

Chapter twelve.

Firstborn and the claims of wisdom.

Introduction.

The exegesis which I have proposed of the Colossian Christ hymn challenges the widely accepted understanding of the meaning of *prototokos*. Modern scholarship tends to link the term to either Hellenistic or Jewish concepts of Wisdom. While the Hellenistic setting has declined in popularity, the suggestion that the term relates to a Wisdom tradition that comes from with Judaism has achieved widespread support. This view has become prevalent as the result of the work of W.D.Davies *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*. Although this is a dated work in research terms, subsequent work has largely been based on the arguments that Davies presented.¹ There has been no detailed challenge to this work and it is therefore necessary to examine its claims to see if they can be substantiated. If the argument advanced by Davies is found to be unsound, then it will bring down with it those works that have depended on it. If it should be found to be sound, then it will call into question the exegesis which I am offering.

Davies' reconstruction.

And now we turn to the interpretation of the term 'firstborn' has been put forward by Davies. As I indicated at the beginning of the chapter, it is Davies argument that all other modern Wisdom Christologies assume to be true. I want to examine this argument to see if it has been a safe foundation to build on.

Not convinced of the validity of the earlier Greek-orientated solutions he began his reconstruction of the evidence by seeking to understand Paul's rabbinical background. Davies began his study of Pauline thinking on the assumption that he carried his training in Rabbinical Judaism with him when he became a follower of Jesus. Davies pointed out that the Torah was not merely a legal code for the Jews, but a divinely appointed way of life. This way of life had been surpassed for Paul, not by another code, but by the teaching and Person of Jesus. Davies said: "not only did the words of Jesus form a torah for Paul but so also did the Person of Jesus. In a real sense conformity to Christ, His teaching and His life has taken the place, for Paul, of conformity to the Jewish torah. Jesus himself - in word and deed or fact is a new torah."²

Davies supported this claim that the Torah has been replaced by Jesus as the new Torah, by appealing to II Cor.3 where Paul contrasts the Christian ministry with the ministry of the old covenant. Paul says: "Our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant - not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Now if the ministry that brought death which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that condemns men is

¹ So for example Donaldson, *Paul*, 206.

² op cit 146.

glorious how much more glorious is the ministry that righteousness brings. For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!.....Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. We are not like Moses who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away. But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed in to his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."³

Glory and the law.

Davies claimed that Paul's argument is that the glory which shone in Moses' face because he had been entrusted with the Torah of Israel was a fading glory. In contrast the Christian minister has received a glory that is not fading because he has looked into the face of Jesus Christ and found there a new knowledge. Davies claimed that the significance of this passage is only fully realised when it is appreciated that in Rabbinic Judaism the Torah was associated with light. He summed up the use he wanted to make of the passage in these words: "The object of the argument was to prove that Jesus, not the torah, was the true revelation of the divine glory and the divine light. This probably means that Jesus was a new torah."⁴

Davies continued to build his case for Jesus being the new Torah by appealing to Matt. 18:20. Here Jesus promises his presence where two or three are assembled in His name. Davies appealed to Matt. 11:29 and 30 where Jesus invites the burdened to take His yoke upon them. He pointed to rabbinic parallels in which it is said that when Jews sit together and are occupied with the Torah, the *Shekinah* is among them, and to the fact that taking the yoke of the Torah was an expression familiar to the Jews.⁵

Wisdom and firstborn.

At this point Davies linked the concept of Christ as the new Torah to Christ being the wisdom of God. Referring to Col. 1:15ff. he said: "Judaism had ascribed to the figure of wisdom a pre-cosmic origin and a part in the creation of the world. It becomes probable therefore, that Paul has here pictured Christ on the image of wisdom."⁶

To support his thesis Davies appeals to the work of C.F. Burney⁷ who had argued that firstborn in Col. 1:15. is a direct reference to Prov. 8:22 where it is said: "The Lord possessed me at the beginning of his work, before his deeds

³ 2 Cor. 3:5-18.

⁴ op cit 149.

⁵ op cit 150. Others such as Witherington, *Sage*, 206 appeal to apocalyptic texts to show that the concept of the yoke of the law was widely known.

⁶ op cit 151.

