own context, 2) earlier texts used by both BWW and Ode 36, and 3) Jesus' own vision wherein he was called the Son of God.

In sum, the fact that the "naming" of the Son of Man is exclusive and unique to BWW makes it quite certain that Ode 36 is alluding to BWW (plus, both speak of the Son of Man being named *in the presence of God*). Furthermore, even the differences between Ode 36 and BWW in this "naming" passage testify to the influence of BWW.

We have shown (independent of Ode 36) that Jesus was influenced by BWW. Ode 36 is yet another attestation to this fact. Also, this is yet

another instance where Ode 36 is demonstrating itself to accurately reflect the historical Jesus – as we have seen for practically every element of it so far. Ode 36 is one of the pieces of evidence (a strong piece) that the historical Jesus' messianic self-understanding was partly based on BWW. As we have been observing, Ode 36 is a poetic telling, as from Jesus' own perspective of a vision he had in connection with his baptism. This vision framed who he understood himself to be and what he understood himself to be called to do. We have seen that he understood himself to be a prophet, but also the Messiah. But there were many diverse understandings of who the messiah would be. What kind of messiah was Jesus? Well, we have seen that he understood himself to be a kingly messiah, a priestly messiah, and now we are seeing that he understood himself to be BWW's messianic Son of Man.

This is a far more profound revelation than might at first appear to be the case. It's easy to think, "Well duh, of course Jesus is the Son of Man – it says so all throughout the Gospels." Yes indeed, the NT gospels say that Jesus is the Son of Man, and they portray Jesus as referring to himself as the Son of Man; but that isn't the question. The real question is whether Jesus himself – the real historical person – viewed himself as the Son of Man. As we have discussed [time](#) and [time again](#), the New Testament Gospels are not perfectly historically accurate and in order to know what Jesus said and did, we can't read the gospels without critical thinking, just accepting everything they say. Instead, we need to engage in serious historical investigation.

There are scholars who do this kind of work and, when it comes to Jesus' "Son of Man" sayings, there is great debate. Most would grant that he used the phrase "son of man" in some way, but when it comes

to determining which of the "Son of Man" sayings in the gospels really go back to the Historical Jesus, there are different ways scholars reckon with the evidence. The best historical construction I have heard put forward by scholars<sup>31</sup> goes something like this: The NT gospels contain some sayings of Jesus where he clearly uses the phrase "the Son of Man" to refer to himself (e.g. Matt. 8:20), but they also contain other says where Jesus seems to refer to the Son of Man as someone other than himself (e.g. Luke 9:26). Since the authors of the gospels believed that Jesus was the Son of Man, it's easy to imagine they might retroject that belief back onto Jesus' lips whereas it's very unlikely that they would make up sayings of Jesus where he speaks of the Son of Man as someone other than himself – since that runs counter to their own beliefs. Most likely, then, this latter class of sayings (those in which Jesus speaks of the Son of Man as someone other than himself) were not made up by the gospel authors and are instead authentic sayings of the Historical Jesus. The conclusion then drawn is that Jesus probably didn't consider himself to be the Son of Man.

Ever since hearing this line of reasoning, I've thought it was quite compelling. For a long time now, I've thought that, at a minimum, we don't have historical evidence that Jesus considered himself to be the Son of Man. The best explanation of the evidence seemed to indicate he probably didn't think of himself in that way. But, as we have been seeing in this article, there is more to the story. For the first time, I, and you, are brought face to face with evidence that the historical Jesus actually did consider himself to be the apocalyptic Son of Man. The argument goes something like this:

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31 See [Bart Ehrman](#) and [Dale Martin](#).

Jesus accepted BWW's teaching about the Son of Man.

BWW taught the Son of Man is the Messiah.

Jesus believed he was the Messiah.

Therefore, Jesus believed he was the Son of Man.

Here is the argument expressed as a formal logical argument:

Premise 1: A accepted B's teaching about X

Premise 2: B taught  $X = Y$

Premise 3: A believed A was Y

Conclusion: A believed A was X

If you aren't familiar with formal logic, that's okay. The basic idea of the argument above is that each bit of content is replaced with a letter so that we can focus on the relationships between each bit without getting distracted by the bits themselves. If the logic is valid, the conclusion should be unavoidable based on the premises; and if the premises are all true in reality, then the conclusion must be true in reality.

And the fact of the matter is that we have just seen in this article that each of these premises is true; and there is also more evidence for each of them than what we have been able to cover here. But given the truth of these premises, we can't avoid the conclusion that Jesus considered himself to be the Son of Man. Yet, it would be inappropriate to stop here. In order for one explanation to supersede another, it should account for all the data accounted for in the first explanation in addition to accounting for additional data. We have just

seen that we can account for the data summarized in our three premises (some of which is additional data) by the explanation that Jesus believed himself to be the Son of Man; more boldly (and accurately), the data demands this explanation. And as should be obvious, the explanation that Jesus didn't consider himself to be the Son of Man fails to account for this evidence. But what about the historical argument that Jesus' sayings wherein he speaks of the Son of Man as someone other than himself are most likely historical? How do we account for that data? Actually, we can account for it just fine. In fact, that historical argument simply does not indicate that Jesus didn't believe he was the Son of Man. All the argument shows is that Jesus made statements in which he described the Son of Man in language that sounded like the Son of Man was someone other than himself. Do you see the difference? Our three-premise argument tells us what Jesus believed whereas the argument put forward by Ehrman, Martin, and others tells us about certain things Jesus said. Does this mean that Jesus was dishonest and said things contrary to what he believed? Not at all! It just means that Jesus was careful with how much he said and to whom. All that it takes for there to be no contradiction between the conclusions of these two arguments is that Jesus spoke about himself as the Son of Man covertly – in such a way that it wouldn't be obvious to everyone that he was talking about himself. Or more accurately, he was talking about the Son of Man figure mentioned in texts written before his lifetime the actualization of which he believed himself to be.

We all know that Jesus spoke in parables (most historians agree on this point). The purpose of parables is to conceal and reveal. On one hand, a parable can conceal the lesson from the hearer(s) until the end

(as in Nathan's parable to David – 2 Sam. 12). On the other hand, parables can conceal a lesson from those who are not ready to hear the hidden lesson while simultaneously revealing it to those ready to hear (Mark 4:10-12). This let's us know that, generally speaking, Jesus spoke covertly at times. Furthermore, we have seen that Jesus believed himself to be the Messiah and yet kept this secret since to do otherwise would mean trouble, even death, from Rome.

