

**THE LADY AND HER TEMPLE:  
AN ORTHODOX APPRAISAL OF THE TEMPLE THEOLOGY  
OF MARGARET BARKER**

*O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called “knowledge”, for by professing it some have swerved from the faith.*

I Timothy 6:20-21

Margaret Barker is a biblical scholar and lay Methodist preacher from England who is best known for her project known as “Temple Theology”. Over the past decade or so her approach to Scripture has attracted the attention of a number of Orthodox hierarchs and intellectuals and her teachings have been featured on more popular Orthodox platforms. On the surface, Ms. Barker’s work might seem to dovetail with certain aspects of Orthodox theology and tradition, given her claim to have uncovered the roots of Trinity and Incarnation, priesthood and liturgy, mystical vision and theosis, even the veneration of the Virgin Mother of God in her reconstruction of the ancient Israelite temple. On closer examination, however, her work is revealed to be but a latter-day manifestation of “knowledge falsely so-called” which, left unchecked, will only confuse and deceive the faithful. This uncritical reception and platforming of her work has led to the deception of those who are unable to see the problems with her teachings and has scandalized members of the faithful who cannot understand how their clergy or hierarchs could accept her ideas.

This essay, then, seeks to analyze the works of Margaret Barker from an Orthodox theological perspective. In the first part, after some brief biographical background, I will outline the main aspects of Ms. Barker’s Temple theology, giving special attention to its historiographical reconstruction of the Jerusalem temple and some of its broader implications. Following this, I will offer a summary and then critique of the methodological foundations upon which Ms. Barker has erected the edifice of her system, in an effort to demonstrate that the Temple that lies at the heart

of her theology is only a figment of her own imagination. Finally, I will seek to address why it is that some Orthodox have been drawn to her work by looking at her claims to have found the temple roots of the doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation as well as the veneration of the Theotokos, clarify her teaching on these points so that those who have mistaken them for Orthodox can see them for what they are and be more discerning in their appraisal of Margaret Barker's theology.

## Part One: Margaret Barker's Story of King Josiah and the Jerusalem Temple

By transferring passages, and dressing them up anew, and making one thing out of another, they succeed in deluding many through their wicked art in adapting the oracles of the Lord to their opinions. Their manner of acting is just as if one, when a beautiful image of a king has been constructed by some skilful artist out of precious jewels, should then take this likeness of the man all to pieces, should rearrange the gems, and so fit them together as to make them into the form of a dog or of a fox, and even that but poorly executed.

St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* I.8

Margaret Barker was born in England in 1944. As a young woman, she attended Cambridge University where she studied for a degree in Theology. Upon completion of her studies, instead of following the usual path of most academics of pursuing a terminal degree in her field and then seeking an academic post, Ms. Barker decided to continue her research and writing outside of the academy as an independent scholar. After some years of research and writing, she made her first big splash in the field of biblical studies with the publication of her 1987 monograph, *The Older Testament: The Survival of Themes from the Ancient Royal Cult in Sectarian Judaism and Early Christianity*. That volume laid out the overarching thesis that has guided all of Barker's work, the particulars of which will be laid out and analyzed below. Ms. Barker claims that she has been able to reconstruct a long-lost theology that stood behind the ancient temple of Jerusalem and that this theology, once recovered, would revolutionize our understanding of the broader history of ancient Israelite religion and the emergence of Early Christianity. The implications of this thesis have been elaborated and brought to bear on specific aspects of biblical studies and Christian theology in her subsequent publications.

For a brief definition of her overarching project, it is enough to quote from her author's website:

Temple theology traces the roots of Christian theology back into the first Temple, destroyed by the cultural revolution in the time of King Josiah at the end of the seventh century BCE. Refugees from the purges settled in Egypt and Arabia. From widely scattered

surviving fragments, it is possible to reconstruct the world view of the first Christians, and to restore to their original setting such key concepts as the Messiah, divine Sonship, covenant, atonement, resurrection, incarnation, the Second Coming and the Kingdom of God.<sup>1</sup>

As a general summary, this description may not seem all that controversial. To the unsuspecting, it might even seem enticing. Who would not be interested in an approach to the Old Testament and Jerusalem Temple that could demonstrate the foundation of a number of central Christian beliefs and practices in those ancient institutions? Unfortunately, the devil is in the details, and so, to properly assess the validity of Ms. Barker's theology, we will first have to examine her idiosyncratic reconstruction of the history of Israel's temple and religion.

Central to Margaret Barker's view of the temple, as noted in the summary listed above, is the claim that in the seventh century BC, a revolution of sorts took place in the city of Jerusalem that radically altered the nature of Israel's Temple worship, destroying nearly all that preceded it and leaving in its wake only a shell of the former glory of Israel's religious beliefs and practices.<sup>2</sup> Who does she claim brought this great tragedy about? King Josiah (ca. 648-609 BC), heir to the throne of David, one of the last kings to reign in Jerusalem before the city's destruction by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, who was assisted in his work by a group who are referred to as the Deuteronomists. According to Margaret Barker, "In the Old Testament as we know it, the patriarchs before the time of Moses and the kings after him followed the religion that Deuteronomy condemned and Josiah purged."<sup>3</sup> What seems clear to Ms. Barker, then, is that when the dust settled

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<sup>1</sup>This summary can be found at the following link: <http://www.margaretbarker.com/Temple/default.htm> (accessed 06/17/2021).

<sup>2</sup> Short summaries of Margaret Barker's understanding of these events can be found in her book *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008), pp. 6-7. A concise summary can also be found in her essay "What Did Josiah Reform?" available for pdf download at this link online: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?filename=18&article=1038&context=mi&type=additional>. An audio recording on her lecture, "What Did Josiah Reform?" is available on YouTube as well: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BtFsFdINbN8>.

<sup>3</sup> "What Did Josiah Reform?" n.p.

after Josiah's reforms, little, if anything, of the older religion of the Jerusalem Temple remained as it was.

Now, if you have never noticed this complete disjuncture between the Temple worship before and after Josiah's time in reading the Old Testament, you are not to be blamed, for these same revolutionaries, once they had risen to power, carried out a massive cover-up operation, rewriting Israel's historical and religious traditions. First, in an effort to justify their revolution, they composed the book we now know as Deuteronomy (hence the name "Deuteronomists"), placing their supposedly puritanical, iconoclastic and radically monotheistic beliefs in the mouth of no less an authority than Moses himself.<sup>4</sup> Then, as victors often do, they (re)wrote the history books, namely the historical books of Joshua, Judges, and Kingdoms (also known as Samuel and Kings in many English Bibles) casting themselves as the heroes of the story and vilifying most of their predecessors as pagan corruptors of Israel's worship. Because of this, the Deuteronomic view of history and theology, and not the supposedly earlier and more authentic theology of the Jerusalem Temple, came to dominate the Scriptural portrayal of these realities and all subsequent theological reflections on them.<sup>5</sup> So Margaret Barker claims.

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<sup>4</sup> While the idea that the book of Deuteronomy was largely composed in the time of Josiah is central to Margaret Barker's theology, the idea did not originate with her. It was first formulated by a German scholar, Wilhelm de Wette, in his 1805 doctoral thesis on the subject. There he equated the "book of the Law" mentioned in II Kings 22:8ff (IV Kingdoms LXX) with the book of Deuteronomy and proposed that it was not discovered, but rather composed at the time to underwrite the reform programs carried out by King Josiah. This view has had a great influence on many in the field of biblical criticism. A critique of the premises upon which the dating of the book of Deuteronomy to the time of Josiah can be found in a pair of articles by the British Old Testament scholar, Gordon Wenham. This two-part article is entitled "The Date of Deuteronomy: Linch-pin of Old Testament Criticism" *Themelios* 10, no. 3 (April 1985): 15-20; 11, no. 1 (September 1985): 15-18. These articles are accessible electronically at the following links: [https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/article\\_deut1\\_wenham.html](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_deut1_wenham.html) and [https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/article\\_deut2\\_wenham.html](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_deut2_wenham.html) respectively.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Barker, *Gate of Heaven*, p. 7. This matter is also discussed in her book *Temple Theology: An Introduction* (London: SPCK, 2004), p. 35

Now, it should be noted at this point that the biblical accounts of Josiah's life and reign found in IV Kingdoms 22-23 and II Chronicles 34-36 are clear that Josiah did in fact carry out a reform of the Temple in his day. According to the book of IV Kingdoms, Josiah's immediate predecessors, the Kings Manasseh and Amon, who had both been exceedingly wicked, introduced idols and pagan practices into the Jerusalem Temple, built altars and sanctuaries outside of Jerusalem, and even went so far as to practice divination, witchcraft and child sacrifice. All these practices had been forbidden by the Holy Prophet Moses in the Book of Deuteronomy.<sup>6</sup> When Josiah ascended the throne, he found the Jerusalem Temple in such a state of disrepair that he commissioned its restoration by skilled workers. In the course of these repairs, a disregarded copy of the Book of the Law was discovered. When it was read in the hearing of King Josiah, he realized just how far his predecessors had transgressed the Lord's commandments and also heard the warnings Moses had given the people centuries before about the judgment that would befall them if they did not repent and change their ways. This prompted his concern for the restoration of the Jerusalem Temple to its original purity by removing all the foreign idols and practices that had been introduced by his immediate predecessors. After completing the work, King Josiah held a glorious celebration of the Passover and conducted a ceremony calling on the people to renew their fidelity to the covenant that the Lord had made with them, many centuries before at Mt. Sinai.

