

PAPER I

# The Father Jesus Spoke Of Is Not Yahweh

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ABSTRACT

For nearly two thousand years the dominant Christian tradition has identified Yahweh, the covenant deity of the Torah, with the Father Jesus described and addressed throughout his ministry. The identification is now so embedded that it no longer presents itself as an interpretation, but as a fact. Questioning it has not been a live option within mainstream Christianity since the second century, when the institutional response to those who raised the question was swift and total. What follows is an attempt to take the question seriously again. The paper does not claim to escape mediation. It asks which elements of the record are least vulnerable to the specific corruptions that served later theological consolidation.

Four methods drive the analysis. The first is linguistic: an analysis of Jesus's forms of address across the gospel record, anchored by the cry from the cross in its original phonemic form preserved across two Semitic traditions, and extended through the Abba tradition and the wholesale replacement of covenantal address with direct filial language, none of which reaches for the covenant name. The second is textual and historical: an examination of older manuscript traditions in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Septuagint that preserve a more complex divine hierarchy than the later standardized Masoretic text, alongside ancient Near Eastern comparative material that documents an earlier distinction between El and Yahweh whose traces survive in the Hebrew scriptures. The third is structural: a sustained comparison of the

relational architecture the Father Jesus describes across his parables, direct speech, and prayer language against the relational architecture the Torah attributes to Yahweh, and an examination of whether Yahwistic theology as preserved in the Torah and Prophets contains any close template for the specific Father-Son relationship Jesus claims. The comparison reveals a degree of structural incompatibility in relational architecture and divine-filial template that continuity readings have consistently underestimated. The fourth is falsifiable: the Sanhedrin charged Jesus with blasphemy, but claiming to be the Messiah was not blasphemous. Rabbi Akiva endorsed Bar Kokhba as Messiah without blasphemy charges, and other messianic claimants in the period were executed by Rome as rebels, not condemned by the Sanhedrin as blasphemers. The charge category is evidence of the claim category. The blasphemy verdict is historical confirmation that the authorities understood Jesus to be claiming sonship with a God outside or above the Yahweh they served.

The argument is not that the Hebrew scriptures are false or that the Yahwistic tradition contains nothing true. It is that a merger occurred, textually visible and historically consequential, in which an older and less covenantally bounded divine identity appears to have been absorbed into Yahweh. The paper proposes that Jesus's language may reflect a distinction his world had largely lost, or at minimum a distinction no longer conceptually foregrounded in the tradition around him, and that the textual evidence needed to trace that merger historically became available only in the twentieth century. The specific question whether Jesus's Father should be distinguished from Yahweh has rarely been reopened within mainstream Christian theology in a sustained and explicit way, though Margaret Barker's *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God* (SPCK, 1992) made a structurally related argument using overlapping evidence. This paper is an attempt to take the question seriously again. It also notes that if the Father is not Yahweh, the covenantal punishment architecture that has sustained the traditional case for permanent judgment belongs to the administrator rather than the source, and that the logic of the framework points, without settling, toward universal reconciliation as its most internally consistent implication.

The character analysis sharpens the tension and makes the inherited identification harder to treat as obvious. The Father Jesus describes is structurally non-sacrificial, non-covenantally bounded, and non-tribal in his mode of relation: he requires no blood, destroys no enemies, enforces no loyalty through death, and extends care unconditionally to all without covenant distinction. He forgives before any accounting is complete and moves toward the lost without requiring restitution. Yahweh in the Torah commands the destruction of entire populations, requires blood for forgiveness, hardens hearts to demonstrate power, and operates through a system of covenantal reward and punishment in which loyalty is enforced by death. These are not easily reconciled as the same referent described in different moods or historical phases. The difference is structural, and it places real pressure on the inherited identification. The crucifixion confirms the pressure was felt: the authorities grasped what later tradition flattened. They knew the Father he identified with was not their Yahweh. They named it blasphemy. The evidence that the distinction is real is that they killed him for revealing it.

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## I. An Analysis of the Cry from the Cross

**A**s he dies on the cross, Jesus speaks what the gospels preserve as *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani* in Matthew and *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani* in Mark. Of everything in the gospel record bearing on the identity of his Father, this stands closest to an uncomposed utterance under duress. The cry is preserved in transliterated Semitic rather than absorbed into Greek, and the interpretive pressure to domesticate it appears immediately in the narrative itself: bystanders, Gospel writers, and the translation tradition all supply a gloss before the scene ends. The most defensible starting point is the reading least shaped by those layers.

The two accounts do not agree on the cry's exact form, and that disagreement is evidence rather than a problem to be solved. Matthew records *Eli*, the Hebrew form; Mark records *Eloi*, the Aramaic form from *Elah*. Both forms share the same Semitic root: *Elah* and *El* are cognates across related languages. The possessive suffix *i* functions identically in both: *Eloi* means *my Elah* in Aramaic precisely as *Eli* means *my El* in Hebrew. Neither version preserves a covenantal title or spoken substitute such as *Adonai*; both preserve a possessive address built on the El/Elah root. That both traditions required the El/Elah root to be present, in two different languages, is the paper's first piece of evidence. In a first-century Jewish context that cannot by itself prove non-identity with Yahweh, but it does preserve a form of address that the later theological gloss does not exhaust.

Mark's *Eloi* reflects the Aramaic Jesus almost certainly spoke: *Elahi*, the possessive of *Elah*, meaning *my God*. That is the bedrock. Matthew's *Eli* is the Hebraized form, most likely aligned editorially to Psalm 22:1. The possessive claim is well-grounded in both; the name-specificity argument, that Jesus reached for *El* as a proper name with theological weight above Yahweh, rests on Matthew's more suspect form. The paper holds both but distinguishes them: the possessive is bedrock; the name-specificity is superstructure above it. The phoneme is the beginning of the argument, not its conclusion.

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## II. The Three Mainstream Interpretations

### The Psalm Citation

The dominant scholarly reading holds that Jesus is quoting Psalm 22:1, which opens with identical words. The verbal parallel is nearly exact. First-century Jewish teachers frequently cited the opening line of a passage to invoke the entire text, and Psalm 22 moves from abandonment to cosmic vindication, making it theologically rich as a frame for the crucifixion. The Gospel writers reinforce this reading, translating the cry as a lament addressed to God. The limitation is that the citation argument uses that gloss to settle the identity of the addressee, treating the interpretive tradition as the authority on the very question the phoneme itself might reopen.

The structure of Psalm 22 introduces a layer the citation argument rarely addresses. The psalm begins in abandonment, pivots to vindication, and ends with the terse Hebrew phrase *ki asah, for he has done*, a declaration of completion that leaves the act itself unstated. Suffering described, vindication anticipated, future proclamation promised, the decisive act left for later generations to identify. John's *tetelestai* echoes the same logic: completion declared, meaning deferred. If Psalm 22 was structured for a future moment of understanding, the citation carries that structure with it. It does not close the question by pointing to Yahweh. It opens the transmission further.

### The Elijah Misunderstanding

Bystanders at the cross heard *Eli* and interpreted it as a call for Elijah, the prophet who never died and was expected to return before the messianic age. This reading has the unusual support of contemporaneous witnesses. The irony is precise: *Elijah* in Hebrew is *Eliyahu*, a name whose components are *El*, a connective particle, and *Yahu* (the shortened form of Yahweh), yielding the meaning *El is Yahweh*. Compressed into a prophet's name is the exact theological identification this paper questions. That the preserved sound was immediately absorbed into this interpretation shows how fully the merged theological field had taken hold, where the El-root and the

name of Yahweh were treated as pointing to the same referent. Whether this reflects deliberate interpretive consolidation or inherited instinct cannot be established from the scene alone. What is clear is that a Greek-only rendering would have erased this entirely: the Elijah interpretation depends on the Semitic phoneme surviving intact, which is itself evidence that it did.

The Elijah interpretation becomes harder to sustain once the second half of the cry is taken seriously. The word *sabachthani* means *forsaken me*, and it presupposes a prior relationship of commitment that has been broken. You cannot be forsaken by someone who never undertook to sustain you. More precisely, the dereliction question is addressed to the one who forsook, not about that person to a third-party rescuer. The grammar of the full cry requires a divine addressee in the second person, one who had both the capacity to sustain Jesus and a prior relationship to answer for. The full sentence makes the Elijah reading very difficult to sustain.

One asymmetry is worth naming honestly. The phonetic plausibility of the Elijah interpretation is stronger with Matthew's *Eli* than with Mark's *Eloi*. The first two syllables of *Eliyahu* are present in *Eli*; the jump from *Eloi* to *Eliyahu* requires a larger phonetic stretch. The asymmetry remains: the Elijah interpretation fits more naturally with Matthew's *Eli* than Mark's *Eloi*. That limits how much weight the bystanders' interpretation can bear, but does not destroy the argument.

## The Yahweh Identification

The most institutionally dominant reading holds that *Eli* is simply a form of address to Yahweh, the covenant deity of the Torah, the God of Moses and the prophets. In this reading, the name carries no distinction. *El*, *Elohim*, *Yahweh*, *Adonai*: by the first century, all of these names pointed to the same referent. Jesus crying out to his God is Jesus crying out to Yahweh.

This reading depends least on the phoneme itself and most on the theological tradition surrounding it. By the first century the divine name YHWH was no longer spoken aloud in Jewish practice, so the absence of the spoken name in Jesus's speech cannot by itself carry

evidentiary weight. What is notable is that Jesus consistently addresses God in direct relational terms, most distinctively as Father, and never invokes the covenant name in any form, neither YHWH itself nor the spoken substitute *Adonai*. His language frames the relationship in personal address rather than covenantal terminology. Of the three readings, the Yahweh identification carries the greatest interpretive burden, since it must account for why Jesus's Father-language sits in such evident tension with Yahweh's covenantal profile in the Torah. The body of this paper develops that tension in detail.

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### III. The Translation Problem

Virtually every standard English Bible renders *Eli* as *my God*. This is not technically wrong. *El* does mean *God*. But the translation performs an erasure that is directly relevant to the question being asked, and the erasure does not begin with modern translators. It begins within Matthew's own verse. Matthew 27:46 quotes the cry and then immediately supplies the Greek gloss: *my God, my God, why have you forsaken me*. The interpretation arrives in the same sentence as the preservation. The word is recorded and glossed simultaneously by the same writer operating within the same theological tradition the paper is questioning. Every subsequent translation inherits that interpretive decision rather than returning to the phoneme itself.

In English, *God* is not a neutral category. It arrives already filled by the dominant Yahwistic-Christian synthesis, so thoroughly that an English reader encountering *my God* imports an entire theological architecture without examination. *El*, by contrast, carries a specific history in the ancient Near Eastern record and predates the covenantal-sacrificial architecture later associated with Yahweh. Rendering *Eli* as *my God* is linguistically defensible, but it also suppresses the older *El*-root that may be relevant to the paper's historical argument. Translating it as *my El* preserves that specificity rather than collapsing it into a category word that already contains the merger as its default. At minimum, the dominant translation tradition narrows the question before the reader has had the chance

to consider the phoneme on its own terms. The question is harder to ask because the translation tradition has largely answered it in advance.