As we saw earlier in this article, *Mark* records Jesus speaking publicly about the Messiah (Mark. 12:35-37). Yet, very obviously, he spoke of the Messiah in third-person language – in a way so that it wouldn't be obvious that he understood himself to be the Messiah. One could argue that since in this statement Jesus speaks of the Messiah in language that sounds like the Messiah was someone other than himself, that it is likely historical and that thus the historical Jesus didn't consider himself to be the Messiah. But good scholars like Bart Ehrman and Dale Martin don't make that move because they know, and accept, that there is evidence that Jesus really did consider himself to be the Messiah. The better explanation of a passage like Mark 12:35-37 is that it reflects the fact that when Jesus spoke of the Messiah in public, he just referenced the figure in third person and kept the fact that he believed himself to be the messiah a secret. This same reasoning applies to Jesus' understanding of himself as the Son of Man. The Son of Man was a figure already described in apocalyptic texts like Daniel and BWW. Jesus could speak of that figure in third person without making it obvious that he understood himself to be the actualization of that figure.

To summarize these points: We have new evidence that shows that Jesus actually did considered himself to be the Son of Man. The

argument put forward by Ehrman, Martin, and others in support of the authenticity of the Son of Man sayings in which Jesus speaks of the Son of Man without identifying him with himself is still a legitimate argument.<sup>32</sup> It is just that this argument does not in any way indicate that Jesus didn't believe he was the Son of Man. What it does indicate is that when Jesus spoke of the Son of Man, he spoke covertly, without making it obvious that he was the Son of Man – at least not to those who weren't "in the know." I was surprised to find that Albert Schweitzer made this very point. He said that when Jesus spoke of the coming of the Son of Man, he ...

“... did so in such a manner that only the initiated understood that He was speaking of His own coming, while others understood Him as referring to the coming of a Son of Man who was other than Himself.” - *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, p. 282

This realization calls for further attention to be drawn to Jesus' statements about the Son of Man. Will a closer examination of Jesus'

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32 Yet, the angle of this argument can be refined: The statements wherein Jesus speaks of the Son of Man in a way in which it isn't obvious that he understood himself to be the Son of Man are indeed authentic. The Gospel writers weren't secretive about declaring Jesus to be the Son of Man, nor did they hold themselves back from placing upon Jesus' lips statements wherein he implied quite obviously and publicly that he was the Son of Man (Luke 5:24). So when we read statements where Jesus speaks about the Son of Man without clearly self-identifying with him, we can know that those statements originated when it mattered that Jesus' identity as the Messianic Son of Man remain covert; namely, during his ministry.

authentic "Son of Man" sayings reveal evidence that he truly thought the Son of Man was someone other than himself or will it reveal more evidence that he was speaking covertly so as to conceal and reveal his identity to different hearers? We'll examine a few statements and see. Consider the saying about the Son of Man dividing the sheep and the goats:

Matthew 25:31-46

<sup>31</sup>Now when **the Son of Man** comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. <sup>32</sup>And all the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate them from one another like a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup>And he will place the sheep on his right and the goats on the left. <sup>34</sup>Then **the king** will say to those on his right, 'Come, *you* who are blessed by **my Father**. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world! <sup>35</sup>For I was hungry and you gave me *something* to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me *something* to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me as a guest, <sup>36</sup>I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you cared for me, I was in prison and you came to me.' <sup>37</sup>Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed *you*, or thirsty and give *you something* to drink? <sup>38</sup>And when did we see you a stranger and welcome *you* as a guest, or naked and clothe *you*? <sup>39</sup>And when did we see you sick or in prison and come to you?' <sup>40</sup>And **the king** will answer *and* say to them, 'Truly I say to you, in as much as you did *it* to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did *it* to me.' <sup>41</sup>Then he will also say to those on *his* left, 'Depart from me, *you* accursed ones, into the eternal fire that has been prepared for the devil and his angels! <sup>42</sup>For I was hungry and you did not give me *anything* to eat, I was thirsty and you did not give me *anything* to drink, <sup>43</sup>I was a stranger and you did not welcome me as a guest,



naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not care for me.' <sup>44</sup>Then they will also answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and not serve you?' <sup>45</sup>Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly I say to you, in as much as you did not do *it* to one of the least of these, you did not do *it* to me.' <sup>46</sup>And these will depart into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." (LEB)

Notice how the Son of Man here is sitting on a throne and is called "the king" and he calls God "my Father." Clearly, as we have seen already in this article, Jesus understood himself to be the Messiah – the king of Israel, the son of God. Furthermore, there are other statements attributed to Jesus in which he states that what is done to others is done to him (Mark 9:37). So Jesus here is speaking of the Apocalyptic Judge in third person language – he is speaking of him in such a way that it wouldn't be obvious to the uninitiated that he believes himself to be that figure. And yet, at the same time he speaks of this Judge using language we know to be a reflection of how he thought of himself. Those closest to him from among his followers wouldn't have missed it. And further, we must not miss that this authentic saying of Jesus plainly equates the king, the messianic son of God with the apocalyptic Son of Man; just as BWW does, and in language taken straight from BWW (c.f. Matt. 25:31; 1 En. 62:2).

Let's consider another saying of Jesus:

Matthew 19:28

<sup>28</sup>And Jesus said to them [the twelve apostles], "Truly I say to you that in the renewal *of the world*, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me—you also will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (LEB – brackets

added)

First of all, the authenticity of this saying is evidenced not only by the fact that, on the surface, it has Jesus referring to the Son of Man as someone other than himself, but also by the fact that Jesus here promises his twelve disciples that they will sit on twelve thrones ruling the tribes of Israel – a saying that no follower of Jesus would make up given the fact that Judas was among these twelve and the promise obviously won't be fulfilled with him. The existence of this statement can only be adequately explained on the basis that it is something actually said by the Historical Jesus before Judas betrayed him.

Now, look more closely at the saying. Notice that Jesus seems strangely absent from the future kingdom. The 12 apostles will sit on thrones judging the tribes of Israel, and the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, but where is Jesus? [As Bart Ehrman has pointed out](#),<sup>33</sup> this statement is one piece of evidence that Jesus considered himself to be the Messiah. I'll summarize Bart's argument: The twelve disciples were called by Jesus; they followed him – he was their leader. Since he was their leader right then and since he had the authority to grant them rulership in the coming kingdom, surely he would also be their leader in the kingdom and would be seated on the ultimate throne as ruler over the rulers so to speak. They would be rulers over the tribes, but he would be king of all Israel. This makes perfect sense. Jesus' promise to his disciples does indeed imply all these things about himself and his self-understanding as the messiah. But what is often missed is that Jesus explicitly identifies the ruler of rulers – the king on

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33 You'll need to [join the Bart Ehrman Blog](#) in order to read the full post. It's a blog worth joining.

the ultimate throne – the messiah of the coming kingdom as the Son of Man. This authentic saying of the Historical Jesus overtly identifies the Son of Man as the ultimate king of the kingdom, but by its implications, it shows us that he understood himself to be that king. Thus, in this statement, the historical Jesus identified himself as the Son of Man using language taken from BWW, and doing so in just the way we would expect – covertly – not so open that he could be accused, but with enough subtly implied that those with ears to hear, would hear and understand.

