The Destruction of the Second Temple

When a temple is the center of the spiritual life of a people, what do they do if it is destroyed? Jews and Christians faced this dilemma in A.D. 70 when Titus sacked Jerusalem and destroyed the Second Temple.¹ Thereafter, despite two abortive attempts to rebuild their temple,² Jews were left without a central focus for their ritual worship. Indeed, without a temple, they could not fulfill all of the requirements of the Mosaic law of sacrifice.³ They thus became a people eternally condemned to fail to keep the commandments of God that were connected to the temple.

Three possible solutions developed in response to this intolerable situation. The Pharisees created an ideology focusing on the minute obedience to all of God's nontemple-related commandments as expounded in the Bible, Talmud, and other Rabbinic literature.⁴ When God was ready, he would send his Messiah and the temple could be rebuilt.⁵ Until then, the Jews had to be content with fulfilling those portions of the law that could be obeyed without a temple. This response became normative for Rabbinic Judaism.

For the Christians, on the other hand, the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem was seen as a fulfillment of Christ’s
prophecy (found in Matthew 24:1-2; Mark 13:1-2; Luke 21:5-6). With the spread of the authority of the Imperial Church following the conversion of Constantine (A.D. 312), teachings concerning the temple were increasingly allegorized. Inasmuch as Christ's atonement had fulfilled the requirement of Mosaic temple sacrifices, such sacrifices were no longer necessary. Nonetheless, as Hugh Nibley has pointed out, medieval Christians retained an ambivalent attitude toward the Jewish temple, claiming that it was no longer important, but still recognizing its vast spiritual power.

Finally, there was a third response, that righteous humans could ascend into heaven and worship at the celestial temple. This paper will focus on the nature of the ascent to the celestial temple in Jewish thought during and after the Second Temple period.

The Heavenly Ascent in the Ancient Near East

The idea of the celestial ascent is one of the most widespread and long-lasting religious concepts in history. Archaic, nonbiblical ascension myths from Mesopotamia and Egypt date back to the early third millennium B.C. Within the Jewish tradition, this idea can be seen in the writings of Isaiah (eighth century B.C.) and Ezekiel (sixth century B.C.). Related and expanded versions of the ascent to the celestial temple are found in pseudepigraphic Enoch materials dating in their current form to at least the second century B.C., Qumran documents (second century B.C. to first century A.D.), Philo (c. 20 B.C. to A.D. 50), and in numerous other Jewish and Christian apocalyptic and pseudepigraphic writings.

I would argue, following James Tabor and others, that the heavenly ascent of the Jewish mystics cannot be under-
stood in isolation. The parallels between Jewish, early Christian, Hellenistic, Gnostic, and Egyptian ascension texts and rituals are too numerous and exact to be explained by random chance.

Tabor has developed a typology for ascension into heaven in the eastern Mediterranean world during the first centuries before and after Christ. Although there are many variations in detail, there nonetheless emerges a basic common pattern. Most ascension texts include most of the following elements:

1. A mortal is taken up to the highest heaven.
2. The ascent is an extraordinary privilege.
3. The way is fraught with danger and can be successfully undertaken only through divine permission and power.
4. There is great distance between the earthly and heavenly realms, with increasing beauty and splendor (or danger for the uninvited) as one moves up, and an increasing sense of alienation from the world below.
5. The ascent itself is a transforming experience in which the candidate is progressively glorified.
6. The climax of the journey is an encounter with the highest god.
7. One is given secret revelations, or shown mysteries.
8. The ascent is followed by a return to the world below to continue life as a mortal.
9. What is seen and heard can be selectively passed on by the recipient of the celestial ascension.
10. The one who has ascended faces the opposition of lower spiritual powers upon his return.  

Although many characteristics of the Judeo-Christian ascent literature parallel these broader characteristics of the ancient Near East, there are also other elements unique to the Judeo-Christian versions of the celestial ascent and
vision of God. Ithamar Gruenwald, one of the leading figures in the study of these ascension visions, adds six additional specific elements that are characteristic of the celestial vision of God in biblical accounts.\(^\text{14}\)

1. God is sitting on a throne, often called a *merkavah* (Eng. "chariot").
2. God possesses anthropomorphic qualities and features.
3. God’s throne is in the Holy of Holies in the celestial temple (Heb. *hekhal*).\(^\text{15}\)
4. The temple is filled with fire, light, gold, crystal, and gems, symbolizing the brilliant glory of God.
5. God is surrounded by angels who minister to him. (These angels fulfill the role of priests in the heavenly temple, paralleling the Levite priests in the earthly temple.)\(^\text{16}\)
6. The angels are singing hymns, paralleling the earthly temple hymns, rituals, and liturgies.\(^\text{17}\)

Thus, for many Jews and Christians in the early Christian period, the heavenly residence of God was conceived of as a vast celestial temple.\(^\text{18}\) Martha Himmelfarb, a leading scholar of this subject, informs us that "with the single exception of the Testament of Abraham, all the later ascent apocalypses . . . understand heaven as a temple either explicitly or implicitly."\(^\text{19}\) Thus, many ascents into heaven contain an important element of the entry into the celestial temple; indeed, in many ways the two are essentially synonymous.

The earthly temple was simply a pale shadow and imitation of the glories of its celestial prototype.\(^\text{20}\) Although the earthly temple had been destroyed because of the sins of Israel, the original celestial prototype continued to exist in heaven. Following the example of the ascents and visions of ancient prophets such as Enoch, Abraham, Moses, Isaiah,
and Ezekiel, many Jews came to believe that they too could ascend to the celestial temple. If properly prepared, a person could ascend into heaven, visit the celestial temple, perform the proper rituals there, and even enter into the presence of God and receive a revelation of the celestial mysteries. The Jewish practices and literature related to these ideas are known to modern scholars as Merkavah and Hekhalot mysticism.

**Ascension to the Heavenly Temple in Hekhalot and Merkavah Literature**

Gruenwald summarizes the historical origins of the post-Second Temple Jewish ascension literature (first through the seventh centuries A.D.) as follows:

The very rise of Merkavah mysticism was connected with the name of Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai, who was himself an eyewitness to the events that led to the destruction of Jerusalem. Thus, in a sense, the preoccupation with mystical problems could well be interpreted as being one of the ways in which people reacted to the disasters which befell them. When the cultic centre of the nation was no longer available, some people adapted beliefs and cultivated experiences which in some sense could replace experiences which had once been connected with the now destroyed Temple.

Merkavah and Hekhalot literature focuses on three fundamental themes: the celestial hekhalot, meaning “temples or palaces”; the divine merkavah, or “chariot/throne” of God; and be-reshit, meaning literally “in the beginning,” but referring to esoteric interpretations of the creation. All of these concepts form interrelated parts of the secret revelation obtained during the ascent to the celestial temple.

In a general sense the term hekhal means “palace or mansion,” but in its technical usage it refers to the Temple
Within the context of the Hekhalot mysticism, it seems best conceived of as a series of concentric courts, palaces, halls, chambers, shrines, or levels of the great celestial temple of God. Generally speaking, God himself dwells within the highest, most sacred, and innermost sanctuary—the Holy of Holies of the celestial temple.

