

## YHWH's Return to Zion: A New Catalyst for Earliest High Christology?

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The promise of a future act/manifestation of YHWH in redemption and/or judgement is found in a number of biblical (OT) and extra-biblical Jewish texts.<sup>1</sup> In some cases the (older) biblical texts seem to portray some future historical reversal of the fortunes of Israel (e.g., Micah 1:2-7; Hos. 6:1-3). In other (often later) texts, YHWH's action is more universal (even cosmic) in scope, and final ("eschatological") in effects (e.g., Isa. 59:15-21; 66:12-16; Zech. 14). Indeed, if we trace the references to YHWH coming for redemption and judgement across the biblical texts "it becomes more future oriented and, finally, eschatological."<sup>2</sup> Second-temple Jewish texts attest this theme of an eschatological coming/manifestation of YHWH frequently.<sup>3</sup> In his massive recent opus on Paul, N. T. Wright contends that the theme of the personal return of YHWH to Zion was appropriated and interpreted with reference to Jesus in earliest circles of the Jesus-movement. More particularly, Wright claims that this was the initial and crucial early christological development and the key historical factor generating and defining all other early christological claims.<sup>4</sup> In this essay, I indicate why I find this claim unconvincing. As we will see later in this essay, NT texts do show the appropriation of the theme of YHWH's return/coming for redemption and judgement to Jesus. That is not under dispute. The key question probed here is whether this theme was the initial christological conviction and impetus that encompasses and, more importantly, accounts historically for the body of christological claims and devotional practices reflected in the NT.

### *Wright's Case*

I begin with a summary of Wright's case. Earlier, in his major book on Jesus, Wright had pointed to the biblical promises of YHWH's redemptive return to Zion and proposed that

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., the numerous texts cited by Edward Adams, "The 'Coming of God' Tradition and Its Influence on New Testament Parousia Texts," in *Biblical Traditions in Transmission: Essays in Honour of Michael A. Knibb*, eds. Charlotte Hempel and Judith M. Lieu (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 3-6 (1-19); and also the discussion by Robert L. Webb, *John the Baptizer: A Socio-Political Study* (JSNTSup 62; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 219-60; and, particularly, Larry J. Kreitzer, *Jesus and God in Paul's Eschatology* (JSNTSup 19; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987).

<sup>2</sup> Adams, "The 'Coming of God'," 6.

<sup>3</sup> Adams, "The 'Coming of God'," 6-8. Key texts include 2 Bar. 48:39; LAB 19:12-13; 1 Enoch 1:2-9; 90:15-17; 91:7; 100:4; 102:1-3; 2 Enoch 32:1; Jub 1:28; T.Abr. A 13:4; T.Mos. 10:3-10; T. Levi 8:11; T.Jud. 22:2.

<sup>4</sup> N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (2 vols; London: SPCK, 2013), e.g., 2.633. Hereafter cited as Wright, *PFG*. Wright's emphasis on the theme of the return of YHWH to Zion is set within his emphasis on the narrative of Israel's exile and promised redemption.

Jesus interpreted his own mission as in some way addressing these promises.<sup>5</sup> This is not overtly attested in the Gospels.<sup>6</sup> But Wright contended that it is a reasonable (he would likely say a necessary) inference from Jesus' proclamation of the coming of the kingdom of God (i.e., as an emphasis on God as king instead of earthly rulers), from Jesus' Temple-action (seeing Jesus symbolically enacting judgement on the Temple and claiming Messiahship), and from Jesus' "riddles of return and exaltation" (various parables so interpreted by Wright).<sup>7</sup> In sum, Wright proposed, "Jesus' prophetic vocation thus included within it the vocation to enact, symbolically, the return of YHWH to Zion," and Wright further proposed that in this theme (and "the Temple theology" that he saw linked to it) we have "the deepest keys and clues to gospel christology."<sup>8</sup>

More recently, in what is for us here the relevant portion of his mammoth two-volume work on Paul, Wright takes up the theme of YHWH's return to Zion in pursuing questions about what might have "pushed the early Christians" to their view of Jesus as included "within the reality of the one God," and whether there was "a pre-Christian set of ideas that could be catalysed . . . to produce the early high christology" that is reflected in various NT writings.<sup>9</sup> Briefly noting scholarly analyses of earliest christological developments by me and Chris Tilling, Wright finds them basically helpful but inadequate (things left "fuzzy").<sup>10</sup> He then cites Bauckham's proposal, however, that earliest christological claims amounted to Jesus being included within "the divine identity" as "even more important" and insightful, "as far as it goes."<sup>11</sup> Judging that still "there is one thing missing" in it, Wright proffers "a

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<sup>5</sup> N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 612-53.

<sup>6</sup> To be sure, the Gospels do link Jesus with God in remarkably close ways, as reflected, e.g., in Mark 1:1-3, where the biblical texts that originally referred to YHWH are applied to Jesus, whose "way" is linked with "the way of the Lord." For discussion, see, e.g., Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 147-48, and also 354, where he comments on Mark 5:19-20, summarizing the Markan view of Jesus in relation to God as "where Jesus acts, there God is acting." Michael Bird pointed me also to Luke 19:44, which seems to allude to the theme.

<sup>7</sup> E.g., Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 616, 629-45.

<sup>8</sup> Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 653.

<sup>9</sup> Wright, *PGF*, esp. 2.644-56 (citing 648).

<sup>10</sup> Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press/London: SCM, 1988; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998; 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, forthcoming 2015); Chris Tilling, *Paul's Divine Christology* (WUNT 2/323; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012).

<sup>11</sup> Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1998); *id.*, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008). "Divine identity" as defined by Bauckham is not an ontological category but rather consists in attributes and functions that he posits as unique to God, especially creation of all things and sovereignty over all things. He emphasizes that NT texts show Jesus sharing in these acts and attributes, and so included in the "divine identity."

significant step beyond” Bauckham’s “divine identity” proposal that allows “a larger perspective altogether.”<sup>12</sup>

Rejecting investigations about the role of human or heavenly “mediator-figures” (his preferred term) in ancient Jewish religious thought as “looking in the wrong place,” Wright urges, instead, that we should ask whether there were “beliefs, stories, ideas *about God himself* upon which they [earliest believers] might have drawn to say what they now wanted to say about Jesus” (emphasis his).<sup>13</sup> As an affirmative answer to this question, Wright points to the second-Temple Jewish belief that YHWH would “return in person,” “in glory,” “to judge and save,” “to establish his glorious, tabernacling presence,” “to rule over the whole world,” and “*to be king*” (emphasis his).<sup>14</sup> This expectation, Wright contends, “best explains not only Paul’s view of Jesus but also that of the entire early church,” and is “the hidden clue to the origin of christology.”<sup>15</sup>

It is important to underscore specifically that what Wright claims is that the “return of YHWH” belief/tradition was *the* key initial christological resource appropriated in earliest Christian circles, and is the best *historical explanation* for the christological beliefs and devotional practices that the NT writings attest. I repeat that these claims are what I want to test in this essay. Wright declares firmly that the earliest and primary christological belief was “that Israel’s one God had returned in person,” “[i]n the person of Jesus.” As devout Jews longing for YHWH’s return, Wright contends, earliest (Jewish) believers saw “the events concerning Jesus,” and “deduced that it had happened.” Pondering the biblical promises of YHWH’s return to Zion, and “wondering what it would look like” when it

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<sup>12</sup> Wright, *PFG*, 2.650-53.