Let's now consider a similar saying from *Luke*.

Luke 22:28-30

<sup>28</sup>“And you are the ones who have remained with me in my trials,  
<sup>29</sup>and I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred on me,  
<sup>30</sup>that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (LEB)

This saying not only has Jesus saying to his disciples (including Judas) that they would sit on thrones judging the tribes of Israel, but also saying to them (again, including Judas) “I confer on you a kingdom.” For the same reasons as we considered with the previous saying, this couldn't have originated after Judas betrayed Jesus – this saying must be authentic to the Historical Jesus. In this statement, the circumstances are somewhat reversed. Jesus here overtly (yet privately to his disciples near the end of his ministry) identifies himself as the one who confers a kingdom upon them. The fact that he says that “my Father conferred [a kingdom] on me” also bears witness to his messianic self-understanding (both because of the sonship language and kingdom language). The aspect left to subtle implications in this

saying is the Son of Man imagery. He doesn't use the phrase "Son of Man" here, but the language is suggestive enough for those "in the know." In BWW and in Daniel – God confers the kingdom upon the Son of Man. And BWW, when describing the righteous and chosen in the future kingdom, says, "and with that Son of Man they will eat" (1 En. 62:14). Here we have another saying of Jesus wherein he identifies himself (covertly yet clearly) as the Son of Man.

For Jesus, being the Messiah and being the Son of Man were one and the same thing. While he kept this on the down low, it is obvious that at some point in his ministry, some of his disciples started to understand who he claimed to be. As we saw earlier, when Peter figured out that Jesus was the messiah, he [Jesus] told the disciples to be quiet about it (for obvious reasons). After this, the gospels (especially *Mark*) describe how Jesus taught his inner group of disciples more about the Son of Man. The fact that Jesus didn't immediately teach openly to everyone all about his identity meant that it was likely that even among his followers, there were different understandings of just what type of Messiah he was. Other than Jesus' self-understanding, there probably was no one "earliest christology."<sup>34</sup> His various followers probably came from different Jewish groups, each having their own preconceived ideas as to just what the messiah was to be like. While some probably had the sorts of messianic beliefs outlined in BWW, others may not have. And even when his followers began to understand that he claimed to be the messiah, it may have only been a small group close to him who understood his claim to be the sort of messiah that is the Son of Man.

Now that we can see that Jesus understood himself to be the

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34 Yes, "christology" is somewhat anachronistic here.

apocalyptic Son of Man, and that he revealed this to at least a few of his closest disciples, certain other mysteries are made more clear. We will see this as we continue.

First, though, let's consider one more point about Jesus' self-understanding as the Son of Man in connection with Ode 36. While researching for this article, I came across a chapter by Joseph Fitzmyer called *The New Testament Title "Son of Man" Philologically Considered*.<sup>35</sup> The chapter deals with many interesting details, but I'll just mention the two most relevant points. They are linguistic in nature, so it may seem a bit foreign, but you don't need to understand Semitic languages to get the main point – so hang in there; it'll make sense in a moment. Here are the two points Fitzmyer made:

- 1) Of the [many forms](#) of the Aramaic phrase for "son of man," the forms lacking the initial *aleph* (א) in (a)nsha/אנשא (the word for "man") arose at a latter date (not in the first century CE). Prior to the the Bar Kokhba revolt (132-136 CE), the initial *aleph* (א) was included.
- 2) In considering the Aramaic phrase underlying the Greek for "the Son of Man" in the New Testament, Fitzmyer suggests that it may be a translation of the emphatic form of the phrase: "*bar ansha* (בר אנשא)."

On this second point, I should also mentioned that I checked to see what other scholars had to say, and everyone I found agreed that "*bar ansha* (בר אנשא)" is the most likely Aramaic form underlying the Greek

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35 This is chapter six of his book [The Semitic Background of the New Testament Volume II: A Wandering Aramean: Collected Aramaic Essays](#).

for "the Son of Man" in the New Testament.<sup>36</sup> This is the form most likely spoken by Jesus.

Okay, so why is this important and how does this relate to Ode 36? The bottom line is that this is the form of the phrase "the Son of Man" in the [Aramaic manuscripts of the Odes of Solomon](#) (including here in Ode 36:3). The Aramaic copies of the Odes of Solomon that we have are in a dialect of Aramaic known as Syriac. This is not the dialect of Aramaic Jesus spoke. Yet, the form of the phrase "the Son of Man" in the Odes is not what we find in Syriac translations of the NT gospels from the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE and beyond. Instead of being the form we find in Syriac translations of the Greek, the Odes contain the form scholars expect is *behind* the Greek translation of the words spoken by Jesus himself in Aramaic. What this means is that Ode 36 not only accurately portrays the self-understanding of the Historical Jesus as the Son of Man, but it does so even using some of the very words and expressions Jesus himself probably used. The particular form of the the phrase "the Son of Man" that occurs in the Odes of Solomon is just one more piece of evidence that testifies to their early date (certainly before the 130s CE) and to their close connection with the Historical Jesus. So again, Ode 36:3b tells us two things we can now demonstrate to be true concerning the self-understanding of the Historical Jesus; that he considered himself to be the Son of Man and the Son of God.

Let's continue:

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36 See e.g. [The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament](#), Vol. 8, p. 404; [Larry Hurtado](#); and [Mahlon Smith](#).

#### 4 while I was glorious among the glorious ones, and great among the great ones.

In context of the previous verse, this is saying that Jesus was birthed by the Spirit in the presence of God and named the enlightened Son of God “while [he] was glorious among the glorious ones, and great among the great ones.” In other words, in his vision, Jesus was in the divine council, among the gods – before the God of gods, and was birthed and called the Son of God. This setting is essentially the same as what we find in BWV; when the Son of Man is named, he is in the divine council. Daniel 7 likewise has the “one like a son of man” in the divine council. Psalm 110 has the same: Yahweh declares to the second Yahweh who is made a priest forever according to the manner of Melchizedek, “Free-will offerings are with you in the day of your power, in the splendor of the holy ones. Go forth from the womb at dawn, with dew I have begotten you” (Ps. 110:3). And of course, all this has its roots even further back in Canaanite literature that describes Baal achieving ascendancy in the assembly of El. There is also a striking similarity with certain passages in [the Thanksgiving Hymns](#). There, [the Teacher of Righteousness](#) says to God:

1QHa Col. 18.8<sup>37</sup>

See, you are the prince of **gods**  
and the king of **the glorious ones** ...

