It is weekly Readers’ Mailbag time again. If you have a question you would like me to address in a future post, just comment here, or send me a private email. Today there are three questions, on three very different topics: the goddess Sophia, the rise of non-apocalyptic Christianity, and the evidence for John the Baptist.

QUESTION: In your debate with Justin Bass, you mention the divinity of Sophia. I googled “Sophia” and can’t quite figure this out. Could you educate us about Sophia?

RESPONSE: Ah, this will be tough to do in a short answer! “Sophia” is the Greek word for “wisdom” (we get a number of English words from it, for example “sophisticated” and “sophistry”). In ancient religious circles, both pagan and Jewish, “Sophia” came to be thought of as not simply a divine attribute (God is “wise”) but as a kind of divine emanation (“wisdom” actually “comes from” or “derives from” God) and then as an actual divine hypostasis. The term “hypostasis” does not have an easy English equivalent. It refers to a divine attribute that is seen to belong to God and yet at the same time somehow to be distinct from God and itself to be a divine being. So let me try to unpack that, with respect to Sophia. God has wisdom (so it is a divine attribute). But since wisdom is something that God has, then it necessarily is something that is distinct from God. At the same time, since it is God’s wisdom, it is itself divine. And so wisdom

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