<sup>13</sup> Wright, *PFG*, 2.653. As “looking in the wrong place” it appears that Wright means my proposal that ancient Jewish traditions about various “chief agent” figures reflect a conceptual category that earliest believers may have drawn upon and radically enhanced in accommodating Jesus next to God in their beliefs and devotional practices. Note also his apparent critique of my work in his rejection of the significance of “mediator-figures” (a term I do not recall using) as irrelevant, and his evaluation of “the strong sense of Jesus’ personal presence during worship and prayer” (again, his words, not mine) as “essentially secondary” (2.654-55). Unfortunately, however, he has not conveyed accurately my views, and so his critique seems to me misdirected. For example, “the strong sense of Jesus personal presence during worship and prayer” (phrasing I cannot recognize from anything I have written) hardly captures my specific proposal that in earliest circles of believers various powerful revelatory experiences conveyed the firm conviction that God had exalted Jesus to heavenly glory and that God now required Jesus to be revered accordingly. See, e.g., Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, esp. 117-22; *id.*, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 64-74; *id.*, “Religious Experience and Religious Innovation in the New Testament,” *JR* 80 (2000): 183-205; *id.*, “Revelatory Experiences and Religious Innovation in Earliest Christianity,” *ExpT* 125 (2014): 469-82. In light of his rejection of the relevance of “chief agent” figures (my term) for the origins of christological beliefs, I am not sure what Wright refers to in writing that “Indeed, I am convinced that Hurtado is basically right in his presentation and analysis of the phenomena . . .” (*PFG*, 2.650).

<sup>14</sup> Wright, *PFG*, 2.653.

<sup>15</sup> Wright, *PFG*, 2.653-54.

happened, Jesus' followers came to see in Jesus' death and resurrection that "Israel's God had done what he had long promised": God had "returned to be king," had "'visited' his people and 'redeemed' them," and had "returned to dwell in the midst of his people."<sup>16</sup>

Wright urges that "*Jesus' first followers found themselves not only (as it were) permitted to use God-language for Jesus, but compelled to use Jesus-language for the one God*" (emphasis his).<sup>17</sup> An immediate historical question seems obvious. What precisely generated these remarkable developments, this freedom in claims about Jesus? How did early believers come to feel compelled to link Jesus with God so closely in beliefs (and, I would add, in their religious practices)? More specifically, to take up Wright's proposal for consideration, what would have led early Jesus-followers to see him as the return of YHWH? To my mind, Wright's handling of these questions is less than adequate. He posits that, "The events concerning Jesus compelled the first Christians" to make their christological claims, and he insists, "The more we understand the second-Temple belief in the *eschatological monotheism* at the heart of the divine identity, the better we can see how the first Christians came at once to regard Jesus in the way they did."<sup>18</sup> But what "events concerning Jesus," and how did "eschatological monotheism" make the crucial contribution to earliest christological claims?

It is not until much later in the discussion that Wright poses and addresses more fully the question of *why* early believers came to regard Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection as comprising "the embodiment of the returning YHWH."<sup>19</sup> But in the ensuing discussion, it remains unclear (at least to me) that he provides an adequate answer. At one point he offers a set of factors that can be summarized as follows: (a) the Jewish expectation of YHWH's return, (b) Jesus' resurrection validating him as Messiah, and his heavenly exaltation and enthronement as "lord," and (c) the experience of Jesus "personally and powerfully present to and with them [earliest believers] in a new mode." Given these factors, Wright contends, "the almost instantaneous rise of the christology" is fully explicable.<sup>20</sup> A couple of pages later, he gives what seems to be intended as essentially the same proposal, but worded differently:

What I am suggesting is that *the resurrection, demonstrating the truth of Jesus's pre-crucifixion messianic claim, joined up with the expectation of*

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<sup>16</sup> Wright, *PFG*, 2.654.

<sup>17</sup> Wright, *PFG*, 2.655.

<sup>18</sup> Wright, *PFG*, 2.655-56.

<sup>19</sup> Wright, *PFG*, 2.690. The ensuing discussion ranges across pp. 690-709.

<sup>20</sup> Wright, *PFG*, 2.690.

*YHWH's return on the one hand and the presence of the spirit of Jesus on the other to generate a fresh reading of 'messianic' texts which enabled a full christological awareness to dawn on the disciples.*<sup>21</sup> (Emphasis his.)

### *Jesus' Resurrection*

I will examine this proposal more closely in due course. Before doing so, however, I want to address what I think is a relevant issue that Wright raises in between these two statements. Wright accuses Carey Newman and me of making “too little of Jesus’ resurrection itself, collapsing it in effect into the concept of ‘glorification’,” and thereby failing to accent adequately the messianic import of Jesus’ resurrection.<sup>22</sup> My first response is that I consider Wright’s criticism inappropriate and misleading, as he fails to take account of the particular aims of the works that he faults. Newman’s study was not intended as an exposition of all that Jesus’ resurrection represents, but addressed instead the specific question of how Paul came to associate Jesus with the glory of God, contending that Paul interpreted his own “christophany” experience of the risen/exalted Jesus in light of biblical/Jewish traditions of divine glory.<sup>23</sup> As for my work cited critically on Jesus’ resurrection by Wright, it has been devoted mainly to the particular question of why and how Jesus came to be linked and revered with God in early Christian devotion, as expressed in christological claims and especially cultic practice.<sup>24</sup> So, in addressing that question I have stressed that for earliest believers Jesus’ resurrection involved, not only a divine vindication of him as Messiah, but also particularly his heavenly exaltation as *Kyrios*, this connection evident in various NT texts (e.g., Philip. 2:6-11; Acts 2:32-36).<sup>25</sup> As will be widely agreed, there is scant basis in Jewish tradition for Messiah receiving such intense devotion as was given to the risen Jesus. It was God’s exaltation of Jesus as *Kyrios* that served as the decisive act that now requires acknowledgement (Philip. 2:9-11), and that is affirmed in early Christian devotional practice (e.g., Rom. 10:9-13; 1 Cor. 12:3). In short, given our respective purposes, neither Newman nor I should be accused of failing to do justice to Jesus’ resurrection in emphasizing (rightly) that it involved particularly the exaltation and glorification of Jesus.