An interesting possible parallel to this concept can be found in the Gospel of John. "In the House of my Father [oikia tou patros mou]," Jesus tells us, "there are many dwelling places [monai]" (John 14:2). The use of the phrase "House of my Father" occurs only twice in John's Gospel: here, referring to heaven, and in John 2:16 which states, "Do not make the House of my Father a house of trade." In John 2:16 the Father's House is clearly the Temple of Jerusalem, which was frequently called the "House of God" or the "House of Yahweh." By extension, then, the use of the phrase "Father's House" in John 14:2 could be seen as describing heaven as a celestial temple. The "many rooms" in God's heavenly temple might therefore refer to the conceptual equivalent of the hekhalot of the celestial temple in the Jewish ascension texts. Indeed, this is precisely how the term was interpreted by some of the earliest Christian exeges such as Origen, Clement of Alexandria, and Irenaeus. As will be noted later, each of the hekhalot in the ascension texts represents a different degree of glory, increasing as one nears the throne of God in the highest hekhal.

Ezekiel's experience following the destruction of Solomon's temple served as an important prototype for the ascent to the celestial temple of the later Merkavah mystics. Merkavah in Jewish mysticism refers to the celestial chariot of fire that Ezekiel saw in vision (see Ezekiel 1, 10). This celestial chariot has two roles in Merkavah mysticism: it can be both the mechanism by which the visionary ascends into
heaven (this is based on Elijah’s ascent into heaven in a chariot of fire—2 Kings 2:11), and it is the divine throne in the celestial Holy of Holies from which God rules the universe. “The mystical tradition of the Jews during the talmudic period is called Ma’aseh Merkavah [the work of the divine chariot] and together with the so-called Ma’aseh Bereshit [the work of the creation of the world] it forms the two branches of the so-called esoteric teachings in Judaism at that period.”27 Ma’aseh be-reshit, the “work of the creation” has reference to a wide range of Jewish esoteric speculations on the meaning of creation and the nature of the universe.

These three aspects of esoteric Jewish speculation—hekhalot/temples, merkavah/chariot-throne, and be-reshit/creation—are closely connected, and can be seen as representing different phases or elements of the celestial ascent. The mystic ascends into heaven by means of the celestial chariot or merkavah. In the heavens, the initiate passes through a series of hekhalot—palaces, temples, or levels—until he enters into the presence of God. God is seated on a throne, which is also described as a merkavah, in the highest level of heaven. There, the mysteries of God are revealed to the visionary, centered around the secrets of Creation, called the ma’aseh be-reshit. These mysteries include cosmogony (the creation of the universe), cosmology (description of the universe), and eschatology (the last days and ultimate destiny of mankind).

Nature of the Ascent

What were the actual experiences, if any, behind these ascension texts? There are at least five possible interpretations. First, the Hekhalot visionaries may simply have been charlatans who falsely claimed to ascend into heaven in order to gain power and influence over their followers.
Second, accounts of the visions may be allegorical, designed to teach moral principles and spiritual truths along the lines of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Third, the visionary experiences may have been a type of ritual initiation where the mysteries of heaven were revealed to the initiate through ritual, drama, or secret teachings. Fourth, the visions may have derived from some type of psychologically altered state of consciousness—trances, dreams, hallucinations, psychosis, hypnosis, or intoxication—which were interpreted by the visionary as representing an actual ascent into heaven. Finally, the visions may represent real experiences of visionaries who did indeed actually ascend into heaven.

The fact that many visionaries may have been charlatans or psychotics does not necessarily imply that all of them were. Some may have seen actual visions of heaven. Others may have used accounts of the experiences of real visionaries as literary motifs. Be that as it may, it is remarkable that nearly all of the visionary ascents to the celestial temple—whether from Jewish, pagan, or Christian sources—exhibit many parallels, indicating that all of these ideas and documents were somehow conceptually and historically linked together.

**A Typology of the Ascent to the Celestial Temple**

I would now like to present a typology of some of the basic elements of the celestial ascent as found in the Hekhalot, Merkavah, and related ascension literature. This typology draws from a large number of texts that differ in date, author, and place of origin. But whatever differences may be found in detail, Peter Schaffer’s synopsis has demonstrated that the parallels between these texts are numerous and often quite exact. Thus, whatever the his-
torical relationships between these texts, it is quite clear that they all shared a related view of the celestial ascent.33

The Ascension Mysteries Are Reserved for the Elect

Initiates into the celestial mysteries had to be of the highest moral and intellectual character, leading sinless lives.34 The Hekhalot Rabbati tells us that “only those can go down to the vision of the Merkabah who fulfill two qualifications: ‘... he who reads the Bible and studies Mishnah, Midrash, Halakhoth, and Aggadoth . . . and he who fulfills all which is written in the Torah and keeps all the prohibitions of statutes and judgments and laws which were declared to Moses on Sinai.’”35 According to Hekhalot Rabbati 13, the initiate must be “pure of idolatry, sexual offenses, bloodshed, slander, vain oaths, profanation of the Name [of God], impertinence, and unjustified enmity, and who keeps every positive and negative commandment.”36 Thus, intellectual maturity, knowledge of scripture, and personal righteousness were the major qualifying factors for those wishing to be initiated into the ritual ascent into heaven.

Ritual Purification before Ascent

Candidates possessing these moral characteristics were often required to further prepare for their ascent through fasting and ritual purifications.37 “Even the slightest possible suspicion of impurity, defined according to the strictest rabbinic law, is enough to have the ecstatic dismissed from before the [celestial] throne [of God].”38

Secrecy

As will be discussed below, a major purpose of the ascent was to gain a revelation of the celestial mysteries. Because of the extreme importance of this revelation, both the mechanism of the ascent, and the teachings and revea-
tions learned during the ascent were kept strictly secret.\textsuperscript{39} This information was generally transmitted only orally, and then to no more than three students at a time.\textsuperscript{40} Indeed, "the \textit{Mishnah} . . . forbids the study of the \textit{Ma'aseh Merkavah} in public."\textsuperscript{41} As with other mystery religions found in the classical Mediterranean world,\textsuperscript{42} the secrets of the Jewish and Christian celestial mysteries were well kept, making it often difficult to know exactly what the texts are discussing. It was usually assumed that the student would have a teacher present to explain the obscure meaning of the texts. This makes it "very difficult to guess what the Merkavah speculations of the circle of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai [one of the founders of Merkavah mysticism] were like."\textsuperscript{43}

\textit{Physical Mechanism of the Ascent}

According to the most important Hekhalot document, the \textit{Hekhalot Rabbati}, an important mechanism for making the ascent into heaven was trances, which were taught and practiced at the earthly temple in Jerusalem. The document tells us that "R. Nehunya ordered an assembly of all the leading scholars, that he might declare to them the secrets of the ascent. R. Ishmael assembled every Sanhedrin [council], great or small, at the third gate of the temple and R. Nehunya sat and instructed the chosen few who sat before him, while the rest of the scholars stood at a distance separated from them by globes of fire and torches of light."\textsuperscript{44} Thereafter Rabbi Nehunya entered into a trance, describing his visionary ascent to his followers.