There is, then, no debate about the fact that a momentous, even revolutionary reform of the Jerusalem Temple took place in the days of King Josiah. The question is whether, as in the biblical accounts, this event should be understood as a purification of the Temple from foreign, pagan elements and a restoration of the proper worship of the Lord, or, as in Margaret Barker's account, this event should be understood as a replacement an older, normative set of beliefs and practices

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Deuteronomy 12 and 17-18.

with a completely different system. We are left to ask who we will trust: the God-inspired, prophetic author of the canonical scriptures or Margaret Barker. While the biblical account has nothing but high accolades for King Josiah and praises him stating that “before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him,”<sup>7</sup> Margaret Barker would have you see this as little more than white-washing propaganda. That which the biblical author refers to as “all the abominations that were in the land of Judah and Jerusalem” which were put away by Josiah in accordance with the book of the Law, Margaret Barker pines after as the truer and more glorious Temple theology which she believes was normative in the earlier history of Israel and was restored by Christ and the early Church. While we think that over, let us move on to consider the methodology by which Ms. Barker “reconstructs” her Temple Theology.

## **Part Two: The Methodology behind Margaret Barker’s Temple Theology**

*They gather their views from other sources than the Scriptures; and, to use a common proverb, they strive to weave ropes of sand, while they endeavour to adapt with an air of probability to their own peculiar assertions the parables of the Lord, the sayings of the prophets, and the words of the apostles, in order that their scheme may not seem altogether without support. In doing so, however, they disregard the order and the connection of the Scriptures, and so far as in them lies, dismember and destroy the truth.*

St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* I.8

Having briefly examined Margaret Barker’s historical picture of the First Temple before the time of King Josiah and demonstrated how it differs so radically from that which we find in the Holy Scriptures, we might ask what method she employs to produce her own portrait of the Temple. Given the extent of the so-called Deuteronomic reforms and their efforts to cover their tracks, it might seem as though Ms. Barker would have to abandon any hope of reconstructing an image of the Temple as it was before Josiah’s time. According to Ms. Barker, though, Josiah and

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<sup>7</sup> II Kings/IV Kingdoms 24:24-25

his Deuteronomic minions were not able to completely blot out the older religion and so, she believes, it can still be possible to piece it together today from a variety of sources. Because of this, Ms. Barker proposes a number of means of reading between the lines of the canonical Scriptures and then going further afield in searching through various non-canonical writings in order to retrieve the original Temple theology.

The first method Ms. Barker proposes involves a sort of “reading between the lines” of the received biblical text. Since, as she claims, the book of Deuteronomy was composed by King Josiah’s seventh century BC reforming party and only claims to have come from Moses’ hand, she believes we can make a sort of reverse inference that any and all beliefs and practices prohibited in the book of Deuteronomy were actually the older practices of the Jerusalem Temple the Deuteronomists sought to eradicate. So, Margaret Barker explains, by comparing passages in Deuteronomy with passages elsewhere in the Old Testament that apparently contradict them, we can begin to reconstruct what Josiah took away:

Deuteronomy, for example, denies that any vision of God was seen when the Law was given: “You saw no form; only a voice was heard” (Deuteronomy 4:12), ... The vision of God must have been a part of the older faith; ... Deuteronomy condemns regard for the host of heaven (Deuteronomy 4:19), ... The heavenly host of angels must have been part of the older faith. ... Deuteronomy also taught that the Law was to be the wisdom of the chosen people, that the Law would make them wise (Deuteronomy 4:6). The book of Proverbs says that it is Wisdom herself who makes her disciples wise (Proverbs 9:1–6). Wisdom must have been part of the older faith.<sup>8</sup>

Added to this, Barker also claims that whatever Josiah is described as removing from the Temple in IV Kings 22-23 or practices of earlier kings that are abhorred by the Deuteronomic authors of that history are actually evidence of the older practices of the Jerusalem Temple. IV Kings

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<sup>8</sup> “What Did Josiah Reform?” n.p. Elsewhere she states the following: “It is clear that the practices forbidden by Deuteronomy – offering child sacrifice by fire, divination and prophecy – had been a part of the pre-Deuteronomic cult. These were the abominable practices of the nations which they were to drive out (Deut.18.9-22), just as the forbidden Hosts had part of the older religion. (*The Mother of the Lord: Volume 1: The Lady of the Temple* [London: T & T Clark, 2012], p. 35).

23:6 describes Josiah dragging away the Asherah and burning it and Deuteronomy 16:21 had forbidden the placement of any tree or pillar in the Temple, so the Queen of Heaven, the Mother of the Lord, Wisdom, must have been worshipped in the older temple practice. In a more chilling example, Margaret Barker claims that while Josiah abolished “the custom of child sacrifice,” it “had been required by the oldest of the Hebrew law codes.”<sup>9</sup> In these and many other instances, the attempts to erase the earlier beliefs and practices of Israel point all the more in their direction. Methinks the Deuteronomist doth protest too much.

The second way Margaret Barker proposes for reconstructing her theoretical pre-Josianic temple involves a sort of allegorical approach to accounts in the received, canonical Scriptures. She claims that recollections of the earlier Temple were encoded and historicized in some of the stories included in the canonical Old Testament and that by reading these stories carefully we can tease out their hidden meanings. So, according to Margaret Barker, the account of the creation in Genesis 1 is not actually about the creation of the world but is, instead, a cryptic telling of a vision Moses had on Mt. Sinai of the symbolic meaning of the Tabernacle.<sup>10</sup> Further, the accounts of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2-3 are not to be understood as historical records about our first parents, their fall into sin and their expulsion from paradise; instead, they are an encoded tale of the ancient Jerusalem priesthood’s experience of the loss of the mysteries, the loss of Wisdom, the loss of the glory of the older Temple brought on by Josiah’s revolution.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> “What Did Josiah Reform?” n.p. On page 36 of her book, *The Mother of the Lord*, she argues that the account of the Binding of Isaac in Genesis 22 originally ended with Abraham performing a human sacrifice of his son, Isaac, and was only later reworked into the story we know in an effort to suppress the previously acceptable practice of child sacrifice.

<sup>10</sup> *Temple Theology: An Introduction*, pp. 16ff.

<sup>11</sup> *The Mother of the Lord*, p. 64.

Ms. Barker also claims that, over time, Jewish scribes re-worked the Hebrew text of Scripture, simply changing a word here or there, in an effort to obscure descriptions of beliefs or practices that they found abhorrent, thereby further erasing the traces of the Temple she believes once existed.<sup>12</sup> Because of this, she feels justified in altering the wording of various texts of the Old Testament when a slightly different wording suits her claims about the Temple. In Joshua 24:26, Joshua is described as writing a copy of the law of God in a book and then setting up a stone, presumably as a memorial, under an oak tree near the sanctuary of the Lord. The Hebrew word for “oak tree” here is *'allah*. Margaret Barker notes that the word is rare, only appearing in this one place in the Old Testament, but it is related to a similar word with slightly different vowels which also means an oak or terebinth tree. She then proposes one more shift to the vowels which would make the word in question mean “goddess” and, since the Hebrew word for “under” can also mean “instead of”, she reworks the passage to mean that Joshua set up the stone of the Law in place of the goddess who used to be worshipped.<sup>13</sup> By similar moves, Barker argues that the Hebrew word “shaddai” found in the name for God, El Shaddai, which the King James Version usually renders “God Almighty” following the tradition of St. Jerome’s Vulgate which rendered it *Deus Omnipotens*, not to be understood as indicative of strength but is rather a reference to the breasts of the goddess who nourishes her people.<sup>14</sup> Just like that, a goddess emerges from the pages of Scripture. Many other examples could be drawn from her writings, but we will let these suffice as an example of her broader methodology.

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<sup>12</sup> Barker discusses these “correcting scribes”, the so-called *Tiqqune Sopherim* in numerous places throughout her book *Mother of the Lord* (cf. pp. 9ff and 182ff for examples). See our discussion below of her attempt to read a goddess into the Hebrew text of Isaiah 7:11.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Mother of the Lord*, p. 218.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Mother of the Lord*, p. 134.

Beyond methods for reading between and behind the lines of the canonical Scriptures, Margaret Barker is convinced that it is essential to resort to a writings outside of the canonical Scripture in order to collect authentic memories of and reconstruct the true theology of the original Jerusalem Temple. She believes that there were refugees who fled the city of Jerusalem during the time of Josiah's Deuteronomic purge. These, she claims, carried the secret traditions of older beliefs and practices with them. She believes that some of these refugees travelled to Egypt, based on the nearly contemporaneous accounts found in Jeremiah 44:16-19 (51:16-19 LXX), while others went as far as Arabia, evidenced by a Rabbinic tradition recorded in the Jerusalem Talmud<sup>15</sup> which was written a mere one thousand years after the time of Josiah's reforms. Because of this, in Ms. Barker's opinion, it is essential to track down and piece together the various echoes of this secret tradition as they appear in a vast array of later texts, be they Jewish pseudopigrapha, early Christian apocrypha, Gnostic literature, later Church Fathers, Rabbinic literature, or even Islamic traditions and Medieval Jewish mystical literature. Among all of these, pride of place is afforded to the Enoch texts, especially 1 Enoch, in which, according to Margaret Barker, "the most complete picture of the first temple religion has been preserved."<sup>16</sup> It is this broader library of Second Temple Jewish literature, and not the Old Testament, which she claims provides the real contextual backdrop to the emergence of Christianity and will help us to understand what the early Christian claims were.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The Jerusalem Talmud is collection of Rabbinic traditions first published around the fifth century AD.