⁷ Burney, "ARCHE", 160-168.

of old.’ Burney argued that the term *reshith* in Prov. 8:22 was used by rabbinic Judaism as the key to the ‘*bereshith*’ which begins the Hebrew Bible. This latter *bereshith* of Gen 1 was correspondingly interpreted as meaning ‘by wisdom’. Davies claims: “It is natural to infer that when in the Epistle to the Colossians Paul calls Christ the *protokos pases ktiseos* he is thinking of him as the reshith of creation.”⁸ Davies continued to appeal to Burney’s work to show the link Col. 1:15-18 has with Gen. 1:1. Burney claimed that the Colossian passage is: “an elaborate exposition of bereshith in Gen. 1:1 in the rabbinic manner.”⁹

So Davies argued that firstborn and wisdom were synonymous terms in Paul’s thought. Davies continued his argument by considering three further Pauline passages. He argued that the reference to the rock in the wilderness in I Cor. 10.4 also supports his thesis,¹⁰ and although he recognises that no evidence exists to show that Jewish piety attached any Messianic significance to the rock, he nevertheless appeals to Philo, who interpreted the passage on which Paul’s text is based, i.e. Deut. 8:15, as a reference to the wisdom of God. Philo said: “The rock of flint is the wisdom of God from which he feeds the souls that love Him.”¹¹ Davies noted that this same interpretation was followed by the book of Wisdom, and he summed up the relevance of I Cor. 10 for his thesis saying: “it is not impossible, therefore, that in equating Christ with the rock Paul was thinking of Him as the Divine wisdom according to a familiar convention of interpretation.”¹²

Two rejections.

The second passage Davies considers is Rom.10:6 ff. where Paul argues for the accessibility of righteousness to everyone. Paul says: ‘But the righteousness that is by faith says: ‘Do not say in your heart, “Who will ascend into heaven?”’ (that is, to bring Christ down), ‘or “Who will descend into the deep?”’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? “The word is near you: it is in your mouth and in your heart”, that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming.’

Davies notes Sanday and Headlam’s conclusion¹³ that this passage is not a direct quotation from the Old Testament and that it might be taken from the Book of *Baruch* where it is applied to wisdom. Davies rightly decided to reject Windisch’s suggestion that Rom. 10:6 ff. is a reference to wisdom, for *Baruch*’s passage¹⁴ refers to the undiscoverability of wisdom, whereas Paul in Rom. 10 bases his argument on the essential accessibility or nearness of Christ in order to prove that the Jews who reject him are without excuse.

The third passage is I Cor. 1:24 and 30, where Paul says: ‘but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God - It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has

8 op cit 151-2.

9 op cit 151-2.

10 Contra Ellis, “A Note”, 55 who says the rock refers to Isa. 48:21, and is thus part of the New Exodus material of the prophet.

11 Philo, *Leg Alleg* 2.21. Craddock, “All Things”, 78-80 warns of substituting the synagogue of Alexandria for the Hellenistic synagogue of which we know little.

12 op cit 153.

13 Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, 289.

14 *Baruch*, 329ff.

become for us Wisdom from God - that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.’

Davies acknowledged that the translation of verse 30 is difficult, but prefers the A.V. of “who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption”. By accepting this translation and interpretation of the passage Davies argues: ‘Here again we see Paul’s twofold emphasis in his ascription of the title wisdom to Christ - it is pre-cosmic wisdom and a morally recreative wisdom that he finds in His Lord.’¹⁵

Davies examines the proposal made by Windisch who thought he could easily identify the progress of Paul’s thinking in arriving at his wisdom Christology. Windisch said that Paul had become convinced that Jesus was the Messiah and he would automatically regard Him as the wisdom of God. Messianic speculation is the key to his Christology. His equation would be simple. Thus:

The Messiah - The wisdom of God

Jesus - The Messiah

therefore Jesus - The wisdom of God¹⁶

Davies, after examining Windisch’s evidence, dismisses it with the conclusion: *in all cases we have found the evidence unconvincing.*¹⁷ i.e. the evidence that there ever was any identification between the Messiah and wisdom in Judaism.

Variations of wisdom.