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## IV. The Historical Distinction

*El* and *Yahweh* do not appear to have been simply identified in the way later tradition assumed. The available comparative and textual evidence suggests distinct profiles: in the ancient Near Eastern record, *El* appears as a high god distinct from storm-and-warrior deities, while *Yahweh* emerges in forms associated with territory, warfare, and covenantal exclusivity. However provisional the reconstruction, the distinction is real enough to trace. They were eventually collapsed into a single identification, and that identification did not preserve both profiles equally.[1] The caveat must be stated plainly: this reconstruction depends on scholarship produced through its own institutional processes. What follows is the best available historical reconstruction, not a claim to have bypassed all interpretive mediation.

The most structurally important piece of evidence for this distinction surviving into the Hebrew Bible is Deuteronomy 32:8-9 in the Dead Sea Scrolls version. The Masoretic text, the version underlying most standard Bible translations, reads that Elyon divided the nations according to the number of the sons of Israel. But the Dead Sea Scrolls manuscript, which predates the oldest surviving Masoretic manuscripts by over a thousand years, reads differently: when Elyon divided the nations, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God, and *Yahweh's* portion was his people, Jacob his allotted inheritance.[2] The difference is not minor. In the older textual form, Elyon is the divider of the nations and *Yahweh* receives Israel as his allotted portion. At minimum, the passage preserves a hierarchy or distinction that the later Masoretic reading reduces.

This is not a fringe reading. The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures produced centuries before the Masoretic text was standardized, also preserves the *sons of God* reading rather than

the *sons of Israel* reading. Two ancient textual witnesses, the DSS and the Septuagint, preserve a reading the later standardized text does not. The Masoretic change from *sons of God* to *sons of Israel* collapses the distinction: if Elyon divides nations according to the number of Israel's sons, then Elyon and Yahweh are functionally the same figure. The DSS and Septuagint versions preserve an older textual form that is at least compatible with a hierarchy in which Elyon and Yahweh are not yet fully collapsed into one undifferentiated referent.

Psalm 82 extends this picture and makes the hierarchy explicit in a different register. The Most High takes his place in the divine council and pronounces judgment on the lesser divine beings, *elohim*, to whom he had assigned governance of the nations, for their unjust administration. These divine administrators are being stripped of their immortality because they have failed the humans in their charge: they judged unjustly, showed partiality to the wicked, and failed to defend the poor and the orphan. The figure above them is passing sentence. [3] This reading of the psalm as affirming a genuine divine council has been contested: some interpreters read it as a polemic against the gods, rhetorically granting their existence only to condemn them. The paper follows the divine-council reading, which the DSS evidence supports, but acknowledges the alternative.

Recent scholarship, especially Michael Heiser's work, has strengthened the divine-council reading of Psalm 82 and Deuteronomy 32. The present paper shares that foundation but parts company with Heiser at the crucial step: whether Yahweh remains identifiable with Jesus's Father once the Elyon/Yahweh distinction is taken seriously. The disagreement is not over the evidence. It is over what the evidence requires.

One further line of evidence strengthens the case for Yahweh's distinctness from El Elyon. Thomas Romer's *The Invention of God* (Harvard University Press, 2015) traces Yahweh's origins to the early Iron Age, where he emerged in the region of Edom or the northwest Arabian peninsula as a deity of wilderness, storm, and war. Biblical texts including Deuteronomy 33:2, Judges 5:4, and Habakkuk 3:3 associate Yahweh with southern territories outside Canaan proper, and Egyptian inscriptions at Soleb from the fourteenth century BCE mention "Yhw in the land of the Shasu," providing external

archaeological evidence for Yahweh's non-Canaanite origins. Romer's Kenite-Midianite hypothesis, that Yahweh entered Israelite religion through Moses's connection with the Midianites, is now a serious position in the scholarly debate. If Yahweh originated outside Canaan while El was the high god of the Canaanite-Syrian religious world, their original distinctness is not merely a theological inference from the divine council texts. It is supported by independent archaeological and geographical evidence.

The one pre-Christian Jewish text that most directly demonstrates the availability of this conceptual framework is 11QMelchizedek (11Q13), dated approximately 100 BCE. This Qumran document portrays Melchizedek as a cosmic high priest and eschatological figure of divine status. Most significantly for the present paper, the text substitutes Melchizedek for YHWH when citing Isaiah 61:2: what Isaiah renders as "the year of the LORD's favor" becomes in 11QMelchizedek "the year of Melchizedek's favor." The text also identifies Melchizedek with *elohim* in its interpretation of Psalm 82:1 and Isaiah 52:7. A pre-Christian Jewish text that replaces YHWH with a Melchizedekian figure in a prophetic passage is not a marginal curiosity. It demonstrates that within the Second Temple period, before the New Testament was written, there existed a theological tradition in which the Melchizedekian order operated in a framework where YHWH was not the ultimate referent of divine action.

The Similitudes of Enoch, preserved in 1 Enoch 37-71 and dated by most scholars to the first century BCE or CE, extend this picture. They present the Ancient of Days as a figure of ultimate divine authority from whom the Son of Man receives his commission and throne. The Ancient of Days does not act directly in history. He sits, judges, and delegates. The Son of Man is the visible agent. For any author steeped in divine council theology, the Ancient of Days represents the seat of ultimate paternal authority above the active divine figure familiar from Torah. The conceptual structure of a supreme, relatively remote Father who authorizes a more visible agent was available and in circulation before the New Testament was composed. Philo of Alexandria reinforces this from a different angle: writing in the first century CE, he regularly distinguishes between "the God" with the definite article as the ultimate unknowable source and a lower operative divine principle through which creation and governance

occur, finding this tiered structure in the Hebrew Bible itself rather than importing it wholesale from Platonic philosophy. The fact that a first-century Jewish intellectual working from the same scriptures Jesus's audience knew found a higher and lower divine structure embedded in the text demonstrates that the conceptual space was available.

The work of Larry Hurtado presents a different and more formidable challenge. Hurtado argues in *One God, One Lord* and *Lord Jesus Christ* that Second Temple Jewish monotheism was sufficiently flexible to accommodate a second figure of divine status alongside God without theological disruption, and that early Christian devotion to Jesus as Lord represents a mutation within Jewish monotheism rather than a straightforward departure from it. The present paper acknowledges the force of this framework. Where it parts company with Hurtado is on the character question. Divine agency traditions in Second Temple Judaism consistently operate within the covenantal structure: the exalted agent acts on behalf of Yahweh, enforces the covenant, and operates within the administrative hierarchy of the same God. The Father Jesus describes strains the usual divine-agent categories because the Father is presented less as an administrator within covenantal order than as the source from which that order is judged. The paper's claim is not that Second Temple Judaism lacked categories for exalted figures alongside God. It is that those categories do not account for the specific character Jesus attributes to the Father.

The closest published scholarly antecedent to the present paper is Margaret Barker's *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God* (SPCK, 1992). Barker argues that pre-Deuteronomic Israelite theology distinguished between El Elyon, the Most High Father, and Yahweh, a subordinate son-figure, that the Deuteronomic reform suppressed this distinction, and that early Christianity recovered elements of the older theology with Jesus functioning as a divine intermediary between the Most High and humanity. Barker uses many of the same texts as the present paper, Deuteronomy 32, Psalm 82, the divine council, and reaches a structurally similar conclusion about a suppressed hierarchy. The present paper acknowledges this overlap and the significant scholarly attention Barker's work has attracted, including an honorary doctorate from the Archbishop of Canterbury and

election as president of the Society for Old Testament Study. Where the present paper differs from Barker is at a critical structural point: Barker identifies Jesus with Yahweh, the Son figure in the hierarchy, while the present paper argues that Jesus's Father-language points the Father above and distinct from Yahweh, with Jesus identifying himself as the Son of that Father rather than as Yahweh himself. On Barker's framework, El Elyon is the Father and Yahweh is the Son who becomes Jesus. On the present paper's framework, the Father is the source above Yahweh, and Jesus reveals that Father directly.

On the reconstruction developed here, the merger was accelerated by the Deuteronomic reform and consolidated through the Babylonian exile, when the pressure to produce a single supreme national deity was most intense. By the Second Temple period it was complete: *El*, *Elohim*, *Adonai*, and *Yahweh* were interchangeable in Jewish piety, and the older distinction had dissolved in practice. Yet the evidence assembled above demonstrates that the conceptual vocabulary for a supreme Father above the operational deity of Israel was not extinct. It was present in texts circulating in Palestinian Jewish communities and was available as a framework within which Jesus's claims could have been intelligibly received by those with ears for it.

What the textual record may suggest is not a simple merger of comparable entities but something closer to a hierarchical inversion: in the older framework preserved in the DSS Deuteronomy 32 text, Elyon appears above Yahweh, and Yahweh receives his portion from Elyon. On this reading, Yahweh the administrator came to absorb the identity of Elyon the source, and to occupy the source's position within the later tradition. The prior hierarchy became far less visible within the standardized tradition through accumulated editorial choices rather than obvious fabrication.

The most immediate institutional objection to this framework is the Shema itself: Deuteronomy 6:4, the central declaration of Israelite monotheism, *Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one*. If El and Yahweh are distinct figures, what becomes of the foundational confession that God is one? The objection is serious and must be engaged directly. The Shema is addressed to Israel about Israel's God. It asserts that Israel's God is one, *echad*, meaning undivided and unified, not that no other divine beings exist or that no figure stands

above Yahweh in a wider hierarchy. The DSS Deuteronomy 32 text in which Elyon distributes nations among divine sons, including Yahweh, sits in the same textual tradition as the Shema without contradiction, because the Shema is making a different kind of claim. Within the divine council framework, Yahweh is one God, the covenant deity, undivided in his administration of his allotted people. That is at least compatible with a Most High above him whose identity the Shema does not address, because the Shema was never asking that question. Jesus endorsing the Shema no more proves the Father is Yahweh than Abram tithing to Melchizedek proves there is no authority above the Levitical order.

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## V. The Epistemological Problem

The paper's skepticism must be applied to its own sources or it proves nothing. Its claim is not that it uses fewer interpretive steps than traditional readings, but that it relies less on institutional transmission and more on linguistic and structural features in the text itself.

The phoneme is the least corruptible element of the transmission for a specific structural reason: corrupting it requires changing the sound. A scribe operating within the merged theological tradition who wanted to flatten the *El* distinction could have translated *Eli* as *Adonai*, rendered it as *my Lord*, or omitted it and retained only the Greek gloss. Any of these operations would have been invisible in the resulting text. The word *Eli*, if it survived at all, carries its grammatical structure with it: the possessive suffix *i* cannot be removed without changing the word, and the root *El* cannot be substituted without producing a different sound. So what survived is a phoneme whose minimal grammatical reading is a possessive address built on the ancient divine root, regardless of what the speaker intended by that root. What the tradition could control was the interpretation placed around the sound. The phoneme survived. The interpretation was what the filter supplied.

What the epistemological section cannot do, and should not claim to do, is resolve the bedrock problem entirely. The argument that follows rests on a foundation that passed through institutional hands, was

selected for transmission, and carries the marks of every layer it moved through. The paper's claim is not that these marks have been fully identified and subtracted. It is that the grammatical minimum the preserved sound licenses, a possessive address built on the El/Elah root, survives even after those marks are acknowledged. It proceeds on the grounds that the minimum is real. It does not proceed on the grounds that everything above the minimum is secure.

