

Paradise Revisited (2 Cor 12:1–12): The Jewish Mystical Background of Paul's Apostolate*

Part 1: The Jewish Sources

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The theory that the background of Paul's rapture into paradise (2 Corinthians 12) is indicated by the rabbinic story of four men who entered a garden, park, or orchard (*pardes*), which is found in collections of traditions associated with "merkabah mysticism," is by no means new. First proposed by Wilhelm Bousset, the theory was developed by Hans Windisch and Hans Bietenhard, but has come to be associated with Gershom G. Scholem.¹ Although a few scholars have subsequently referred to Jewish mysticism in

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¹Wilhelm Bousset, "Die Himmelsreise der Seele," *ARW* 4 (1901) 136–69 and 229–73, esp. 147–48; Hans Windisch, *Der zweite Korintherbrief* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1924) 368–98, esp. 375–76; Hans Bietenhard, *Die himmlische Welt im Urchristentum und Spätjudentum* (WUNT 2; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1951) 91–95 and 161–68; Gershom G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (2d ed.; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1965) 14–19.

their interpretations of Paul,² the subject on the whole has figured only at the periphery of the map of Pauline studies as a puzzling and little explored *terra incognita* of marginal or, at best, uncertain relevance to the whole. Growing recognition of the importance of apocalyptic for our understanding of Paul now makes it imperative that this unknown territory be explored. Following the publication of Alan F. Segal's recent book,³ it is clear that Jewish mysticism must occupy a more central place than has previously been the case in any reconstruction of the matrices of Paul's experience and thought.

The New Testament scholar who seeks to engage the subject of Jewish mysticism may find it difficult to access. Although the situation with regard to the texts themselves is gradually improving,⁴ they remain well

²William David Davies (*Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* [London: SPCK, 1948] 14–15, 37–38, and 196–98) refers in passing to Jewish mysticism; see also idem, "From Schweitzer to Scholem: Reflections on Sabbatai Svi," *JBL* 95 (1976) 529–58, reprinted in idem, *Jewish and Pauline Studies* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 257–77; Seyoon Kim (*The Origin of Paul's Gospel* [WUNT 2/4; 2d ed.; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1984] esp. 252–56) mentions Jewish mysticism several times but circumspectly. More confident in their use of the material are Morton Smith, "Observations on Hekhalot Rabbati," in Alexander Altmann, ed., *Biblical and Other Studies* (Studies and Texts 1; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963); John W. Bowker, "'Merkabah' Visions and the Visions of Paul," *JSS* 16 (1971) 157–73; Christopher Rowland, "The Influence of the First Chapter of Ezekiel on Jewish and Early Christian Literature" (Ph.D. diss., Cambridge University, 1974) esp. 239–98; and idem, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1982) esp. 368–86. On the specific subject of Paul's ascent to paradise, see Brad H. Young, "The Ascension Motif of 2 Corinthians in Jewish, Christian and Gnostic Texts," *Grace Theological Journal* 9 (1988) 73–103; and especially James D. Tabor, *Things Unutterable: Paul's Ascent to Paradise in its Greco-Roman, Judaic and Early Christian Contexts* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986).

³Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1990).

⁴Peter Schäfer's monumental edition, *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, together with the supplementary *Geniza-Fragmente zur Hekhalot-Literatur* and *Konkordanz zur Hekhalot-Literatur* and the four-volume *Übersetzung der Hekhalot-Literatur* (Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 2, 6, 12, 13, 17, 22, 29; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1987–91) supersede most earlier "editions" of the material that they include (vol. 1 of the *Übersetzung* has yet to appear). Work on a one-volume English edition of the corpus is under way.

At the present time, published English translations exist only for the following texts: 3 *Enoch* (= *Sefer Hekhalot*) by Hugo Odeberg (3 *Enoch, or The Hebrew Book of Enoch* [1928; reprinted New York: Ktav, 1973]) and P. S. Alexander, *OTP* 1. 223–315; *Ma'aseh Merkabah* (the text first published by Scholem in *Jewish Gnosticism*, appendix C) by Naomi Janowitz (*The Poetics of Ascent: Theories of Language in a Rabbinic Ascent Text* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989]) and Michael D. Swartz (*Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism: An Analysis of Ma'aseh Merkabah* [Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 28; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1992]). On the *Ši'ur Qomah* and passages of *Hekhalot Rabbati*, see nn. 7 and 10 below.