Davies then sought¹⁸ to give a detailed summary of the significance of the concept of wisdom in the Old Testament, inter-testamental and rabbinic literature. In this section Davies notes the difference between the Old Testament concept of wisdom, which was thoroughly universal, and the nationalistic view which emerged later. Davies commented: “One fact, however, will be evident from the above, namely that wisdom as found in the Old Testament is in no sense a ‘nationalistic’ figure. There is about all the wisdom literature of the Old Testament an international flavour, there is in it nothing that is specifically Israelite. It is not surprising, therefore, that there should grow up a tendency to make the figure of wisdom more distinctly Jewish. It is this that we find in the book of Ecclesiasticus. There the figure of wisdom becomes identified with the torah, wisdom takes up her abode in Israel and is established in Zion.”¹⁹

It is from the identification of wisdom and the Torah that Davies launched his concluding argument to identify Paul’s wisdom Christology with the Jewish concept of wisdom, and in turn with the title firstborn of all creation. Davies pointed out that for the Jews, the Torah was older than the creation, as was

15 op cit 155.

16 op cit 159.

17 op cit 162. Windisch was in fact nearer to the truth than Davies. Windisch’s error was to fail to see that salvation reveals God’s wisdom. Jesus is God’s salvation, therefore Jesus is God’s wisdom.

18 op cit 159-171.

19 op cit 168, so also Cabaniss, “According”, 166.

wisdom. That the Torah was the means of creation, as was wisdom, and that creation was for the sake of the Torah.²⁰ Clearly Davies had no difficulty in applying these themes to Christ himself, who is pre-existent, the means of creation, and the purpose of creation.

This, I consider summarises the essentials of Davies' argument that Christ's title firstborn of all creation is to be interpreted in the light of the Jewish concept of wisdom. Jesus is the New Torah, the Torah being wisdom itself which in turn was begotten before all things, and involved in creation (Prov 8:22). So Davies explained the meaning of Paul's thinking when he used the term firstborn of all creation in relation to Christ.²¹

An assessment.

What are we to make of this argument? The first thing is to commend the attempted Biblical focus in his attempt to explain 'the firstborn of all creation'. This does justice to the constant reference Paul made to the Old Testament, especially in verses 13 and 14 which immediately precede the statement. It was the OT that provided the substructure of Paul's theological thinking. But what of its weakness; are there any flaws in the argument that Davies has overlooked?²²

Having acknowledged that no evidence exists to claim the Messiah was identified with wisdom in pre-Christian Judaism, Davies has to base his argument entirely upon the New Testament text. It is these texts which he has mustered for his argument that we will now examine.

The shekinah.

The first is the reference in Matt. 18:20, where Davies says that Christ's presence is to be compared to the *shekinah*. The problem Davies' interpretation must face is that the context of Matt. 18:20 does not suggest the believers have met for worship or for instruction, but specifically for discipline. By seeing this instruction to be the basis of I Cor. 5:4-5, where Paul also says that he will be with the Corinthian Church in their gathering, it is right to claim that the promise relates to nothing more than the Semitic concept of solidarity, as Best has suggested,²³ and not to Christ modeling himself on the presence of the *shekinah*.

The new torah.

Nor does Davies' argument find support in Matt. 11:29-30, where Christ's yoke is spoken of as being easy.²⁴ By stating *my yoke is easy* Christ is not saying He is the yoke, but that His teaching, as compared to the teaching of

20 see op cit 170 for Rabbinic references.

21 Supported by Lohse, *Colossians*, 47-48. Bruce, *Paul*, 3. For further detail of support see ch 7 note 17. However, against this cf. Michaelis, *TDNT* 6:877, cf also Ridderbos, *Outline*, 79. "If one remembers, moreover, that Wisdom in the passages quoted is a personification, while Christ is the divine person himself, not the means or the Mediator God employs, and that no connection between Wisdom on the one hand and the Messiah on the other can be shown either in the Jews or in Paul, then it is surely evident that Colossians 1:15 ff. very definitely cannot be understood as a Christological interpretation of Wisdom". For a detailed critique of Wisdom being identified with the Messiah see Machen, *Origin*, 200 ff and Thrall, "Origin", 304-318.

22 Wright, *Messiah*, 88 claims that Davies has achieved harmony between Paul and Judaism by remaining silent about much of the contradictory material.

23 *One Body*, 162.