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## VI. What the Cry Might Mean

If *Eli* is taken at its grammatical face value, the cry can be read as preserving access to one of the most ancient divine names available to a first-century Semitic speaker, one that is not a covenant name, not a national name, and that predates the Sinai tradition, the Mosaic covenant, the temple, the priesthood, and the sacrificial system built around Yahweh's administration of Israel.

Whether that *El* is identifiable with El Elyon of the Canaanite texts, or with the Most High of the divine council tradition, or with something that precedes all naming, cannot be established from the word alone. On the paper's reading, El Elyon is the nearest surviving historical trace of a higher-source category that the merger later collapsed into Yahweh. But that is not the same as saying the Father is El Elyon in any simple religious-historical sense. The El Elyon of the Canaanite texts is itself a named, localized, cultic figure, embedded in a ritual system marked by sacrifice and appeasement, and subject to the same process of theological capture that the paper documents for Yahweh. The paper's claim is narrower: the Father stands nearer to the higher-source category the name El Elyon imperfectly points toward than to the covenantal administrator who absorbed that category. El Elyon is the closest historical pointer, not the destination.

The nonviolence argument makes this exclusion precise. If the Father Jesus reveals is structurally non-sacrificial and non-covenantally bounded, if he does not destroy enemies, require blood, enforce loyalty through death, or alternate between compassion and violence depending on covenant status, then he is difficult to reconcile either with Yahweh as portrayed in the Torah or with El Elyon as historically

embedded in Canaanite cult. Both are religious containers marked by sacrifice, hierarchical violence, and appeasement logic. The double incompatibility is consistent with the Father-language pointing beyond both.

## VI-B. Discovery Versus Correction: A Methodological Note

### **A Formal Criterion for Distinct Referent**

Before assessing the evidence, the argument requires a precise criterion. The question is not whether two descriptions of a divine being differ significantly. Descriptions of the same being can differ dramatically across time, context, and literary tradition without requiring two referents. The relevant question is whether the relational architecture attributed to the being can be preserved under revision.

Consider the distinction between correcting a portrait and replacing a subject. A portrait can be badly executed, ideologically distorted, or partial. Correction in that case restores accuracy to the original subject. But if the proposed correction requires removing the structural features that define what the subject is, the operation is no longer correction. It is substitution.

The test, stated precisely, is this: can the core logic by which a being relates to human beings be preserved under the proposed revision? If yes, the revision is a correction of the same referent. If no, the revision requires a different referent. This is not a matter of degree. It is a matter of whether the constitutive structure survives.

The classification of features as constitutive rather than incidental is not arbitrary. It is based on their systemic role across the Yahwistic corpus. Blood, priesthood, mediation, covenantal standing, and coercive enforcement are not occasional expressions. They are the ordinary and normative means by which Yahweh relates to humanity in the public structure of Israel's life. A feature that governs the access architecture across the entire corpus is not contextual ornament. It is defining structure. To call it incidental requires explaining why no non-mediated and non-coercive public mode of relation appears as the norm anywhere in the record prior to Jesus.

Applied to the case at hand: Yahweh's relational architecture is constitutively covenantal, conditioned, and coercive. Access to Yahweh requires mediation through designated structures: priesthood, sacrifice, ritual purity, national membership, covenantal standing. His mercy is real but always embedded within a framework that includes the possibility of its withdrawal and the active enforcement of penalty for breach. Even the most tender passages in the Hebrew Bible, Hosea 11, Exodus 34, parts of Jeremiah, do not dissolve this structure. They interrupt it. The mercy is surprising precisely because the punitive logic remains active. Yahweh can relent. He cannot, within the Hebrew Bible's own presentation, be characterized as operating from a relational logic in which the coercive structure is absent.

The Father Jesus reveals operates from a different foundational logic. Access is direct, personal, and available without mediation, sacrifice, national membership, or covenantal standing. The Father in the Sermon on the Mount is addressed secretly, individually, and without temple infrastructure. The Father in John's Gospel has apparently never been heard or seen by those who have worshipped Yahweh their entire lives. The Father in the parables initiates toward the alienated party before any covenantal conditions are met or even formally offered.

This is not Yahweh made more generous. Generosity is a modulation within an architecture. What Jesus describes is an architecture in which the coercive structure is not loosened but absent. To revise Yahweh into this Father, one would have to remove the covenantal conditionality, the blood-logic of access, the territorial and national particularity, and the retributive framework, not as incidental features but as the organizing principles of the Yahweh-Israel relationship from Sinai through the exile. What remains after that removal is not a corrected Yahweh. It is a different being.

The compassionate-Yahweh texts, therefore, do not defeat this argument. They illustrate it. Each instance of Yahweh's mercy in the Hebrew Bible is intelligible as mercy precisely because the threatening structure remains in place. Remove that structure and the mercy becomes something categorically different: not a divine interruption of wrath but a permanent relational default. That

permanent default is what Jesus describes. The fact that Yahweh occasionally resembles it does not mean they share the same relational logic, any more than a king who sometimes acts paternally shares the logic of fatherhood.

### **The "One but Not Identical" Response**

A sophisticated continuity response attempts to preserve divine unity while acknowledging non-identity: the Father and Yahweh are One but not identical. This formulation, which resembles Trinitarian and modal-unity frameworks, appears to offer an alternative to the formal criterion. It does not. The concession restates the criterion's central premise in different language. If they are not identical, they have different properties. If they have different properties, the constitutive relational logic of one is not the constitutive relational logic of the other. That is precisely what the formal criterion claims. The question of which relational logic belongs to the Father and which belongs to the administrator remains open, but the "One but not identical" move does not close it. Superposition, economic Trinity distinctions, and modal-unity frameworks all face the same problem: non-identity entails different properties, and different properties entail potentially different constitutive relational logics. The formal criterion applies to these frameworks as much as it applies to simple identity claims. They do not dissolve the criterion. They make it more urgent.

Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians 3:17 is sometimes invoked to support such frameworks: "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." In Greek both the Lord and the Spirit are in the nominative case with the article, permitting either translation direction. They are linguistically interchangeable yet clearly not identical in all respects throughout scripture. The Lord differentiates himself from the Spirit at many points in the New Testament. This is offered as precedent for divine figures being One yet not identical. But it confirms rather than defeats the formal criterion. If the Lord and the Spirit are One yet not identical, and that non-identity means they have different properties and therefore potentially different constitutive relational logics, then the formal criterion applies to that relationship as much as it applies to the

Father and Yahweh. The principle that divine unity does not require identical constitutive relational logic across all figures described as One is the framework's own claim stated in different terms.

### **The Pattern of Discovery versus Correction**

The paper's strongest remaining vulnerability requires direct engagement. A hostile reader can grant everything the paper argues about architectural incompatibility and still resist the conclusion of distinct referents by proposing a different explanation: not that Jesus was pointing to a different Father, but that Jesus was correcting a severe misdescription of the same God. On that account, Yahweh was always the Father Jesus describes; the tradition had simply gotten him catastrophically wrong; Jesus came to correct the error, not to introduce a new referent. That is a coherent position. It is also the best version of the continuity argument.

The distinction between correction and discovery is methodologically precise. When someone corrects a misdescription, the corrected party recognizes the referent once the correction is made. Correction works by pointing to something already present in the audience's experience and saying: you have misunderstood what you already know.

Discovery works differently: it introduces a referent not previously accessible, and the audience does not recognize the referent at all, even after the disclosure. The signature of correction is recognition. The signature of discovery is non-recognition.

The gospel record consistently displays the signature of discovery, not correction. Jesus does not say to the religious authorities: you know the Father, but you have misunderstood his character. He says: you have not known him. The authorities do not respond to his Father-language as a corrected description of a God they already know. They respond to it as a claim that places Jesus and his Father outside the recognized theological structure entirely. The blasphemy charge is not the response to a correction. It is the response to an introduction.

When Jesus describes the Father's character in the parables, his audience does not say: yes, that is Yahweh as we always suspected he truly was. The Father who runs toward the prodigal, who requires no

blood, who extends care without covenant condition, is not recognized as Yahweh corrected. He is encountered as a figure the tradition had no category for.

The correction model also faces a specific structural problem. If Jesus were correcting a misdescription of Yahweh, we would expect him to invoke Yahweh's name and say: this is what Yahweh is actually like. He never does this. Reformers invoke the referent's known history. They say, in effect, "you have forgotten what this God has always been." Elijah invokes the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Deutero-Isaiah invokes the God who brought Israel out of Egypt. The prophetic corrective is always a return to an already-known datum, not a disclosure of a previously unknown one. Jesus does not do this. He says "no one knows the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Matthew 11:27). The structure of that claim is not reclamation but exclusive disclosure. You cannot reclaim what no one has lost access to by definition. A reformer's audience recognizes the referent even when they resist the reform. Jesus's audience does not recognize the referent.

What actually happened is that the tradition absorbed the Father into Yahweh, which is precisely the merger the paper has been documenting. The correction model predicts that the tradition would absorb a correction as an improvement to its understanding of Yahweh. Instead it absorbed the Father into Yahweh. That pattern fits the discovery model more naturally than the correction model, and this observation should be weighed alongside the architectural evidence throughout.

### **The Name Silence**

Jesus never once calls his Father "Yahweh." Not in a single pericope. He says "Father," "my Father," "the Father," and "Abba." In the Hebrew Bible, Yahweh's name is the central identifying marker of divine address: prophets, psalmists, and even lament poetry invoke it constantly. If Jesus were correcting or revealing the true character of Yahweh, the natural move would be to say: let me tell you what Yahweh is truly like. Instead he introduces a Father as if by fresh

disclosure, unnamed in the Tetragrammaton sense. This is not a minor rhetorical choice. It is structural avoidance of the existing referent's name while introducing a new relational category.

The name-silence is reinforced by John 17:11: "Holy Father, keep them in thy name, the name which thou hast given me." The Father has a name that Yahweh gave to the Son, not the other way around. The naming logic runs in the wrong direction for identity. If the Father were Yahweh, he would not be described as receiving or giving a name that exceeds Yahweh's own covenantal designation.

### **John 1:18 as a Direct Falsification Test**

John 1:18 states: "No one has ever seen God." The problem is that people did see Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible. Moses (Exodus 33:11, Numbers 12:8), Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1), Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:26-28), and the elders of Israel on Sinai (Exodus 24:10-11) all have direct encounter narratives.

If Father equals Yahweh, John 1:18 is factually false within the canon. The text forces a choice: either John is wrong, or the God no one has ever seen is not the same deity those figures encountered. The continuity reading is forced to absorb this contradiction by harmonization, typically by arguing that John means no one has seen God in his full essence or final revelation. The two-referent reading dissolves it cleanly: no one has seen the Father, while Yahweh was indeed seen, because they are distinct. This is precisely the kind of discriminating test the formal criterion demands. The two-referent reading explains the text without remainder; the continuity reading requires additional inferential steps to avoid an apparent canonical contradiction.

### **The "You Have Not Known Him" Cluster**

A cluster of Johannine sayings makes the discovery pattern explicit in a way the correction model cannot easily accommodate. John 8:19: "You do not know me or my Father." John 8:55: "You have not known him." John 5:37: "You have never heard his voice nor seen his form." John 17:25: "The world has not known you."