The actual process of the ascent into heaven is described in a number of different ways.\textsuperscript{45} Some climb ladders or stairways into heaven (based on Jacob's vision at Beth-el near Beer-sheba of a ladder or stairway into heaven—\textit{Genesis} 28:10–22). For others a great wind carries them away; for
instance, a whirlwind is mentioned in the ascent of Elijah (see 2 Kings 2:11). Some are enveloped by a cloud;46 while others are carried to heaven by a bird.47 The ascent into heaven is frequently associated with the ascent of a sacred mountain.48 For instance, on Mount Sinai Moses sees God (see Exodus 24:9–11; 33:11, 20–23), receives the law (see Exodus 20–23), and has a vision of the heavenly tabernacle/temple (see Exodus 25:9, 40; 26:30; 27:8). Abraham is said to have ascended Mount Horeb to offer sacrifice preliminary to his ascent into Heaven.49 The transfiguration of Christ also occurs on a “high mountain” (Matthew 17:1–2; Mark 9:2; Luke 9:28). At the top of the mountain might be a temple,50 throne, a paradisiacal garden,51 or the Tree of Life.52

Based on the stories of Elijah and Ezekiel in the Bible (for Elijah, see 2 Kings 2:11; for Ezekiel, see Ezekiel 1, 10; cf. Psalm 104:3; Isaiah 66:15; Jeremiah 4:13), ascension into heaven by means of a celestial chariot became a common metaphor. Indeed, in Jewish mystical circles the phrase “entering or descending into the chariot” ultimately became synonymous with ascending into heaven. Jewish ascension mysticism as a whole became known as ma'aseh merkavah, meaning “the work of the [celestial] chariot.”

Number of Heavens

By whatever mechanism our initiate entered into the celestial realm, he usually passed through a number of different “heavens,” often called hekhalot in the Jewish ascension literature.53 The exact number of heavens differs in the texts, varying from one to ten.54 However, there are generally seven heavens, each associated with one of the seven moving celestial bodies seen in the visible sky.55

It is worth noting that in ascension literature heaven is not the equivalent of “paradise.” Rather, the celestial par-
adise is simply one place or *hekhal* within the various levels of the celestial realm. Paradise, as a specific location within the celestial realm, is most frequently located in the third heaven. The highest heaven, or "heaven of heavens"—the conceptual equivalent of the Holy of Holies in the earthly temple—is where God resides on his throne.

**Gradation in Glory between the Different Levels of Heaven**

The nearly universal belief that there were multiple heavens concentrically surrounding the celestial Holy of Holies and throne of God was naturally linked to a belief in gradations of glory in each level or *hekhal*. The higher the heaven and the closer to the residence of God, the greater the glory. Each of the levels or *hekhalot* of Heaven were inhabited by angels possessing different degrees of glory. Some of the earliest Christian fathers saw this as reflecting the degrees of glory for the righteous dead.

**The Angelic Host**

These heavens are inhabited by both the righteous dead and by endless concourses of angels who are sometimes called the "holy sons of God." It is a common notion that these heavenly angels are constantly singing praises to God. This is not just pleasant music making, however. The angels are in fact performing the celestial prototype of the earthly temple liturgy, as partially preserved in the book of Psalms in the Bible. According to Himmelfarb, "certain liturgical formulae taken from the [earthly] temple service were introduced into these doxologies [of the angels in heaven]."

The angels are the priests of the celestial temple. Since the visionary is permitted, and even required, to participate in the singing of this celestial liturgy to God, there is a strong implication that the visionary is also given some type
of priesthood authority as part of his heavenly ascent. Indeed, in the Testament of Levi, Levi is given his priesthood during his ascent to the heavenly temple. This authority—the Levitical or Aaronic priesthood—is then eventually passed to Levi’s descendants, who form the exclusive Jewish temple priesthood for the earthly temple.

Passing the Guardians

As noted above, the heavens were conceived of as a vast palatial temple-complex, composed of a series of concentric courts, halls, chambers, and shrines. The heavens are enclosed by “a wall which was built of white marble (or crystal) and surrounded by tongues of fire.” To move between the various sections or hekhalot of the celestial temple, the visionary initiate must pass through a series of doors or gates, each guarded by angels.

As the visionary ascends into heaven, he is often paralyzed with terror and confusion. He is able to progress from level to level only through the assistance of angelic guides who protect the visitor and explain what he is seeing. The assistance of the angels is not guaranteed, however. Some of the angels encountered in the ascent to the celestial temple oppose the admission of a mortal into the heavenly sanctuary. They will allow the visionary to pass only if he knows the proper passwords—often secret names of the angels—and has the proper tokens or seals. “All the different versions of the Hekhaloth lay great emphasis upon the knowledge of various seals (khotemoth) described as magical names either of the angels or of aspects of the godhead, that must be shown as passports to the gate-keepers at the entrances to the seven palaces.” In summary, the visionary can enter into the celestial temple only if he has authorization from an archangel or God himself.
The dangers for the unworthy in the celestial ascent are well illustrated by the famous Rabbinic story of the "four who entered paradise."  

Four men entered a garden [pardes = paradise]. Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, Aher and R. Akiba. One looked and died; One looked and was struck [mad]; One looked and cut the plants. One went up in peace and came down in peace. Ben Azzai looked and died. . . . Ben Zoma looked and was stuck [mad]. . . . Elisha [Aher] looked and cut the plants. . . . R. Akiba went up in peace and came down in peace. [The TB version adds:] The ministering angels attempted to push R. Akiba away also. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to them, Leave this elder alone, for he is worthy to avail himself of my glory.

This cautionary tale demonstrates the dangers for the unprepared or unworthy who attempt the celestial ascent.

Celestial Initiation: Anointing and the Celestial Robe

As the visionary approaches closer to the celestial Holy of Holies and the throne of God, he undergoes a process of ritual initiation and transformation into a being of celestial glory, becoming a member of the heavenly angelic host. Since the angels are frequently described as forming the celestial temple priesthood, initiation into their ranks is closely connected with the reception of priesthood authority, authorizing the visionary to participate in the celestial liturgy and sacrifices. Two main elements are involved in this transformation: anointing and receiving a celestial robe or garment.

Purification and anointing are the preliminary parts of the initiation. For example, during the ascension of Enoch—a fundamental prototype of all later Hekhalot visionaries—God said to his angels, "extract Enoch from [his] earthly clothing, and anoint him with my delightful oil, and put him into the clothes of my glory." This passage indicates
that before entering the celestial temple, the initiate is required to shed his earthly clothes and don celestial robes. These robes are similar to those worn by the angels and God himself. Morton Smith has argued convincingly that the donning of such new garments is symbolic of ritual initiation throughout the Ancient Near East.

Likewise, Isaiah is allowed to enter into the presence of God in the innermost sanctuary of the seventh Heaven only because he has the proper celestial robe or garment: “The Holy Isaiah is permitted to come up here [to the throne of God], for his robe is here.”