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<sup>21</sup> Wright, *PFG*, 2.692.

<sup>22</sup> Wright, *PFG*, 2.691.

<sup>23</sup> Carey C. Newman, *Paul's Glory-Christology: Tradition and Rhetoric* (NovTSup 69; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992).

<sup>24</sup> See, e.g., the statement of the problem investigated in *One God, One Lord*, 2, and the focus set out in *Lord Jesus Christ*, 1-4.

<sup>25</sup> Contra Wright’s accusation, I have discussed the messianic import of Jesus’ resurrection and the place of the messianic claim in earliest Christian circles, e.g., *Lord Jesus Christ*, 98-101, 167-70, 178-79, 188-94.

Indeed, to turn the table around, one might respond to Wright's misjudged critique of Newman and me by wondering if it is he who makes too little of Jesus' resurrection, or at least inadequately represents it in comparison with NT texts. What does Wright mean in appearing to distinguish between "the resurrection itself" and what he calls "the *concept* of 'glorification'" (emphasis mine)?<sup>26</sup> It appears that Wright practically limits "the resurrection itself" to a divine confirmation of a prior belief in Jesus' messianic status, and Wright seems to me reluctant to grant that Jesus' resurrection accorded him anything significantly new. But the NT connects indissolubly as one action God's raising Jesus from death to new/eschatological life (Jesus not simply "alive again" but alive in a significantly new mode) and also God's exalting/glorifying Jesus to a heavenly lordship that he did not hold and exercise before that exaltation (e.g., Philip. 2:9-11; Col. 3:1-4; 1 Pet. 1:21).<sup>27</sup> I submit that to do justice to what Paul and other NT writers say about Jesus' resurrection requires precisely that we see it as integrally and emphatically including Jesus' glorification and exaltation as *Kyrios*.

#### *Historical and Theological Issues*

But let us turn now to Wright's proposals about how earliest christological claims emerged. As noted already, Wright basically makes Jesus' resurrection a confirmation of a prior messianic claim. Wright grants, however, that in Jewish tradition Messiah is not "divine." So, even Jesus' resurrection by itself could not have generated the high view of Jesus (and, I would add, the remarkable devotional practice) presumed already in Paul and the NT generally. To press the historical question again, how then did earliest believers so readily acclaim the risen Jesus as more than Messiah, or at least as such a glorious and exalted Messiah, as in some sense bearing a divine status, and as rightful recipient of cultic devotion?

As reflected in both of Wright's statements cited earlier in which he summarizes his proposal for how early christology originated, the crucial factor in his schema seems to be the supposed role of the theme/expectation of the return of YHWH. Indeed, all through Wright's chapter in which he considers the emergence of the lofty view of Jesus reflected in Paul, he

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<sup>26</sup> If the aim is to reflect the NT accurately, how is God's glorification of Jesus a "concept" and not a divine action as real for earliest believers as Jesus' resurrection, and, indeed, as a component part of God's act in raising Jesus? And why the scare-quotes around glorification, as if Wright holds the topic at arms' length?

<sup>27</sup> "Alive again" is Wright's phrase used in his book, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003). Cf., e.g., these critical reviews, which press questions about the adequacy of Wright's articulation of NT teaching about Jesus' resurrection: Michael Welker, "Article Review: Wright on the Resurrection," *SJT* 60 (2007): 458-75; L. W. Hurtado, "Jesus' Resurrection in the Early Christian Texts: An Engagement with N. T. Wright," *JSHJ* 3(2005): 197-208.

repeatedly invokes this theme of YHWH's return as crucial.<sup>28</sup> But, to repeat the relevant question, how did this notion that YHWH would "return" in judgment and redemption come to play this supposedly crucial role? That is, what led early Jesus-followers supposedly to portray the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus as YHWH's "personal" return?

Although at one point Wright characterizes "the strong sense of Jesus personal presence during worship and prayer" as "important but essentially secondary," at a later point in the discussion he seems to suggest a more significant role of "vivid 'experiences' of the presence and power of Jesus" by believers, which Wright apparently sets in the "post-Easter" period.<sup>29</sup> I presume that he means what Paul ascribes to the Holy Spirit/Spirit of God, which Paul can also call the Spirit of Jesus (e.g., Rom. 8:9-11). Paul refers to the effects of the Spirit variously as including revelatory insights into Jesus' high significance (2 Cor. 3:12—4:4), an inner power of behavioural transformation (e.g., Rom. 8:12-17; Gal. 5:16, 22-26), and outward "charismatic" phenomena such as those in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 and other texts, including revelations, prophecies, etc.<sup>30</sup> But Wright seems curiously reticent to elaborate what he means in referring to the post-Easter Jesus being "personally and powerfully present" in circles of believers. Wright's discussion of Paul's view of the Spirit in this same chapter is devoted mainly to emphasizing that this too is essentially shaped by the theme of the return of YHWH: "The christology of 'divine identity' is thus matched by the pneumatology of 'divine identity', in both cases focused in particular on the Jewish eschatology of the return of YHWH."<sup>31</sup> That is, Wright focuses on the conceptual content, "pneumatology," leaving the specifics of the phenomena in question somewhat vague. So, it seems to me that we are left without an adequate answer to the question of *how* Jesus supposedly came to be seen as the personal and embodied return of YHWH.

Perhaps part of the reason for Wright's less-than-specific historical account of matters is given in an interesting paragraph in a section on the "Origin of Christology." After a less than satisfactory characterization of scholarly work over the last few decades that supports the position that a remarkable level of Jesus-devotion erupted early and initially in circles of Jewish believers,<sup>32</sup> Wright then states,

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<sup>28</sup> Wright, *PFG*, esp. 2.645-737 *passim*.

<sup>29</sup> Wright, *PFG*, 2.690; cf. 2.654-55. Again, note the curious use of scare-quotes around "experiences."

<sup>30</sup> Note also Gal. 3:5, where Paul likely refers to God as "the one who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you."

<sup>31</sup> Wright, *PFG*, 2.727. His discussion of the Spirit occupies pp. 709-28.