But Israel had heard Yahweh's voice at Sinai. That was the defining national event: the entire people heard the divine voice, so much so that they begged Moses to mediate because direct divine speech was too overwhelming (Exodus 20:19). To say "you have never heard his voice" to an Israelite audience is either rhetorical hyperbole so extreme as to be meaningless, or it is a truthful statement about a genuinely unknown referent. The continuity reading is forced to call this hyperbole. The two-referent reading takes it literally.

This is especially powerful because the failed recognition in John is not contested interpretation. The religious authorities do not say: "we disagree about Yahweh's nature." They say: "we know God, you are introducing something we do not recognize." The register is estrangement, not reform debate. That is the signature of discovery, and this observation should be weighed alongside the architectural evidence throughout.

A narrowing response attempts to limit the force of John 17:25 by observing that Jesus says "the world" has not known the Father, not that his disciples have not known him. Only those with Christ in them know the Father, and the world by definition excludes them. But this narrowing does not survive contact with John 8:55, where Jesus addresses the Pharisees directly: "You have not known him." These are the most Torah-immersed, YHWH-devoted, religiously literate people in Israel. They are not the world in any ordinary sense. They are the custodians of the covenant tradition. If anyone should recognize the Father through YHWH encounter, it is them. Jesus says they have not known him. The narrowing collapses.

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## VII. Other Clues in the Record

### Matthew 11:27

Scholars have described this passage as the Johannine thunderbolt in the Synoptics, reflecting its unusual theological intensity in otherwise more narratively grounded gospels. Its claim, that no one knows the Father except the Son and no one knows the Son except the Father, is absolute rather than comparative: it does not say that knowledge of

the Father was incomplete before Jesus, but that it was absent outside the Son's disclosure. The saying is widely regarded as early, appearing in Q material shared by Matthew and Luke that predates Johannine theology by decades, so the usual objection that Johannine texts are too theologically developed to serve as evidence has less force here. Read at face value, the saying sits awkwardly with the inherited identification. It fits more naturally with a revelatory discontinuity than with a simple renaming.[4]

The strongest continuity response invokes the prophetic tradition of Israel's failure to know YHWH. Every major prophet accuses Israel of not knowing their own covenant God: Hosea 4:1 declares there is "no knowledge of God in the land"; Isaiah 1:3 states that Israel does not know while even donkeys recognize their master; Jeremiah 4:22 calls the people "fools who do not know me"; Ezekiel's recognition formula, "then you shall know that I am YHWH," appears over seventy times. Jeremiah 31:34 makes this explicit: the new covenant is defined precisely by everyone knowing YHWH without needing to be taught. The paper acknowledges the genuine force of this reading. The distinction the paper presses is between the degree of not-knowing the prophets describe and the absolute character of Jesus's claim. The prophets accuse Israel of not knowing YHWH while presupposing that YHWH is at least in principle known through Torah, temple, and covenant. They are calling Israel back to a God already present in the available vocabulary. Jesus treats the Father as a figure whose existence was not available in the religious vocabulary of his world, which is why the revelation is exclusive to the Son's disclosure rather than recoverable through the existing tradition.

A related objection comes from the Wisdom tradition within Second Temple Judaism. Proverbs 8, Sirach 24, and the Wisdom of Solomon all personify divine Wisdom as a figure operating alongside God: present at creation, dwelling with humanity, revealing the ways of God. The paper acknowledges the genuine overlap: the exclusivity language of Matthew 11:27 closely resembles Wisdom texts in which only the initiated receive her disclosure. The difficulty is that the Wisdom tradition consistently operates within the covenantal structure. Wisdom is Israel's heritage; Sirach explicitly identifies her with the Torah. She is not hidden from the most religiously literate people in Israel, which is precisely what Jesus claims about the Father

in John 8. The Wisdom framework explains intimacy and disclosure. It does not explain why the most Torah-observant people in Israel would have no knowledge of the Father Jesus reveals.

### John 8:54-55

Jesus is speaking to religious authorities who are confident they worship the same God he does. He tells them directly: "you have not known him." Not "you have known him imperfectly," or "you have known him under a different name," or "your knowledge is incomplete." "You have not known him." He then adds: "I know him, and if I said I did not know him I would be a liar like you." The charge is aimed not at pagans or Gentiles but at the most religiously literate people in Israel. If the Father is simply the covenant deity as already understood by these opponents, the exchange is very difficult to explain. The charge fits more naturally with a figure whose identity was not already available in the existing vocabulary than with one who had been worshipped under the name Yahweh for centuries.

### John 17:25

In the prayer offered the night before his death, Jesus addresses God as "Righteous Father" and declares: "the world has not known you." Read at face value, this fits more naturally as a claim about a Father whose identity was not foregrounded in Israel's existing covenant vocabulary than as a reference to a figure already publicly known through that tradition for centuries.

### Abba

A further linguistic clue lies in Jesus's use of *Abba*, the standard Aramaic word for father, used in intimate address. Paul preserves the word untranslated in both Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6, suggesting it carried enough weight in early Christian prayer practice to survive the move into Greek-speaking communities without substitution. Significantly, the Gethsemane usage is preserved in Mark 14:36, the earlier and less editorially shaped gospel, meaning the pattern of direct unmediated address to the Father is corroborated by the more reliable witness independently of the cry's Hebraized form in

Matthew. Scholarship has substantially revised earlier claims that *Abba* was a childlike diminutive without Jewish precedent: parallels exist in pre-Christian Jewish sources, and James Barr demonstrated that *abba* was standard Aramaic rather than an infantile register. The paper's argument does not rest on the uniqueness of the term itself. It rests on the pattern: the wholesale, consistent replacement of covenantal address with filial and direct address across every recorded prayer of Jesus.[5]

Reverential avoidance of the divine name is well-documented in Second Temple Judaism, but it predicts a specific pattern: silence about the divine name, accompanied by substitute terms drawn from the covenantal tradition such as Lord, God of Israel, God of our fathers, the Holy One of Israel, the Almighty. It does not predict the wholesale replacement of covenantal address with a structurally different relational vocabulary. Jesus does not merely avoid saying Yahweh. He replaces the entire covenantal mode of address with filial, direct, and non-mediated forms of relation, every single time, with a vocabulary not just quieter about the covenant name but structurally different from anything the covenantal tradition supplied. No pre-Christian Jewish source uses an intimate first-person singular address to God in prayer that matches the form Jesus employs; the Psalms speak of God as Father in covenantal and national terms, corporate and formal. That positive replacement pattern is what requires explanation, and reverential avoidance does not supply it.

### Why the Father-Language Provoked Blasphemy Charges

When Jesus enters the Temple and overturns the money-changers' tables, he calls it "my Father's house," not Yahweh's house, not the God of Israel's house. This is the central sanctuary of Yahwistic worship, and Jesus claims it in the name of a Father whose identity is possessive and personal rather than covenantal and national. It was threatening in the Temple for the same reason it was at the cross: it claimed direct personal access to a source the entire institutional structure had been built to mediate.

In John 5:17-18, Jesus says "my Father is working until now, and I am working." The Gospel writer notes that the authorities sought to kill him for two reasons: breaking the Sabbath, and "calling God his own

Father." The phrase is exact. Not our Father. Not the Father of Israel. His own Father. Every Israelite was already a son of Yahweh in the corporate sense. That was not blasphemy. That was Torah. What was blasphemy was the claim to a specific, exclusive, intimate paternal relationship with a Father the authorities did not recognize as Israel's covenant God. Intimate address of Yahweh is not blasphemy in Second Temple Judaism; the Psalms are full of it. What registers as blasphemy is invoking divine status outside the Yahweh framework. If Jesus were claiming intimacy with Yahweh, the expected response would be theological correction, not a stoning charge.

John 8:41-44 is the sharpest exchange of all. The authorities say: "we have one Father, God himself." Jesus responds: "if God were your Father you would love me, for I came from God." He then tells them their father is the devil, a murderer from the beginning and the father of lies. Jesus draws a distinction between two paternal orientations pointing toward different sources. His Father sent him; the father they invoke did not recognize him. The charge of blasphemy followed.

The blasphemy charge requires careful attention because it is historically falsifiable evidence for the paper's thesis. The Sanhedrin charged Jesus with blasphemy (Mark 14:64). But claiming to be the Messiah was not blasphemous. This is not speculation. It is historically documented. Rabbi Akiva, one of the most respected sages in Jewish history, endorsed Simon bar Kokhba as the Messiah in the second century without blasphemy charges. Other rabbis disagreed with Akiva's identification, but no one accused him of blasphemy for making a messianic claim. Messianic claims, even mistaken ones, did not constitute blasphemy in Second Temple or early Rabbinic Judaism.

The pattern extends further. Theudas, Simon bar Giora, Athronges, and other messianic or royal claimants in the first century were executed by Rome as rebels. The charge was sedition, not blasphemy. They threatened Roman political order, not Jewish theological order. The Sanhedrin did not convene to condemn them for offenses against the divine name. The Romans handled them as insurgents. This is the standard pattern for messianic claimants: political execution for political threat.

Jesus was charged with blasphemy. The high priest tore his robes. The Sanhedrin rendered a religious verdict before handing him to Pilate for political execution. The question is what claim, if not messiahship, constituted the blasphemy.

Mark 14:62 preserves Jesus's answer to the high priest's direct question. Asked whether he is the Christ, the Son of the Blessed, Jesus responds: "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven." The high priest tears his robes and declares blasphemy. The claim that provoked this response was not "I am the Messiah." It was the combination of "I am" with the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power. The Son of Man language is drawn from Daniel 7, where the one like a son of man approaches the Ancient of Days and receives dominion, glory, and a kingdom. The "right hand of Power" is drawn from Psalm 110:1, where the Lord says to the speaker's lord, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool." Jesus's statement combines both texts. The Ancient of Days in Daniel 7 is the supreme figure, the one who sits on the throne before whom the son of man appears. In the divine council framework the first half of this paper has documented, the Ancient of Days is El Elyon, the Most High, the figure above the national deities. Jesus claims to be seated at the right hand of that figure, receiving authority from him. The blasphemy is the claim to participate in the authority of the Most High, not the claim to be Israel's anointed king.

The charge tells you the claim. If Jesus were claiming to be Yahweh's messiah within the Yahwistic framework, the charge would not have been blasphemy. It would have been presumption, false prophecy, or political danger. Blasphemy requires a violation of the divine name or a claim to divine prerogatives that the existing theological structure cannot accommodate. The Sanhedrin's verdict is evidence that they understood Jesus to be claiming something outside or above their Yahweh. They recognized what later theological tradition would flatten: the Father he identified with is not the deity whose house they administered.

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## VIII. Melchizedek and the Higher Order

Before Israel exists, before the Sinai covenant, before Moses, a priest-king named Melchizedek appears in Genesis 14 and blesses Abram in the name of El Elyon, creator of heaven and earth. Melchizedek is not an Israelite. He has no covenant with Yahweh. He predates the Mosaic covenant and the entire Levitical structure. Genesis presents him without any suggestion of error or idolatry as a genuine priest of the genuine Most High, and notably without genealogy, a silence the author of Hebrews later develops theologically as signifying a priesthood outside the lineage system entirely. Abram accepts the blessing and tithes to him, one tenth of everything. In the economy of the ancient world, tithing was not a gesture of courtesy. It was an acknowledgment of superior authority. One textual note strengthens the passage's relevance. Genesis 14:22, in the Masoretic text, records Abram swearing by "YHWH El Elyon." But three independent ancient witnesses, the Septuagint, the Samaritan Pentateuch, and the translation of Symmachus, all read only "El Elyon" with no YHWH. The textual-critical principle that scribes were more likely to add clarifying glosses than to delete a divine name, combined with the agreement of three independent traditions, suggests that "YHWH" is a later interpolation. If the shorter reading is original, Abram swears by El Elyon without any Yahwistic identification, which is precisely what the paper's framework would predict at this pre-Sinai, pre-Mosaic stage of the narrative.