known only to a small number of specialists in early Judaica who have not yet reached a consensus about the origins and dates of their multifarious traditions and literary strata. There are three basic bodies of evidence to consider: the apocalyptic literature of the Second Temple and early Christian periods, with which most New Testament scholars are familiar; the traditions associated with *ma'aseh merkabah* in rabbinic literature; and the visionary-mystical hekhalot literature, which describes (among other things) a journey through seven concentric palaces or temples (*hekhalot*),⁵ corresponding to the seven celestial levels,⁶ to behold the vision of God's "glory"

Ithamar Gruenwald (*Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* [AGJU 14; Leiden: Brill, 1980] 127–234) offers detailed summaries of several texts, as do Anthony J. Saldarini ("Apocalypses and 'Apocalyptic' in Rabbinic Literature and Mysticism," *Semeia* 14 [1979] 187–98) and Peter Schäfer (*Der verborgene und offenbare Gott* [Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1991; now available in English as *The Hidden and Manifest God* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992)] 11–133). Not in the *Synopse* but included by Gruenwald and/or Saldarini are *The Visions of Ezekiel* (full translations in Louis Jacobs, *Jewish Mystical Testimonies* [New York: Schocken, 1977] 26–34, and, better, David J. Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision* [Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 16; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1988] 264–80) and *Sefer ha-Razim* (ed. and trans. Michael A. Morgan, *Sepher ha-Razim: The Book of Mysteries* [Pseudepigrapha 11; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983]). These are not hekhalot texts but include merkabah traditions.

⁵It is now widely recognized that the heavenly ascent, which Scholem placed at the center of his interpretation of hekhalot mysticism, represents only one aspect of the literature. Nonetheless, it is with this aspect that this study is primarily concerned. See further and compare, Halperin, *Faces*, 359–87; Peter Schäfer, "Gershom Scholem Reconsidered: The Aim and Purpose of Early Jewish Mysticism" (12th Sacks Lecture; Oxford: Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies, 1986); reprinted as idem, "The Aim and Purpose of Early Jewish Mysticism," in idem, *Hekhalot-Studien* (Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 19; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1988) 277–95; and idem, *Der verborgene und offenbare Gott*.

⁶According to 3 *Enoch* 18.3 and *Massekhet Hekhalot* 4 (in Adolf Jellinek, ed., *Bet ha-Midrash: Sammlung kleiner Midraschim und vermischter Abhandlungen aus der ältern jüdischen Literatur* [6 vols.; 1853–77; reprinted Jerusalem: Bamberger & Wahrmann, 1938] 2. 42–43; also in Solomon Wertheimer, ed., *Batei-Midrashot* [2d ed.; 2 vols.; Jerusalem: Kuk, 1950–53] 1. 57–58 [there entitled *Ma'aseh Merkabah*, but not to be confused with the text now known by that title: see n. 4 above]; this text is not in the *Synopse*), all seven palaces are located in the uppermost of the seven heavens. From a formal point of view, however, these two texts are not typical of the hekhalot corpus: the former is an apocalypse, and the latter a midrashic compilation. Neither include instructions for the heavenly journey. In the instructional texts, it seems that the "palaces" correspond to the heavenly levels, and a heavenly ascent is nowhere described apart from the journey through the hekhalot. In *Hekhalot Rabbati's* description of Neḥunya b. ha-Qanah's journey through the gates of the seven palaces (see below pp. 181–82), there is no mention of a prior ascent through the heavens. Nonetheless, the method is said to be "like having a ladder in one's house" (*Hekhalot Rabbati* 13.2 and 20.3; *Synopse* §§199 and 237), implying that the journey through the palaces and the ascent through the seven heavens are one and the same thing. In the final chapter of *Ma'aseh Merkabah* (Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism* §33 = *Synopse* §595), Aqiba speaks of