<sup>16</sup> "What Did Josiah Reform?" n.p. 1 Enoch is work of Jewish apocalyptic literature written roughly over the final two centuries before Christ but claiming to have been authored by Enoch, the great-grandfather of Noah, who is mentioned in the early chapters of the book of Genesis. For Barker's opinions of the books, see especially her book *The Lost Prophet: The Book of Enoch and Its Influence on Christianity* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. her essay "Texts and Contexts" included in *The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy* (London: T & T Clark, 2003), pp. 294-315.

As intriguing as all of this may seem, there is a fundamental flaw in Ms. Barker's methodology which has been pointed out by a number of scholars in published reviews and other assessments of her work: its arbitrariness and lack of exegetical controls. While it is a somewhat lengthy quotation, let us consider what H. G. M. Williamson, then Regius Professor of Hebrew at the University of Oxford, had to say in a review of Barker's first major publication, *The Older Testament: The Survival of Themes from the Ancient Royal Cult in Sectarian Judaism and Early Christianity*. There, he wrote the following concerning Barker's claim to be able to reconstruct an image of the Temple from before the time of Josiah:

This provocative thesis may prove more difficult to refute than to reject, not least because of its conspiratorial reading of the texts, which frequently allows Barker to have her cake and eat it (absent or contradictory evidence is the result of revision; fragmentary evidence testifies to what once was; material that might fit becomes strong evidence in favour, etc.). A full evaluation can clearly not be undertaken within the confines of a short notice, since each text would require separate examination, but two caveats may be entered. One is Barker's approach to textual criticism. She can be quite critical of widely accepted emendations proposed by scholars who have been misled by the present text's prevailing ideology over what they might expect to find, whereas, on the other hand, she allows herself considerable liberties to revocalize, emend or reinterpret the text to make it fit her theory (e.g. the discussion of Ezek. xxviii on pp. 235-7). The fact that a text can be (re)read in a certain way in no way demonstrates that it was so. Secondly, Barker places considerable emphasis on the observation that many of the texts which she thinks testify most strongly to the older mythology are generally agreed to be particularly corrupt. This is said to show that they have been tampered with by the Deuteronomic revisionists. The argument is not convincing since one would expect a reviser either to eliminate objectionable material or to revise it properly; otherwise, why bother? Why, in particular, Deut. xxxii should have been incorporated in Deuteronomy, of all books, without being more satisfactorily worked over is not made clear (but, no doubt, all such criticisms only go to show how far the reviewer has been prejudiced in his reading of the O.T. by what the Deuteronomists have programmed him to find there).<sup>18</sup>

What Dr. Williamson rightly points out about Ms. Barker's work is that, beyond the fact that it falls prey to the logical fallacy of unfalsifiability, there are few exegetical controls on her proposed interpretations. If we look soberly at the methods employed by Ms. Barker, we cannot help but see

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<sup>18</sup> *The Older Testament: The Survival of Themes from the Ancient Royal Cult in Sectarian Judaism and Early Christianity*. Review by H. G. M. Williamson in *Vetus Testamentum* Vol 38 Fasc. 3 (July 1988) pp. 380-381.

that they are very much at odds with the norms Orthodox approaches to the interpretation of Holy Scripture.

First, while Margaret Barker speaks derisively of the canonical Scriptures of the Old Testament, the Nicene Creed, echoing the words of St. Paul (I Corinthians 15:1-4) has asserted that the Church's confession of Christ's saving work was "in accordance with the Scriptures" by which was meant the canonical Old Testament, not the books of Enoch, Jubilees or countless other writings which were rejected by the Church as apocryphal. Both the Church Fathers and Church Councils have clearly stated that only the canonical Scriptures are to be read in Church and to serve as the source of Church dogma.<sup>19</sup> The Synodikon of Orthodoxy recited every year on the first Sunday of Great Lent announces that the faith of the Orthodox church is the same "*as the Prophets saw, as the Apostles taught, as the Church received, as the Teachers laid down as doctrine, as the World has agreed ...*" confirming a continuity of the Apostolic tradition with the Old Testament Scriptures. As Orthodox Christians, we sit at the feet of the prophetic authors of the Old Testament, embracing them with a filial trust, receiving from them the faith once for all delivered to the saints<sup>20</sup> and content ourselves with the word that God has given us through them; we do not approach the Old Testament with the conspiratorial suspicion proposed by Margaret Barker nor do we go running to those non-canonical writings, knowing they are nothing but "wells without water."<sup>21</sup>

Next, Margaret Barker's approach to the methods of discovering the "original" wording of biblical passages runs counter to the practice of both the majority of scholars in the field of textual

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<sup>19</sup> E.g. Canon 19 of the Council in Trullo, St. Athanasius of Alexandria's Festal Letter 39, St. Augustine On *Christian Doctrine* (II.8), St. John Damascene's *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* (IV.17).

<sup>20</sup> Jude 3

<sup>21</sup> II Peter 2:17

criticism, as well as the practice of the Church Fathers. It is not uncommon for a biblical scholar to propose a possible correction to the present Hebrew text when one or more of the following is true: 1) different existing Hebrew manuscripts contain wordings that differ from one another forcing a scholar to ask which manuscript represents the earliest form of the text, 2) the wording of an early translation (e.g. Septuagint or Vulgate) seems to assume a different Hebrew wording likewise raising the question about the original wording, or 3) when the received Hebrew wording is simply nonsensical leading a scholar to wonder if perhaps one letter or another was mistaken by a scribe and a small alteration would smooth out the reading of the text. Even the Church Fathers, though they were often reading the Old Testament in Greek or Latin translation, raised questions about the accuracies of their translations when different translations rendered phrases differently.<sup>22</sup> What is not normal is proposing alterations to the Hebrew text where there is no textual problem to necessitate the change just to suit one's theological penchants. As Dr. Williamson pointed out, "The fact that a text can be (re)read in a certain way in no way demonstrates that it was so."<sup>23</sup>

Finally, it is not uncommon for the Church Fathers to propose allegorical or typological interpretations of biblical stories and persons, but they do not do so, as Margaret Barker proposes, to the exclusion of the literal or historical interpretation of Scripture, but as an additional sense of meaning on top of the literal.<sup>24</sup> In this, they followed the example of the Holy Apostle Paul who, in his Epistle to the Galatians, offered an allegorical interpretation of the two sons of Abraham,

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<sup>22</sup> E.g. St. Cyril of Alexandria's, in his *Glaphyra on Genesis*, comments on whether Genesis 6:1-4 refers to the "angels of God" or "sons of God" given the textual variants present in different Greek texts of his day. Likewise, St. Augustine, in his *On Christian Doctrine* (III.3) discusses whether the Latin phrase *os meum* in Psalm 138:15 is derived from *ossa* ("bone") or *ora* ("mouth") and so, looking back to the LXX Greek, seeing that it there says οστέον (the word for bones) and not στομα (the word for mouth), he settles the matter.

<sup>23</sup> Op. Cit.

<sup>24</sup> E.g. St. John Cassian, in Conference 14.8 says the following concerning allegorical interpretations of Scripture: "to the allegory belongs what follows, for what actually happened is said to have prefigured the form of some mystery." It is clear, then, that allegory does not dispense with the historical or literal interpretation, but rises up from it to another level of meaning.

Isaac and Ishmael, in order to elucidate the relationship between the Church and the Jews who had rejected Christ.<sup>25</sup> At no point does St. Paul propose that Abraham, Isaac and Ishmael were not historical persons; rather he is making a point on the basis of this historical personages. So then, on top of the problem of what Ms. Barker claims to find behind the biblical narratives like those about the creation and Adam and Eve in Eden, her claim that these are not to be read as referring to historical realities is contrary to the Patristic interpretation of the Scripture.

It is also not uncommon for an appeal to be made to literature outside of the Scripture as a means of better contextualizing or filling out the historical picture offered in Scripture. Any student who has studied the Scriptures with me knows that I regularly make use of ancient Near Eastern, early Jewish, Greek and Roman sources, where applicable, to help contextualize the Scriptural accounts and our understanding of the world in which they were written. But the most common sense approaches to historical method would tell you that you are far more likely to find better historical information in an historical work written close to the time of the events described (in our case, the accounts in the Books of Kingdoms often assumed to have been written, if not during Josiah's reign, during the Babylonian exile, that is, within a century's time) and not in an intentionally symbolic, apocalyptic work written nearly half a millennium later (in this case, 1 Enoch). That is not even to mention the much later Gnostic texts, Muslim traditions and Jewish Rabbinic and Kabbalistic literature that she cites throughout her books. With such a problematic methodology, one is left wondering whether Ms. Barker's portrait has any foundation in history or if it is simply a figment of her imagination. While we ponder that question, let's move on to consider why some Orthodox might be drawn to her Temple Theology.