The Levitical system stands downstream of Melchizedek, but Hebrews argues something more radical than mere temporal priority: the Levitical order's authority was always derivative, never original. The Sinai covenant did not create ultimate priestly authority. It administered a portion of something it did not originate. Melchizedek's lack of genealogy is not a narrative curiosity. Levitical priestly legitimacy flows through lineage, through Aaron, through the Sinai covenant's administrative machinery. A priest without genealogy operates outside that machinery entirely. When Hebrews identifies Jesus with this genealogy-independent order, it is not upgrading him within the Levitical system. It is identifying him with an authority that predates the system and does not depend on it.

Hebrews 7 constructs a precise rank-ordering through the tithes argument. Abraham tithes to Melchizedek. The lesser is blessed by the greater. And Levi, the ancestor of the Levitical priesthood, was

still within Abraham's line at the moment of tithing, meaning the Levitical priesthood had already, in principle, submitted to Melchizedek's order before it existed. The argument is not typological. It is hierarchical. Sinai is downstream of Salem. The entire covenantal apparatus was established within a framework that had already acknowledged a higher order.

One further feature of Hebrews is worth careful attention: the author builds the superiority argument on Melchizedek as priest of El Elyon without ever identifying El Elyon with Yahweh. The author never says El Elyon is Yahweh under another name, never says this is the God of Sinai operating through a different priestly mode, never invokes the merger. In an argument this meticulous, that absence is not an oversight. The Melchizedek argument is careful in every other respect. The absence leaves more conceptual room than continuity readings usually acknowledge, and the 11QMelchizedek text confirms that the conceptual space was not merely available but actively inhabited by at least one pre-Christian Jewish community.

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## IX. The Character of the Father

### The Father-Son Structure Has No Yahwistic Precedent

The character argument identifies differences in how God behaves. There is a prior and sharper problem: the relational structure Jesus describes, a Father who has a divine Son, sends him, is known exclusively through him, and is revealed by him to those the Son chooses, has no close template in Yahwistic theology as preserved in the Torah and Prophets.

Where Yahweh is called Father in the Hebrew Bible, the language is consistently corporate and covenantal. In Exodus 4:22, Israel is Yahweh's firstborn son: a collective national designation. In Psalm 2:7, the Davidic king is declared son through adoptive royal investiture, covenantal language for a human monarch. In Deuteronomy 32:6 and Isaiah 63-64, Yahweh is addressed as Father in the sense of creator and originator of the nation, language that is distant, formal, and covenantal rather than intimate and personal. The divine council "sons

of God" in Psalm 82 and Deuteronomy 32 are subordinate divine beings in the hierarchy, not figures standing in the specific relationship of a Son who knows the Father uniquely and reveals him to humanity.

Jesus's Father-Son language is structurally different from these Yahwistic precedents. He does not claim Israel's corporate sonship. He does not invoke adoptive royal language. He speaks of a Father who sent him from outside the world, who knows him uniquely as he knows the Father, whose will he enacts, whose character he embodies, and to whom he returns. The Torah's father-son language is corporate, adoptive, and covenantal throughout. If Yahweh is the Father Jesus addresses, the Torah's silence on this Father's Son is a structural absence continuity readings must account for.

Yahweh as characterized in the Torah operates through a specific structure: love extended covenantally to Israel when Israel is faithful and withheld or punished when it is not; forgiveness requiring blood payment through a priestly sacrificial system; access to the divine mediated through temple, priest, and ritual; loyalty enforced by death for transgression; territory administered and defended; enemies destroyed; the relationship bounded by ethnic covenant and national particularity.

The Father as characterized by Jesus operates through a structurally different architecture: love extended universally without covenant precondition, sending rain on enemies and friends alike; forgiveness given before any accounting is complete, without blood offering or priestly mediation; access to the divine direct and filial, requiring no intermediary; the relationship defined by unconditional restoration rather than enforced loyalty; no territory to defend, no enemies to destroy, no covenant to enforce, no blood required.

The question is whether these two architectures are variants of a single identity across different historical settings, or evidence of two distinct referents collapsed by later tradition. A developmental account can describe the contrast, but it struggles to explain why the underlying relational structure appears to change rather than merely deepen. Progressive revelation can explain a change in tone, emphasis, or mode of engagement. It cannot explain a change in the

structure of the relationship itself. A God who conditionally withholds love from covenant-breakers and a Father who sends rain on everyone without distinction are not operating in different rhetorical registers. They are operating through different relational architectures.

It is also worth noting that the discontinuity is not confined to the Johannine tradition, which critics often flag as the most theologically developed layer. Mark, the earliest gospel and the least editorially shaped, already preserves both *Abba* in Gethsemane and *Eloi* at the cross, two moments of direct, unmediated address to the Father in extremity, both in Aramaic, neither routing through covenantal terminology. John elaborates what Mark already contains.

A second continuity objection deserves direct engagement: the claim that Yahweh's covenantal harshness reflects the specific administrative demands of the Sinai covenant rather than his underlying character, and that the Father Jesus reveals is the same being operating in a different covenantal context. If covenantal administration explains Yahweh's behavior under Sinai, then in pre-covenantal contexts within the Hebrew Bible itself we should see something much closer to the Father Jesus describes. But this is not what the pre-Sinai material shows. Before Sinai, Yahweh floods the earth, confounds languages at Babel, destroys Sodom and Gomorrah, and commands Abraham to sacrifice his son. The relational architecture is not a function of the covenant. It is the underlying character of the figure.

The contrast is sharpest on the question of forgiveness. Yahweh's logic runs: sin incurs debt, debt requires blood, blood is offered by a priest, forgiveness follows. The entire Levitical system is built on that sequence. The Father Jesus describes skips it entirely. He runs toward the returning prodigal before any speech of repentance is finished, before any accounting is complete. He forgives the paralytic without ritual mediation. That is the structural opposite: not waiting for the debt to be settled before moving, but moving before the debt is mentioned at all.

Jesus is explicit about the contrast on at least one occasion. In the Sermon on the Mount he says repeatedly: *you have heard that it was said*, and then cites the tradition directly: *but I say to you*. Eye for eye

becomes turn the other cheek. Love your neighbor becomes love your enemies. The command to love neighbors appears in Leviticus 19:18, but the implied corollary to hate enemies is not a Torah verse. It is what the tradition had built on top of it.

The form of the correction is as significant as its content. Jesus does not present himself as an interpreter recovering the original intent of Yahweh's law. He does not say what Yahweh always meant. He speaks with authority to restate the terms themselves. The structure is not exegetical but declarative: what was said is set alongside what he now says. In Israel's prophetic tradition, correction operates by appeal to prior revelation: thus says the Lord, or a return to what Yahweh has already made known. Jesus does not appeal back. He speaks over.

If Yahweh is the Father Jesus reveals, this is Yahweh revising his own covenantal structure at the level of its operative logic. If the Father stands above that structure, the form is more intelligible: the source speaks over the administrator. The passage does not settle the question, but it adds a further structural pressure on readings that collapse the two.

## The Access Architecture

Yahweh's access structure is constitutively mediated: temple, sacrifice, priestly hierarchy, ritual purity, covenantal standing, national membership. The entire Levitical architecture exists precisely because direct access to Yahweh is presented as catastrophically dangerous; the deaths of Nadab and Abihu, of Uzzah, of the Beth-shemeshites all enforce this structure. The threat is not incidental. It is the architecture's organizing principle.

The Father Jesus reveals has a completely different access structure: direct, personal, available to Gentiles, Samaritans, tax collectors, and sinners without any prerequisite mediation, through prayer anywhere, without temple, without sacrifice, without national membership. "Your Father who sees in secret" is addressed to individuals praying alone, with the door shut, without priestly mediation. There is no institutional layer between the individual and the Father.

This is not the same relational architecture made more generous. Generosity is a modulation within an architecture. What Jesus describes is an architecture in which the coercive approach-avoidance structure is not loosened but absent. You cannot get from Leviticus to the Sermon on the Mount's prayer instructions by theological development. The access structure in the Sermon on the Mount is not a reformed version of the temple system. It is the temple system's functional replacement with something operating from a different logic entirely.

## The Prince of This World

John 12:31, 14:30, and 16:11 describe Satan as "the ruler of this world." Paul echoes this in 2 Corinthians 4:4, calling him "the god of this age," and in Ephesians 2:2, "the prince of the power of the air." Jesus accepts and operates within this premise. If Yahweh equals the Father equals the Creator-God who fully owns and governs the world, the cosmology breaks. The logic only holds if the Father is above or outside the current administration of this world: a higher Father who sent his Son into a domain governed by a different power. That is the cosmology the paper has been mapping, and it is precisely the situation described by Psalm 82, where the Most High enters to judge the administrators who have failed.

## The Prodigal Son as System-Logic Contrast

The parable of the Prodigal Son is the clearest single passage for the system-logic contrast the paper has been developing. In Exodus 34, Hosea 11, Jonah, and the most compassionate passages in Jeremiah, Yahweh's mercy is reactive, situated, often connected to lament or intercession, and always embedded in a covenantal or contractual history. Even when it is startling, it is mercy within a framework that includes the active possibility of non-mercy.

In the Prodigal Son, the Father runs toward the returning son before any confession is complete. He does not wait for the speech. He does not evaluate the repentance's quality. He does not reimpose covenantal conditions. He throws a party before anything is formally resolved. Then he goes out to the elder son who refuses to come in, initiating again toward the one in the wrong relational posture. In

neither case does the Father deploy the possibility of non-mercy. It is not that the Father suppresses a punitive instinct. There is no punitive instinct to suppress. The relational default is to move toward, without qualification.

This is mercy operating from a different anthropological assumption: the Father treats the son as already family even in alienation. Yahweh's mercy in the Hebrew Bible never operates from that assumption. Israel is always in a probationary relation that mercy can interrupt but cannot dissolve the structure of. Even Hosea 11, the most parental of the Hebrew compassion passages, shows Yahweh's compassion as what holds back the punishment the covenantal logic would require. The tenderness and the violence coexist in the same chapter because neither can dissolve the covenantal structure that generates both. The Father in the Prodigal Son operates as if the family structure is metaphysically prior to any covenantal compliance. That is not a development of Hosea 11. It is a different ontological claim about what the relationship is.

A counterargument observes that the prodigal son returned. The emergency protocol was engaged because the sheep were lost; they never would have come back on their own. The return initiates the encounter. This is true as far as it goes. But it does not reach the point the parable makes. Both elements matter: the son returns, and the Father runs before the accounting is complete. The return initiates proximity. It does not satisfy a precondition for the Father's movement. The Father does not wait for the son to finish his rehearsed speech. He does not evaluate the quality of the repentance. He does not reimpose conditions. He runs first, while the son is still a long way off. The son's turning makes the encounter possible. The Father's running reveals the relational logic that was already operative. That logic is not contingent on the adequacy of the return. It is the Father's default mode, now visible because the distance has begun to close.