24 For a summary of interpretations see Betz, "Logion", 10ff.

the Scribes and Pharisees, was easy and not a crushing burden. It was not the Torah which Christ guided men away from but the Pharisees' legalistic interpretation of the Torah which was so crushing and burdensome.²⁵ Davies' interpretation of Christ being the new Torah, replacing the old, cuts across Christ's statement that He had not come to destroy (or even replace!) the law, but to fulfil it (Matt. 5:17 ff.)

This point is supported by Suggs in his work *Wisdom, Christology and Law in Matthew's Gospel*. He accepted that Matthew identified Jesus with wisdom, but went on to say: "We should be very clear that in the Matthean setting what is offered by Jesus is not an alternative to the yoke of the torah. Jesus speaks as sophia, and in such a saying as 11:28-30 that means as torah as well. Rejection neither of the law nor of authoritative interpretation as part of the law is indeed implied in principle. Matt.11:28-30 is not polemic against the law as such."²⁶

Suggs supports this position by pointing out that in Matt. 12:1-8 (which immediately follows the 11:28-30 passage), he said: "Matthew clearly acknowledges here that the issue involved is one of interpretation of the torah."²⁷

Davies also appealed to Philo and the Book of Wisdom to establish that the rock in I Cor 10 was interpreted as, and symbolised, wisdom. If this interpretation is accepted it follows that there is a straight equation between Christ, whom Paul says the rock represents, and wisdom. But the problem that this argument presents is that it assumes Paul to be influenced by the Alexandrian Philosophical School. This is the weakness of this point in Davies argument. Davies acknowledged that Judaism itself never made this interpretation. The influence of Alexandria on Paul must be established, rather than presupposed, and until it has been, the argument presented must be suspect.

Returning to the evidence concerning the yoke in Matt. 11:25ff, there is a much better explanation than the one given by Davies.²⁸ Matthew is the gospel of the kingdom in which Jesus is presented as the ideal king Israel has been waiting for. It was Rehoboam who threatened to multiply the burden of his father when Jeroboam came to him on behalf of the people. Rehoboam rejected the advice of his father's counselors who advised him to make himself the servant of the people (1 Kings 8-11). He refused to lighten the yoke that they had had to bear under Solomon and threatened to multiply it until they longed for the rule of Solomon to return. It is this that Matthew is alluding to, for in the following chapter he presents Jesus as the true son of David (Matt. 12:3 cf. v13), who is the perfect servant (Matt. 12:15-21). He is the one who is greater than Solomon (Matt. 12:42). Thus, Matthew is not pointing to personified Wisdom, but to the true king who is wiser than Solomon and who is the true Son of David the true burden bearer of his people.²⁹ The ultimate yoke as seen by the law³⁰ and the prophets³¹ was the

²⁵ See Rengstorf, *TDNT* 2:899ff. Maher, "Yoke", 98 points out that law was covenant law and not burdensome, so also Sanders, *Palestinian*, 1ff. Bertram, *TDNT* 2:877 points out that "yoke" is used in the OT of political burdens and being ruled over by occupying nations.

²⁶ Suggs, *Wisdom*, 99ff.

²⁷ op cit 99.

²⁸ c.f. Johnson, "Reflections", 44ff who rejects Davies' claim that the yoke refers to Wisdom.

²⁹ See Stanton, *Gospel*, 364ff.

exile itself. Such a description, within the sacred writings, could hardly be missed by first century Jews. Thus Jesus could well be referring to the freedom that he had come to bring was the release from bondage (exile).

She second Moses.

The most important of the texts to which Davies alluded is II Cor. 3:5-18, where he claimed that Paul claims that as the revelation of Christ has superseded the Torah, so Christ is presented as the new Torah. Davies claimed that: "The object of the argument was to prove that Jesus, not the torah, was the true revelation of the divine glory and the divine light. This probably means that Jesus was a new torah."³²

To arrive at this explanation Davies had to argue that Paul was equating his own ministry with that of Moses. As Moses brought the old Torah to Israel so Paul brought the new Torah to the new Israel. Davies said: "Here Paul, a minister of Christ, assumes that he himself is no less distinguished a person than Moses."³³