(*kabod*) or appearance as a glorious and gigantic human form of fire and light, seated upon the *merkabah* ("throne-chariot") as described in scriptural passages such as Daniel 7, Isaiah 6, and, above all, Ezekiel 1. The form and enormous dimensions of the *kabod* are described in detail in the *šī'ur-qomah* ("dimensions of the body") texts and passages of this literature.⁷ In apocalyptic, Hellenistic-Jewish, Samaritan, Gnostic, and early Christian literature, there is abundant evidence of a proliferation, during the late Second Temple and early Christian periods, of traditions that regarded the *kabod* as a created archangelic or demiurgic being and/or identified a human being who had ascended to heaven (for example, Enoch or Moses) with the glory on the throne.⁸ Traces of these traditions are preserved here

gazing "from the palace of the first firmament to the seventh palace" (MS New York: "... to the palace of the seventh firmament"). See further, P. S. Alexander, "Introduction" to 3 *Enoch* in *OTP* 1. 239–40; Schäfer, *Der verborgene und offenbare Gott*, 11, 98–99, 117, and 123. The model is already explicit in a merkabah liturgy found at Qumran; see Carol A. Newsom, *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice: A Critical Edition* (HSS 27; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985).

⁷See Martin S. Cohen, *The Shi'ur Qomah: Liturgy and Theurgy in Pre-Kabbalistic Jewish Mysticism* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983); and idem, *The Shi'ur Qomah: Texts and Recensions* (Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 9; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1985). On this material, see further, Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 36–42; and idem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah* (New York: Schocken, 1991) 15–55; Saul Lieberman, "Mišnat Šir ha-Širim," appendix D of Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 118–26 [Hebrew]; Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic*, 213–17; Joseph Dan, "The Concept of Knowledge in the *Shi'ur Qomah*," in Sigfried Stein and Raphael Loewe, eds., *Studies in Jewish Religious and Intellectual History Presented to Alexander Altmann* (Birmingham: University of Alabama Press, 1979) 67–73; and Joseph Dan, *Ha-Mistiqaḥ ha-ʿIbrit ha-Qēdumah* (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defence Publications, 1989) 48–58 [Hebrew].

⁸On the traditions concerning the *kabod*, and early Jewish "divine agency" traditions in general, see Gilles Quispel, "Gnosticism and the New Testament," *VC* 19 (1965) 65–85, reprinted in J. Philip Hyatt, ed., *The Bible in Modern Scholarship* (Nashville/New York: Abingdon, 1965) 252–71, and in Gilles Quispel, *Gnostic Studies* (2 vols.; Istanbul: Netherlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut in het Nubije Osten, 1974–75) 1. 196–212; idem, "The Origins of the Gnostic Demiurge," in P. Granfield and J. A. Jungmann, eds., *Kyriakon: Festschrift Johannes Quasten* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1970) 271–76, reprinted in Quispel, *Gnostic Studies* 1. 213–20; idem, "Ezekiel 1:26 in Jewish Mysticism and Gnosis," *VC* 34 (1980) 1–13; and idem, "Judaism, Judaic Christianity and Gnosis," in A. H. B. Logan and A. J. M. Wedderburn, eds., *The New Testament and Gnosis: Essays in Honour of Robert McL. Wilson* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983) 46–68; Alexander Altmann, "Saadya's Theory of Revelation: its Origin and Background," in idem, *Studies in Religion, Philosophy and Mysticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969) 140–60; Christopher Rowland, "The Visions of God in Apocalyptic Literature," *JSJ* 10 (1979) 137–54; and idem, *The Open Heaven*, 94–113 and 280–89; Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (SJLA 25; Leiden: Brill, 1977); and idem, *Paul the Convert*, 34–71; Jarl E. Fossum, "Jewish-Christian Christology and Jewish Mysticism," *VC* 37 (1983) 260–87; and idem, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord* (WUNT 36; Tübingen: Mohr/

and there in the hekhalot writings, even though such dualistic tendencies are on the whole eschewed. Unlike the apocalypses, the hekhalot writings offer detailed instructions about the ascetic, liturgical, and theurgic techniques that make the visionary journey possible.⁹ The most complete account of this journey is given in *Hekhalot Rabbati*, where Neḥunyah b. ha-Qanah reveals the mystical method to Ishmael and “the entire great and small sanhedrin” in the temple.¹⁰ Neḥunyah begins by describing a magical, apparently autohypnotic, method of inducing trance:

When a man wants to descend to the merkabah, he should invoke סרירא, the Prince of the Countenance, and adjure him a hundred and twelve times by יהוה מטרסאי צורסם מטרסאי מטרסאי יהוה, who is called מטרסאי צורסם מטרסאי יהוה, the God of Israel.