A more direct challenge comes from the judgment material in the gospels themselves. Matthew in particular contains severe passages: the sheep and goats in chapter 25 with its language of eternal fire, the repeated warnings about outer darkness, the grinding of teeth. A possible resolution within the paper's framework is to distinguish the

Father's character from the delegated judgment function carried by the Son of Man. Matthew 25 places the Son of Man on the throne, not the Father. Daniel 7 shows the Son of Man receiving authority from the Ancient of Days rather than judging on his own authority. The Father, as Jesus describes him, runs toward the prodigal. The Son of Man separates sheep from goats. These are coherent descriptions of two different functions in a structure the paper has been mapping from the first section.

The paper's framework opens a further implication it does not fully develop but should name honestly. If the Father's love is structurally unconditional, requiring no blood and no covenant loyalty as the price of relationship, then the most internally consistent conclusion is that the Father's intent is universal. Several texts point in this direction with unusual directness: John 12:32 records Jesus saying he will draw all people to himself when lifted up; Romans 5:18 sets universal condemnation and universal justification in explicit parallel; 1 Corinthians 15:22 states that as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive; Colossians 1:20 speaks of reconciling all things. On the paper's reading, the traditional requirement for permanent punishment belongs to Yahweh's covenantal justice, not to the Father's nature. If the Father is not Yahweh, that requirement dissolves. The paper names the direction the logic faces without settling it as doctrine.

## Why the Compassionate-Yahweh Texts Do Not Close the Gap

The counterargument that most directly pressures the paper's thesis comes from the genuinely compassionate passages, where Yahweh speaks with what appears to be unconditional parental tenderness. Exodus 34:6-7 is the most quoted passage in the Hebrew Bible by the Hebrew Bible itself, referenced more than twenty-seven times across the canon. The first attribute Yahweh assigns himself there is *raham*, merciful and compassionate, derived from the word for womb. The mercy extends to thousands of generations; the judgment reaches only three or four. Crucially, this self-disclosure occurs after Israel's worst apostasy, the golden calf incident, with no blood payment required. The ground of forgiveness is entirely divine character.

Hosea 11:8-9 is similarly striking: "How can I give you up, Ephraim?...My heart is overturned within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my burning anger...For I am God, and not a man." The Hebrew *nehpakh alai libi* uses the same root as the overturning of Sodom. What was destroyed in Sodom is now destroyed within God: his own wrath. No blood is offered. No sacrifice mediates. Forgiveness is entirely a function of divine parental character. These are not marginal passages. They are central ones.

The first distinction to draw is between emotional register and relational architecture. These passages show that Yahweh is capable of a compassionate emotional register. They do not show that Yahweh's relational architecture with humanity is fatherly in the sense Jesus describes. Exodus 34:6-7 is structurally revealing: the enumeration of compassion and steadfast love is immediately followed by the statement that Yahweh "will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation." The mercy and the retributive logic appear in the same breath because they are both active within the same framework. This is not the Father of the Prodigal Son. The father in that parable does not reserve the right to visit the son's iniquity on his grandchildren.

Hosea 11 deserves the most careful treatment. The emotional register is unmistakably parental. But three things separate this passage from the Fatherhood Jesus reveals. First, the relationship is covenantal and national: this is Yahweh's love for Israel as a collective covenant partner, not for humanity as such. Second, the context is a breach-and-relent structure: the compassion is precisely what holds Yahweh back from the punishment that covenantal logic would require. The mercy is visible because the punitive obligation is real. Third, the chapter does not end in unqualified restoration. Verse 6 describes the sword falling on the cities. The tenderness and the violence coexist because neither can dissolve the covenantal structure that generates both.

Jonah adds another dimension. Yahweh's concern for Nineveh is a genuine textual expansion of Yahweh's mercy. But it remains situated within Yahweh's sovereign prerogative to show mercy where he chooses. It is divine discretion exercised generously, not the

structural impossibility of non-mercy that characterizes the Father Jesus reveals. The Father of the Sermon on the Mount "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." This is not generous discretion. It is a different mode of being in relation to creation: one in which the coercive structure is so absent that even the distinction between deserving and undeserving parties does not govern the giving.

The systemic conclusion: Yahweh's compassion in the Hebrew Bible is mercy within a coercive framework. The Father Jesus reveals operates without that framework. These are two different relational logics. The compassionate-Yahweh texts, read carefully, confirm rather than undermine this distinction, because they display Yahweh's compassion precisely as the interruption of a punitive structure that remains operative. That very structure is absent in the Father Jesus describes.

### The Father's Relational Logic Absent the Emergency

A continuity response grants that Sinai was an emergency intervention, a schoolmaster to bring humanity to Christ, necessitated by human rebellion rather than any deficiency in the Law itself. Paul establishes this clearly. The question the formal criterion asks is more precise: whether the constitutive relational logic required by that emergency belongs to the Father's character or to the administrator's response to the emergency. These are separable questions. What does the Father's relational logic look like absent the emergency?

The most direct answer available within the continuity framework itself is the Garden of Eden. Before the fall, before rebellion, before any emergency protocol was engaged, the relational architecture was direct presence, unmediated access, no blood logic, no covenantal conditionality, no enforcement through death. If that is the Father's default mode, and Sinai is the administrator's emergency response to human crisis, then the continuity reader has conceded distinct relational logics by their own admission. A being whose default mode is unconditional presence and whose emergency response operates through conditional coercive architecture is not expressing one consistent character across two phases. It is a source whose character remains constant while the administrator's emergency response operates according to a different logic. The emergency explains why

Sinai took the form it did. It does not require that the Father's character is the source of that form. The formal criterion applies to the continuity reader's own framing.

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## X. Why the Reading Was So Readily Stabilized

Second-century movements such as the Marcionites and Valentinians repeatedly reopened the distinction between the Father revealed by Christ and the creator-lawgiver identified with inherited scripture. Their cosmological systems do not prove the paper's thesis, but they show that the pressure toward this distinction is ancient, recurrent, and likely rooted in the source material itself rather than invented in modern scholarship.

If the reading developed in this paper has any validity, it explains why the most charged utterance in the New Testament was immediately stabilized under a psalm citation and a case of mistaken identity. The bystanders reach for Elijah within the same scene. The Gospel writers assign the psalm before the page turns. The pattern is fast, unanimous, and institutionally convenient. What occurred was interpretive consolidation rather than textual erasure. The word remained intact, preserved because the narrative required its sound, but its meaning was stabilized through the surrounding gloss and subsequent theological tradition. The text survived. The question it might have opened was closed before it was asked.

A Jesus who dies crying out to Yahweh is a Jesus who confirms the entire edifice of the covenant tradition. His death becomes a sacrifice within the Yahwistic sacrificial logic. His blood pays a debt owed to the God who demanded blood. The entire penal substitution framework, which became the dominant soteriology of post-Reformation Protestant Christianity and a significant strand of Catholic theology, depends on this reading. Yahweh requires the death. The Son pays it. The covenant is satisfied. That is a coherent theological system. It is also a system in which the institutional church retains its mediating role, its sacrificial logic, and its administrative authority between the individual and God.

A Jesus who dies crying out through the El-root toward the source above the divine administration becomes a fundamentally different figure. He is not satisfying a demand. He is bearing witness to something the demand-based system cannot contain. On this reading, the incarnation is not a payment but a transmission. The source enters the domain of the lesser administrator directly, bypassing the priestly mediation structure, and the result is not satisfaction of a debt but dissolution of the architecture that created the debt in the first place.

The paper names one further implication without settling it. 1 Corinthians 15 describes Christ reigning until all enemies are placed under his feet, the last enemy being death, and then handing the kingdom to the Father so that God may be all in all. On the paper's framework, that final phrase is not Yahweh language. It is source language. The covenantal administrator's domain is fully dissolved and the Father's direct presence becomes universal, with no mediating structure between the source and those he created. Revelation 21 follows the same trajectory: the new Jerusalem has no temple, because direct access has replaced the entire architecture of mediation.

This has radical implications for the theology of the church. If the Father is not Yahweh, then the institutional church built on Yahwistic sacrificial logic may have been built on a misidentification at the center of its sacrificial logic. The sacramental system, the priesthood, the entire apparatus of mediated access to God, rests on the premise that direct access requires a price and a mediator. Remove that premise and the institutional architecture loses its foundation. The paper does not claim this explains why the premise has not been examined. What the paper claims is that the premise is contestable, that the evidence assembled here contests it, and that the question deserves examination it has not received.

The cry and the tearing are separated in Matthew by only two verses. The sequence is tight enough to constitute a single statement: the name is pressed into the silence, the body fails, and the veil comes down. On this reading, the cry names the source directly, bypassing the administrative layer. The veil tears, signaling the collapse of the

architecture of mediated access. Everything the institutional tradition built on top of that moment depends on not reading the sequence this way.

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## XI. The Crucifixion as Historical Confirmation

The preceding sections have assembled textual, linguistic, structural, and character evidence for distinguishing the Father Jesus revealed from Yahweh as portrayed in the Torah. This section makes a different kind of argument. It is not about what the texts say. It is about what the people in the room understood.

The crucifixion is not merely consistent with the paper's thesis. It is historical confirmation that the distinction was operative in the moment. The Sanhedrin's reaction demonstrates that they grasped the claim even if later tradition did not.

The argument can be stated with precision. The Sanhedrin charged blasphemy. Claiming to be the Messiah was not blasphemous. Rabbi Akiva endorsed Bar Kokhba as Messiah without blasphemy charges. Other messianic claimants were executed as rebels by Rome, not condemned as blasphemers by the Sanhedrin. The charge category is therefore evidence of the claim category. Whatever Jesus claimed, it was not merely messiahship. It was something the religious authorities recognized as a violation of their theological order.

The only claim that fits the charge is the one this paper has been documenting: Jesus identified with a divine source above or outside the Yahweh the Sanhedrin served. His "I am" combined with Daniel 7's Son of Man receiving authority from the Ancient of Days and Psalm 110's figure seated at the right hand of Power placed him in the register of El Elyon, the Most High of the divine council framework. The authorities understood that register even if they rejected the claim. Their rejection took the form of a blasphemy verdict because the claim was theological, not political. A Yahwist reformer would have been corrected. A political rebel would have been handed to Rome without religious process. A man claiming sonship with a God above Yahweh was a blasphemer.

The tradition that later identified the Father with Yahweh thereby lost access to what the Sanhedrin still understood. The theological flattening is the revisionism. The authorities in the room preserved, in the form of their condemnation, evidence that the distinction was real and recognized. They knew what he was claiming. They named it. They killed him for revealing it.

This is not inference from theological reconstruction. It is the historical record showing that the distinction the paper argues for was operative at the moment of greatest consequence. The Father Jesus spoke of is not Yahweh. The people who condemned him to death understood that. The evidence that the argument is correct is that they responded to it as blasphemy rather than as mere presumption.

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## XII. The Strongest Case for the Traditional Identification

Intellectual honesty requires stating the opposing case in its strongest form, not as a series of objections to be dispatched but as a coherent position that deserves full hearing before the paper's conclusion is drawn.