And of himself, the Teacher of Righteousness says,

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37 This quote and the next are both taken from [The Dead Sea Scrolls: Study Edition](#).

1QHa Col. 26.7

... with the gods is my position

8 and my glory is with the sons of the king....

10 rejoice in the assembly of God

Since [Jesus accepted the teachings of the Teacher of Righteousness](#), he knew it was possible for a human to become a member of the divine council. Now, in his vision, Jesus saw himself granted that very privilege; and not just as one member among many, but as the Son of Man and the Son of God.

### **5a-b For like the greatness of the Most High, so she made me,**

This parallels verse 3, where Jesus is birthed by the Spirit and called "Son of God." This verse brings forth an additional nuance: being made "like the greatness of the Most High." This goes beyond saying that Jesus is closely related to God – the Son of God; it describes his likeness to the Most High himself. As you may know, this isn't the only early Nazarene<sup>38</sup> hymn to speak of Christ in such exalted language. Paul's *Letter to the Philippians*, for example, contains an early hymn that most scholars say is "pre-pauline" and that Paul is merely quoting it. It is often called things like "The Christ Hymn" or "The Christ Poem." Here it is:

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38 This was the name of the early Jesus-Movement (Acts 24:5, 14).



Philippians 2:5-11

<sup>5</sup>... Christ Jesus,

<sup>6</sup>who, existing in the form of God,

did not consider being equal with God something to be grasped,

<sup>7</sup>but emptied himself

*by* taking the form of a slave,

*by* becoming in the likeness of people.

And being found in appearance like a man,

<sup>8</sup>he humbled himself

*by* becoming obedient to the point of death,

that is, death on a cross.

<sup>9</sup>Therefore also God exalted him

and graciously granted him the name above every name,

<sup>10</sup>so that at the name of Jesus

every knee should bow,

of *those* in heaven and of *those* on earth and of *those* under the earth,

<sup>11</sup>and every tongue confess

that Jesus Christ *is* Lord,

to the glory of God the Father. (LEB)

Since Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians sometime in the 50s CE, this poem must have been composed sometime between the crucifixion and the time Paul wrote this letter; that is, within the first 20 years or so after the cross. It is remarkable that a hymn with such a "high christology" was written at such an early time. Notice that this hymn describes Jesus as a being who, prior to becoming human, already existed and was in the form of God. Subsequently, he became human and died a humiliating death. After which, God exalted him, granting him the name above every name so that to him (to Jesus)

every knee would bow and every tongue would confess that he (Jesus) is Lord. This language of every knee bowing and every tongue confessing is taken straight from Isaiah 45:23 where it applies to Yahweh and the context emphasizes that it can only apply to Yahweh. This hymn thus describes Jesus as a preexistent divine being who became human and who then was exalted to equality with God and who should receive worship as Yahweh. This is one of those mysteries I referred to earlier. How is it that so soon after Jesus death, his followers came to think of him not only as being highly exalted through the resurrection, but as having been preexistent as a divine being in the form of God – even as God's own Son (Rom. 8:3)?! In the ancient world, men could be exalted to divine status and thus be gods. It is easy to see how some followers of Jesus could think that this happened to Jesus by his resurrection and ascension. But that doesn't explain why they believed in his preexistence!

What makes this mystery even more mind-blowing is the fact that we know this view didn't originate with people far removed from Jesus and his disciples and it wasn't accepted only by "gentile Christianity." Again, Paul – a Jew – accepted this incarnational view of Jesus, as testified by his quotation of this "Christ Hymn" as well as statements he made throughout his letters (Rom. 8:3; 1 Cor. 10:1-9; 15:47). And, as we already mentioned, the hymn wasn't authored by Paul; it was authored by another Nazarene before Paul wrote *Philippians*, and scholars have shown that it originated in a Hebraic or Aramaic context<sup>39</sup> (the linguistic context of Jesus himself and his earliest followers).

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39 This is discussed in chapter five of [Fitzmyer's book](#) that we referenced earlier.

Furthermore, unlike Nazarene “pillars” such as James, Peter and John (Gal. 2:9), Paul’s apostleship was contested (Gal. 1; Phil. 1:15-17). People like James and Peter were top tier leaders that everyone in the movement recognized whereas Paul was a second tier leader; some in the movement accepted him and others rejected him. Because of this, *if* Paul believed anything that was contrary to the teachings James and Peter or other top tier leaders, he would have to be extremely careful to not express those views around those who would be able to spot the contradiction. Yet, we find him expressing his incarnational view of Christ in his *Letter to the Romans* (Rom. 8:3). This is important because Paul didn’t found the church in Rome. In fact, he had never even been there when he wrote his letter (Rom. 1:8-15). As is evident from the letter, the church in Rome had a congregation that was a mixture of Gentiles and Jews, some of whom were believers from the earliest days of the Nazarene movement and had strong ties with the apostles (Rom. 16:7). This means they were in a position to know whether Paul was contradicting the teachings of Jesus and the top tier apostles. This is especially evident in the case of Andronicus and Junia whom Paul calls apostles and says that they were Nazarenes even before he was (Rom. 16:7)! Paul became a Nazarene in 33 or 34 CE,<sup>40</sup> so they were in the movement **super early**; it wouldn’t at all be surprising if they knew and followed Jesus before his crucifixion. Paul’s greeting to them at the end of the letter shows that he expected them to be among those to whom the letter would be read when it arrived in Rome. The fact that Paul casually speaks of Jesus as a preexistent being in this letter

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40 We had two important studies ([1](#) and [2](#)) that cover some of Paul’s chronology as well as the evidence for the authenticity of some of his letters.

indicates that the believers in Rome (including those who were believers before him) already knew and accepted this incarnational view of Christ. At minimum, one would have to acknowledge that Paul *thought* they they shared this view with him. But let's face it; Romans 16 evidences he clearly knew people there and he would surely be aware of it if they differed on such an important point as the preexistence of Jesus! Besides, we actually have evidence independent of Paul that the believers in Rome received his letter well. This is preserved in a letter written from the church in Rome to the church in Corinth shortly after Paul's death. The letter I'm referring to is commonly called [1 Clement](#), though it doesn't claim to be written by Clement; it just identifies itself as a letter written from the church in Rome to the church in Corinth (1 Clem. 1). The letter happens to reference the Jerusalem temple (1 Clem. 40-41) and it is clear that it hadn't yet been destroyed, thus forcing a pre-70 CE date for the letter.<sup>41</sup> By the fact that it speaks of the deaths of Peter and Paul (1 Clem. 5), we know it was written after they died in the early-mid 60s. What is so striking is that it speaks not only of Peter, but also of Paul as being holy apostles and it says that Paul "taught righteousness" (1 Clem. 5:1-6:1). This is clear evidence from the church of Rome itself within a few years of receiving Paul's letter that they agreed with Paul's teaching and considered him to be a true apostle. This is powerful evidence that prominent figures like Andronicus and Junia, upon the receipt of Paul's letter to the Romans did not raise their voice in objection to his teachings; rather, they agreed. This shows that the church in Rome, as well as prominent apostles who were

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41 [Clement and the Early Church of Rome: On the Dating of Clement's First Epistle to the Corinthians](#)

Nazarenes before Paul, already believed in Jesus' preexistence independent of Paul.