Gruenwald believes there are two types of celestial garments. There “are the white garments of the righteous . . . [which] are eschatological garments; but we do have another type of heavenly garments: . . . mystical garments. These garments most likely are to protect the mystical visionary from all kinds of dangers [during the ascent].” This suggests that there may have been an actual physical garment that the visionaries wore as part of their ascension rituals, as well as a celestial garment reserved for the righteous in heaven. This interpretation is partially confirmed by the story of Rabbi Yohanan b. Zakkai wrapping himself in his tallith garment when studying the mysteries of the chariot, and by the robe used when Christ taught an unnamed initiate the “Mysteries of the Kingdom” according to the Secret Gospel of Mark.

The Secret Names of God

The need for secrecy concerning the celestial ascent is in part because a key concept of the celestial mystery is the revelation of the most secret and sacred names of God and the angels. Pronouncing the tetragrammaton Yod-He-Waw-He (often vocalized today as Yahweh or Jehovah) was restricted
to the High Priest in the Holy of Holies in the earthly temple on Yom Kippur, the most sacred day of the Jewish year. "The secret name, or names, of God played a great role in some of the ancient Jewish concepts of creation," which "might be connected with certain speculations concerning the uttering of the tetragrammaton during the [earthly] temple service." Likewise, the rituals and mysteries of the celestial temple are closely associated with the knowledge of the tetragrammaton. Since the visionary often learned the secrets of the Holy Name, which could be pronounced only by the High Priest, the celestial ascent seems to imply an initiation into the highest Israelite priesthood.

The ritual use of names is widespread in the celestial ascent. When Abraham is called to ascend into heaven, God sends to him the angel Yahweh-el (Iaoel) "through the mediation of my [God's] ineffable name." Likewise, Rashi's commentary on the famous ascent of the four Rabbis into paradise claims that "they ascended to heaven by means of a Name." Those who misuse their knowledge of these sacred names receive eternal condemnation. Thus, the sacred names of the angels and God are to be kept secret and only revealed to those who are worthy to ascend to the celestial temple.

**Altar**

As the visionary approaches the inner sections of the celestial temple, he frequently passes by the celestial altar, where one of the leading angels—often Michael or Metatron—is offering the daily sacrifices in heaven paralleling the daily sacrifices in the earthly temple.

**Veil**

Paralleling the curtain or veil in front of the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies of the earthly temple
(described in Exodus 26:31-33; 30:6; Numbers 18:7; Leviticus 16:2; 2 Chronicles 3:14; Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45) is a veil or curtain (Heb. *parqod*) separating the throne of God in the Holy of Holies of the celestial temple from the rest of heaven. Whereas most of the angels are not allowed to pass through the veil and view the face of God, some visionary initiates, such as Enoch, who "enjoys a qualitative superiority over the angels," are permitted to do so.

**Led by Right Hand**

Having learned the secret names of God and the angels and having been purified, anointed, and clothed in a celestial robe, the initiate is now prepared for the ultimate goal of his ascent to the celestial temple—the vision and revelation of God. He is introduced into the celestial Holy of Holies by one of the archangels, who sometimes takes him by the right hand, and guides him into God's presence. Metatron/Enoch shows R. Ismael "the Right Hand of MAQOM [the Omnipresent One], laid behind (Him) because of the destruction of the Holy Temple.... And I [Ismael] went by his side and he took me by his hand and showed me (the Right Hand of MAQOM)." Likewise, Enoch claims that "Michael, one of the archangels, seizing me by my right hand and lifting me up, led me out into all the secrets of mercy."

**The Throne of God**

Having passed through the veil, the visionary is now allowed to see God seated upon his throne in the innermost Holy of Holies of the celestial temple. The throne is frequently described as being made of crystal, having wheels, and being surrounded by cherubim and other
hayyot—strange celestial creatures such as those found in the books of Ezekiel and Revelation (see Ezekiel 1; 10; Revelation 4–5). Descriptions of the celestial throne in the Hekhalot literature are frequently dependent upon Ezekiel’s vision of the merkavah, the chariot-throne of God (see Ezekiel 1:16; 10).

Revelation of the Secrets of God

One of the fundamental purposes of the ascent to the heavenly temple is to learn the secret mysteries of God. These mysteries are described by the Rabbis as “what is above [the earth], what is beneath [the earth], what was before time, and what will be hereafter.” The mysteries that are revealed center on the mystery of the creation of the universe (cosmogony), the nature of the universe (cosmography), and the ultimate destiny of mankind (eschatology). “Where a revelation of the ways of God with man is given,” Gruenwald informs us, “it is simultaneous with a revelation of the secrets of nature.”

According to the Hekhalot Rabbati, creation was brought about by a “wondrous and strange and great secret; the name through which the heaven and the earth were created, and all the orders of creation of the world (sedrei bereshit) . . . were sealed by it.” All creation is also bound together by an great cosmic oath formulated at the foundation of the world.

When these mysteries are revealed to the visionary, he is frequently ordered to write and preserve the secrets. “The secrets [of God] had been disclosed to the legendary sages of antiquity [such as Enoch] who in turn put them into books which were sealed away, and in that condition they were preserved till the eschatological time came to open them.”
Salvation through the Heavenly Mysteries

The mysteries of heaven are not revealed to the visionary merely to satisfy his idle curiosity. Rather, "apocalyptic revelation is one of the first, and necessary, stages in the process of salvation." The secret knowledge revealed to humans during their ascent to the celestial temple is fundamental to their salvation. An integral part of the knowledge learned through the celestial mysteries was often a revelation of the correct principles of scriptural interpretation. "They [the sectaries at Qumran] claimed that among the revelations given them were the correct explications of Scripture. Some of their writings in fact were eschatological commentaries to Scripture, and in them they believed to have uncovered the exclusive inner meaning and terms of reference of the biblical text."

Rebellious Angels and Occult Secrets

The importance of maintaining the secrecy of the revelations received in the celestial ascent is reflected in the legends concerning the unauthorized revelation of celestial secrets by the rebellious angels. Rebellious angels were said to have overheard some of the celestial mysteries, and thereafter they taught mankind the secrets of heaven, which were passed down to wizards and magicians in an apostate version of the authentic revelations from God. Thus, occult sciences such as astrology and magic, as well as many elements of pagan mystery religions and philosophy, were often seen as unauthorized forms of the true celestial mysteries.

Exaltation

The culminating event of the celestial ascent is the exaltation of the visionary. The vision of God and the revelation of the mysteries of heaven are frequently equated with
the glorification and exaltation of the visionary. The visionary is clothed in the “clothes of [God’s] glory,” he is crowned, seated on a throne beside God. The visionary is raised in glory and authority above the angels of heaven, having received a revelation of the celestial mysteries and secret knowledge of God.