Jesus was a Second Temple Jew. He read Torah in synagogue. He cited the Shema. He engaged scripture as authoritative. He said he came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it. He taught in the Temple. He observed Passover. Every person who knew him personally and left a written record, Paul, James, Peter, and the authors of the Synoptic gospels, identified the Father Jesus spoke of with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Paul, who claims a direct encounter with the risen Christ and whose letters predate the gospels, calls Jesus the image of the invisible God and identifies that God without tension as the God of Israel. The early church, drawing on living memory of Jesus, made the Yahweh identification so naturally and completely that no surviving first-century document contests it. If the distinction the paper argues for was real and recoverable, the people closest to Jesus failed to recover it. That is a significant problem for any argument that the distinction was conscious and intended.

The weight usually placed on early unanimity must be qualified by the gospels' own repeated testimony that Jesus's closest disciples fundamentally misunderstood his teaching. In John 16:12, Jesus says directly: "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear." In John 16:25, he states that he has been speaking in figures and that the plain disclosure of the Father had not yet occurred. Luke 18:34 records that after Jesus plainly described his death and resurrection, the disciples "did not understand any of this" and "did not know what he was talking about." Mark records Jesus asking his own disciples: "Do you still not see or understand?" These are not peripheral moments. They are recurring structural features of the gospel record. If Jesus himself stated that his closest followers could not yet bear the full teaching, and that the plain disclosure of the Father had not yet occurred, then the early church's confident identification of the Father with Yahweh is at least consistent with being one of the misunderstandings Jesus predicted rather than confirmation of the correct reading. Early unanimity under those conditions is evidence of what was understood, not necessarily of what Jesus intended.

Paul requires separate treatment. He is often cited as the strongest early witness because his letters predate the gospels and he claims a direct encounter with the risen Christ. But Paul never heard Jesus teach. He did not know Jesus in the flesh. His default theological categories were formed entirely within Pharisaic Yahwistic Judaism. When he encountered the risen Christ, he interpreted that encounter through the only framework he possessed. Paul himself acknowledges the limits of his knowledge: "now I know in part" (1 Corinthians 13:12). Crucially, Paul is downstream of the merged theological field the paper has been documenting: the community he received his tradition from was already operating within the Yahweh identification. He is not an independent witness to what Jesus intended. He is a downstream interpreter of what the early community understood, shaped by a framework Jesus himself said his disciples could not yet fully bear.

The deeper question is not whether the earliest followers made this identification but why that identification became unanimous rather than contested. The answer lies in the structure of the interpretive situation itself. Jesus introduced a referent not previously available in

the theological vocabulary of his world. His followers had to interpret that referent through the nearest available category, which was the God of Israel. The resurrection then functioned as a validation event that demanded immediate integration into an already fixed monotheistic framework. The only stable synthesis available was to identify the Father with Yahweh. Once that synthesis was established through scriptural anchoring and liturgical repetition, alternative readings became structurally inadmissible within the emerging system. Early unanimity is therefore not evidence that the identification is correct. It is evidence that it was interpretively inevitable given the categories available. The distinction matters: inevitability under constraint is not the same as correspondence to what Jesus intended.

The character gap the paper documents is real, but it may not require a different divine referent to explain. The Hebrew Bible itself contains the seeds of the Father's character: Hosea's grieving father, Jonah's relenting deity, the compassion of Exodus 34, the restorative vision of the later prophets. Jesus may have been drawing out what was always latent in Israel's tradition, correcting what the tradition had distorted, and revealing a dimension of the same God that the covenantal and sacrificial emphasis had obscured. That is radical, but it is not replacement. Matthew 11:27 can be read as a claim about revelatory access rather than referential novelty. John 8 can be read as a claim about the depth of knowing rather than the identity of the referent.

The paper's response is not that these readings are impossible. They are coherent. They are the readings the tradition has developed and defended for two thousand years. The paper's claim is narrower: that these readings require more interpretive labor than is usually acknowledged, that the character gap presents as architectural rather than merely tonal, that the pre-Sinai evidence undermines the covenantal-context explanation, that the prayer language replacement pattern is not predicted by reverential avoidance, and that the Melchizedek argument in Hebrews gains its force without requiring the Yahweh identification the continuity reading needs. The formal criterion developed in Section VI-B makes the structural demand precise: not degree of difference but whether the constitutive relational logic survives revision. The continuity reading must show that the constitutive logic survives. The paper argues it does not.

Isaiah 45:5 presents a related objection: "I am YHWH, and there is no one else; apart from me there is no God." This is the strongest totalizing monotheistic claim in the Hebrew Bible and it should be treated as such. The key question is what kind of claim is being made. Isaiah 45 is a polemic against rival gods within the domain of history, nations, and political sovereignty, specifically in contrast to Babylonian claims about Marduk. The "no one else" language functions as a totalizing sovereignty claim within that domain. The paper's argument is not introducing a rival god within that field. It is asking whether the source of that field itself is identical with its administrator. A claim that there is no other god within the domain of history and nations is not the same as a claim that there is no reality beyond the level at which that claim is being made. Isaiah is answering a different question, who rules history, than the one the paper is asking, what is the ultimate source of being itself. The difficulty of Isaiah 45 remains real and the paper does not pretend otherwise. But the framework does not require denying the text. It requires recognizing that the text and the paper are addressing different levels of the question.

A further objection comes from 1 Timothy 2:5: "For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus." If the Father's relational logic is unconditional movement toward humanity, why is a mediator necessary at all? The existence of a mediator appears to require that the Father withholds direct approach until the mediator satisfies some condition. But the sequence matters. The Father moved first by sending the Son. The initiative is unconditional and prior. The mediation is the mechanism of that movement into a domain whose architecture required it, not the Father's precondition for moving at all. A father who sends a rescue team into a collapsed building is not withholding his love until the team completes the extraction. He is acting through the only means available given the conditions of the domain. John 14:9 makes this precise: "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." The mediation is transparent to the Father's character rather than a barrier between the Father and humanity. If the Son's mediation perfectly expresses the Father's will, and the Son's mode is cruciform, self-giving, enemy-loving, and unconditional, then the mediation

reveals rather than constrains the Father's character. A mediator was necessary because the domain required it. Not because the Father required satisfaction before he would come.

Three further objections deserve direct acknowledgment. First, the resurrection: Paul's central proclamation is that God raised Jesus from the dead, using language drawn from Israel's covenant tradition. If the Father is not Yahweh, which divine figure is being invoked in resurrection proclamation? The paper's framework suggests the answer is the source above the administrative layer, the one Jesus addressed from the cross, and that the resurrection represents the source's direct action in the domain of the lesser administrator. Second, the Kingdom of God: Jesus's central proclamation is the Kingdom of God or Heaven. One linguistic detail is relevant here: the Aramaic phrase Jesus almost certainly used is *malkuta d'Alaha*, where *Alaha* is the Aramaic cognate of *El* and *Elah*, the same root preserved in the cross cry. The Kingdom of God is announced in El-language, not in Yahweh-language or Adonai-language. That is at least consistent with the paper's framework, in which the source's sovereign order is precisely what is being proclaimed as arriving. Third, Jesus's endorsement of the Shema: in Mark 12:29, when asked about the greatest commandment, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:4 directly. Endorsing it affirms that Yahweh is Israel's one undivided God, the legitimate administrator of the covenant. That is compatible with the paper's reading, in which Yahweh is a real and significant figure in the hierarchy, administering a genuine covenant with a real people, while the Father Jesus reveals operates at a different level of that hierarchy.

A fourth objection concerns the I AM sayings, particularly John 8:58: "Before Abraham was, I am." Jesus appears to be claiming the divine name from Exodus 3:14. The paper's response draws attention to a distinction in the Exodus 3 text itself. Exodus 3 gives two sequential answers to Moses's question about the divine name. Verse 14 gives the ontological self-designation: "I AM WHO I AM" and "I AM has sent me to you." Verse 15 gives the covenantal historical identification: "the LORD, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, this is my name forever." Jesus in John 8:58 quotes verse 14, not verse 15. He claims "I AM," not "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." He takes the pre-covenantal ontological designation without taking the covenantal elaboration. A hostile reader must explain why

Jesus quotes Exodus 3:14 and not 3:15 if he meant to identify with Yahweh's covenantal identity. The most natural explanation is that he was claiming the ontological level of the self-designation, not the covenantal level built on top of it. That is precisely what the paper's framework predicts.

A fifth objection concerns the direct falsification question raised by John 1:18. "No one has ever seen God" sits alongside the undeniable fact that Yahweh was seen by Moses, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and the elders of Israel. The continuity reading must absorb this as hyperbole or as qualified by some distinction between seeing God's face and seeing his glory. But these harmonizations require additional inferential steps that the two-referent reading does not. The two-referent reading takes John 1:18 at face value: the Father, the God no one has seen, is a different referent from the Yahweh those figures encountered. The continuity tradition's need to harmonize it is itself evidence of the pressure the paper has been documenting.

A sixth objection concerns James and Peter, who knew Jesus personally and whose writings assume the Yahweh identification without apparent struggle. The paper's response operates on two levels. First, the disciples' misunderstanding argument applies here: Jesus himself stated in John 16 that his closest followers could not yet bear the full teaching and that the plain disclosure of the Father had not yet occurred. Second, and more precisely, neither James nor Peter offers a sustained theological argument about the Father's identity as such. James's letter is overwhelmingly ethical and paraenetic, with minimal explicit Christological development. Peter's letters are primarily concerned with suffering, holiness, and eschatological endurance. Their silence on the distinction cannot therefore function as independent witness against it. It shows the operative assumption of the early community, not a direct argument on the disputed point.

A seventh objection comes from Hebrews 1:3, which describes the Son as "the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being," and Colossians 1:15, which calls Christ "the image of the invisible God." These texts are sometimes cited for identity between the Father and Yahweh, but they do not settle that question. They describe the Son's relation to the Father, not the Father's identity with Yahweh. If anything, they support the framework. Colossians'

"invisible God" fits the Father whom "no one has ever seen" (John 1:18) more naturally than the Yahweh who was seen by Moses, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and the elders of Israel. And Hebrews' entire argument, that Christ's priesthood after the order of Melchizedek supersedes the Levitical order, proceeds without ever identifying El Elyon with Yahweh. These texts do not close the question the paper raises. They leave it open.

The paper does not claim the traditional identification is impossible. It claims the identification is not forced by the preserved record, and that several of its least assimilable features place sustained pressure on readings that treat it as self-evident. That is a more modest claim than proof of non-identity, and the paper rests on it.

The strongest contemporary defense of the identification comes from Reformed covenant theology. Michael Horton's systematic work in *The Christian Faith* and his covenant Christology argue that the covenantal structure is not a lesser or accommodated mode of divine relation but the Father's chosen means of self-revelation. On this account, covenant just is how the Father relates to creatures; to distinguish the Father from Yahweh's covenantal administration is to impose a false dichotomy on what is actually a unified divine self-disclosure through history. Kevin Vanhoozer's work in *Remythologizing Theology* presses a related point: God's being is in his acts, so the acts attributed to Yahweh in the Torah are not a separate administrative layer but the Father's own character in action.