<sup>32</sup> One of the unsatisfactory features of Wright's brief account of scholarly work on early christological developments is his characterization of it as essentially a theological controversy. In particular, he portrays the work positing an early eruption of "high" christology as "claiming to speak for the Christian tradition," when, in fact, those involved in this work have included Jewish scholars such as Alan Segal, and others of a variety of

In any case, the attempt to perform an essentially historical operation, i.e. the investigation of the dating and cultural setting of particular early Christian beliefs and motifs, was always at best an uneasy guide to the question of what might actually be *true*. Even if we came upon documents which demonstrated beyond a shadow of doubt that all Christians in the first decade of the movement believed most surely in a fully trinitarian theology, and believed that they could hold this view while remaining good Jews, that would be interesting but *theologically inconclusive*.<sup>33</sup> (Emphasis mine)

He is obviously correct. The historical provenance of given christological beliefs does not determine their theological validity. So, for example, the early emergence of a “high” christology among Jewish circles of Jesus-followers does not necessarily make it any more persuasive theologically, e.g., for non-Christians or for Christians inclined toward a “low” christology.<sup>34</sup> But I find it curious that he should make such a point of this. For, although the results of historical inquiry into the origins of Jesus-devotion may be “theologically inconclusive,” I submit that questions about when, where and how Jesus-devotion emerged and developed are, nevertheless, worth pursuing. We can aim to understand as well as we can how things happened, and attempt to avoid or correct misunderstandings of the historical developments. That is, we can try to do good historical work! Whatever the theological value, it is, for example, a valid historical question whether the acclamation of Jesus distinguished Pauline churches from circles of Jewish believers in Roman Judaea or emerged initially in the latter. Likewise, it is a perfectly reasonable historical inquiry to explore what factors may have helped to generate and shape early Jesus-devotion. After all, in considering the origins of earliest Jesus-devotion, we are dealing with historical phenomena, which require asking historical questions and attempting a historical analysis.

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confessional positions. Compare the insightful discussion of matters in essays in *Reflections on the Early Christian History of Religion/Erwägungen zur frühchristlichen Religionsgeschichte*, eds. Cilliers Breytenbach and Jörg Frey (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2013), by Cilliers Breytenbach, “Erwägungen zu einer Geschichte der Religion des Urchristentums,” 1-25, and Jörg Frey, “Eine neue religionsgeschichtliche Perspektive: Larry W. Hurtados *Lord Jesus Christ* und die Herausbildung der frühen Christologie,” 117-69.

<sup>33</sup> Wright, *PFG*, 2.647.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. my own position that the historical provenance of a given christological conviction does not establish its theological validity, and that the historical investigation of early Jesus-devotion can and should be pursued for its own sake, without the intent “either to refute or to validate the religious and theological meaning of early devotion to Jesus”: *Lord Jesus Christ*, 9. That is not to presume some unreflective notion of pure “objective” historical inquiry unaffected by who we are. All inquiry is shaped by the interests of those conducting it, the questions posed, etc. But there is a *discipline* of historical inquiry that we can seek to develop and practice.



The tone of Wright's remarks suggests to me, however, that, for all his profession of historical interests, his own real concern is theological. There is, of course, nothing wrong with preferring theological concerns to historical questions. But I wonder if Wright's apparent lack of enthusiasm for the historical work of other scholars, or what appears to be his subordination of historical inquiry to his theological concerns, may help account for the lack of an adequate proposal about *how*, in terms of historical process, earliest convictions about Jesus emerged.

### *YHWH and Chief Agents*

A curious feature of Wright's discussion of the theme of the eschatological return of YHWH is his sharp distinction between a *personal* return/coming of YHWH (himself) and the role of *agents* in YHWH's eschatological manifestation. I have noted already Wright's rejection of the relevance of what he calls "mediator-figures" in accounting for earliest christology (which he refers to as "semi-divine" figures). As my own work seems to be in view, I point out that "mediator-figures" is Wright's term, not mine. I have referred to "chief agent" figures in second-temple Jewish tradition, emphasizing thereby their prominent roles in the execution of God's purposes.<sup>35</sup> It is not clear why Wright prefers "mediator-figures," but I wonder if it is because he wants to emphasize that they are less than YHWH, not fully "divine," and so not adequate for accounting for the level of christological claims that we have in the NT.<sup>36</sup> In any case, in discussing the theme of the return/coming of YHWH, Wright repeatedly emphasizes the Jewish expectation of YHWH's "personal presence," YHWH's return "in person," which Wright contrasts with "Jewish beliefs about this or that mediator-figure."<sup>37</sup>

To be sure, a number of biblical and extra-biblical texts emphasize YHWH's direct involvement in eschatological judgement and redemption, often expressing this as YHWH himself acting as the judge, and/or redeemer, and shepherd of Israel: e.g., Isaiah 40:10; 59:15-20; 60:15-17; 63:1-6; 66:12-16; Ezekiel 34:11-16.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, in his survey of texts referring to certain eschatological figures Robert Webb judged that "both in the OT and

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<sup>35</sup> E.g., Wright, *PFG*, 2.653: "... exalted mediator-figures might be all very well, but they would still not explain the phenomena."

<sup>36</sup> Although it bears noting that some NT writings readily apply to Jesus the Greek term translated "mediator" (*mesitēs*): 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24.

<sup>37</sup> E.g., Wright, *PFG*, 2.633, 653, 656.

<sup>38</sup> See, e.g., Frank Schnutenhaus, "Das Kommen und Erscheinen Gottes im Alten Testament," *ZAW* 76 (1964): 1-22.

Second Temple Jewish literature the most prominent figure who was expected to act in judgment and restoration was Yahweh.”<sup>39</sup>

But there are also texts that portray this or that agent of YHWH’s actions.<sup>40</sup> For example, in Ezekiel 34, after a length passage emphasizing that YHWH himself will act on behalf of his people (vv. 11-22) and will shepherd them, the very next verses (vv. 23-24) tell us that this will involve “my servant David” appointed as shepherd and agent of God’s rule. Webb reviewed texts which feature in that role a Davidic King/Messiah, such as *Psalms of Solomon* 17.<sup>41</sup> In fact, this is an interesting text as it combines the acclamation of YHWH as “our king for ever and ever” (17:1) with the declaration that YHWH chose David as “king over Israel” (17:4), and the text combines confident predictions that YHWH will overthrow Israel’s enemies (17:7) with appeals that YHWH “raise up for them their king, the son of David” (17:21) to accomplish this. This human agent, the “righteous king, taught by God” will act in God-like fashion in showing mercy to reverent nations and smiting the earth “with the word of his mouth” (17:34-35). This righteous king will be the agent through whom God will “hasten his mercy upon Israel,” and “deliver us from the uncleanness of profane enemies,” so that “The Lord is our king for ever and ever” (17:46). Likewise, in the Qumran text, 1QSb 5.17-23, “the prince of the congregation” (17.20) appears to be the human royal-Messiah, the personal vehicle who is raised “to an everlasting height” (17.23) and through whom God’s eschatological purpose is accomplished (17.24-25).