Even further, we have good evidence from Galatians that James and Peter examined Paul's gospel to make sure his teachings were sound and they gave him the right hand of fellowship. This all indicates that James, Peter, John, and other prominent persons among the very earliest followers of Jesus believed that he preexisted as a divine being.

So how does all this make sense? How the earliest believers in Jesus, including some who were very close to him, came to believe in Jesus' preexistence is an immense mystery; that is, if Jesus never said anything that would lean toward that conclusion. Indeed, if Jesus never indicated that he was the Son of Man, it is very difficult to explain how his earliest followers – even his closest disciples and his own brother – could come to believe he was a preexistent being. As I mentioned earlier; one could imagine them believing he was exalted to divine status because of the resurrection, even without him making any sort of “exalted” claims. But that doesn't at all explain how they ended up believing he was a preexistent being. But as we have seen in this article, the Historical Jesus actually believed that he was the Son of Man and he let his closest disciples in on the secret.

Jesus self-identification as the Son of Man is really all we need to explain the belief in his preexistence among the earliest and most prominent of his followers. The Son of Man in BWW is described as existing before the foundation of the world (1 En. 48:6; 62:7). Likewise, it says that, “All who dwell on the earth will fall down and worship before him [the Son of Man],” which explains how the “Christ Hymn” in *Philippians* could say that unto him every knee will bow.

Granted, as I said earlier, there probably was no single "earliest christology" among the followers of Jesus. From the moment his followers learned he believed he was the Messiah, they probably had at least a few different interpretations of what that meant, who he was, and what he was to do. While the preexistence of the Messiah is testified in BWV, it doesn't appear to have been a common idea within Second Temple Judaism. Most Jews (including followers of Jesus) wouldn't jump from the idea that Jesus was the Messiah to the idea that Jesus was the incarnation of a preexistent being. I expect that most of his followers prior to the resurrection hadn't even conceived of the idea of his preexistence. Yet, since he believed himself to be the Son of Man and since his closest disciples knew this, they doubtless proclaimed it after the resurrection. This is the only way to adequately account for the earliness and prominence of belief in Jesus' preexistence among the earliest Nazarenes. If the idea originated with people who didn't even know Jesus, it wouldn't have caught on among the earliest and most prominent believers. Jesus' brother James and Jesus' closest disciples (Peter, James, and John) along with other prominent figures in the movement surely would have shut it down as a bonkers idea that was without foundation in the teachings of Jesus. But since Jesus, the Master Himself, said he was the Son of Man and since those closest to him could testify to this fact, it became the predominant view. The fact that Jesus didn't publicly and openly declare his identity as the Son of Man allowed for other views to persist, but the fact is, those views aren't what we find promoted in the sources that are earliest and that reveal the beliefs of those closest to Jesus. Why would this be? The best explanation is that Jesus' most prominent followers after his resurrection believed in, and

taught, his identity as the Son of Man along with the accompanying doctrine of his preexistence.

**5c and according to his renewing he renewed me.**

**6 And he anointed me from his fullness,**

**and I became one of those near to him.**

As you can see by looking again at the chiastic structure of the Ode, this passage finds its parallel in verse 3. Being renewed by the renewing of God is being birthed as mentioned in verse 3. The major difference is in emphasis: the birthing language is focused on the action of the Spirit, whereas the language of "renewing" is focused on the action of the Most High. By the action of the Spirit and the Most High together, the Son of Man is born anew as the Son of God with the Spirit as his Mother and the Most High as his Father.

We've already discussed the messianic connotations of the phrases "Son of God" and "Son of Man" as revealed in a range of texts from 2 Sam. 7 to BWV. But here, the connection is made overt within the Ode itself. The chiastic parallel shows that being "birthed" as the Son of God (vs. 3) is an anointing (vs. 6), thus obviously making Jesus an "Anointed One" - Messiah. This makes it all the more clear that Ode 36, even aside from its connections with other texts, is a representation of Jesus' vision of his messianic anointing.

Jesus being made one of those near to the Most High invokes the ideas we discussed in relation to the earlier verses of the Ode. Jesus is brought into the inner circle of holiness; he is not only a king, but also a priest. While it is true that, in light of the depiction of him as a newly born Son, his closeness to God goes beyond what is captured by

priestly holiness, the phrase “I became one of those near to him” clearly focuses on a closeness to God that isn’t unique to Jesus. Again, it says “I became **one of those** near to him.” This is similar to saying, “I was glorious **among the glorious ones**” (vs. 5). These passages depict Jesus as a member of the heavenly priesthood, ministering before God. This is brought out even more clearly in what follows.

**7 And my mouth was opened like a cloud of dew,  
and my heart gushed out a flood of righteousness.**

**8a And a peace offering was mine,**

This passage parallels the phrase “while I was praising him by the composition of his odes” (vs. 2c). The peace offering is the truth-filled ode issuing forth from his heart and mouth like a flood of righteousness – a cloud of dew. As Ode 20 says,

<sup>1</sup> I am a priest of the Lord,

and to him I serve as a priest;

<sup>2</sup> And to him I offer the offering of his thought.

...

<sup>4</sup> **The offering of the Lord is righteousness,  
and purity of heart and lips.**<sup>42</sup>

[Ode 12](#) says:

<sup>1</sup> He has filled me with words of truth,

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42 This and the next quote are from James Charlesworth’s translation as found in [The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha](#), Vol. 2.



that I may proclaim him.

<sup>2</sup>And like the flowing of waters, truth flows from my mouth,  
and my lips declare his fruits.

The connections between Ode 12:1-2 and Ode 36:7 suggest that Jesus in Ode 36 is able to have a flood of truth and righteousness issue from his mouth due to having been filled with truth and righteousness. This idea is also found in the [Thanksgiving Hymns](#), which we know to have [influenced Jesus and the Odists](#).

<sup>43</sup>1QHa Col. 10:19-20

... the man in whose mouth you have established and taught understanding. You put it in his heart to open a fountain of knowledge to all who understand.

1QHa Col 16:17

But you, my God, you have put in my mouth as it were early rain for all [...], and a fountain of living water - and it will not fail.