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<sup>25</sup> Galatians 5:22-31

### Part Three: The Naked Truth of Margaret Barker's Perverted Temple

*Error, indeed, is never set forth in its naked deformity, lest, being thus exposed, it should at once be detected. But it is craftily decked out in an attractive dress, so as, by its outward form, to make it appear to the inexperienced (ridiculous as the expression may seem) more true than the truth itself.*

St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, Preface

At this point, one may begin to wonder how it is that any sound-minded Orthodox Christian could be drawn to Ms. Barker's Temple Theology in the first place. While each person may have his or her own reasons, by and large, the most likely reason is that her work seems to promise historical precedents and justifications for a number of things that the Orthodox hold dear. As was already cited above, Margaret Barker claims that her Temple Theology approach is able "to reconstruct the worldview of the first Christians, and to restore to their original setting such key concepts as the Messiah, divine Sonship, covenant, atonement, resurrection, incarnation, the Second Coming and the Kingdom of God."<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, a number of her books are presented as challenges to the skepticism that dominates contemporary biblical scholarship. Finally, her discussion of liturgy and theosis, her preference for the Septuagint Greek over the Masoretic Hebrew text of the Old Testament, the fact that she discredits the notion of *sola scriptura* and pays homage to the place of a "secret tradition" that was normative in early Christianity, all of these have caught the ears of an Orthodox audience.

The problem is, though, that while Margaret Barker uses a lot of Orthodox terminology and discusses themes important in Orthodox theology, it is not always clear that she means the same thing as Orthodox Christians do when discussing these matters. As such, we will need to

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<sup>26</sup> Op cit

look closely at what it is she does say about these various theological topics and make a sober assessment of her presentation. While we could discuss any one of a number of themes, we will limit ourselves to three areas of doctrinal consideration, namely, the doctrine of the Trinity, the belief in the Incarnation of the Messiah, and the veneration of the Theotokos. After such an examination, it should be clear that Barker's Temple Theology is anything but Orthodox.

### **Christian Doctrine of the Trinity**

In her 1992 book, *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God*, Margaret Barker claimed to have uncovered the pre-Christian roots to the belief in the divinity of Christ and that, contrary to the opinions of many secular biblical scholars, there was no need to claim that such a belief was either a late development or a foreign Greek idea that found its way into Christian theology. In the front matter of the book, she recounts an experience that prompted her to write the book in the first place:

What finally prompted me to write was an article (I will not specify!) which I came across one day whilst browsing in the library. Like so many recent contributions to New Testament study, this one assumed that the idea of Jesus's divinity was brought relatively late to Christianity, invented by Greek converts who had not really left their paganism behind.<sup>27</sup>

Now, to someone who accepts the truthfulness of the Gospels and the other New Testament writings, the claim that Ms. Barker is seeking to counter may seem odd, but it is true that many secular New Testament scholars do not think it is possible that the earliest followers of Jesus could have ever confessed belief in His divinity because it is assumed the followers of Jesus would have been committed to a narrow form of Jewish monotheism that would have excluded claims about Jesus' divinity. If, then, Ms. Barker were actually able to refute this bit of skepticism, it would

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<sup>27</sup> *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God* (Louisville: WJK Press, 1992), p. xiii.

seem we should be grateful. But, when we examine what it is that Ms. Barker actually concludes in her study, we will find that it misses the mark of Orthodox Trinitarian theology.

Margaret Barker starts by arguing that the scholarly assumption that pre-Christian Judaism was strictly monotheistic and would have precluded the possibility of confessing Christ's divinity is ill founded:

What has become clear to me time and time again is that even over so wide an area, the evidence points consistently in one direction and indicates that pre-Christian Judaism was not monotheistic in the sense that we use that word. The roots of Christian trinitarian theology lie in pre-Christian Palestinian beliefs about the angels. There were many in first-century Palestine who still retained a world-view derived from the more ancient religion of Israel in which there was a High God and several Sons of God, one of whom was Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel. Yahweh, the Lord, could be manifested on earth in human form, as an angel or in the Davidic king. It was as a manifestation of Yahweh, the Son of God, that Jesus was acknowledged as Son of God, Messiah and Lord.<sup>28</sup>

We will have to unpack a couple of themes found in this quote and discussed at much greater length throughout the remainder of her book, namely her distinction between the High God (El/Elohim) and the chief of the Sons of God (Yahweh/Lord) and the place of Yahweh among the Sons of God.

Barker's first point is to distinguish different divine beings in the Old Testament by pointing to the different divine titles usually translated as "God" and "LORD" in English Bibles. While many might be inclined to see these different titles as different ways of referring to the same being, Barker claims that they rather should be seen as a key to distinguishing at least two divine beings in the Old Testament. To understand this better, we will have to explain a little bit about the Hebrew words for God used in the Old Testament.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

Perhaps, in reading the Old Testament, you have noticed that sometimes God is referred as “God” and sometimes as “LORD”, that latter designation being set in small caps to distinguish it from “Lord/lord” written more normally. The reason your English translation does this is because there are two main names or groups of names for God found in the Old Testament. First, there is the simple word “God” (Hebrew אֱלֹהִים / Elohim). Like its English counterpart, this word can mean either “god” or “gods”, generically, or “God” more particularly. I can say “Thank God” as an Orthodox priest and no one will wonder whether I mean the Holy Trinity, the ancient Greek Zeus, or the Hindu Vishnu. But I can also use that same term to explain to my children that Zeus and Vishnu are considered “gods” in ancient Greek and Hindu mythology respectively. So too, the Hebrew language allows one to refer to one’s own God as “God” (*Elohim*) or to the god/gods of other peoples (*el/elohim*).

The other major name for God in the Old Testament is the particular or covenantal name of God revealed to Moses on Mt. Sinai, יהוה sometimes rendered “Jehovah” in older English translations, but now generally assumed to have been pronounced Yahweh. This name is usually rendered as “LORD” in small capital letters in order to distinguish it from “Lord/lord” which often translates another Hebrew word אֲדֹנָי/אֲדֹנָן (*adon/adonai*) which means “lord” or “master”. This latter name was given to Moses on Mt. Sinai when the prophet was commissioned to deliver the sons of Israel from their Egyptian slavery.<sup>29</sup> At that time, Moses told God that if he went back to Egypt and told them that God had sent him to deliver them, the Israelites were likely to ask “Which God? What is His name?” It was then that God told Moses, “I am that I am. Therefore tell the people of Israel I AM has sent me to you.” The Hebrew basis of the name “I AM” is the verb הָיָה (*hayah*) which is the simple “to be” verb in Hebrew. The name Yahweh is based on a related verb,

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. Exodus 3-4 and 6.

used somewhat rarely in the Hebrew Old Testament but evident in related languages like Aramaic, הוה (*hawah*) which also means “to be”. This name, Yahweh, is interpreted in Exodus 3 by God to mean that God is “He who is/exists.”

Now, with both classes of names, the name can be used either in its simple form, *Elohim* or *Yahweh*, or in compound forms like El Elyon/God Most High,<sup>30</sup> El Shaddai/God Almighty,<sup>31</sup> Yahweh Sabaoth/ LORD of Hosts.<sup>32</sup> In a few rare cases, the two are combined, most notably in Genesis 2. Both names can also be incorporated into the names of Israelites in what is known as a theophoric (“god-bearing”) element. So, for example, the “-el” at the end of the Prophet Samuel’s name is the divine name *El*, the prophet’s name meaning either “God (El) has heard” or “His name is God (El)”. Likewise, the “-iah” at the end of the righteous King Hezekiah’s name is the short form of Yahweh, Yah, and his name means “Yahweh strengthens”. With all of this in mind, let us return to Margaret Barker’s claims in this regard.

Instead of seeing Elohim and Yahweh as one divine being differently named in different parts of the Old Testament, Margaret Barker claims that we should distinguish them from one another. In her mind, Yahweh is not to be identified with El, but should be understood as a son of El Elyon.<sup>33</sup> One of the foundations of Barker’s distinction, argued for in the first chapter of her book, *The Great Angel*, is based on her examination of the Old Testament concept of the “son(s) of God”. She cites James Dunn’s handling of this theme in his book *Christology in the Making* as characteristic of the commonly accepted scholarly view that she would like to inveigh against:

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<sup>30</sup> E.g. Gen. 14:18-20, 22, Psalm 57:2, 78:35

<sup>31</sup> E.g. Gen. 17:1, 28:3, 35:11, 43:14, Gen 48:3.

<sup>32</sup> E.g. 1 Sam. 1:11, 17:45; 2 Sam. 6:18, 7:27; 1 Kings 19:14; 2 Kings 3:14; 1 Chron. 11:9; Psalm 24:10, 48:8, 80:4, 19, 84:3, Isaiah 1:24, 3:15, 5:16, 6:5, 9:19, 10:26, 14:22, Jer. 9:15, 48:1, Hosea 12:5, Amos 3:13, Micah 4:4, Nahum 3:5, Haggai 2:6, Zech. 1:3, Mal. 1:6, Hab. 2:13, Zeph. 2:9.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *The Great Angel*, pp. 4, 17.