The first question I would raise with regard to Davies' exegesis of the passage is foundational to the whole of his argument. Does Paul really compare himself with Moses? In his first letter he has modeled Christ on Moses (I Cor. 10:2). Can it be that within a matter of months, in a letter to the same church, he should alter his typological exegesis so radically? This point, of whether Paul is setting himself up as the fulfillment of Moses as against his previous statement that Christ is himself the fulfillment, is a point of dispute amongst scholars. Munck³⁴ and Brownlee³⁵ support Davies whilst Bruce³⁶, Shedd³⁷, Sanders³⁸ and Hays³⁹ claim Paul is modeling Christ on Moses. Clearly with such a difference of opinion amongst scholars, one ought to be careful in making this passage a corner stone, yet that is precisely what Davies has done. What then is the essence of Paul's argument? I would suggest that he is not comparing himself personally with Moses, but all those who bear the revelation of Christ to others, as Moses had done to Israel. This is borne out in that Paul repeatedly refers in the following chapters to an increasing glory or renewing, a reference that contrasts with that glory which decreased with Moses. Whilst physically Christ's servants suffer and age, yet inwardly they are constantly renewed and their contact with others imparts the same blessing.⁴⁰ Even death itself will not rob believers of the presence of this glory⁴¹ and the result of its increase will be the glory of God.⁴² While the

30 Lev. 26:13.

31 Isa. 14:25.

32 op cit 149

33 op cit 148.

34 Munck, *Paul*, 59. See also Blair, *Jesus*, 132 who doubts the extent of the second Moses motif in Matthew.

35 Brownlee, "Messianic", 17.

36 Bruce, *Corinthians*, 190-4.

37 Shedd, *Community*, 183.

38 Sanders, *Palestinian*, 479.

39 Hays, *Echoes*, 101. Our earlier argument has claimed that Jesus is not modelled on Moses but on David who was predicted to lead the people of God out of bondage.

40 1 Cor. 4:1-12.

41 1 Cor. 4:16-5:5.

apostles are the examples of God's servants, and Paul is especially so, what Paul is saying here is not limited to his own experience. It is true of any faithful servant of Christ.⁴³

If we examine Davies' argument more closely we find further inconsistency. His reasoning is this: When Moses went into the presence of the Lord, he received the law. This, in Jewish thinking, is associated with light; so affected by it was Moses that he radiated glory which he had to cover over. Paul, however, has a glory that is not the result of handling the Torah, but the revelation of God through Christ. Therefore, what the Torah was to Moses, Christ is to Paul.

This way of reasoning is thoroughly Johannine (Jn. 1:16-17), but is it Paul's argument here? I would suggest it is imposing on this passage a pattern of thought that causes the argument to be lost. If Moses was affected by the law, why did his glory fade? After all he did not stop handling the law after his visit onto the Mount. Indeed, he handled it, through application, even more. Why did this not maintain the glory supposedly given by the Torah?

The fact is that Paul is not saying that the law was the source of the glory, it was the giver of the law who was. It was when Moses left the presence of the Lord that the diminishing of the glory took place. Paul is saying that he also brings a message, and its authority is enhanced by the evidence of its effect, for it brings man into contact with God. This is not a momentary contact, but an abiding one and it is authenticated by the effect it has upon the lives of people because they are being continually changed from glory to glory, increasing not diminishing. Tasker sums up our argument perfectly when he says concerning Moses: "The direct vision of God that he was in this way privileged to enjoy was denied the Israelites to whom he had been speaking. They had to be content with a more partial knowledge of God conveyed to them through the medium of the law. And so whenever Moses turned to the Lord he could by inference be also said to have turned away from the law."⁴⁴ In other words, the law took away the glory of Moses, rather than being the source of it.

Christ and the law.

Are there any other points that can be raised, independent of identifying who is the anti-type of Moses? There are and these ought to help us decide on the correctness, or otherwise, of Davies' exposition. First, if Christ is the new Torah why does Paul never say this explicitly and unequivocally?⁴⁵ If this is what Paul held then this argument would have been his trump card in dealing with the legalism that so often threatened the infant Church. Why did he not produce this argument to the Galatians? Rather than saying Christ replaces the law his argument is that Christ fulfilled the law, thus following Christ's own explanation of the relationship of his own life and work to the Torah. He had not come to destroy it, but to fulfil it.⁴⁶

A further problem Davies has failed to resolve is why, if Christ is the new

42 1 Cor. 4:15.