Both of these passages and [Ode 12](#) depict the inspired messenger being filled with truth in order that truth may issue forth from them. Ode 36 has the same basic idea. In verse 6, Jesus is depicted as saying, "he [the Most High] anointed me from his fullness" and then in vs. 7 he says, "and my mouth was opened like a cloud of dew." Anointing implies anointing oil, a symbol of the word of Yahweh (Zech. 4). Being filled with oil, Jesus is prepared to issue a cloud of dew from his heart and mouth. This is because anointing oil and dew are used here as two overlapping symbols representing the same thing. This

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43 Both quotations here are my own translation.

overlapping symbolism is also attested in Psalm 133:

Psalm 133:1-3

<sup>1</sup> Look, how good and how pleasant *it is*  
*when* brothers dwell together in unity.

<sup>2</sup> *It is* like the fragrant oil upon the head,  
running down upon the beard, the beard of Aaron,  
that runs down upon the edges of his robes.

<sup>3</sup> *It is* like the dew of Hermon that runs down  
upon the mountains of Zion,  
because there Yahweh commanded the blessing—  
life forever. (LEB)

Quite clearly, dew and the oil used for anointing the high priest are likened to one another. As I mentioned earlier, Psalm 110 also uses this image:

1 The Declaration of Yahweh to my lord: Sit at my right hand until  
I place your enemies as a stool for your feet.

2 Yahweh will send the staff of your strength out from Zion. Rule  
in the midst of your enemies!

3 Free-will offerings are with you in the day of your power, in the  
splendor of the holy ones.

Go forth from the womb at dawn,  
**with dew** I have begotten you.

**4 Yahweh has sworn and will not regret it: You are a priest  
forever according to the manner of Melchizedek.** - Psalm 110:1-4  
(my translation)

The oil by which one is anointed as a priest is here likened to dew.

Being begotten with dew is being anointed with oil. The result is that the begotten/anointed one becomes a priest. The Odes ([along with other Nazarene writings](#)) clearly present Truth as being a major part of the heavenly priestly system (Ode 20). Jesus, in Ode 36 is filled with truth as represented by the anointing oil, and then he speaks clouds of dew, also a symbol of the truth – the word of Yahweh:

Deuteronomy 32:1-2

<sup>1</sup>“Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak,  
and let the earth hear the words of my mouth.

<sup>2</sup> May my teaching trickle like the dew,  
my words like rain showers on tender grass,  
and like spring showers on new growth. (LEB)

The truth is Jesus' heavenly offering. And, as Ode 36:8a says, it is a particular type of offering; a peace offering. In the priestly system outlined in *Leviticus*, the peace offering was an animal that would be eaten not only by the priest, but by common people as well, such as the person bringing the offering along with their family (Lev. 7:11-21). In the heavenly priestly system – the one that operates “according to the manner of Melchizedek,” the peace offering is truth; and not just truth that is presented in the heavenly courtroom alone, but truth which gets to be digested (understood) by Jesus and those with whom he shares it. While, as we have seen, Ode 36:8a stands in parallel to verse 2c, we can now see that verse 8a carries a different nuance. The composition of odes in 2c is a sort of offering Jesus presents in the heavenly temple, in the divine council, as a prior action to his being birthed by the Spirit. But here in verse 8a, the peace offering is something he offers already having been birthed and having already

been anointed (made the Messiah). He offered his odes, was made the begotten/anointed messiah (the Son of God) and, thus being filled with more heavenly truth, he was prepared to share his peace offering of truth with those who were pure (fit) to receive it. And once again, we know that this is precisely what the historical Jesus did after he had his vision that confirmed to him his messianic anointing – he proclaimed his message – the truth.

### **8b and I was established in the spirit of governance.**

#### **Hallelujah!**

This final line summarizes the gist of the vision and expresses its result. Jesus was made King – he was anointed as the Messiah – the heavenly Son of Man – the Spirit-born Son of God. This vision of Christ (Jesus' own vision in which he was anointed as the Messiah – the Christ) explains a great deal about the historical Jesus. It explains how he went from living each day as an unknown Galilean laborer from the small town of Nazareth to proclaiming his prophetic and apocalyptic message of the now immanent kingdom of God. It explains why he taught what he taught and why he taught it how he taught it – with parables and other covert ways of expressing his ideas. It also explains why he appointed twelve disciples and organized a movement focused on spreading this kingdom message. It even explains his self-understanding and his eventual execution that resulted from it. Though he was secretive about his claim; he couldn't deny that he believed himself to be the king of the Jews, and it cost him his life.

Beyond explaining the self-understanding, teachings, and mission

of the historical Jesus, this vision of Christ also explains one of the greatest mysteries of the early church; that is, the early appearance of the belief in Jesus' preexistence among the most prominent Nazarenes – those closest to Jesus and who were part of the movement from the earliest times. As we have seen, Ode 36 has provided key evidence (and has drawn our attention to additional evidence) that the historical Jesus considered himself to be the Son of Man. This formed the basis for belief in his preexistence among the Nazarenes after Jesus' resurrection and ascension. The rise of the doctrine of Jesus' preexistence is indeed a mystery if it has absolutely no basis in pre-crucifixion realities. But given Jesus' self-understanding as the Son of Man, the mystery is made plain. There is thus more continuity between Jesus' self-understanding and his disciples post-resurrection understanding of him than we might have otherwise suspected. Yet, there are some differences.

During Jesus' ministry, his disciples were charged to be secretive about his Messianic identity – and those who knew exactly what kind of Messiah he understood himself to be (not only a king and priest, but also the Son of Man, were secretive about that as well). But as we all know, the messianic secret got out at the end, which led to his crucifixion as an enemy of the state. There was no hiding it now – Jesus claimed to be the Messiah – the King. The crucifixion was the greatest disconfirmation of his messianic claim that his followers could hope for, or rather, lose all hope for. But then the resurrection and ascension happened. This went far beyond rekindling their hopes – it confirmed that Jesus' claims were true – that he really was the Messiah. And those who were closest to him and had received the most sacred and hidden revelations of his teachings could now

proclaim him not only as the King of Israel, but as the King of the World. They knew that what Christ had experienced in vision, he now experienced in the fullest glory of reality. At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus had a visionary ascent into heaven where he was made king and priest and Son of God. Now, at the end of his ministry on earth, he was raised from the dead and ascended into the heavens, not in a vision, but bodily. In vision, he had been seated at the right hand of God and made king, but now in reality he had been seated at the right hand of God in Heaven and made king upon a real throne right alongside God. In vision, he had been made priest and had taught his disciples about how to act as priests upon earth in harmony with the priesthood of heaven, but now he had been brought into the heavenly temple itself in reality and was appointed as High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary, to represent his disciples as their heavenly intercessor in the council of the gods. In vision, he had been born of the Spirit – been made a new man with a new calling; he was God's adopted Son – the King of Israel. But now, he had been raised from the dead and had his body transformed into a glorified body – this was a new birth from that which is corruptible to that which is incorruptible; he was the firstborn of the new world – the first fruits of the resurrection.