An interesting example of this idea comes from a Christian ascension text known as the Ascension of Isaiah: “But they [the righteous dead] were not sitting on their thrones, nor were their crowns of glory on them. And I asked the angel who (was) with me, ‘How is it that they have received these robes, but are not on thrones nor in crowns?’ And he said to me, . . . ‘They will receive their robes and their thrones and their crowns when he [Christ] has ascended into the seventh heaven.’” In other words, in Christian versions of the celestial ascent, the full exaltation of the righteous dead can only be obtained through the atonement, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.

Divinization

The visionary has now become immortal, glorified, and privy to the secret knowledge of God. He is given authority over the angels and power over the forces of nature. Is it legitimate to say that the visionary has become deified? In fact, there are a number of elements in Jewish and Christian Ascension literature indicating that in some traditions the ultimate purpose of the ascent is the divinization of the visionary.

The prototype of all visionary ascents into heaven in the Hekhalot literature is Enoch. Enoch is said to have put on the robes of the glory of God, which transformed him into a celestial being: “I [Enoch] had become like one of his [God’s] glorious ones, there was no observable differ-
ence." But this is not all, for Enoch also received a secret celestial name, Metatron, and was enthroned in Heaven. As a glorified celestial being, Enoch/Metatron figures prominently throughout all Hekhalot and later Kabbalistic (late medieval Jewish mystical) literature as the most important celestial personage after God himself, superior even to the archangel Michael.

Indeed, Enoch/Metatron is referred to by a number of titles and descriptions that point to his deification. Most importantly, he is called "lesser YHWH (Yahweh qatan)." He is said to be "little less than God," whose "name is like the name of his master (God)"; indeed, he is specifically called "elohim" and "shadday," two of the names of God in the Old Testament. Enoch/Metatron is "seated on a Throne like the Throne of Glory," and "all keys [powers of God] are committed to Metatron." Because of the vast celestial authority he holds, "it was Metatron (rather than God) who showed himself to Moses and to the prophets."

Although Metatron is the most well-known example of divinization, other mortals are also said to have become deified through their celestial ascent, including Moses, Melchizedek, and an unknown visionary from Qumran, who claimed that

El Elyon gave me a seat among those perfect forever
a mighty throne in the congregation of the gods ... 
I shall be reckoned with gods
and established in the holy congregation.

The idea that the visionary ascent conferred divine powers upon the Merkavah mystic is manifest in later Kabbalistic texts. The celestial ascent was said to give the visionary incredible powers. "If the righteous wished, they could create a world ... For Rava created a man (golem)." This refers to the Kabbalistic legend of the Golem, or artifi-
cial man, which the Kabbalistic masters were said to be able to create because of their mastery of the secrets of creation.128

Thus, when the Merkavah visionaries ascend into heaven, they are provided with robes, crowns, and thrones, given the secret knowledge of God, the power to create worlds, human beings, and the title of "Lesser Yahweh." A reasonable conclusion from this is that they have become gods. The implication is that divinization was sometimes seen as the ultimate goal of the visionary ascent to the celestial temple.

**Ascension Motifs in Late Medieval Times**

The practice of the Hekhalot and Merkavah ascension rites seems to have declined after the seventh century. Jewish mystical impulses became increasingly dominated by neoplatonic emanationism and obsessed with gematria. Although the actual practice of the ascension rituals and visions seems to have declined, many of the ideas, texts, and practices of the Hekhalot and Merkavah visionaries were transmitted to later medieval Jewish mystics. The most important late medieval manifestation of ascension mysticism is found in Kabbalism. Though the subject of the transmission of ascension motifs from antiquity through the Middle Ages requires a full study, the developments of motifs can only be briefly summarized here. The following comments represent a preliminary analysis.

**Kabbala**

Kabbalism—a form of late medieval Jewish mysticism—developed in southern France in the twelfth century.129 The most important center of Kabbalism emerged in Spain, where the greatest Kabbalistic text, the *Zohar*, or *Book of Splendor*, was compiled.130 Although some elements of the earlier Hekhalot
ascent were discarded or reinterpreted by the Kabbalists, much of the ancient ascent tradition survived.\textsuperscript{131}

\textbf{Christian Kabbalists}

Beginning in the late fifteenth century, Christian Renaissance sages, in their endless quest to recover the lost secrets of antiquity, began the serious study of Hebrew, not only to help them understand the Old Testament in the original language, but also to gain access to the "secret knowledge" of the Jewish Kabbalists.\textsuperscript{132} Many Kabbalistic works were translated from Hebrew into Latin and in the process were reinterpreted to fit the Renaissance magical Christian worldviews.\textsuperscript{133}

One of the most important early figures in the history of the transmission of Kabbalistic lore from Rabbinic to Christian circles was the famous Renaissance philosopher Pico della Mirandola. He believed that Kabbala contained one of the most important proofs of the divinity of Christ.\textsuperscript{134} Other important Renaissance works on Christian Kabbalism include the \textit{Kabbala Denudata} of Knorr von Rosenroth and \textit{De Arte Cabalistica} of Johann Reuchlin, which exerted a tremendous influence on later European esoteric thought.\textsuperscript{135} Thus many esoteric concepts about the celestial ascents and temples were transmitted from Jewish Kabbalistic circles of the twelfth through sixteenth centuries A.D. to Western European Christian esoteric speculation in the fifteenth through nineteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{136}

\textbf{Freemasons and Christian Kabbalists}

A final phase in the history of these ideas came in the late sixteenth century and early seventeenth centuries with the origins of Speculative Freemasonry in Scotland.\textsuperscript{137} Freemasonry served as an esoteric sponge, absorbing and synthesizing a wide array of religious and occult ideas.\textsuperscript{138}
Christian Kabbalism thus also came to play a role in the development of the esoteric ideas and practices of Freemasonry.

**Summary**

In summary, the discovery of new evidence from Qumran and the reevaluation of the long-ignored pseudepigrapha and Jewish Hekhalot and Merkavah ascension lore has revealed a forgotten aspect of Judaism and Christianity at the time of the destruction of Herod's temple. An emerging consensus among many scholars is that during the first two centuries before and after Christ, a wide range of Jews, Christians, Gnostics, and pagans practiced a group of interrelated visionary ascension rituals. These rituals included the following concepts, ideas, or practices: limitation of the ascension to the elect; the necessity of ritual and moral purity; secrecy concerning the nature of the ascent and the knowledge learned during the ascent; ascension into various levels of heaven representing different degrees of celestial glory; encounters with a priestly angelic host, guardians, and guides; a heavenly initiation including anointing and receiving celestial robes; the knowledge and use of the secret names and tokens of God and angels; participation in celestial priesthood sacrifices and other rituals; passing through the veil of the celestial temple into the presence of God; a revelation of the secrets of creation; and the exaltation and even deification of the visionary.

These ritual practices and ideas were transmitted secretly among both Jewish and Christian esoteric elites but were finally rejected and condemned as heretical by the emerging orthodoxies of both Rabbinic Judaism and the imperial Christian church. Thereafter, these mysteries were
suppressed, with elements surviving in the metaphysical speculations of the Jewish Kabbalists, Christian Hermits, and medieval magicians. Although the full range of these rituals does not seem to have been preserved, late medieval Jewish Kabbalists did retain a wide array of ideas and practices that derived from these archaic mysteries. Ultimately, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, these Kabbalistic speculations were adopted by Renaissance scholars and magicians in the form of Christian Kabbalism. By the seventeenth century, vague reflections of these archaic mysteries were making their way into the ideology and practices of early Speculative Freemasonry.