Let him not add to the hundred and twelve times, neither let him subtract therefrom! If he adds or subtracts, “his blood is on his own head” (Josh 2:19)! Rather, while his mouth is pronouncing the names, let the fingers of his hands count one hundred and twelve times. Then he will descend and master the merkabah.¹¹

Following this episode, Neḥunyah travels in trance through the seven palaces and reveals, by automatic speech, the names of the terrifying angelic

Siebeck, 1985); Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Jewish Monotheism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988); Carey C. Newman, *Paul's Glory-Christology: Tradition and Rhetoric* (NovTSup 69; Leiden: Brill, 1992); Margaret Barker, *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God* (London: SPCK, 1992); C. R. A. Morray-Jones, “Transformational Mysticism in the Apocalyptic-Merkabah Tradition,” *JJS* 43 (1992) 1–31.

⁹Gruenwald (*Apocalyptic*, 99) calls them “technical guides, or manuals for mystics.” See further, Martha Himmelfarb, “Heavenly Ascent and the Relationship of the Apocalypses and the *Hekhalot* Literature,” *HUCA* 59 (1988) 73–80.

¹⁰*Hekhalot Rabbati* 13–(?)23 = Schäfer, *Synopse* §§198–(?)250 (it is not clear exactly where Neḥunyah's narrative ends). There are English translations by L. Grodner in David Blumenthal, *Understanding Jewish Mysticism, a Source Reader: The Merkabah Tradition and the Zoharic Tradition* (New York: Ktav, 1978) 56–89 (not very reliable); Aryeh Kaplan, *Meditation and the Kabbalah* (York Beach, ME: Weiser, 1982) 42–54 (an interesting but idiosyncratic and somewhat speculative interpretation); P. S. Alexander, *Textual Sources for the Study of Judaism* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1984) 120–25 (summarized, but by far the best; note that Alexander follows the chapter divisions in Wertheimer's edition, *Batei Midrašot* 1. 67–136, which differ from those found in the majority of the manuscripts). The passage is discussed in some detail by Joseph Dan, *The Revelation of the Secret of the World: The Beginning of Jewish Mysticism in Late Antiquity* (Occasional Paper No. 2; Providence: Brown University Program in Judaic Studies, 1992).

¹¹Schäfer, *Synopse* §§204–5. The magical names are given according to the primary readings in MS Oxford 1531 (which also records variants). The expression “descend to the merkabah” is characteristic of this literature (although “ascend” is also used) and has been variously explained by modern scholars. See Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 20 n. 1; Halperin, *Faces*, 227; Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 322 n. 77; Annelies Kuyt, “Once Again: *Yarad* in the Hekhalot-Literature,” *Frankfurter judaistische Beiträge* 18 (1990) 45–69.

guardians of the gateways, who will only allow the traveler to pass if they are shown the correct magic seals, on which are inscribed magical names of God. Finally, he is permitted to enter the innermost palace and to worship before the merkabah.

Long sections of these texts consist of grandiloquent, rhythmical, and apparently ecstatic or ecstasy-inducing hymns and prayers, sometimes said to have been learned from helpful angels. The mystic must know and perform these in order to be able to make the ascent and withstand the overpowering and dangerous vision of the *kabod*.¹² Many include long lists of *nomina barbara* (is this what Paul means by “speaking in the tongues of angels” [1 Cor 13:1]?) and a very large proportion include or end with Isa 6:3 (the *qēdušah*). Indeed, Isa 6:1–4, the vision and praise of the divine glory, is as central a text in this tradition as Ezekiel 1. It seems that the mystic, by combining recitation of these liturgical passages with visualization of the images described, was able to enter, in imagination and belief, into the presence of the glory and participate in the worship of the angels.¹³

The rabbinic traditions about *maʿaseh merkabah* (“the work or story of the chariot”¹⁴) are found in both talmudic and midrashic literature. In the midrashim, they are frequently associated with the Sinai theophany and so

¹²See further, Alexander Altmann, “Širei Qēdušah bē-Siphut ha-Heikhalot ha-Qēdumah,” *Melilah* 2 (1946) 1–24 [Hebrew]; Gershom G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (3d ed., 1954; reprinted New York: Schocken, 1961) 57–63; Karl-Erich Grözinger, “Singen und ekstatische Sprache in der frühen jüdischen Mystik,” *JSJ* 11 (1980) 66–77; Janowitz, *Poetics*; Swartz, *Mystical Prayer*.