This is a point not to be missed: what Jesus experienced in vision at the beginning of his ministry, he experienced in reality at the end. The vision is what set him in motion; it was the catalyst that sprung him into action. It gave him his mission and his identity and it set the framework for all that followed. However, after the resurrection, the glory that had been shining from Jesus' heavenly vision was now surpassed ten thousand times ten thousand-fold. The new reality of

the resurrected Jesus was a glory beyond all preceding glory and it was naturally attended by a new proclamation of what had been accomplished through him. The work which was begun in his vision was now confirmed and vindicated in his resurrection and ascension. The vision provided Jesus with his self-understanding as the Messianic King, but the resurrection and ascension proved that he actually was the Messianic King. The vision revealed to Jesus his identity as the Son of Man, but the resurrection and ascension demonstrated and confirmed to his followers that he was indeed the Son of Man. By the vision, Jesus was exalted to being "like the greatness of the Most High" (Ode 36:5), but after his death on a cross, and by his resurrection and ascension, "God exalted him and graciously granted him the name above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven and of those on earth and of those under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." (Phil. 2:9-11 – LEB)

While there is clearly continuity between the message of and about Jesus pre and post resurrection, the difference is clear. Jesus understood himself to have been anointed via this vision as the King, but he had no throne and was not ruling over any kingdom. But when he ascended on high, his disciples understood that he was seated on a literal throne, truly reigning as king. Jesus knew that he had been appointed as a priest to implement a priestly system that worked in harmony with heaven; but he wasn't actually functioning as a priest in heaven. Upon his ascension, his disciples understood that he literally became the High Priest in the heavenly temple. Jesus understood that he had been born of the Spirit and begotten of the Most High – but he was still composed of the same corruptible flesh he had had since

the day he was born. The resurrection transformed his corruptible flesh into incorruptible flesh – this was his birth into unending glory.

The elements of the visionary ascent and the bodily ascent clearly parallel each other, with the latter surpassing the former. When looking at something like the “Christ Hymn” in Philippians 2, it is easy to see that it refers to some of these elements – for example, Jesus being exalted, being given a name, and being pronounced “Lord.” And one can ask, is this referring to his exaltation, naming, and lordship granted to him in connection with his vision, or in connection with his resurrection and ascension? Since the Hymn describes him being exalted after his humiliating death (Phil. 2:8-9), it is obviously the latter. And this is exactly what we should expect given the fact that Jesus' bodily ascent really did overshadow his visionary ascent in the minds of his followers. Imagine if you were a follower sometime between 30-50 CE. If you were to write a song about Jesus being exalted by God, would you be writing about Jesus being exalted through a vision he had, or would you be writing about Jesus literally ascending to heaven after being risen from the dead? Obviously, the latter would be more significant. If you were to write a song or poem about him being made Lord, would you be writing about him being appointed as Lord through a vision he had, or would you think of him being literally enthroned next to God in heaven and being made Lord over all? Obviously the latter! And this is just what we find in the Christ Hymn in Philippians and in many other passages in the New Testament. The Christ Hymn isn't the only bit of poetry in the New Testament. There are other poems, songs, and “formulas” in New Testament texts that scholars identify as being quotations of earlier works – whether literary or oral. It makes sense that early Jesus-



followers would write songs and poems. Knowledge of these could have spread easily from community to community as they were sung and recited and also since they were easy to remember. These little poetic and formulaic fragments give us insight into what the earliest post-resurrection followers of Jesus thought of him. Beyond these fragments, there are other passages in the New Testament that say things about the various elements we have found in parallel related to Jesus' visionary and bodily ascents. Let's look at more of these passages (both poetic/formulaic and non-poetic/formulaic) in order to determine whether they describe what Jesus experienced in associating with his visionary ascent or with his bodily resurrection and ascension.

Romans 1:3-4

<sup>3</sup>... his [God's] Son, who was born a descendant of David according to the flesh, <sup>4</sup>who was declared Son of God in power according to the Holy Spirit by the resurrection from the dead of Jesus Christ our Lord, (LEB) [brackets added]

If you just look at the phrase "declared Son of God in power according to the Holy Spirit" it could easily apply to Jesus' visionary experience. In fact, if one was able to travel back in time to just before Jesus was arrested and ask him, "When were you declared Son of God in power according to the Holy Spirit?," his answer (assuming he was willing to discuss it) would clearly be to point back to his baptismal vision. But that is certainly not what this passage refers to – it refers to Jesus' resurrection from the dead. What Jesus would point to as confirming (for himself) his identity and giving him his mission and message is this vision. What his post-resurrection followers would

point to as confirming Jesus' identity and giving them their mission and message is his resurrection and ascension.

Let's look at another passage:

Hebrews 1:2-4

<sup>2</sup>in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all *things*, through whom also he made the world, <sup>3</sup>who is the radiance of his glory and the representation of his essence, sustaining all *things* by the word of power. *When he* had made purification for sins through him, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, <sup>4</sup>having become by so much better than the angels, by as much as he has inherited a more excellent name than theirs. (LEB)

Again, if you were able to time-travel back to before Jesus was arrested and ask him when he was given a more excellent name than angels and when he was appointed heir of all things, he would certainly point back to his baptismal vision. Indeed, his vision and his self-understanding thereafter shows that he understood himself to fulfill the role of the anointed king-priest of Psalm 110 – the one who Psalm 110:1 describes as being sat down at the right hand of God. Yet, this passage in *Hebrews* clearly is not referring to something that happened to Jesus at the beginning of his ministry – at least not his earthly ministry. Instead, *Hebrews* is referring to the beginning of Jesus heavenly ministry that started following his resurrection and ascension.

Hebrews 10:12-13

<sup>12</sup>But this one, *after he* had offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, <sup>13</sup>from now on waiting until

his enemies are made a footstool for his feet. (LEB)

Here again this passage draws on Psalm 110 where there enthroned messianic king is to have his enemies made his footstool. Jesus would have understood this to apply to him since he was anointed as king via his vision. But *Hebrews* again doesn't look to a visionary enthronement, it looks to the far more significant literal enthronement in heaven next to God after Jesus' ascension.