Notes


5. For background on the building of the eschatological temple, see Ezekiel 40–48 and the *Temple Scroll* from Qumran (11QT) in *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, trans. Geza Vermes, 3rd ed. (New York: Penguin, 1987), 128–58, with full edition by Yigael Yadin, *The Temple Scroll*, 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1983). The description of New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:9–27 contains many similarities to the temple of Ezekiel (48:31–35) and the Qumran *Temple Scroll*. However, the New Jerusalem is explicitly said to have “no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it” (Revelation 21:22). It may be that the entire city of New Jerusalem was conceived of as a temple.
6. This is a major theme of the letter to the Hebrews, especially chapters 8–10; see also George Buchanan, *To the Hebrews* (New York: Doubleday, 1972), 132–53.

7. See Hugh Nibley, "The Christian Envy of the Temple," in *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, in CWHN, 4:391–434; see also Isaiah Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar: An Anthology of Texts*, 3 vols., tr. David Goldstein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 3:867. Tishby cites Nibley's article (p. 900, n. 4) as definitive on this subject. It is worth emphasizing that although the early Christians abandoned the Mosaic temple sacrifices, which they saw as being superseded by the cosmic atonement of Christ, some Christian mystics were nonetheless active participants in Christian versions of the celestial ascension rituals and literature.

8. I would like to thank Janet Carpenter for her research assistance on this paper.


14. See *AMM*, 31. My list is based directly on Gruenwald's but expanded with material from other sources as indicated.


17. See ibid., on the angelic hymns as celestial temple liturgies.


19. See Himmelfarb, “Apocalyptic Ascent and the Heavenly Temple,” 212. Himmelfarb mentions specifically 2 Enoch, The Similitudes of Enoch (1 Enoch), the Apocalypse of Abraham, the Testament of Levi (5:1), the Ascension of Isaiah, 3 Baruch, and the Apocalypse of Zephaniah. There is sometimes ambiguity between the structure of heaven as a whole symbolizing a temple, and a celestial temple being somewhere within one of the levels of heaven. In the Testament of Levi 5:1 the temple in the third heaven contains God’s throne; TB Haggigah 12b has the temple in the fourth heaven; Re’uyot Yehezkel in the fifth heaven. For general studies of Judeo-Christian ascent literature, see Martha Himmelfarb, Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Mary Dean-Otting, Heavenly Journeys: A Study of the Motif in Hellenistic Jewish Literature (New York: P. Lang, 1984); and Martha Himmelfarb, Tours of Hell: An Apocalyptic Form in Jewish and Christian Literature (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983).

20. See Martha Himmelfarb, “From Prophecy to Apocalypse: The Book of the Watchers and Tours of Heaven,” in Jewish Spirituality: From
the Bible to the Middle Ages, ed. A. Green (New York: Crossroads, 1986), 149–53.
21. See 1 Enoch; 3 Enoch; Apocalypse of Abraham; Ascension of Moses; Isaiah 6; Ezekiel 1; 10; 40–48.
22. AMM, 47.
26. See Origen, On First Principles (Peri Archon), II, 11, 6; Clement of Alexandria, Miscellanies (Stromateis), IV, 6, 36, 3; VI, 14, 114, 1; VI, 107, 2; Irenaeus, Against Heresies (Adversus Haereses), V, 36. See also Hugh W. Nibley, “Baptism for the Dead in Ancient Times,” in Mormonism and Christianity, 4:112–13, 116–17.
27. AMM, 74.
29. It is interesting to note that Paul’s vision as recounted in 2 Corinthians 12:2–4 is widely regarded as the only first-person account of a celestial ascent from this period (see Tabor, Things Unutterable, 1). For a general study of esoteric ideas in Paul’s writings, see Alan F. Segal, Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).
30. See Tabor, Things Unutterable, 57–111.
31. For lists, descriptions, and sources of the major Hekhalot documents that will be quoted throughout this paper, see Gershom Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism (New York: Schocken Books, 1961); AMM, 127–234; and most recently Peter Schaefer, Synopse zur Hekhalot Literatur (Tubingen: Mohr, 1983). The thorny problems of determining the exact date and provenance can probably
never be fully resolved and are irrelevant for the purposes of this paper.


33. It should be emphasized that there are many elements in Jewish ascension mysticism that we today would find very strange, including various magical incantations and practices and a strong emphasis on gematria. Gematria is a complex system of mystical interpretation of numbers, letters, and words. The most well-known example is found in Revelation 13:18, where the number of the “beast” is given as 666, which is frequently thought to represent a gematria on a name (see Gershom Scholem, “Gematria,” in *Encyclopedia of Judaism* [Jerusalem: Keter, 1972], 7:369–74). Although I want to emphasize that these Jewish mystics were not “closet” Latter-day Saints, there are nonetheless some remarkable features of their ascension rituals and literature.

34. See TB *Haggigah* 14b; TB *Kiddushin* 71a; 1QS 6:13–22; 1QS 5:24; *Hekhalot Zutreti* (AMM 142–43); *Hekhalot Rabbati* (AMM, 172); *Merkavah Rabbah* (AMM, 174); *Sefer Hekhalot* (AMM, 194). Emphasis is also sometimes placed on physiognomy (special physical characteristics denoting special spiritual power) and astrology (see AMM, 79–80, n. 21).


38. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 12, discussing *Hekhalot Rabbati* 18. In the Book of Mormon we learn that “there cannot any unclean thing enter into the Kingdom of Heaven” (1 Nephi 15:34), a concept that would have been fully endorsed by the Merkavah visionaries.

39. See M *Haggigah* 2:1; TB *Haggigah* 2:1, 11b, 14b; TY *Haggigah* 77a; *Hekhalot Zutreti* (AMM, 142–44); *Merkavah Rabbah* (AMM, 178).

40. See AMM, 77–79, for a full discussion of the sources.


43. *AMM*, 85.


45. For a general discussion of these various mechanisms of the ascent into heaven, with numerous references to primary and secondary sources, see *AMM*, 119–23.

46. See *1 Enoch* 14:8; 39:3; 52:1; 70:2; 2 Kings 2:11. Moses ascended to heaven in a cloud according to *Pesikta Rabbati*, in A. Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash* (Jerusalem: Wahrmann, 1967), 1:59. Notice Christ’s “ascent” into the presence of God is associated with a cloud during the transfiguration on the Mount (see Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:34–35). God also appears to Israel in a cloud (Exodus 16:10, 19:9).

47. See *Apocalypse of Abraham* 12:10; the Etana legend, cited in n. 9.


49. See *Apocalypse of Abraham* 12; cf. Genesis 15; note the possible relationship of setting between Genesis 15:5 and JS Abraham 3:2 (in order to distinguish between the LDS book of Abraham and pseudepigraphical writings attributed to Abraham and Moses, I will designate the LDS scripture as JS [for Joseph Smith] Abraham or Moses).