¹³David J. Halperin discusses the “reality” or otherwise of visionary experience in “Heavenly Ascensions in Judaism: The Nature of the Experience,” in David J. Lull, ed., *SBL Seminar Papers* 26 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987) 218–32. The discussion is repeated in *Faces*, where he distinguishes throughout between “fantasy” and “hallucination.” Compare Schäfer, *Der verborgene und offenbare Gott*, 146–53. This discussion does not seem to me to be very useful. If a person believes that he or she has seen a vision, the question whether he or she “really” did so is of limited historical significance. The historical reality that concerns us is surely that the people who produced the (apocalyptic and) hekhalot literature apparently used traditional imagery as a basis for emotionally charged “active visualization,” in connection with mystical and theurgic techniques of the kind discussed above, in an attempt to obtain visions and/or ecstatic experiences. That some individuals did actually obtain such experiences and attributed “reality” to them seems to me beyond reasonable doubt.

¹⁴The term *ha-merkabah* is used, according to context, to mean either the divine throne or the biblical chapter, Ezekiel 1 (in the hekhalot, it always carries the former meaning). The expression *maʿaseh merkabah* (“the work/story of the chariot”) generally seems to refer to an esoteric tradition of exegesis of Ezekiel 1, sometimes associated with mystical practices and ecstatic experience, although it may occasionally be another term for the chapter itself. I do not italicize the term merkabah (other than in quotations), except in cases where it is used, unambiguously, as a shorthand term for Ezekiel 1 ([*ha-*]merkabah).

with the revelation of the Torah. Ezekiel 1 became, by the third century CE at the latest, the standard prophetic reading in the synagogues at Shabu'ot (Pentecost), and a complex exegetical web associating Ezekiel 1 and the Song of Songs with the Sinai revelation was developing well before this time.¹⁵ The stories of Moses' ascent into heaven to receive the Torah,¹⁶ often in the face of angelic opposition,¹⁷ belong in this context. The talmudic sources contain two types of material. There is a genre of "horror stories" which warn against involvement in *mā'āseh merkabah*, and in which ill-advised individuals come to various sticky ends. On the other hand, we find stories of great rabbis who successfully "expounded *ha-merkabah* (or: *mā'āseh merkabah*)"¹⁸ and produced supernatural phenomena by so doing. The *pardes* story, as we shall see, combines both themes. These sources display an ambivalent attitude toward *mā'āseh merkabah*, and the overall impression is of something mysterious and wonderful, but terrifyingly dangerous and forbidden.

The theory proposed by Gershom G. Scholem and developed by Ithamar Gruenwald, among others, is that the talmudic *mā'āseh merkabah* was a continuation of apocalypticism and that the hekhalot writings preserve genuinely rabbinic esoteric visionary-mystical traditions which go back to the first century CE and beyond.¹⁹ A number of scholars have challenged this

¹⁵See especially Ira Chernus, *Mysticism in Rabbinic Judaism* (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1982); and Halperin, *Faces*, 262–356, who offer very different historical interpretations of this material.

¹⁶An extended version of this very widespread tradition is found at *Pēsīqta' Rabbati* 20 (ed. and trans. William G. Braude, *Pesikta Rabbati: Discourses for Feasts, Fasts and Special Sabbaths* [2 vols.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968] 1. 405–11). See further, Karl-Erich Grözinger, *Ich bin der Herr, dein Gott! Eine rabbinische Homilie zum ersten Gebot (PesR 20)* (Frankfurter judaistische Studien 2; Frankfurt a.M.: Lang, 1976); Wayne A. Meeks, "Moses as God and King," in Jacob Neusner, ed., *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough* (Leiden: Brill, 1968) 334–71; and idem, *The Prophet-King* (NovTSup 14; Leiden: Brill, 1967).

¹⁷On this subject, see Joseph P. Schultz, "Angelic Opposition to the Ascension of Moses and the Revelation of the Law," *JQR* 61 (1971) 282–307; and Peter Schäfer, *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen* (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1975).

^{18b} *Hag*. 14b and parallels.