43 See chapter 4.

44 Tasker, *Corinthians*, 66.

45 See Hanson, *Wrath* 211-12.

46 Matt. 5:17.

Torah 'in word and deed', do the actions of Christ not take on the significance such an understanding would inevitably lead to. It is true that Paul occasionally appeals to Christ's instructions directly, but nowhere is there any suggestion that the deeds of Christ had a revelatory significance which equaled that which the Jews placed on the Torah. Christ promised the Apostles the guidance of the Holy Spirit in their ministry, and it is clear that they took this to mean that they would speak with an authority equal to the One who had commissioned them. Church history testifies that what the Torah was to Israel the New Testament documents became to the Church, i.e. the written revelation of God.

While Paul clearly held Christ to be the full revelation of the Father, he never expressed it in the way Davies argued. The simple reason for this is that it would have created a new legalism which was even more intolerant than that from which it had emerged, the old Torah. The Muslim community, even though not believing Mohammed to be the Son of God, have given to Mohammed's words and deeds full revelatory significance, and the outcome is nothing less than the most rigid legalism. Williams expressed this fact when he wrote: "The Prophet is not only the founder and legislator of the community; he is the model for Muslims. It is accepted as axiomatic that every act he made after the beginning of the Revelation was preserved by God from error; had it not been so then the Revelation itself would be cast into doubt, a thing God could never have permitted. Therefore, Mohammed's slightest act was rightly guided, and of moral value. For traditional Muslims everything the prophet did is a part of his 'sunna': his treatment of children, the way he broke his fast, how he cleaned his teeth and wore his beard, are all worthy of study and emulation."⁴⁷

This emphasis on the significance of minute details of the life of Mohammed is completely contrary to the attitude taken by both the early Church, and the Church throughout its history. The only parallel that can be drawn is the attention Christians give to the written word, which preserves Christ's spoken word and His significant actions that are of import to the believing community as presenting guiding principles and attitudes. Nowhere is there any evidence that Christ's deeds achieved the same significance that Mohammed's deeds came to have. This is for one very simple reason. Neither the Apostles nor the historic Church have ever seen Christ to be the new Torah in the way Davies has argued. The old Torah has been supplemented by the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2) which has not set the old aside, but filled it out so that its spirit could be both understood and followed.

This observation finds support from Machen who, answering the "search for the historical Jesus" at the beginning of the twentieth century wrote: "If imitation of Jesus had been central in the life of Paul as it is central, for example, in modern liberalism, then the Epistles would be full of the words and deeds of Jesus."⁴⁸

Christ and wisdom.

The last of Davies' arguments that we need to consider is that Col. 1:15ff. is an elaborate exposition of *bereshith* in Gen. 1:1 in the rabbinic manner. The

⁴⁷ Williams, *Islam*, 84-5.

⁴⁸ Machen, *Origin*, 166.

argument of Burney whom Davies quotes is that Prov. 8:22 portrays Wisdom to be present in creation because of this association Paul has Wisdom in mind in Colossians 1:15ff, and therefore Wisdom and firstborn are synonymous. The argument is somewhat circular. Davies admits that there is no evidence that Wisdom and the Messiah were ever linked in Judaism, and his arguments from New Testament texts have not been convincing. I have sort to show that the significance for Paul linking his statement of Christ being the firstborn with creation is part of a wider argument giving the credentials of Christ to act as the Redeemer of the whole of creation.

In addition to this, the material Burney presents as evidence that there was a Rabbinic tradition of interpreting Gen. 1 in the light of Prov 8 is later than the third century AD. This is far too late to be used for evidence of thinking in the NT period. Furthermore, Davies has argued that Paul in 1 Cor. 1:24 and 30 is speaking about “pre-cosmic and morally creative wisdom”.⁴⁹ In fact, 1 Cor. 1 and 2 is saturated with OT quotes from the prophets, and each of them are clearly linked with the New Exodus theme. The point of wisdom in Isaiah is not of some “pre-cosmic” existing wisdom, but that Yahweh in redeeming His people from her bondage, displays his wisdom and righteousness as he achieves Israel’s sanctification and redemption. This point is fully supported by Hill’s comment on 1 Cor. 1:30 when he says: “The context makes it clear that it is supremely in the cross that God has revealed the true wisdom which is composed of righteousness, sanctification and redemption. It seems probable that these terms refer to three aspects of the deliverance of Christ.”⁵⁰

Crucial Texts.