In other texts, the chosen agent of YHWH’s eschatological purposes is an angelic prince such as Michael (e.g., Dan. 12:1-3), who in the Qumran “war scroll” (1QM 17.6-8) will be exalted “above all the gods,” which in turn will secure “the dominion of Israel over all flesh.”<sup>42</sup> In another Qumran text, 11QMelchizedek, we have a mysterious figure who seems to be a principal angel who will “carry out the vengeance of God’s judgments” and deliver the elect from Belial (2.13-14). Still more remarkable is the identification of this figure

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<sup>39</sup> Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet*, 222. See 222-27 for his survey of texts in which YHWH himself acts.

<sup>40</sup> I surveyed various “chief agent” figures in *One God, One Lord*, including “personified divine attributes” (41-50), “exalted patriarchs” (51-69), and “principal angels” (71-92).

<sup>41</sup> Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 231-32.

<sup>42</sup> On Michael, Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 77-78, and for fuller discussion, Darrell D. Hannah, *Michael and Christ: Michael Traditions and Angel Christology in Early Christianity* (WUNT 2/109; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999). As Webb notes (*John the Baptizer*, 240 n. 82), Michael is probably also the “Prince of light” mentioned in 1QM 13.10. On chief-agent figures in the Qumran texts: John J. Collins, “Powers in Heaven: God, Gods, and Angels in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *Religion in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, eds. J. J. Collins and R. A. Kugler (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 9-28; and on second-temple messianism more generally, John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1995). On the relation to early Jesus-devotion, L. W. Hurtado, “Monotheism, Principal Angels, and the Background of Christology,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, eds. Timothy H. Lim and John J. Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 546-64.

(11QMelch 2.10-25) as fulfilling the biblical text (Psa. 7:8-9) that “God [MT: יהוה] will judge the peoples,” also as the “Elohim” who will stand forth in the divine/heavenly assembly (Psa. 82:1) to bring about eschatological justice, and as the one referred to in Isaiah 52:7 as “your God” (אלהיך) who will free the elect from Belial. Other examples can be cited, and have been noted by various scholars in previous publications.<sup>43</sup>

Perhaps the chief agent most frequently noted is the figure in the *Parables of Enoch* identified variously as “the chosen one,” “the righteous one,” and “the anointed one.”<sup>44</sup> Several other Ethiopic expressions that are typically translated “son of man” make it clear that this is a human figure.<sup>45</sup> Yet his eschatological appearance is described in the most august terms. For example, he will sit in judgment “on the throne of glory” (45:3; 55:4; 61:8; 62:3), will de-throne the kings and mighty men of the earth and “crush the teeth of the sinners” (46:4). Named and chosen before creation (48:2-3; 62:7), he will be “a staff for the righteous” and “the light of the nations” (48:4), and all people of the earth will reverence him (48:5; 62:9). Note how the text combines the presence of “the Lord of Spirits” (YHWH) with the rule of this figure: “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” (62:13). It looks like the enthronement and supremacy of this figure constitutes the eschatological triumph of God (69:26-29).

As Webb concluded, in the Jewish texts the coming of these figures for judgment and/or restoration comprises “an expression and outworking of God coming in judgement and restoration.”<sup>46</sup> Granting that second-temple Jewish hopes of eschatological redemption were often expressed “in terms of actions by Yahweh,” Webb rightly observed that “expressing in vivid terms Yahweh’s future or eschatological judgment and restoration” went hand-in-hand with “the realization that such judgment and restoration would take place through Yahweh’s agents and historical events.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> E.g., Yahoel and other principal angel figures, Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 79-82.

<sup>44</sup> See, e.g., Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 53-54; Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 242-49; and the various contributions in Gabriele Boccaccini (ed.), *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

<sup>45</sup> On these expressions, see now Darrell D. Hannah, “The Elect Son of Man of the *Parables of Enoch*,” in *Who Is This Son of Man? The Latest Scholarship on a Puzzling Expression of the Historical Jesus*, eds. Larry W. Hurtado and Paul L. Owen (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 130-58. I cite here from the translation by George W. Nickelsburg and James C. VanderKam, *1 Enoch: The Hermeneia Translation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012).

<sup>46</sup> Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 256.

<sup>47</sup> Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 257.

Thus, in the OT and literature of the Second Temple period there exists an interplay in expectation: Yahweh as God will judge and restore his people, and his agents will carry out that ministry of judgment and restoration.<sup>48</sup>

In short, this “interplay” simply represents two complementary emphases. References to YHWH as acting directly stressed “the theological necessity for divine involvement as the prime cause behind the eschatological judgment and restoration,” and the complementary depiction of the involvement of chief-agent figures expressed “the realization that Yahweh worked through these figures as his agents” to execute eschatological hopes.<sup>49</sup>

It is, thus, dubious in historical terms for Wright to make such a sharp contrast between the “personal” return of YHWH and the roles of chief-agent figures. To put it mildly, it is certainly not clear that this sharp contrast is there in the biblical or second-temple Jewish texts. There may be theological reasons, however, for making such a contrast. Wright’s rhetorical emphasis that in Jesus’ life, death and resurrection he was, not the uniquely exalted agent of God, but, instead, the “personal” and “embodied” return/coming of YHWH himself seems to me to resonate obviously with a strong “incarnational” christology (although the latter doctrinal stance does not require the exegetical move that Wright makes). The “pre-existence” and “incarnation” of Christ is, of course, a teaching reflected in NT texts (e.g., Philip. 2:6-8; 1 Cor. 8:4-6; John 1:1-18) and in subsequent Christian tradition, and the incarnation is a particularly traditional emphasis in Anglican theology.<sup>50</sup> But the question here is whether second-temple Jewish expectation shared the strong contrast that Wright asserts and makes so crucial in his case. I repeat that the preceding evidence illustrates that in second-temple Jewish tradition, the theme of YHWH’s return that Wright makes so much of went quite comfortably (indeed, went typically, it seems) with the expectation that this manifestation of YHWH would involve and be expressed through one or another chief-agent figure.

To be sure, the NT reflects a remarkably heightened view of Jesus in comparison to any of the chief-agent figures of second-temple Jewish tradition (even “the chosen one” of the *Parables of Enoch*), and, still more remarkable historically, NT texts even align the risen/exalted Jesus along with God in devotional/worship practices.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, what we

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<sup>48</sup> Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 258.