Even those whose cultural horizons were more limited to the literature and traditions of Judaism would be aware that 'son of God' could be used in several ways: angels or heavenly beings - 'the sons of God' being members of the heavenly council under Yahweh the supreme God (Gen. 6.2, 4; Deut. 32.8; Job 1.6-12; 2.1-6; 38.7; Pss. 29.1; 89.6; Dan. 3.25); regularly of Israel or Israelites - 'Israel is my firstborn son' (Ex. 4.22; Jer. 31.9; Hos. 11.1; see also e.g. Deut. 14.1; Isa.43.6; Hos. 1.10); the king so called only a handful of times in the OT - II Sam. 7.14 (taken up in I Chron. 17.13;22.10;28.6)Ps. 2.7and 89.26f.<sup>34</sup>

While Barker agrees that these various groups or individuals are all referred to as divine sons in some sense, she contends that Dunn fails properly distinguish between the divine persons referred to in each case and thereby misses something that she thinks is fundamental to her Temple theology. In this regard, she contends that the phrase “sons of El/Elohim” is only ever applied to spiritual or heavenly beings (e.g. angels) while human figures (e.g. Israel or her kings) are only ever described in relationship to Yahweh, though only ever implicitly, the explicit phrase “sons of Yahweh” never being used in the Old Testament. On this basis, she feels justified in proposing that El Elyon was once understood to be the head of the Israelite pantheon, the progenitor of other divine beings and transcendent creator of all that is. Yahweh, on the other hand, was member of that pantheon, as the Holy One of Israel, who was near to His people, often manifesting himself in human or angelic likeness in order to appear to them. In her mind, then, it was only at a much later date that these two distinct divine beings conflated with one another, blurring the distinction and giving the impression of a fully unitarian monotheism.

Barker contends that this distinction was foundational to early Christian interpretation of the Old Testament and claims about Christ. So, in one place, she states that “the Gospel writers, in using the terms ‘Lord’ and ‘Son of God Most High’, saw Jesus as an angel figure, and gave him their version of the sacred name Yahweh.”<sup>35</sup> Not only the authors of the New Testament, but also numerous Church Fathers are said to bear testimony to this distinction: “Several writers of the first

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<sup>34</sup> Cited in *The Great Angel*, p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> *The Great Angel*, p. 5.

three Christian centuries show by their descriptions of the First and Second persons of the Trinity whence they derived these beliefs. El Elyon had become for them God the Father and Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel, the Son, had been identified with Jesus.”<sup>36</sup>

While we might be tempted to welcome this claim as a first step towards full Christian trinitarianism, it is not clear that Ms. Barker’s distinction can hold up under closer examination. First, it is true that an overly simplistic understanding of monotheism cannot do justice to a number of Old Testament passages which point towards a pre-Christian perception of plurality within the Godhead, many of which were used in early Christian polemics against the Jews. Here, we might think of passages like Genesis 19:24 which states that the “the Lord (Yahweh) rained down fire from the Lord (Yahweh) in heaven,” the oft-cited Psalm 109:1 “the Lord (Yahweh) said to my Lord (Adonai), ‘Sit Thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool’” or Daniel’s vision of the “one like the Son of Man” who sits at the right hand of the “Ancient of Days” in Daniel 7:13. While distinctions within the Godhead are hinted at in these passages, it is not on the basis of divine titles employed. In fact, in the case of Genesis 19:24, both figures are referred to as “the Lord (Yahweh)”. Furthermore, it is not true that those referred to as “sons of God (El or Elohim)” are always spiritual beings. Leaving aside the majority opinion of the Patristic interpretation of the “sons of God” in Genesis 6:1-4, which sees this as a reference to the righteous line of Seth and not angelic being, as the non-canonical book of 1 Enoch would have it, Hosea 1:10 tells the people of Israel, clearly human agents, that they shall be called “sons of the living God (’El or אֱלֹהִים).” I suppose Ms. Barker could claim that later scribes tampered with Genesis 19:25

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<sup>36</sup> *The Great Angel*, p. 190.

or Hosea 1:10 to blur a distinction that was once there, but there is no manuscript evidence to warrant such a claim.

Next, it is true, as Barker points out, that a number of early Church Fathers pointed precisely to these sorts of passages to make their claims concerning the divinity of Christ. As Barker rightly notes in her *The Great Angel*, St. Justin Martyr capitalized on a number of these passages in his dispute with Trypho.<sup>37</sup> So, for example, St. Justin, discussing the appearance of the Lord to Abraham in Genesis 18, distinguishes the Lord who appears to Abraham from the heavenly Father in this way:

Moses, then, the faithful and blessed servant of God, tells us that *he who appeared to Abraham under the oak tree of Mamre, was God*, who, with two accompanying angels, to judge Sodom, *was sent by another*, who forever abides in the super-celestial regions, who has never been seen by any man, and with whom no man has ever conversed, and whom we call Creator of all and Father.<sup>38</sup>

But, even Barker admits that not all of the early Fathers employed this distinction. So, in discussing this matter in the writings of St. Irenaeus of Lyons, she says the following:

The next generation of writers continued to interpret the Scriptures in this way. Irenaeus of Lyons used the same arguments for the preexistent Christ in his *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, *but the memory of the distinction between God Most High and the Son had begun to blur*. It was the Word who said to Moses at the burning bush “I am He Who is”, a clear indication that the God named with the sacred name was thought to be the Second, not the First person (Proof 2), and *yet Irenaeus could also say that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was the Father, God Most High* (Proof 8).<sup>39</sup>

When the evidence does not fit her scheme, it is explained away as proof that “memory of the distinction ... had begun to blur.”

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. *The Great Angel*, pp. 193ff *passim*.

<sup>38</sup> *Dialogue with Trypho*, 56.1 (emphasis added).

<sup>39</sup> *The Great Angel*, p. 195.

Beyond the problems with lining up this hard and fast distinction with the biblical evidence and history of Patristic interpretation, it is important to point out that in Margaret Barker's mind, Yahweh is not the Son of God, but one of the Sons of God, the others being the beings that we might typically identify as angels. It becomes apparent, then, that Margaret Barker is proposing a model of the godhead that shares much more in common ancient Israel's Canaanite neighbors, wherein the high god, El, sat atop a pantheon of deities, with his divine consort, the goddess Asherah, with a number of deities beneath him, all the offspring of that supreme divine pair. Among these deities, Ba'al (known especially from the times of the Holy Prophet Elijah recorded in the Books of Kingdoms) stood out as a chief in divine counsel, though, while he might hold a prominent place, he was nevertheless just one among many sons of El. In similar fashion, Margaret Barker envisions the Israelite El Elyon or Elohim in the place of the Canaanite El, the High God and Father to the Sons of God, and the Israelite Yahweh as an analogue for the Canaanite Baal, a chief divinity, perhaps, but otherwise just one of the Sons of God. This is a far cry from the Orthodox confession that Christ, as Son and Word of God, is the "only-begotten of the Father" alone "begotten, not made" while the angels are only created beings, neither begotten of, nor consubstantial with, the Father.<sup>40</sup>

So, then, while it is true that plurality within the Godhead is hinted at throughout the Old Testament and that both the New Testament and the early Church Fathers made use of these passages both in polemics against the Jews and in instructing members of the Church, Margaret Barker's portrayal of a thorough-going distinction between El/Elohim and Yahweh does not hold up under scrutiny. Particularly problematic are her claims that the Old Testament scriptures were

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<sup>40</sup> For the traditional teaching of the nature of the angels, one may look to the *Celestial Hierarchy* of St. Dionysius the Areopagite or the discussion of the creation and nature of the angels in St. John Damascene's *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, especially Book II.3

obscured by those who sought to blur the distinction between these two deities and her failure to distinguish between the use of the phrase “son of God” when applied to the only-begotten Son and Word of God, the second person of the Trinity, and its use when referring to created beings who are either like God in being spiritual beings (i.e. Angels) or adopted as sons of God (i.e. Israel or Christians). Having considered her view of Trinitarian theology on the basis of her Temple Theology, let us now consider her claims regarding the Temple roots of the belief in the Incarnation.

### **Christian Doctrine of the Incarnation**

Margaret Barker’s 1996 book, *The Risen Lord* has an intriguing subtitle, *The Jesus of History as the Christ of Faith*. This references the tendency common among skeptical biblical scholars to claim that the portrait of Christ in the Gospels is historically incredible (e.g. claims that miracles are scientifically impossible and that it would be inconceivable for a first-century Jew to claim to be God) and so scholars must work to reconstruct the real, historical figure Jesus of Nazareth and distinguish him from the later Christian confessions about the Christ they believed in. Barker’s subtitle, then, promises to confound the claims of these skeptics by proving the Jesus of history to have been the Christ always confessed. Once again, though, while this is promised, it is not the traditional Christ of faith that is delivered, but rather another scholarly reconstruction, just this time it is Barker’s and not that of prior critical scholars.

This book is summarized on Ms. Barker’s own author website, so we will quote her summary and then look at what it is that she actually proposes there and in the actual book.