50. Temples are often associated with mountains (see *1 Enoch* 24–25 translated in *OTP*; J. Maier, *Vom Kultus zur Gnosis* [Salzburg: Otto Muller Verlag, 1964]; *AMM*, 38).

51. See extensive bibliography in *AMM*, 38, n. 44. Dante, in his *Purgatorio*, also ascends a cosmic mountain to discover a sacred tree (see Canto 22.130–41) and paradise (see Cantos 28–33).

52. See *1 Enoch* 24:4–6 (*OTP* 1:26). Note the extensive parallels between Enoch’s vision of the Tree of Life and Nephi’s vision in the Book of Mormon: The tree is most beautiful (*1 Enoch* 24:5 = 1 Nephi 8:10–11; 11:8); its fruit brings eternal life for the righteous (*1 Enoch* 25:5 = 1 Nephi 8:10–12); an angelic figure guides and explains the vision (*2 Enoch* 24:6 = 1 Nephi 11:2–3); and there is a valley near the tree representing hell (*1 Enoch* 26:3–6, 27:1–2 = 1 Nephi 8:13, 26; 12:16–17). On the Tree of Life in Paradise, see *2 Enoch* 8:3; *3 Enoch* 5. Gruenwald adds that “the Tree of Life could be the place on which God rests, and God’s theophany on the Tree of Life is, thus, a counterpart to his theophanies in the Temple and on His Throne of Glory” (*AMM*, 50–51). There is also a possible relationship between Lehi’s
vision of the throne of God (see 1 Nephi 1:8, 14) and the tree of life (see 1 Nephi 8–14).

53. See Masekhet Hekhalot (AMM, 210); Michael A. Morgan, tr., Sefer ha-Razim: The Book of Mysteries (Chico, California: Scholars, 1983).

54. There appears to be only one heaven in the book of Revelation, or perhaps John’s vision includes only the highest heaven. Three: 2 Corinthians 12:2; Testament of Levi 3. Five: Apocalypse of Zephaniah cited by Clement of Alexandria; Greek Baruch. Eight: Re’uyot Yehezkel (AMM, 134, n. 2, 136, 139). Ten: 2 Enoch 20:3 (OTP, 1:134). In 2 Enoch 22:6, the ninth heaven is called “Kukhavim” or “stars” (cf. JS Abraham 3:13). This may support the interpretation that the astronomy in the Book of Abraham reflects an ancient geocentric world view similar to that found in the ascension literature (see William J. Hamblin, John Gee, and Daniel C. Peterson, “And I Saw the Stars: the Book of Abraham and Ancient Geocentric Astronomy,” unpublished manuscript; cf. Revelation 4:1; Testament of Reuben 1:6; 5:7; 6:9; Testament of Judah 21:4; Testament of Levi 14:3; 18:3–4).

55. See 2 Enoch; Apocalypse of Abraham 19; Ascension of Isaiah.

56. See 2 Enoch 8:1; Apocalypse of Moses 38:4; cf. discussion by Tabor, Things Unutterable, 113–19, and AMM, 90–92. This may be related to Paul’s account of his celestial ascent in 2 Corinthians 12:2–4.

57. Note that in JS Abraham 3:3, 9, God resides on his throne in the highest part of heaven. For a discussion see Hamblin, Gee, and Peterson, “And I Saw the Stars.” It is interesting to speculate that from this perspective, Christ’s promise to the thieves with whom he was crucified, “today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43), is not a necessarily a promise of eternal exaltation as some Christians understand it, but simply a promise that they will enter into one of the levels (“mansions”) or hekhalot of heaven, or one of the lower degrees of glory in LDS understanding.


59. See Ascension of Isaiah 7–8; Hekhalot Rabbati 17.

60. See Origen, On First Principles, 1.6.2; see also further references in note 25.

61. 1 Enoch 71:1; the original reads “sons of the holy angels,” which R. H. Charles equates with the bene elohim of the Old Testament (The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English [Oxford: Clarendon, 1913], 2:233, 235). Cf. Hekhalot Rabbati (AMM, 159–60); Ma’aseh Merkavah (AMM, 183); Masekhet Hekhalot (AMM, 210); Morgan, Sefer ha-Razim.
62. Himmelfarb, "Apocalyptic Ascent and the Heavenly Temple," 210–12; cf. Apocalypse of Abraham 8:3; Ascension of Isaiah 9:40 (AMM, 40, n. 52); I. Elbogen, Der judische Gottesdienst in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1962), 61 ff., 521–22. This idea is also found at Qumran, according to J. Strugnell, "The Angelic Liturgy at Qumran 4Q400," Vetus Testamentum Supplement 7 (1960): 318–45 (4Q400–407 = Vermes, Dead Sea Scrolls in English, 221–30; 2 Enoch 8:8). The Christian Apocalypse of Paul tells us that Hebrew—the liturgical language of the earthly temple—is also the language of the angels. When not singing, the angels are said to speak only in a reverent whisper (see Hekhalot Rabbati 3:1, 7:5).


64. See 1 Enoch 71:11–12 (= OTP, 1:50), Apocalypse of Abraham 17:6–21 (= OTP, 1:697); Revelation 4:10; 5:9; 7:12; 11:17; 19:4.


66. 1 Enoch 14:9 (= OTP, 1:20); Hekhalot Zutreti (AMM, 33 n. 13); TB Hagigah 14b; cf. Ezekiel 1:22; 1 Enoch 71:5.


68. See 2 Enoch 21:2; Apocalypse of Abraham 10:1–2; a similar reaction is found in JS Moses 1:20.

69. See 2 Enoch 21:3; Hekhalot Rabbati 17; cf. Nephi's angelic guide, 1 Nephi 11.


71. The obsession with angelic names is most pronounced in Sepher ha-Razim, see Morgan, Sepher ha-Razim; Hekhalot Rabbati 15; see also Betz, The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, passim.


73. Toseftah Hagigah 2:3; TY Hagigah 77b; Midrash Rabba to Shir

74. Toseftah Haggigah 2:3, translated in Rowland, The Open Heaven, 310–12.


76. See 2 Enoch 22; Pistis Sophia; cf. AMM, 33–34.

77. See 1 Enoch 71:1; Revelation 4:4; 6:11; 15:16; 1 Maccabees 10:89; 11:58; Ascension of Isaiah 9:6; 46:5.

78. Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark, 243–44; note that the transfiguration of Jesus can be seen in this light, where Christ’s clothes are transformed (see Matthew 17:2; Mark 9:3; Luke 9:29; see also Hugh Nibley, “Sacred Vestments,” in Temple and Cosmos, in CWHN, 12:91–138).


81. See TB Haggigah 14b.


83. See Hekhalot Zutreti (AMM, 145); Merkavah Rabba (AMM, 175–76); Ma’aseh Merkavah (AMM, 182, 185). Secret names of God and angels are found throughout the Shi’ur Qomah (see Martin Samuel Cohen, ed. and tr., The Shi’ur Qomah: Texts and Recensions [Tubingen: Mohr, 1985], and Morgan, Sepher ha-Razim).