Ephesians 2:20-22

<sup>20</sup>... he [God] has worked in Christ, raising him from the dead and seating *him* at his right hand in the heavenly *places*, <sup>21</sup>above all rule and authority and power and lordship and every name named, not only in this age but also in the coming one, <sup>22</sup>and he subjected all *things* under his feet and gave him *as* head over all *things* to the church, (LEB)

Does this speak of Jesus' visionary ascent into heaven and a visionary anointing as the messianic king? The answer is clearly, "No." As we should be coming to expect, what was accomplished through Jesus in association with his resurrection and ascension was far more significant to the Nazarenes than Jesus' visionary experience. There is passage after passage like this. Let's just look at a few more:

Acts 2:29-36

<sup>29</sup>"Men *and* brothers, it is possible to speak with confidence to you about the patriarch David, that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us until this day. <sup>30</sup>Therefore, *because he* was a prophet and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants on his throne, <sup>31</sup>*by* having foreseen *this*, he

spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that neither was he abandoned in Hades nor did his flesh experience decay. <sup>32</sup>This Jesus God raised up, of which we all are witnesses. <sup>33</sup>Therefore, having been exalted to the right hand of God and having received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father, he has poured out this that you see and hear. <sup>34</sup>For David did not ascend into heaven, but he himself says,

'The Lord said to my Lord,

"Sit at my right hand,

<sup>35</sup>until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." '

<sup>36</sup>Therefore let all the house of Israel know beyond a doubt, that God has made him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified!"

Acts 5:30-31

<sup>30</sup>The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you killed *by* hanging *him* on a tree. <sup>31</sup>This one God has exalted to his right hand *as* Leader and Savior to grant repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

Acts 10:40-42

<sup>40</sup>God raised this one up on the third day and granted *that* he should become visible, <sup>41</sup>not to all the people but to us who had been chosen beforehand by God *as* witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. <sup>42</sup>And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify solemnly that this one is the one appointed by God *as* judge of the living and of the dead.

Acts 13:30-33

<sup>30</sup>But God raised him from the dead, <sup>31</sup>who appeared for many days to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem—who are now his witnesses to the people. <sup>32</sup>And we proclaim the

good news to you: that the promise that was made to the fathers,  
<sup>33</sup>this *promise* God has fulfilled to our children *by* raising Jesus, as it  
is also written in the second psalm,

'You are my Son;  
today I have fathered you.'

The above passages describe Jesus as being exalted to heaven, receiving the Holy Spirit, being made Lord and Christ, being appointed as the Judge of the living and the dead (which is the job of the Son of Man), and being begotten as the Son of God. All these things, Jesus himself would have associated with his vision, but these passages associate them with his resurrection and ascension. I'm pointing out this difference not to say that one is right and the other wrong. It is obvious that Jesus wouldn't have associated these things with his resurrection and ascension – he hadn't even died yet. And after the resurrection and ascension, it makes most sense that his followers would focus on the fulfillment of all these things in the bodily experience of the resurrected Jesus while Jesus' visionary experience would fade into the background.

This brings us to our final point. All these passages that we have just considered from Philippians, Romans, Ephesians, Hebrews and Acts describe Jesus using the elements that we found are paralleled in the experiences of Jesus related to his visionary and bodily ascents. But all of these passages focus on the latter experiences – those related to Jesus' bodily ascension. All of them are clearly post-resurrection reflections on Jesus and what God has done with him. This is not the case for Ode 36. Ode 36 shows no signs of post-resurrection reflection on Jesus. It doesn't speak of his sufferings, the shedding of his blood, his death, his resurrection, or his bodily

ascension. When it speaks of him being risen on high, it is his visionary ascent into heaven. When it says that he entered the presence of God, it was in vision. When it says he was born of the Spirit and begotten of God, it speaks of his visionary appointment as God's Son at the beginning of his ministry. When he is referred to as the Son of Man who was named the Son of God, it is speaking of him seeing this in vision. When it says he was glorious among the glorious ones, it isn't describing him in heaven bodily; it is a description as from his own first-person perspective of being among the glorious ones while in vision. His mouth being opened like a cloud of dew, his peace offering, and his being established in the spirit of governance – all of these things are aspects of his visionary experience. And all of it matches what we can show to be true of the historical Jesus prior to his crucifixion. Ode 36 is a historically accurate description of how Jesus would have described the vision that was the catalyst of his ministry. Obviously, since he was necessarily secretive about his identity and mission, he wouldn't have actually spoken words like those of the Ode, or at least not to many. But as we have seen, he did communicate the ideas about himself that are now found in the Ode to his closest disciples.

Given the remarkable historical accuracy of Ode 36's portrayal of Jesus and his self-understanding, it raises the question again of who wrote the Odes. I wish I knew, but at least for now, we'll have to be satisfied with not knowing. Whoever it was, though, it was someone who knew an awful lot about the real historical Jesus and who was able to reflect on him, not as a post-resurrection follower of Jesus basking in the glory of the resurrected Christ, but as one who could capture Jesus' own reflection upon his own vision and the impact it

had on him, revealing to him his identity, mission, and message. If the author of the Ode wasn't Jesus or one of his followers before the crucifixion, it was someone who was able to peer back through the glorious light of the resurrection and ascension and get a glimpse of the dimmer light shining from his vision. It was someone who knew what the historical Jesus was like – knew his identity, his mission, and his message, even that part of his message which he retained for his inner circle. It seems that it must have been written by someone who either knew him well or knew someone who knew him well. Ode 36 is thus one of the most important texts we have for studying the historical Jesus.

The closeness of the Odist to Jesus is expressed in another Ode – [Ode 7](#):

Ode 7:2-6

2 My joy is the Lord,

and my impulse is toward him.

This my path is good,

3 for to me it is a help because of the Lord.

He has caused me to know him in his simplicity without envy,

diminishing his greatness with his kindness.

4 He became like me,

so that I could receive him.

He appeared to have a likeness like mine,

so that I could put him on.

5 And I trembled not when I saw him.

Because of who he is, he was gracious to me.

6 Like my nature he became,

so that I could learn to know him,

and like my form,

so that I could avoid turning away from him. (Nuhra 2020)

The Odist here speaks of seeing and knowing Jesus not as the resurrected Christ in all his glory but as the simple and humble teacher – the man Jesus.

A Vision of Christ  
 a precious ode  
 what time had lost it stowed

By wind it has washed  
 upon our shore  
 the historical man  
 is seen once more  
 The Son of Man, Behold

His Mother raised him  
 yes cooed the dove  
 he offered odes above

By Her he was birthed  
 as Son of El  
 anointed as king  
 with dew to tell  
 righteousness, truth, and love

Messiah and Priest  
 and bar ansha



his destiny he saw

But glory and story  
so soon surpassed  
Jesus' own catalyst  
mystery massed  
then century after century passed

But now in awe  
think on this ode  
A Vision of Christ  
what might it bode?

Knowledge is knocking  
for those who keep walking  
the panharmonic road