<sup>49</sup> Webb, *John the Baptizer*, 259-60.

<sup>50</sup> I do not accuse Wright of theological bias, at least in any conscious manner. I simply note that his tradition places great emphasis on the doctrine of Jesus’ incarnation, and that his exegetical judgments align with that emphasis.

<sup>51</sup> I have discussed this in various publications, e.g., “The Binitarian Shape of Early Christian Worship,” in *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism: Papers from the St. Andrews Conference on the Historical Origins*

may call the christological discourse of the NT consistently portrays Jesus' significance with reference to God, positing Jesus as what we may term the unique agent of God's purposes (e.g., as "Son," "Image," or "Word" of God).<sup>52</sup> So, for purposes of historical analysis, it still seems to me more accurate to understand the remarkable developments that comprised the early Jesus-devotion already reflected in Paul's letters as amounting to a novel, even astonishing, "mutation" in ancient Jewish chief-agent traditions, and also, notably, in ancient Jewish devotional practices (as I have proposed over a number of years). In short, the NT comfortably presents Jesus both as the direct expression of God in redemptive purposes (e.g., 2 Cor. 5:19; Col. 1:19), and as the unique agent of God (e.g., 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:20), and it distorts the evidence to play up the one emphasis and play down the other. As defined by Bauckham (and endorsed by Wright), "divine identity" is the unique exercise of the attributes of universal creator and universal sovereign. So, with that definition we can say that NT texts show Jesus quickly included within the "divine identity."<sup>53</sup> But, as reflected in the NT texts just cited, Jesus was included in a role differentiated from that of God ("the Father"), Jesus posited rather consistently as the unique agent of God, the unique and ultimate historical expression of God's purposes. "Divine identity" and chief-agent categories are not really the alternatives that Wright (and, for that matter, Bauckham) claim.

#### *The NT Appropriation of the Return of YHWH*

As noted earlier in this essay, the NT certainly reflects the christological appropriation of the theme of YHWH's return/coming in eschatological judgment and redemption. It is important to note that Wright claims that this involved initially and particularly interpreting Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection as YHWH's return. But, actually, as Edward Adams has shown, where we can see the appropriation of this theme most clearly in the NT, it is with reference to Jesus' *parousia*.<sup>54</sup> For example, in what may be our earliest NT writing, Paul's reference to "the coming/appearance [παρουσία] of our Lord Jesus *with all his holy ones*" (μετά πάντων τῶν ἁγίων, 1 Thess. 3:13; emphasis mine) is commonly seen as adapting

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*of the Worship of Jesus*, eds. Carey C. Newman, James R. Davila and Gladys S. Lewis (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 187-213; republished in Larry W. Hurtado, *At the Origins of Christian Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 63-97.

<sup>52</sup> Larry W. Hurtado, *God in New Testament Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2010), esp. 49-71; and Jens Schröter, "Trinitarian Belief, Binitarian Monotheism, and the One God: Reflections on the Origin of Christian Faith in Affiliation to Larry Hurtado's Christological Approach," in *Reflections on the Early Christian History of Religion/Erwägungen zur frühchristlichen Religionsgeschichte*, eds. Cilliers Breytenbach and Jörg Frey (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2013), 171-94.

<sup>53</sup> Bauckham, *God Crucified*, esp. 6-13; *id.*, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 6-13, 18-31, 182-232.

<sup>54</sup> Adams, "The 'Coming of God' Tradition," *passim*.

wording from Zechariah 14:5, where we have the prediction of the eschatological appearance of YHWH (καὶ πάντες οἱ ἅγιοι μετ’ αὐτοῦ).<sup>55</sup> Other Pauline texts are likewise widely recognized as reflecting this appropriation of predictions of YHWH’s return to describe Jesus’ future return, e.g., 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (“the *parousia* of the Lord,” who will descend from heaven); 2 Thessalonians 1:6-8 (“the revelation of our Lord Jesus from heaven”); and 2 Thessalonians 2:8 (“the Lord [Jesus] will destroy [the “lawless one”] with the breath of his mouth”). Kreitzer referred to what he called a “conceptual overlap between God and Christ” in Paul, illustrated in how the future *parousia* of Jesus effectively functions as the fulfilment of OT promises of “the day of the Lord” and the return of YHWH.<sup>56</sup>

This is not confined to Paul, however. Note, for example, in Hebrews 10:37 the appropriation of the promise of YHWH’s coming (from Isaiah 26:20) to encourage believers to await in patience its fulfilment in Jesus’ future appearance. In 2 Peter 3:10-13, the author deploys wording from Isaiah 65:17 and/or 66:22 in predicting the future coming of “the day of the Lord,” who in this context is Jesus. Mark 8:38 and 13:24-27 (and parallels) are additional instances. And Revelation 19:11-16 is replete with wording that seems to be adapted from various OT texts that reflect the return of YHWH theme used to depict the future appearance of Jesus as eschatological warrior.<sup>57</sup>

In his chapter on Paul’s eschatology (later in the big work on Paul), Wright discusses briefly the Pauline use of the theme of YHWH’s return to portray Jesus’ future *parousia*, but he seems to me to present this as essentially an extension of what he posits as the more important appropriation of YHWH’s return to interpret Jesus’ ministry, death and resurrection.<sup>58</sup> This is perhaps why earlier, where Wright initially presents his case about the christological appropriation of this return-of-YHWH theme in Paul, these rather clear instances referring to Jesus’ *parousia* are either mentioned only briefly or not at all.<sup>59</sup> Instead, we have treatments of several other Pauline passages in which Wright strives to

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<sup>55</sup> The Nestle-Aland list of biblical citations and allusions includes also Matthew 25:31 and Luke 7:19 as other possible allusions to the Zechariah passage, but these are not so obvious.

<sup>56</sup> Kreitzer, *Jesus and God in Paul’s Eschatology*, 116. See also Neil Richardson, *Paul’s Language about God* (JSNTSup 99; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994).

<sup>57</sup> See, e.g., discussion in G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 949-64.

<sup>58</sup> Wright, *PFG*, 2.1078-85.