The fourth stage of her work was assembled in outline to deliver as the *Scottish Journal of Theology* lectures in 1995, and published as *The Risen Lord; the Jesus of History as the Christ of Faith* (T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1996). She applied the results of earlier temple research to the figure of Jesus and concluded that even the canonical materials described Jesus as one who lived and died within the tradition of the high priesthood. She challenged much of the scepticism of recent scholarship - hence the book’s subtitle *The Jesus of*

*History as the Christ of Faith* - arguing that the texts should be read on their own terms and in the context of first century Palestine. ***She proposed that Jesus saw himself as one of the high priestly initiates, one of the resurrected ones, and that this mystical experience is recorded in the Gospels as his baptismal vision. After this experience he believed himself to be the Lord, the Son of God Most High, the high priest who had come to perform the final act of atonement at the end of the tenth Jubilee. Thus the whole of the ministry was the post-resurrection period, a position confirmed by material in Gnostic texts, especially the Gospel of Philip, but also in early Christian writers such as Irenaeus.*** Re-reading the New Testament, early Christian and early Gnostic texts with this paradigm gave remarkable results; it explained much of Paul's salvation imagery, which derived from the older covenant beliefs; it explained the Parousia hope, as the return of the high priest from the holy of holies; it explained the origin of the belief that Jesus' death effected atonement; it explained the form of the early baptismal liturgies; it accounted for the high priestly imagery of the Letter to the Hebrews. Evidence emerged of an esoteric tradition in the early church in which the arcana of the temple were transmitted. Her initial work in this area was published in an article 'The Secret Tradition', in *The Journal of Higher Criticism* 2.1 (1995) pp.31-67.<sup>41</sup>

Barker begins her study raising the question about the meaning of "resurrection" when applied by Christians to Christ. While recognizing that a number of Jewish and Christian texts understand resurrection to mean a "revival of the dead to live a renewed human life in the king of the Messiah,"<sup>42</sup> Barker argues that "when Paul says that Jesus was designated Son of God by his resurrection he must have meant something more than this."<sup>43</sup> If resurrection here only referred to being raised bodily from the dead, Barker contends, there is no reason that Jesus should have thereby "been recognized as the Messiah and a pre-existent divine being rather than just a revived body."<sup>44</sup>

How, then, does Ms. Barker propose we understand references to Christ's resurrection if not as his being bodily raised from the dead following the event of his crucifixion? She answers this question by stating that she intends to "show that the earliest understanding of resurrection

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<sup>41</sup> <http://www.margaretbarker.com/Publications/History.htm#Risen> (accessed November 17 2021). Emphasis added.

<sup>42</sup> *The Risen Lord: The Jesus of History as the Christ of Faith* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> *The Risen Lord*, p. 2.

<sup>44</sup> *The Risen Lord*, p. 4.

may have been [an] experience of mystical ascent and the transformation it effected.”<sup>45</sup> She elaborates this claim further in the following paragraph which is central to her overarching argument:

The remarkable early testimony in Romans 1:4 to Jesus having ‘become’ son of God, Lord and Christ after the resurrection must imply that if Jesus himself was aware of his being Son of God, Lord and Christ, *he must himself have experienced the event which was described as his resurrection*. I want to explore the possibility that his resurrection was originally a mystical experience and that Jesus was a mystic who ascended and experienced transformation into the angelic state. There is an extraordinary passage in the *Gospel of Philip* which suggests that Jesus’ resurrection did occur before his death.

Those who say the Lord died first and then rose up are in error for he rose up first and then died (*Philip 56*.)

This could be gnostic fantasy but I think not. This extraordinary statement is the key to a whole new way of reading the New Testament. The original raising of Jesus was at the start of the ministry.<sup>46</sup>

There is a lot that could be said about this passage.

First, it is clear that Barker here understands St. Paul’s use of the verb  $\text{οριζω}$  in Romans 1:4, often translated “declared to be, manifested as, appointed or designated”, to mean that Christ’s resurrection was understood by early Christians to be the event wherein or the means whereby Christ *became* the Son of God, implying He was not so prior to this event. Barker is not coy about proposing an adoptionist understanding of Christ, but actually claims in another book that “once Jesus is set back within the temple tradition, ... pre-existent and adoptionist Christologies are seen to be both compatible and original.”<sup>47</sup> It should go without saying that such an interpretation of the Apostle’s words is not in keeping with the Rule of Faith. The Church Fathers regularly interpret St. Paul’s use of the verb  $\text{οριζω}$  at this point in his Epistle to the Romans to mean that Christ’s resurrection *confirmed* or *manifested* His divinity. So, for example, St. John Damascene remarks

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<sup>45</sup> *The Risen Lord*, p. 6.

<sup>46</sup> *The Risen Lord*, p. 8. Emphasis in the original

<sup>47</sup> *The Great High Priest*, p. 32.

that “by His miracles and resurrection and by the descent of the Holy Ghost it was made plain and certain to the world that he was the Son of God.”<sup>48</sup>

Equally problematic is the fact that her justification for rethinking the nature of Christ’s resurrection comes not from something in the canonical scriptures or one of the Church Fathers, but rather this quotation from the Gnostic “Gospel of Philip”: “Those who say the Lord died first and then rose up are in error for he rose up first and then died.”<sup>49</sup> This text, erroneously ascribed to the Apostle Philip, was probably written sometime in the second or third century AD, though the only existing copy comes from a manuscript buried in the late fourth century and unearthed in 1945 near Nag Hammadi, Egypt along with other Gnostic texts like the Gospel of Thomas. Like the Gospel of Thomas, and unlike the canonical Gospels, Philip does not record the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Christ, but consists of a record of sayings attributed to Christ, all of which bear a resemblance to the worldview and teachings of the Gnostic heretic Valentinus who lived in the second century AD. Are we then to privilege a Gnostic gospel, which appears to be associated with a heretical group whose teachings were rejected and refuted by Church Fathers like St. Epiphanius of Salamis and St. Irenaeus of Lyons, over the teachings of the canonical scriptures and the Church Fathers? Margaret Barker thinks so because, while historically “our ideas about resurrection have been formed by the canonical gospels and only one possibility has been seriously considered,” but now our understanding can be “enriched” and “radically altered by a reappraisal of materials outside of the New Testament.”<sup>50</sup>

We might then ask what the “resurrection” was if it was not the event of Christ’s being raised bodily from the dead after his crucifixion as is traditionally confessed. It is, in Barker’s

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<sup>48</sup> *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* IV.18.

<sup>49</sup> *Op. cit.*

<sup>50</sup> *The Risen Lord*, p. 11.

mind, a mystical experience that Jesus underwent at the time of His baptism by John in the Jordan.

Concerning this she says the following:

There were ... mystics who believed that human beings could be transformed into angels, sons of God, when they ascended to the presence of God and that this state is what the earliest Christian sources described as resurrection. There are also indications that Jesus had such experiences and that he ascended to heaven at his baptism and became a son of God. A variety of evidence in early tradition links the baptism with merkavah phenomena and with the priesthood where these secret practices had their origin.

What Barker imagines is that the man, Jesus of Nazareth, at the time of his baptism, experienced a heavenly vision which imparted divine knowledge to him and granted him a divine status. This experience is compared by Barker to similar accounts in the canonical scriptures, such as Isaiah's vision of the Lord in the Temple (Isaiah 6), Ezekiel's vision of the throne chariot of the Lord accompanied by the four living creatures (Ezekiel 1) and Daniel's vision of the heavenly throne (Daniel 7). More important for Barker, though, are connections with the Enochic literature like the account of Enoch heavenly journeys in 1 Enoch or the transformative vision Enoch undergoes in 2 Enoch 23-37.

The contents of the vision Jesus received during His baptism are only hinted at in the canonical Gospels by their brief records of the opening of heaven and the descent of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:1-17 // Mark 1:1-11 // Luke 3:21-24 // John 1:30-34). According to Barker, though, the actual content of this vision mu the canonist have been was is described in the canonical Book of Revelation. This vision was apparently so troubling to Jesus that struggled with its meanings and had to come to terms with His new vocation during His forty days of His temptation in the wilderness.

All this talk, though, of Jesus receiving divine visions as something foreign to Himself, becoming divine, something that He was not before, and gaining knowledge He did not previously

possess flies in the face of the biblical witness in the canonical Gospels and the Patristic consensus concerning their interpretation. One important scriptural text to consider in this regards is the interchange between Jesus and his Mother in Luke 2:48-50. There, Mary, having been worried sick about her missing Son, is both relieved and shocked to discover that He has been in the Temple all along. She confronts Him, saying, “Son, why has thou thus dealt with us? Behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.” To this, the boy Jesus, replies, “How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?” After surveying the history of Patristic interpretation of this passage, Patrick Temple, in his book, *The Boyhood Consciousness of Christ*, states the following:

The conclusion from this patristic study is , that the Fathers are unanimous in the view that Jesus at twelve years of age revealed His real Divine Sonship ; the Latin Fathers are clear and explicit on the point , and the Greeks go beyond this , nearly all using the text , Luke ii . 49 , to defend or demonstrate Christ's true Divinity. <sup>51</sup>

Here then is Christ, only twelve years old, decades prior to the event of His baptism in the Jordan, not only possessing, but already acknowledging His divine sonship. More could be said on Barker’s understanding of the Incarnation, but these points should suffice to demonstrate that once again, while Margaret Barker holds out the promise of shoring up some aspect of traditional Christian belief with her imaginary Temple Theology, she in fact winds up adding confusion and error. Let us turn now to Margaret Barker’s claims about the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God.