¹⁹Scholem, *Major Trends*, 40–79; idem, *Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbala* (Studia Judaica: Forschungen zur Wissenschaft des Judentums 3; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1962) 15–20; idem, *Kabbalah* (2d ed.; New York: Dorset, 1987) 8–21; and especially idem, *Jewish Gnosticism*; Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic*; and his essays (some previously published) in idem, *From Apocalyptic to Gnosticism* (Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des antiken Judentums 14; Frankfurt a.M.: Lang, 1988). Note that Scholem's classification of hekhalot mysticism as "Jewish Gnosticism" has not met with widespread approval. Gruenwald argues that both Gnosticism and the hekhalot tradition have roots in Second Temple apocalypticism. See P. S. Alexander, "Comparing Merkavah Mysticism and Gnosticism: An Essay in Method," *JJS* 35 (1984) 1–24, for a sophisticated model of the historical interrelationships.

theory,²⁰ arguing that the rabbinic *ma'aseh merkabah* was a purely speculative and exegetical tradition and that the ecstatic mysticism of the hekhalot literature developed in circles marginal to rabbinism in late and post-talmudic times. According to this view, the hekhalot authors' relationship to both apocalyptic and rabbinic traditions (neither of which involved ecstatic mysticism) was merely that of literary derivation.²¹

Uncertainty about the date of origin of the hekhalot traditions and their relationship to early rabbinic orthodoxy has been a major deterrent to New Testament scholars who might otherwise have referred to Jewish mysticism when interpreting Paul. My analysis of the rabbinic *ma'aseh merkabah* traditions, however, leads me to support a modified version of the Scholem-Gruenwald hypothesis.²² The data suggest that esoteric traditions associated with the vision of God's *kabod*, including the mystical practice of "heavenly ascents," were inherited from apocalyptic circles and enthusiastically developed by some Tannaim but opposed by others, mainly because these traditions were also being developed by groups whom they regarded as heretical (including Christians and Gnostics). While it cannot be assumed that everything in the hekhalot literature goes back to the tannaitic period, the writers' claim to be the heirs to a tradition from this time and milieu deserves to be taken seriously. As Segal has rightly argued, Paul himself is a witness to the currency of a mystical tradition within first-century apocalyptic Judaism.²³ Whatever the attitude of subsequent rabbinic orthodoxy toward this tradition may have been (and I have argued that it was

²⁰Johann Maier, "Das Gefährdungsmotiv bei der Himmelsreise in der jüdischen Apokalyptik und 'Gnosis,'" *Kairos* 5 (1963) 18–40; and idem, *Vom Kultus zur Gnosis* (Salzburg: Müller, 1964); Ephraim E. Urbach, "Ha-Masorot 'al Torat ha-Sod bi-Tēquphat ha-Tanna'im," in idem, R. J. Zvi Werblowsky, and Ch. Wirszubski, eds., *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gershom G. Scholem on His Seventieth Birthday by Pupils, Colleagues and Friends* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967) 1–28 [Hebrew]; Peter Schäfer, "Tradition and Redaction in Hekhalot Literature," *JSJ* 14 (1983) 172–81, reprinted in idem, *Hekhalot-Studien*, 8–16; idem, "Merkavah Mysticism and Rabbinic Judaism," *JAOS* 104 (1984) 537–54; and idem, "Gershom Scholem Reconsidered"; David J. Halperin, *The Merkavah in Rabbinic Literature* (AOS 62; New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1980); idem, *Faces*.

²¹Gerd A. Wewers (*Geheimnis und Geheimhaltung im rabbinischen Judentum* [Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1975]) believes, however, that visionary mysticism was practised in apocalyptic circles, but that such practices were unanimously opposed by the rabbis in the early period.

²²C. R. A. Morray-Jones, "Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition: A Study of the Traditions Concerning *hammerkavah* and *ma'aseh merkabah* in Tannaitic and Amoraic Sources" (Ph.D. diss., Cambridge University, 1988).