<sup>59</sup> E.g., he mentions 1 Thess. 3:13 only briefly (2.706), curiously rendering the key phrase as “when our Lord Jesus is present again with all his holy ones,” which has the effect of making Jesus’ *parousia* a second instalment of the return-of-YHWH that supposedly found more crucial and original expression in the past events of Jesus’ ministry, death and resurrection. Cf. e.g., W. Radl, “παρουσία,” *EDNT*3:43-44. The NT usage of the term likely derives from its use from the Ptolemaic period onwards to denote official visits of rulers or other high-ranking figures. For examples, MM 497.

show at length that the theme of YHWH's eschatological return is crucial: Galatians 4:1-11; Romans 8:1-4; 1 Corinthians 8—10; Colossians 1; 2 Corinthians 3—4; and Philippians 2:6-11.<sup>60</sup> Instead of the *parousia* texts, it appears that he focuses on these texts because he wishes to marshal them for his claim that the theme of YHWH's return was applied initially and (in Wright's view) most importantly to Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection. But despite his extended and ingeniously argued case for each of these passages, it is not so obvious to me (and, I suspect, will not be so obvious to most exegetes) that the texts are what Wright makes of them. Indeed, I have to say that it seems to me that one can perceive the theme of the return of YHWH in these texts only if one commences with the prior conviction that it is there. Confidently armed with this conviction, Wright presses details of these passages into service as putatively subtle and deft allusions to YHWH's return in Jesus. But Wright's approach, presuming that the theme of YHWH's return must have shaped the Pauline texts, and then searching for any hint of confirmation of this, may seem to others somewhat exegetically coercive on the texts.<sup>61</sup>

It would, however, take more space than available here to engage the intricacies of Wright's discussion, and so I will confine myself to brief attention to one of these texts, Philippians 2:6-11, to illustrate what I see as the problems in Wright's exegetical approach.<sup>62</sup> I focus on this passage because it unambiguously shows the christological appropriation of an OT text that originally referred to YHWH. Every exegete recognizes the remarkable adaptation of phrasing from Isaiah 45:22-25 to predict a universal acclamation of Jesus as *Kyrios* in Philippians 2:9-11.<sup>63</sup> The Isaiah passage appears in a larger context declaring YHWH's uniqueness and predicting YHWH's future judgment on the nations and the restoration of Israel (e.g., 45:14-17). The Philippians passage reflects a creative

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<sup>60</sup> Wright, *PFG*, 2.656-89.

<sup>61</sup> Of course, Wright has spent many years working through the textual evidence, and would surely answer that he has developed his exegetical framework through this. But, still, I have to say that his handling of the texts in question seems to me to involve looking for confirmations of a conclusion already reached.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Wright, *PFG*, 2.680-89. I analysed this passage earlier in *How on Earth did Jesus Become a God? Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 83-107. On the question of whether the passage preserves an early Christian ode/hymn, however, I am now far less confident. See, e.g., Jennifer R. Strawbridge and Benjamin Edsall, "The Songs We Used to Sing? Hymn 'Traditions' and Reception in Pauline Letters," *JSNT* 37 (2015): 290-311, and the other works cited that question the hymnic nature of the passage. But cf. Martin, Michael Wade and Bryan A. Nash. "Philippians 2:6-11 as Subversive *Hymnos*: A Study in the Light of Ancient Rhetorical Theory," *JTS* 66 (2015): 90-138, who propose that the passage is hymnic. In any case, the compressed wording of the passage strongly suggests to me that it expressed christological convictions with which the original readership were already acquainted.

<sup>63</sup> See, e.g., my discussion in "Two Case Studies in Earliest Christological Readings of Biblical Texts," in *All that the Prophets have Declared*, ed. Matthew R. Malcolm (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2015), 3-23 (esp. 14-20). I take the acclamation, *Κυριος Ιησους Χριστος*, as "Jesus Christ is Lord."

christological reading of Isaiah 45:22-25, however, in which the eschatological supremacy of YHWH is to be recognized in the universal acclamation that is to be given to Jesus. But note that in Philippians 2 Jesus is to receive this universal acclamation because it was with this intention (ἵνα, v. 10) that God “highly exalted him” and gave him “the name above every name” (which I take to be “*Kyrios*”).<sup>64</sup> To underscore the matter, the text depicts God as having given Jesus a new and exalted status and role (as *Kyrios*) in response to Jesus’ complete obedience (διὸ, v. 9); and consequently, on the basis of that exaltation, Jesus is to be acclaimed by all spheres of creation.

Wright’s approach to this passage, however, is to range through Isaiah 40—55, noting that there we have the theme of YHWH’s return, and urging that Philippians 2:6-11 is “a fresh meditation on the original Isaianic passage.”<sup>65</sup> That is likely so. But, whereas the Philippians passage makes God’s exaltation of Jesus in vv. 9-11 the crescendo, the point where Jesus is given the divine name and is thereafter to receive universal acclamation, Wright seems concerned to make the preceding verses describing Jesus’ earthly obedience (vv. 6-8) the focus. This is apparently what Wright refers to in stating, “This is how Israel’s God *came back* to do what he had promised” (note the past tense, emphasis mine).<sup>66</sup>

My point is that, if (as seems entirely warranted) we are to see in Philippians 2:6-11 a christological appropriation of the OT theme of YHWH’s eschatological return and supremacy, this appropriation is again with reference to Jesus’ “post-Easter” status and a future universal acclamation as portrayed in vv. 9-11. It is from God’s exaltation of Jesus onward that he is the *Kyrios*, the future universal acclamation of him described in wording from Isaiah 45:22-23. This is similar to what we have in the other clear NT instances noted earlier, where YHWH’s return is appropriated with reference to Jesus’ *parousia*. To underscore the relevant point, (contra Wright) the Philippians passage does not show the theme of YHWH’s return used to describe the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus. It certainly does not give evidence that the appropriation of the theme of YHWH’s return was the foundational christological conviction upon which the full gamut of christological claims then developed.

Instead, with some other NT texts, Philippians 2 (esp. vv. 9-11) suggests strongly that the initial conviction that generated subsequent christological development and devotional practice was that God had raised Jesus from death and exalted him to share in divine glory

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<sup>64</sup> See, e.g., Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 221-22.

<sup>65</sup> See also Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 47-62; *id.* *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 33-45.

<sup>66</sup> Wright, *PFG* 2.681-83, citing 683.



and the divine name, and now required Jesus to be revered accordingly.<sup>67</sup> Fired by this startling conviction, earliest believers searched their scriptures to find resources to grasp what God's exaltation of Jesus meant, and what import it held for their understanding of God's purposes. Philippians 2:6-11 is a particularly remarkable example of this fervent activity (which I have referred to elsewhere as "charismatic exegesis") in which biblical texts were read in a radically new way with reference to Jesus.<sup>68</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The biblical theme of YHWH's return is evidenced in second-temple Jewish expressions of hopes for eschatological judgment and redemption. In the second-temple tradition that served as the matrix of the earliest circles of Jesus-believers, references to YHWH's personal and direct return/manifestation were readily linked with references to this taking place through a chief-agent figure. The emphasis on YHWH's direct action and the involvement of a chief agent were not in tension with each other, but served as complementary expressions of the eschatological hope.