### ***Christian Veneration of the Mother of God***

We have already noted above the fact that in Margaret Barker’s understanding, one of central aspects of the older Temple that was removed by Josiah was the Asherah: “The centrepiece

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<sup>51</sup> Patrick Joseph Temple, *The Boyhood Consciousness of Christ: A Critical Examination of Luke ii.49* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1922), 12.

of Josiah's purge was the removal of Asherah from the temple and her destruction (2 Kgs 23.4), which must correspond to the rejection of Wisdom/the Queen of Heaven."<sup>52</sup> Who, though, was this "Asherah"? The Old Testament elsewhere uses the Hebrew "Asherah" (אֲשֵׁרָה) in a number of places, at times in reference to a cult symbol, probably a stylized tree meant to represent a deity,<sup>53</sup> while in other places it is more naturally understood as the personal name of a female deity, a goddess, worshipped by the Canaanites and, at times, by Israelites.<sup>54</sup> Not much is said about the characteristics of this female deity in the Old Testament itself, but she seems to be a goddess found in the mythological texts uncovered in Syria in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that date back to the Late Bronze Age city of Ugarit that once stood in that place. There, we find references to a goddess *Athirat* who is depicted as the goddess consort of the chief god El and often receives the epithet *qnyt ilm*, "Creatress/Begetter of the Gods".

Margaret Barker argues that what Josiah removed from the Temple was the worship of the goddess Asherah who she equates with a figure elsewhere referred to as the "Queen of Heaven," the personified or personal being "Wisdom," and the "Mother of the Lord." The first title, "Queen of Heaven" is derived from Jeremiah 44:16-19 (51:16-19 LXX). There, the prophet Jeremiah is seen preaching to a number of refugees in Egypt who had escaped the destruction of Jerusalem. When the prophet instructs them to put away their idols and worship the Lord, they reject his teaching, arguing that back in the day when they had made offerings to the "Queen of Heaven" everything had gone well for them. They are convinced that it was only when they had stopped worshipping, or been forbidden to worship, this female deity that the times of trouble, culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem, had begun. Jeremiah seeks to counter their narrative, pointing out

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<sup>52</sup> *The Mother of the Lord*, p. 32.

<sup>53</sup> E.g. Exod. 31:13, Deut. 7:5, Judges 6:25.

<sup>54</sup> E. g. III Kingdoms 15:13 refers to the production of an "abominable image for Asherah" and III Kingdoms 18:19 refers to the prophets of Baal and the prophets of Asherah.

that it was precisely on account of this idolatrous worship of the “Queen of Heaven” that the Lord had subjected His people to destruction and exile, the long-before promised curse of the law.<sup>55</sup>

The second figure with whom Ms. Barker equates the Asherah removed by King Josiah the figure of Lady Wisdom who is prominent in the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs.<sup>56</sup> While this depiction of Wisdom as a feminine personal being may be simply understood as a personification of an otherwise abstract quality and the fact of her femininity being a mere accident of language, given that the Hebrew word for “wisdom,” *hokmah* is a feminine noun, Margaret Barker believes that the figure in the book of Proverbs is actually a thinly veiled vestige of a goddess who was once worshipped alongside the Lord by the people of Israel. She attempts to further this claim by pointing to a few descriptions of Wisdom found in the Old Testament pseudopigraphic book of 1 Enoch. The first of these, 1 Enoch 42, refers to Wisdom’s failed attempt to find a dwelling among the people of Israel: “Wisdom went forth to make her dwelling among the children of men, and found no dwelling place Wisdom returned to her place, and took her seat among the angels.” Secondly, a passage from 1 Enoch 93: “All who lived in the temple lost their vision, and the hearts of all of them godlessly forsook Wisdom, and the house of the kingdom was burned and the whole chosen people was scattered.” In both cases, Margaret Barker assumes this Enochic figure of Wisdom should be equated with Lady Asherah and that the book of Enoch is consciously equating Josiah’s eviction of Asherah from the Temple with the departure from Wisdom which resulted in the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the people a few decades later at the hands of the Babylonians.

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<sup>55</sup> Cf. IV Kingdoms 17 which hearkens back to Leviticus 26:27-33 and Deuteronomy 28:53-57.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. especially Proverbs 8:22ff.

The final figure, the “Mother of the Lord” is title which, according to Margaret Barker, originally appeared in the Hebrew text of the book of Isaiah but was obscured by later scribes who were too skiddish about the prophet’s supposed reference to a feminine divine figure. The verse in question, Isaiah 7:11, appears in the middle of an account in which Isaiah proposes to the then king of Jerusalem, Ahaz, who is worried about an impending invasion by foreign, hostile powers, that he ask for a divine sign to confirm the Lord’s promise that He will protect him. The verse is usually translated something like “Ask a sign *from/of the Lord* your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.” The phrase “from/of YHWH/the Lord” in Hebrew would be transliterated as מֵעַם יְהוָה (*mē‘im yhw̄h*) with the first word understood as a contraction of the two prepositions מִן (*min*) and עִם (*‘im*), individually meaning “from” and “with” respectively but often contracted to refer to something that proceeds or has its origin from a person or thing. According to Margaret Barker, though, the middle letter of the first word, the Hebrew ‘ayin (ע transliterated by the symbol ‘) was originally an ‘aleph (א transliterated by the symbol ’) which would change word from meaning “from [a source]” to מִן אֵם (*min ‘ēm*) meaning “from the Mother of YHWH/the Lord”. Her justification for this alteration of the wording is supposed evidence found in the Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa<sup>a</sup>) where she argues the Hebrew letter in the middle of the word in question is an ‘aleph and not an ‘ayin.<sup>57</sup> It is to be admitted that the middle letter of the word in question is at least unclear and if it was in fact an ‘aleph it would seem to be a singular reference to an otherwise unknown figure, the “Mother of YHWH/the Lord” and perhaps, further, evidence that the monotheistic claims of both later Jewish and Christian communities only stands because of the erasure of a female deity from their shared Scriptures. It should go without saying that Orthodox theology can neither accept the existence nor the worship of a female deity alongside of the true God who has

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<sup>57</sup> Images of this portion of the Great Isaiah Scroll can be accessed electronically here: [dss.collections.imj.org.il/isaiah#7:11](http://dss.collections.imj.org.il/isaiah#7:11)

revealed Himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but in order to demonstrate just how dubious Margaret Barker's proposals are in this regard, let us consider in turn these three titles and their concomitant claims.

First, the equation of the Asherah removed from the Temple in IV Kingdoms 23 with Jeremiah's "Queen of Heaven" to whom some of the Jerusalem refugees say they used to make offerings does not seem too far flung. The practices described in Jeremiah of offering of incense, libations and cakes are attested to in the worship of foreign gods and goddesses elsewhere in the Old Testament.<sup>58</sup> The presence of such a figure in the Jerusalem Temple at the time of Josiah is also not contested by the biblical text. IV Kingdoms 21 describes the wickedness of King Manasseh, son of Hezekiah and grandfather of Josiah, who "erected altars for Baal and made an Asherah ... and worshipped all the host of heaven" (v. 3) and focusses further on the "carved image of Asherah that he had made" which "he set in the house of the Lord [i.e. the Jerusalem Temple]" (v. 7). Further, archeological evidence supports the idea that, regardless of what happened in the Temple, the official center of worship, some of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, in particular, and Judah, more broadly, were worshipping a goddess figure, perhaps Athirat/Asherah, given the prevalence of small female figurines that are generally interpreting as fertility symbols.<sup>59</sup> A large collection of these found in in a cave in Jerusalem by the British archeologist Kathleen Kenyon in the 1960s may even be physical evidence of Josiah's reforms.<sup>60</sup> All of this is to say that the fact that a goddess was worshipped by at least some Israelites during the period of the first temple is something that is as easy to find in the canonical scriptures and the archeological record as it is in

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<sup>58</sup> E.g. Deuteronomy 32:38, Isaiah 57:6, Jeremiah 7:18, Ezekiel 16:8; 20:28.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Richard Hess *Israelite Religions: An Archeological and Biblical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), pp. 308-312. Also, William Dever, *Did God Have a Wife?: Archeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), pp. 176ff.

<sup>60</sup> Kenneth Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 418-19.

Margaret Barker's reconstructions of that history. The real question, like in the dispute between Jeremiah and the Queen of Heaven devotees, is ultimately one of interpretation of the data: was this goddess worship, as it is portrayed by the scriptural books of Kings and the Prophets, a syncretistic corruption of Israel's pure worship in defiance of the expressed will of the one true God communicated to the people of Israel centuries before at Sinai through the Prophet Moses and recorded in the books of Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy or was it a normative part of Israel's worship, unjustly maligned by a group of puritanical monotheists, a sort of Iron Age ISIS, bent on violently erasing the real history of Israel's Temple and enforcing their own narrowed theology and practice? Will you trust the scriptural portrayal or Margaret Barker's reconstruction?