84. See TB Kiddushin 71a.

85. AMM, 11.

86. Apocalypse of Abraham 10:3 (= OTP 1:693). Rubinkiewicz reads the Slavonic name of the angel as “Iaoel,” which he equates with yhwh’l or Yahweh-el (cf. Hekalot Rabbati 14:4–5).

87. See TB Haggigah 14b.

88. Cited in AMM, 52, n. 81.

89. “It should be noticed that in M ‘Avot i,13, Hillel the Elder is reported to have said: ‘He who uses the Crown [Aramaic: Taga] is to pass away.’” According to the explanation found in Avot de-Rabbi Nathan (ed. Schechter) version A, chapter xii, the meaning of Hillel’s saying is: “He who uses the Shem ha-Meforash (= the Ineffable Name) has no share in the world to come” (AMM, 53). From this perspective
the commandment, “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain” (Exodus 20:7, Deuteronomy 5:11) is a reference not only to profanity, but also to the ritual abuse of the power of the Name.

90. See Ascension of Isaiah 7:5. The Essenes had a tradition of secret names of angels which they would not reveal to outsiders (see Josephus, Jewish Wars, II, 8, 7.)

91. See Testament of Levi 3.5; 4:6; Zohar 2.159a; Revelation 4; 6:9; 8:3; 9:13.


93. 3 Enoch 45 (Odeberg, 3 Enoch, 141–48); Apocalypse of Paul 44; Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, 72, 367; O. Hofius, “Der Vorhang vor dem Thron Gottes,” Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 14 (Tubingen, 1972).

94. See 1 Enoch 14:21 (= OTP, 1:21); Hekhalot Rabbati 3:4.

95. AMM, 37; cf. 1 Enoch 71:10; see also 2 Enoch 24:1 (= OTP, 1:140), where Enoch spoke with God “face to face.”


97. See 3 Enoch 1:5.

98. 3 Enoch 48A:1–2 (= OTP, 1:300); this translation is based on Odeberg, 3 Enoch, 154–55. Maqom literally means “place,” but it is used in 3 Enoch as a euphemism for God.

99. 1 Enoch 71:3; Apocalypse of Abraham 15:2 (= OTP, 606). An early Christian illustration of God extending his hand from the cloud/veil and taking Christ into heaven by the right hand can be found in a late fourth- or early fifth-century ivory panel called “The Maries at the Sepulchre and the Ascension,” now in the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum in Munich (see John Beckwith, Early Christian and Byzantine Art [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971], 51, illustration #37).

100. See Re’uyot Yehezkel (AMM, 137); Hekhalot Rabbati (AMM, 153); Masekhet Hekhalot (AMM, 209); cf. Revelation 4: 7:9; 16:17.

101. See Isaiah 6:1; Ezekiel 1:26; TB Hullin 89a; 1 Enoch 14:18 (= OTP, 1:21).

102. See Daniel 7:9; 1 Enoch 14:18 (= OTP, 1:21). In some versions there is a throne in each of the heavens or hekhalot, but God is sitting only on the throne in the highest heaven (see Ascension of Isaiah 7:14–33; Re’uyot Yehezkel [AMM, 59, n. 106]). The Ark of the Covenant is also sometimes seen as an earthly throne of God (see C. L. Seow, “Ark of the Covenant,” Anchor Bible Dictionary, 1:388–89).


104. AMM, 8, cf. 9.
105. *Hekhalot Rabbati* 9:5 (AMM, 11). This concept may be related to the discussion of Christ as God's "Word" in John 1. On the role of Christ and his name in salvation and creation, see Acts 4:12; Ephesians 1:21; 3:9; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2.

106. See 1 Enoch 41:5 (= OTP, 1:32); AMM, 10–11.

107. AMM, 12; 1 Enoch 82:1–3 (= OTP, 1:60); 4 Ezra 12:36–38 (= OTP, 1:550); 14:23–26, 45–48 (= OTP, 1:554–555); Daniel 12. Note the parallel to the breaking of the seals in Revelation 10; 22:10.


110. AMM, 20.


112. See 1 Enoch 8–9 (= OTP, 1:16–17); 69:1–2 (= OTP, 1:47); Forsyth, *The Old Enemy*, 172–81. There were, however, some celestial secrets that the rebellious angels did not learn, according to 2 Enoch 24:3 (= OTP, 1:142–143).


114. 2 Enoch 22:10 (= OTP, 1:138); see also 1QS 4:6–8, 11–13; 1QM 12:1–7; Origen, *On First Principles*, I, 6, 2; Nibley, "Sacred Vestments."

115. See Revelation 2:10; 3:11; 4:4; 1 Corinthians 9:25; 2 Timothy 4:7–8; James 1:12; 1 Peter 5:4; 4 Ezra 2:43–45; Shepherd of Hermas, Similitudes VIII, 2, 1; VIII, 3, 6; TB Berakhot 17a. The angel Syndalphon ties crowns on the head of God in TB Haggigah 13b (see also *Hekhalot Rabbati* 3:2; 9:1; 16:5).


117. *Ascension of Isaiah* 9:10–18. It is interesting to note that verse
sixteen claims that Christ will remain on the earth after his resurrection for 545 rather than the standard forty days (see Acts 1:3). One wonders what Christ was supposed to be doing during his extra 505 days (cf. 3 Nephi 11–28).

118. "In the magical papyri the purpose of ascent is often divinization, taking on the power of god. In the apocalypses the visionary usually achieves equality with the angels in the course of the ascent" (Himmelfarb, "Apocalyptic Ascent and the Heavenly Temple," 212). For general background on the idea of deification in early christianity, see Keith Edward Norman, "Deification: The Content of Athanasian Soteriology," Ph.D. Dissertation, Duke University, 1980.

119. 2 Enoch 22:8.

120. For general background on Metatron, see Odeberg, 3 Enoch, 79–146; AMM, 235–41, with bibliographic references to other studies.

121. 3 Enoch 12:5. Gruenwald speculates that Iaoel (see Apocalypse of Abraham 10:3) may be the equivalent of Metatron (see AMM, 54, n. 84).


123. Ibid., 115.

124. See Ascension of Moses. Although I do not agree with all of his conclusions, Carl H. Holladay, Theios Aner in Hellenistic-Judaism (Missoula, Minnesota: Scholars, 1977), contains a complete study of the idea of the "Divine Man" in Jewish thought around the time of Christ.

125. See 11QMelch = Vermes, Dead Sea Scrolls in English, 300–301.


128. Ibid.


131. Many of the passages relevant to the celestial ascent and the heavenly temple have been collected by Tishby, The Wisdom of the Zohar, 2:550–652, 3:867–940.

132. See Jerome Friedman, The Most Ancient Testimony: Sixteenth-


134. See Chaim Wirszubski, Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989). Indeed, Pico maintained that Kabbalism provided proof of the divinity of Jesus (see Pico della Mirandola, Conclusiones Cabalisticæ, 7; also Wirszubski, 161–69, for discussion).