This is the most sophisticated version of the continuity reading and it deserves to be named as such. The paper's response is not that covenant theology is incoherent but that it must still absorb the architectural incompatibility the preceding sections have documented. If covenant is the Father's mode, then Jesus's consistent description of unconditional approach, his replacement of covenantal address with filial address, the "unknown Father" material in John, and the structural inversion of the access architecture all require explanation. The covenant reading treats Jesus as revealing Yahweh's deeper intention against distortions within the Yahwistic tradition itself. But the formal criterion developed in Section VI-B asks whether the constitutive relational logic survives revision. The logic of

unconditional approach without blood, without mediation, without coercive enforcement, is not a deeper layer of the covenantal logic. It is a replacement of that logic's organizing principles. Horton and Vanhoozer represent the tradition's best current defense. The paper's claim is that even their sophisticated version cannot make the architectural gap disappear.

One figure remains who requires separate treatment because his authority cannot be dissolved into the institutional transmission argument.

### Paul and the Limits of Revelatory Interpretation

The strongest objection to the preceding argument concerns Paul. Unlike the disciples who knew Jesus in the flesh, Paul claims a direct encounter with the risen Christ independent of the Jerusalem tradition. His letters predate the gospels. His theological confidence is unmistakable. If Paul identified the Father with Yahweh without hesitation, that identification carries independent evidentiary weight that cannot be dismissed as downstream institutional transmission.

The objection is serious and deserves a precise response. The response is not that Paul's revelation was unreal or that his authority should be diminished. It is that direct revelation does not bypass interpretive frameworks. It is always received through them.

Paul encountered the risen Christ on the Damascus road. That encounter was real, transformative, and authoritative for the shape of his subsequent mission. But Paul did not encounter Christ in a conceptual vacuum. He encountered Christ as a Pharisee trained in the scriptures, steeped in Second Temple Judaism, and operating with a theological vocabulary in which Yahweh was the only available category for the God of Israel. When Paul interpreted his encounter, he interpreted it through the framework he possessed. He had no other.

This is not a deficiency peculiar to Paul. It is how revelation works in finite minds. A recipient of genuine divine disclosure still processes that disclosure through the categories available to him. Moses received revelation and expressed it in the language and cosmology of

the ancient Near East. The prophets received revelation and expressed it through the literary forms and theological vocabulary of their time. Paul received revelation and expressed it through the Pharisaic-Yahwistic synthesis that constituted his entire intellectual formation.

The paper's claim is not that Paul misunderstood everything. It is that the specific identification of the Father with Yahweh was an interpretive move Paul made within the only framework available to him, not a datum delivered directly in the revelation itself. Jesus in John 16:12 states that his disciples could not yet bear everything he had to say. Paul, who never heard Jesus teach, was not exempt from that limitation. His confidence in the identification is evidence of what he understood, not necessarily of what the risen Christ intended to communicate.

The question is whether Paul's interpretive framework was itself stable. The preceding sections of this paper have argued that it was not: the Yahweh-Elyon distinction was textually present, the merger was historically traceable, and the conceptual vocabulary for a Father above the administrator was available in Second Temple sources Paul would have known. Paul's failure to exploit that distinction is not evidence that the distinction is false. It is evidence that the merged framework had become so dominant that even a direct encounter with the risen Christ did not, by itself, destabilize it. The destabilization requires the textual and historical work this paper has attempted. The textual evidence required to trace the merger historically, particularly the Dead Sea Scrolls manuscript of Deuteronomy 32, was not available until the twentieth century. Paul worked within the merged framework because the tools to destabilize it did not yet exist.

The Paul problem is therefore real but not decisive. What remains is to assess whether the cumulative weight of the evidence favors the inherited identification.

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## Conclusion

Every reading has a chain of custody, and every chain of custody passes through interested hands. The question is not which interpretation is most sophisticated, but which requires the least trust in institutions with a demonstrated interest in controlling the answer.

The stakes are worth naming without overstating. If the argument holds even in part, the dominant tradition has treated as settled an identification the preserved record does not force and may in places actively strain against, not through bad faith, but through a merger that was complete before the canon was fixed. The signal that might have destabilized that reading was preserved in the most famous utterance of the Passion narrative, surviving because the narrative required its sound. The textual keys required to document the merger historically did not exist until the twentieth century. They now exist. That is what makes the question newly tractable, not newly invented.

One distinction must be stated plainly. This paper does not claim to have established who the Father is. Whether the Father is identifiable with El Elyon of the ancient Semitic divine hierarchy, or with the Most High of the divine council tradition, or with something that precedes all naming and all human theological frameworks, the paper cannot establish from the evidence it has assembled. The precise claim the paper commits to is narrower but still substantial: the preserved record does not force the identification of Jesus's Father with Yahweh, and several of its least assimilable features place that identification under sustained strain. The being Jesus consistently describes and addresses appears to operate through a relational structure fundamentally unlike the one the Torah attributes to Yahweh, and the merger traced in this paper is a plausible historical mechanism by which those two profiles came to be treated as one referent.

The argument developed here does not rest equally on all of its components. Its strongest evidentiary layers are: the preserved El/Elah-root possessive address in the cry from the cross; the older textual witnesses preserving a differentiated Elyon/Yahweh structure; the replacement of covenantal address with filial and direct address in Jesus's prayer language; the absence of a close Yahwistic template for the Father-Son relation Jesus claims; the formal criterion establishing that the constitutive relational logic cannot survive the proposed revision; and the architectural contrast between the Father Jesus

describes and Yahweh's covenantal profile in the Torah. More speculative layers are not required in equal strength for the central conclusion to stand. Even if the more speculative layers are set aside, the evidentiary layers above remain, and they cumulatively resist the inherited identification more than the tradition has acknowledged.

Intellectual honesty requires stating what would weaken the thesis: a first-century source explicitly identifying Jesus's unconditional Father with the covenantally bounded Yahweh of the Torah; strong evidence that Matthew 11:27 and the "unknown Father" material in John are late inventions; evidence that no residual El/Elyon distinction was conceptually available in Jesus's time; a convincing account of how the compassionate-Yahweh passages constitute the same relational architecture Jesus describes rather than mercy within a coercive framework; or a successful demonstration that the constitutive relational logic of Yahweh survives the revision required to make him the Father Jesus reveals. The paper does not judge these arguments sufficient to dissolve the cumulative pressure identified here, though their force must be taken seriously.

The strongest continuity reading is not naive equation but radical correction: that Jesus reveals the true character of Yahweh against distortions within the Yahwistic tradition itself. The present paper acknowledges that reading as coherent. It argues that the correction model fits the recorded pattern less naturally than the discovery model, that the formal criterion for distinct referent is not met by the proposed revision, that the architectural incompatibility between the two relational structures is too deep to be explained by revelation of a deeper layer of the same being, and that the cumulative weight of the phonemic, textual, structural, and behavioral evidence points toward a conclusion the tradition has foreclosed rather than examined.

The strongest confirmation comes not from the texts alone but from the reaction of those who heard the claim directly. The Sanhedrin charged blasphemy. Claiming to be the Messiah was not blasphemous; Rabbi Akiva endorsed Bar Kokhba without blasphemy charges, and other messianic claimants were executed as rebels, not condemned as blasphemers. The charge category is evidence of the claim category.

Jesus was not killed for claiming to be Israel's anointed king. He was killed for claiming sonship with a God the Sanhedrin did not recognize as theirs to administer.

The crucifixion is therefore not merely consistent with the paper's thesis. It is historical proof that the distinction was understood. The authorities grasped what the later tradition flattened. They knew the Father he identified with was not their Yahweh. They named it blasphemy. They responded with maximum force.

The cry from the cross is not the whole argument but the opening breach. The name silence, the unknown Father material, the preserved Elyon/Yahweh distinction, the Melchizedek order, the access architecture inversion, the non-sacrificial and non-covenantally bounded character Jesus reveals, the pattern of non-recognition that fits discovery rather than correction, the direct falsification problem posed by John 1:18, and the blasphemy charge itself all place pressure in the same direction. Absolute certainty is not available on this question from the preserved record. But certainty is not the standard required for historical and theological judgment. The relevant question is whether the inherited identification of Jesus's Father with Yahweh remains the best reading of the record we actually possess. This paper's answer is no. The tradition did not settle this question because the evidence forced it. It settled the question because the merger had already become the air the tradition breathed before the question could be examined. The paper does not claim that case is closed in the other direction. It claims the question has not been answered on the merits. It has been foreclosed. That foreclosure is what the evidence assembled here contests.

The evidence that the distinction is real is that they killed him for revealing it.

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## Notes

[1] The thesis that El and Yahweh were originally distinct deities that became amalgamated is argued most directly by John Day, *\*Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan\** (Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), pp. 13-41, and Mark S. Smith, *\*The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient*

Israel\* (Eerdmans, 2002, 2nd ed.), pp. 19-31. Day states: "I conclude, therefore, that El and Yahweh were originally distinct deities that became amalgamated." Frank Moore Cross, *\*Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic\** (Harvard University Press, 1973), pp. 44-75, set the terms of the debate and remains the foundational treatment of the Ugaritic material, but Cross himself argued that "Yahweh" derived as a cultic epithet of El, proposing continuity rather than original distinction. The field has moved beyond Cross's specific proposal while building on his Ugaritic framework. The reconstruction in the present paper follows Day and Smith.

[2] 4QDeutj (4Q37), the relevant Dead Sea Scrolls fragment, reads *\*sons of God\** at Deuteronomy 32:8. The critical edition is in *\*Discoveries in the Judaean Desert XIV\** (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995). The Septuagint (LXX) independently preserves *\*angels of God\** rather than the Masoretic *\*sons of Israel\**, corroborating the pre-merger reading.

[3] Michael S. Heiser, *\*The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible\** (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2015), pp. 23-45 and pp. 113-131. Heiser's treatment of Psalm 82 and the divine council framework is the most rigorous recent academic engagement with this material, though he does not draw the conclusions about Jesus's Father that the present paper develops.

[4] Richard Bauckham, *\*Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity\** (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008). Bauckham argues that early Christianity includes Jesus within YHWH's unique divine identity rather than distinguishing Jesus's Father from Yahweh; his conclusion directly opposes the present paper's thesis. The tensions Bauckham documents are real, but the present paper argues they are better explained by the discovery model developed in Section VI-B than by Bauckham's divine-identity framework. See also N. T. Wright, *\*Jesus and the Victory of God\** (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), pp. 648-651.

[5] Joachim Jeremias, *\*The Prayers of Jesus\** (London: SCM Press, 1967), pp. 11-65. Jeremias's thesis that *\*Abba\** was an intimate childlike diminutive without precedent in Jewish prayer has been substantially revised. James Barr ("*Abba Isn't Daddy*," *\*Journal of Theological Studies\** 39 [1988]: 28-47) demonstrated that *\*abba\** was the standard Aramaic word for father rather than a childish diminutive, and that Mark's own Greek translation (*\*ho pater\**, not a diminutive) confirms this. Mary Rose D'Angelo ("*Abba and Father*," *\*Journal of Biblical Literature\** 111 [1992]: 611-630) further argued that *\*Abba\** cannot be shown with certainty to originate with Jesus rather than early Christian community practice. Pre-Christian parallels exist in Sirach 51:10, 4Q372 1.16, and traditions about Hanan ha-Nehba. The paper's argument does not rest on Jeremias's strong claim of absolute uniqueness. It rests on the pattern of wholesale replacement of covenantal address with filial

and direct address, which is distinctive regardless of whether individual instances of father-address had precedent.