But those who argue for a developed Wisdom Christology have to rely on uncertain evidence. It has been realised that the location of the development has been focused on the Palestinian church rather than the Hellenistic church. So for example Perrin observed that: ‘Palestinian Christianity arrived at its Christology via a Passover setting.’⁵¹ Holloway is also aware of the danger of forgetting the location of development when he cautioned against reconstructions outside of the texts original location saying: ‘it is dubious to erect historical reconstructions without acknowledging and taking into account, the pre-history of such traditions.’⁵² Berkey adds to this growing disquiet when he said; “the discovery of Jewish roots of the New Testament is indeed of tremendous significance for the search for the origins of Christology,”⁵³ and Deismann has commented that ‘the origin of the cult of Christ (and that means Christology) is the secret of the earliest Palestinian community.’⁵⁴ He went on to say that it was the Jewish Christians who were the driving force of Christology in the first century. The early development of the Christological material is also supported by Martin who said that: ‘it was the Jerusalem church which reworked the messianic Psalms and applied them to Jesus.’⁵⁵

49 op cit 155, contra Clark, “Wisdom”, 200.

50 Hill *Words*, 147, cf also Hubbard “Hope”, 33-59.

51 Perrin, *Pilgrimage*, 76, so also Fuller, *Foundations*, 119.

52 Holloway, “Christology”, 280.

53 Berkey, “Perspectives”, 118.

54 Deismann cited by Hengel, *Son*, 65.

55 Martin, “Reflections”, 39.

Now this growing realisation of the importance of the Palestinian community in the early development of Christology must cause us to ask questions about the use that many have made of the books of Wisdom Sirach and 1 Enoch. The book of Wisdom, a key text to support the existence of a developed Wisdom doctrine in Judaism which was adopted by the early church, was not found in the Palestinian Jewish cannon. The book appears to have been written in Alexandria and was representative of the philosophical interests of the Jews of that city.⁵⁶ The fact that it was rejected as canonical by the Jews of Palestine ought to send out a signal of caution for making it a key text for tracing the early development of Christology when the early development has been located to have taken place in Palestine.

Also, the second important text that is used to support Jewish Wisdom interests on the development on early Christology is 1 Enoch. The difficulty with depending on this is that while the first 37 chapters are unquestionably second century AD, the part of the book known as the Similitudes of Enoch, 37-71 is not so early. In fact there is no certainty as to when it was written. Some date it as late as 270BC. While this is an extreme dating, most accept that it was not written until the later part of the first century AD. In fact most consider it so late that they discount its value for interpreting the gospel's Son of Man material. It should therefore receive similar caution in using it to unlock even earlier documents. The significance of this fact of the lateness of the second part of 1 Enoch is that virtually all of the Wisdom material in 1 Enoch is in this latter part of the book. This crucial material was not in existence as early as would be required to have made the influence on the development of Christology as is claimed. But even if these dating and setting problems did not exist, in any search for sources, we are obliged to find the source that has the closest matches to the texts and their arguments that we are dealing with, and its my claim that there are more likely sources.

The book of Sirach has been used to support the development of Wisdom Christology. While there is little doubt of the antiquity of this work and of its acceptance in Judaism as a valued religious writing, there is no evidence that the work had any canonical status in Judaism. The references in Sirach 24 to Wisdom concerning Wisdom dwelling amongst the Jews clearly refers to the giving of the law to Israel. There is thus no sense of a personification of wisdom as required to support a developing Wisdom Christology.⁵⁷ The relevance of the book of Baruch has been considered earlier and Davies himself has discounted the reference to the rock in the wilderness and its interpretation as the presence of the wisdom of God as being relevant for understanding Paul's doctrine of Wisdom Christology.

I would argue that the role of wisdom in the OT salvation history setting with its unfolding drama of deliverance from exile fits the themes found in the NT

⁵⁶ See Gigot, *Wisdom*.