Secondly, we come to Margaret Barker's equation of the Lady Asherah, the goddess who supposedly once resided in the Jerusalem Temple, with the figure of Wisdom as a personified being or person, found, among other places, in the canonical Book of Proverbs. First, it would be easy enough to demonstrate that the overwhelming Patristic consensus when it comes to the interpretation of the Wisdom passages of the Old Testament is to associate the figure with the Pre-incarnate Christ and not with a feminine divine principle. One need only to second of the Four Discourses against the Arians written by St. Athanasius where he is at pains to prove that the reference to the "creation" of Wisdom in Proverbs 8:22 does not refer to the eternal origins of the Son of God and if not, therefore, a text proving the position of Arius that there was a "time when the Son was not".<sup>61</sup> We could further counter this interpretation by pointing the early twentieth-century synodal condemnations of the Sophiological heresy proposed by figures like Vladimir Soloviev, Pavel Florensky and Sergii Bulgakov.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> St. Athanasius, *Discourses against the Arians*, II.16-22.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. the decisions of the Bishops' Council of October 17/30, 1935, which stated the decided the following:

While Orthodox theological presuppositions should be sufficient to safeguard one against Ms. Barker's claims, we would like to demonstrate here, briefly, on the grounds of the biblical and pseudopigraphical texts and the broader Semitic philology that illuminates our understanding of the figure of Asherah as understood by Israel's Canaanite neighbors, that her claims do not hold water. With that in mind, it is first important to point out that while it is the case that Wisdom is portrayed as a feminine figure in the book of Proverbs, which has led some scholars to associate Asherah with the personified Wisdom,<sup>63</sup> this connection seems to be little more than the speculation of modern scholars. As John Day has argued, in his *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*,

Though ingenious, this proposal does not seem very convincing. *Nowhere in the Ugaritic texts, Old Testament or elsewhere is the goddess Asherah associated with wisdom* (unlike her Canaanite consort, the god El), the relation of Wisdom to Yahweh is more akin to that of a daughter than a wife (cf. Prov. 8:22), the tree of life seems to have been more than a stylized tree, and there is no special significance in the occurrence of the word 'ašrê 'blessed' in Prov. 3. 13, 18, since this word is quite frequent in Proverbs and related Wisdom literature (cf. Prov. 8.32, 34, 13.21, 16.20, 20.7, 28.14, 29.18; Ps. 127.5, 128.1)<sup>64</sup>

So much for the connection of Proverb's Lady Wisdom with Ms. Barker's Lady Asherah, but what about the references in 1 Enoch? Do they point to a poor, evicted goddess? Here again, laying aside for the moment the fact the 1 Enoch is not a part of the canonical scriptures, Ms. Barker seems to be over interpreting the passage. It would take more space than this essay will allow to unpack fully the theology of Wisdom in the Old Testament, but for now, suffice it to say that one

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"i) To recognize the teaching of Archpriest Sergei Bulgakov on Sophia the Wisdom of God as heretical.  
ii) To inform Metropolitan Yevlogy of this Decision of the Council and to request that he admonish Archpriest Bulgakov with the intention of prompting him to publicly renounce his heretical teaching concerning Sophia and to make a report about the consequences of such admonition to the Synod of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad.

iii) In the event that Archpriest Bulgakov does not repent, the present Decision of the Council which condemns the heresy of Sophianism is to be made known to all Autocephalous Churches."

<sup>63</sup> An early example of this is Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 94-95.

<sup>64</sup> John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), p. 67.

of the strong strands of tradition found throughout the Old Testament is the vision of the Law and its performance as the source of or means of obtaining Wisdom. Whether one points to earlier texts like Deuteronomy 4:5-8 or later texts like Sirach 24 (esp. vv. 23-27) or Baruch 3:9-4:4, one can see that the normative, biblical strand of reflection on the nature of Wisdom saw the Law as the revelation of Wisdom to Israel and that the performance of the Law would guide one into the Wisdom that God offered. Taking that into consideration in returning to the above-cited passages from Enoch, and also with an eye towards the interpretation of the passage referring to the rejection of Wisdom in the early chapters of Proverbs, it makes more sense to equate the “rejection of wisdom” with the failure to keep the Law of Moses than with the removal of a goddess or cult symbol from the Temple of Jerusalem. Again, the question is, will you trust what is presented in the Scriptures or what is presented by Margaret Barker in this matter.

Finally, in coming to the matter of the association of Lady Asherah with the supposed reference to the “Mother of the Lord” in Isaiah 7:11, the whole matter comes down to an analysis of the writing of the early Isaiah scroll and, as stated above, whether the letter in question is an *'aleph* or an *'ayin*. Here, I would argue that what one finds is simply a poorly written *'ayin* which was caused either by the imprecise handwriting of the scribe or the bleeding of the ink into the previous letter. The first argument against this reading of 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> is the simple fact that no one other than Margaret Barker has proposed this reading of this text. If you know anything about the field of biblical studies, it should be clear that some scholars, and especially the popular media, would be having a heyday with this if any Dead Sea Scrolls expert were to make this claim. After this, it is important to point out that no early version (Greek Septuagint, Latin Vulgate, or Syriac Peshitta) has a reading that deviates from the received Hebrew reading of this passage.

Even if we could grant that the middle letter is in fact an *'aleph* and the word means “mother”, as Margaret Barker claims, the preposition at the beginning of the word would more likely that not need an additional letter that is clearly absent. As we noted above, the received reading sees the word as a compound preposition *mē'im* derived from the two prepositions *min* and *'ēm*. Barker's reading understands the initial *m* letter of the word to be the preposition *min*. The problem is that, while the preposition *min* does often drop its *n* when conjoined to a noun, there is no instance in Hebrew literature where this occurs with the Hebrew word for “mother” as Barker is proposing. This probably because such a construction would be avoided because it was it could be confused with the compound preposition that is usually understood to be the word in this verse. A similar example might be if we consider an English speaker who, having the option between using “a” or “an” before the word “historical account”, might opt for “an historical account” if he was concerned that saying “a historical account” might be mistaken for “ahistorical account”. It seem far more likely that were Isaiah or a scribe wanting to saying “from the mother” they would have written it out as two separate words, *min 'ēm* to avoid confusion with the compound preposition. By contrast with the non-existence of any other instance of the preposition *min* contracted with the Hebrew word for “mother” elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, the compound preposition *mē'im* found in the received reading of the Hebrew text of Isaiah 7:11 is found frequently throughout the Old Testament. There is, then, no reason to accept Ms. Barker's emendation of the Hebrew text of Isaiah 7:11 which seriously problematizes her claim that a “Mother of God” is found, however obscurely, in the Old Testament.<sup>65</sup> So then, not only do Margaret Barker's claims about the Mother of God fail to harmonize with traditional Orthodox

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<sup>65</sup> For a notated photographic image of and more on the question of the reading of 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> in relation to Isaiah 7:11, cf. Michael Heiser's post on the matter found online at [Microsoft Word - Isaiah 711 Qumran notes.doc \(drmsh.com\)](https://www.drmsh.com/microsoft-word-isaiah-711-qumran-notes.doc). Her further evidence for this “institution” is related to the role of the Queen Mother or Royal Consort of the Davidic kings, which we will consider further below.

beliefs concern and practices of veneration towards the Theotokos, it is not clear that they are even able to stand up under the weight of her own exegetical claims.

### **Conclusion: The Verdict of Margaret Barker's Temple Theology**

*Hypotheses do not become fact simply by frequent repetition, or even by detailed elaboration.*

Margaret Barker<sup>66</sup>

It should be apparent, by now, that Ms. Barker's novel portrayal of a supposedly reconstructed Temple Theology is just that, a novelty, a product of her scholarly imagination. We may marvel at the breadth of her reading in Scriptural texts, apocryphal literature, Gnostic writings, Islamic traditions and Jewish mysticism, but for all that, we cannot accept the tapestry that she weaves together from so many far-flung and disparate threads as a portrayal of the truth. Here, an analogy employed by St. Irenaeus of Lyons centuries ago seems quite apropos. St. Irenaeus compared the way in which the Gnostic heretics of his own day constructed their remarkably complex, but nevertheless erroneous theological systems by putting together numerous passages from Scripture to the work of an artist piecing together an elaborate mosaic one tile at a time. The problem, St. Irenaeus said, was that while the Gnostics had all the right mosaic tiles (i.e. the Scriptures) to construct a beautiful mosaic of a king, they lacked the proper understanding of how to put the pieces together and so kept arriving at a distorted image of a fox or a dog, and even that was poorly executed. We might say that same of Ms. Barker's work as well. She has drawn together many of the right tiles, though she has poured in handfuls of foreign tiles that were never meant to be part of the picture, and she has arranged them in such a fashion that we cannot recognize in them the image of the true faith which we have received.

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<sup>66</sup> *The Great Angel*, p. 12.

So then, we conclude that it is true that Margaret Barker's work, with its focus on Temple theology and ritual, might interest many Orthodox scholars who, rightfully, lament the absence of such themes in the bulk of modern Old Testament scholarship and, on the basis of a superficial reading, might seem to dovetail with certain aspects of Orthodox theology and tradition. But, on closer examination, however, her work is revealed to be nothing more than a latter-day manifestation of "knowledge falsely so-called" which, left unchecked, will only confuse and deceive the faithful. As such, her writings should in nowise be endorsed by Orthodox hierarchs, clergy and faithful, nor should she be given platforms in Orthodox settings to teach her erroneous ideas.