This is reflected also in the NT texts that illustrate the remarkable christological appropriation of the theme of YHWH's return. Despite Wright's urgings, however, it is not clear that the theme of YHWH's return was appropriated initially to interpret Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection. Instead, the identifiable NT instances of the appropriation of the theme present Jesus' *parousia* as effectively being YHWH's eschatological return/manifestation. Jesus' return in glory ("the *parousia* of the Lord," 1 Thess. 4:15) will comprise the "day of the Lord" (e.g., 1 Thess. 5:1-11). Yet the same NT texts also clearly posit Jesus as the unique agent of God: e.g., "through Jesus God will bring with him those who have died" (1 Thess. 4:14); "God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:9). The two christological emphases, Jesus acting in the role of YHWH and as the unique agent of YHWH, are not in tension in the NT, and should not be played off against the other.

Moreover, notwithstanding Wright's contention, this appropriation of the theme of YHWH's return was not the initial christological claim or the conceptual move that prompted or accounts for all other early christological developments. Instead, the conviction that God raised from death and exalted him to unparalleled heavenly glory was the likely ignition for the explosively rapid and remarkably early development of the intense Jesus-devotion that we

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<sup>67</sup> Note also, e.g., Acts 2:35; 17:31; 1 Peter 1:21; 3:22.

<sup>68</sup> Hurtado, "Two Case Studies," 14-20, and also 4-14 on the early christological reading of Psalm 110.

see already presumed in our earliest NT writings (as reflected, e.g., in Philip. 2:9-11). In its earliest form, this crucial conviction was that in raising Jesus from death, God confirmed Jesus as the true Messiah (e.g., Acts 2:35), declared Jesus as God's unique Son (Rom 1:3-4), and exalted him as the Lord (*Mar/Kyrios*) who now shares the divine throne, glory and "the name above every name" (e.g., Philip. 2:9-11; 1 Cor. 15:27; Heb 1:3-4). This conviction likely erupted in the earliest days/weeks after Jesus' crucifixion, and was generated and confirmed by the interaction of experiences that included encounters with the risen/glorified Jesus, visions of him in heavenly exaltation, prophetic oracles (and perhaps Spirit-inspired odes) declaring his status and expressing God's will that Jesus be revered, and new "charismatic" readings of scriptural texts that confirmed and helped believers to understand better how to accommodate Jesus in relation to God.<sup>69</sup>

At some very early point in this process, believers came to see (or perhaps came to see more fully) Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection/exaltation as prefigured in various biblical texts (prominently among these texts, Psalm 110:1), and even felt free (obliged?) to apply what Capes termed "Yahweh texts" to the risen/exalted Jesus (e.g., Psalm 24; Joel 2:32).<sup>70</sup> As reflected in Paul's letters, early christological developments also included ascribing to Jesus "pre-existence" in a divine mode (Philip. 2:6) and the role of unique agent in creation as well as redemption (1 Cor. 8:6).<sup>71</sup>

Still more remarkably, early believers felt obliged to incorporate the risen/exalted Jesus programmatically in their devotional/cultic practices, according to Jesus the sort of place that they otherwise reserved for God alone. For example, in both Aramaic-speaking and Greek-speaking circles, they invoked ("called upon") and "confessed" the risen Jesus in their worship-gatherings (e.g., 1 Cor. 16:22; Rom. 10:9-13). Their initiation rite was a baptism in Jesus' name. The corporate meal of fellowship was also identified with reference to Jesus (e.g., "the table of the Lord," 1 Cor. 10:21; "the Lord's supper," 1 Cor. 11:20). In

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<sup>69</sup> David E. Aune, "Charismatic Exegesis in Early Judaism and Early Christianity," in *The Pseudepigrapha and Early Biblical Interpretation*, eds. James H. Charlesworth and Craig A. Evans (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 126-50. In Hurtado, "Two Case Studies," 20-23, I have proposed the sort of setting/circumstances in which this "charismatic exegesis" took place.

<sup>70</sup> As discussed by David B. Capes, *Old Testament Yahweh Texts in Paul's Christology* (WUNT 2/47; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992); and "YHWH and His Messiah: Pauline Exegesis and the Divine Christ," *HBT* 16 (1994): 121-43.

<sup>71</sup> In the logic of Jewish apocalyptic thought, final/eschatological things can also be posited as primal things, as reflected in the *Parables of Enoch*, where the "Chosen One" is referred to as named before creation (48:2-3). But the references to the "pre-existent" Jesus as *εν μορφη θεου*, and as the agent of creation are unprecedented for any of the other chief-agent figures in second-temple Jewish texts. The language of the unnamed voice of the Qumran "Self-Glorification Hymn" (4Q491c) perhaps comes closest, although the exalted status claimed in the text seems to be an eschatological one, with no ascription of a role in creation. On this fragmentary text, see, e.g., Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 146-49.

my view, this programmatic place of Jesus, producing a “dyadic” devotional pattern in which God and Jesus are linked as recipients, likely arose under the conviction that God required Jesus to be so revered. I seriously doubt that it would have arisen through some sort of inference or liturgical experimentation. This “dyadic” devotional pattern was in no way “secondary”!

In the process of the early christological appropriation of biblical tradition, believers drew upon the theme of YHWH’s eschatological return/triumph, especially to describe Jesus’ future return in glory. That is, although (contra Wright) the appropriation of this theme is not the crucial step or clue to the eruption of other christological claims, it is a striking example of the latter process. But, finally, even though I find Wright’s claim about role of the return of YHWH theme unpersuasive, it appears that we are agreed that, in one form or another, an “early high christology” erupted initially among circles of Jewish believers and remarkably soon after Jesus’ crucifixion. In sharing this basic view, despite differences on some other matters, Wright also aligns with other scholars such as Bauckham, Tilling, Newman, Capes, Segal, Frey, Schröter, and a growing number of others, whose work amounts to a *“Paradigmenwechsel in der Erfassung der neutestamentlichen Christologie oder immerhin von einer ‘neuen Perspektive.’”*<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Frey, “Eine neue religionsgeschichtliche Perspektive,” 125. See also Andrew Chester, “High Christology—Whence, When and Why?” *Early Christianity* 2 (2011): 22-50, who refers to a “clear (though not unanimous) scholarly consensus” now that “a Christology that portrays Christ as divine emerges very early, in distinctively Jewish terminology and within a Jewish context” (38).