⁵⁷ 18 "Come to me, all you that yearn for me, and be filled with my fruits;
19 You will remember me as sweeter than honey, better to have than the honeycomb. 20 He who eats of me will hunger still, he who drinks of me will thirst for more; 21 He who obeys me will not be put to shame, he who serves me will never fail." 22 All this is true of the book of the Most High's covenant, the law which Moses commanded us as an inheritance for the community of Jacob.

much better that those uncertain texts found in Baruch, Sirach, Wisdom or 1 Enoch.

Wisdom and pre-existence.

These considerations lead me to doubt Davies' exposition of the term *prototokos*. But even if he had been successful in relating *prototokos* to wisdom, what significance would that have had for Christology? It would depend upon whether the Jewish concept of wisdom was that it was eternal, or that it was created. If created, even if before anything else was created, it would still be a creature, and therefore a contradiction of the orthodox doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ. This, in fact, is the very position at which Davies finished up. While he claimed that the Torah and Wisdom are pre-existent and responsible for creation, he has not arrived at a Trinitarian doctrine of the Person of Christ. It is one thing to claim pre-existence, even before the cosmos, and quite another to claim that absolute eternal oneness with the Father has been established. Without that absolute oneness we are still left with an Arian Christology. Davies, in fact, recognised that the establishing of pre-existence in itself proves very little. He acknowledges that: "There is evidence that the pre-existence of a person had no particular, or unique, significance for rabbinic Judaism."⁵⁸ He later went on to say: In Judaism the conception of pre-existence was midrashic; we are to seek for no deep metaphysical truth in it. We may assume that for Paul too the pre-existence of Christ by itself had no profound significance."⁵⁹

Yet despite these acknowledgements Davies still seems to have assumed that the wisdom Christology of Paul is tied up with Jewish concepts which to the Jews would never have suggested a personal eternal oneness with Jehovah. If we accept Davies' interpretation, then unless we are able to go further by the help of other Christological statements, we are left with an Arian Christ.

Christological developments.

Defining Christ in Arian terms was an inevitable consequence of leaving the Paschal model of redemption that we have seen is so fundamental to Paul's understanding of the death of Jesus. But an Arian Christology was not part of the thinking of the apostle. The early Christians were not struggling with ontological definitions, but glorying in redemptive history.⁶⁰ From their understanding that Yahweh himself would redeem creation, and that Yahweh himself would come to bring salvation to Israel, they were driven to recognise that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.⁶¹ This is far more than saying that they saw Jesus as Yahweh's agent through whom He achieved redemption. The way the early church naturally and almost unthinkingly ascribed the attributes of Yahweh to Jesus shows that they were Christocentric (Trinitarian being a later designation), in their thinking. They did not even notice the later theological problems the Church had to tackle.

58 Davies, *Rabbinic*, 162.

59 Davies, *Rabbinic*, 174

60 Contra Casey, "Deification", 709 who dates John's gospel second century to show that it is a further step along the road to Chalcedon.

61 Martin, "Reflections", 49 says of the hymn in Colossians: "The Christological hymn in the event turns out to be soteriological tributes paid to the cosmic salvation wrought by the redeemer - it was a short step for Christians to go further into Christology."

Their Biblical perspective did not demand ontological definitions but Biblical fulfillment. The philosophical niceties of the Greeks were problems reserved for later generations of Hellenised believers who had a far more difficult task than they should have had because they had lost their way in substituting a Hellenistic mind set for the OT one that had guided the writers of the NT.

The problem with this model that has been developed to explain the development of Christology is that it removes wisdom material from its obvious context and disregarding the danger of this it is used as evidence for the widespread presence of the theme. By doing this the wisdom material has been removed from its New Exodus context in which it spoke not of the incarnation of Wisdom but of the display of God's wisdom in the redemption of His people. It is the same theme that is repeatedly followed in the prophets where much of these passages originate from. In doing this, theology has been deprived of the data that ought to have helped see the existence of the New Exodus paradigm as well as being given a false paradigm that did not have the supposed evidence to support it. It has also screened that Paschal meaning of the firstborn of all creation and deprived the church of a rich, NT based, paradigm for Christology and soteriology. Wisdom Christology, in the sense of the personification of Wisdom, is not a NT doctrine, but the product of fertile minds and bad exegesis.