²³Segal, *Paul the Convert*, esp. 34–71.

mixed), it seems certain to have been the ancestor, at least, of hekhalot mysticism.²⁴

The talmudic *ma'aseh merkabah* traditions are mostly appended to the mishnah-lemma *m. Hag.* 2.1, which reads as follows:

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|-----|--|--|
| A | It is not permitted to expound | אין דורשין
[var. שנין ²⁵] |
| A1 | the forbidden sexual relationships with three (persons), | בעריות בשלושה, |
| A2 | nor the story of creation with two, | ולא במעשה בראשית בשניים, |
| A3a | nor the <i>merkabah</i> with an individual, | ולא במרכבה ביחיד, |
| A3b | unless he were wise and understands [understood] from his (own) knowledge. | אלא אם כן היה חכם ומבין
(var. והבין ²⁶) מדעתו |
| B1 | Whoever meditates upon [or: gazes at] four things, | כל המסתכל בארבעה דברים, |
| B2 | it were fitting [a mercy] for him | ראוי [var. רחוי ²⁷] לו |

²⁴In the light of the above observations, I use the expression “merkabah mysticism” to refer to an esoteric, visionary-mystical tradition centered upon the vision of God on the celestial throne. It is not simply synonymous with the contents of the hekhalot texts (“hekhalot mysticism”), which represent one development of this tradition, whose influence is also found in the apocalypses (although the term merkabah is not yet in use) and in a wide range of Jewish, Christian, and Gnostic sources. See Morray-Jones, “Transformational Mysticism.”

²⁵All texts of *m. Hag.* read דורשין, but שנין is found in MS Vienna of *t. Hag.* 2.1, where Yohanan b. Zakkai cites the “merkabah restriction” independently of its mishnaic context (parallels in *y.* and *b.* read simply: ולא במרכבה ביחיד . . . etc.). Therefore *t.* (Vienna) may preserve the premishnaic form of the “merkabah restriction.” See Halperin, *Merkabah*, 29–39.

²⁶MSS Parma and Kaufmann.

²⁷The reading רחוי (also at C2) is supported by several manuscripts and editions of *m.*, *t.*, *y.*, and *b.*, but ראוי (thus the printed edition of *m.*) is equally well attested. See Halperin, *Merkabah*, 12 n. 7. Both readings appear to be early, and it is impossible to tell which is

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| if he had not come into
the world: | כאילו לא בא לעולם: |
| B2a what is above, | מה למעלה, |
| B2b what is below, | מה למטה, |
| B2c what is/was before, | מה לפנים, |
| B2d and what is behind/will be
afterwards. | ומה לאחור, |
| C1 And whoever is not careful
about the glory of his
creator, | וכל שלא חס על כבוד קונו,
על כבודו, |
| C2 it were fitting [a mercy]
for him
that he had not come into
the world | ראוי [רחמי] לו
שלא בא לעולם. |

In its present form, the mishnah states that the forbidden relations (A1) may be taught to a maximum of two (not three) students at one time, the story of creation (A2) only to one (not two), and *ha-merkabah*, that is, Ezekiel 1 not even to a single student, unless he meets the required condition.²⁸ The “*merkabah* restriction” (A3a–b), however, can be shown to have circulated as an independent unit, and so the mishnah as we have it is a redactional construct: the numerical sequence three-two-one has almost certainly been developed on the basis of the *merkabah* restriction’s *bē-yahid*. David J. Halperin has pointed out that the preposition *b-* would more naturally be translated “by,” which, although it makes no sense in the present context, may be a clue to the original meaning of the *merkabah* restriction. It meant, he has suggested, that only an accredited scholar (*hakam*) who could be trusted not to fall into erroneous exegesis was allowed to study (*drš/šnh*) Ezekiel 1 in private (in other words, on his own: *bē-yahid*).²⁹

This reconstruction does allow us to understand the preposition in its most obvious sense (“*ha-merkabah* may not be expounded by an individual

original. Both were probably current in the oral tradition. Possibly B2 and C2 were originally different and have been harmonized by the redactors: MS Göttingen 3 of *b.* reads ראוי at B2, but רחמי at C2. The *pardes* tradition (see below p. 213 and n. *cc*) presupposes ראוי.

²⁸The mishnah is thus explained at *t. Hag.* 2.1 and *b. Hag.* 11b.

²⁹Halperin, *Merkabah*, 19–63. His hypothesis is that the regulation was formulated in an attempt to control the wilder forms of exegesis associated with the reading of Ezekiel 1 in the synagogues.

on his own"). Neither *drš* nor the variant *šnh*, however, normally mean "to study": both verbs usually refer to teaching (exposition to others). Moreover, Halperin's theory implies that *daʿat* ("knowledge") here means "scholarship," which would be, as far as I am aware, unique. In rabbinic literature, the word normally means either "mind" or (personal and nonauthoritative) "opinion," neither of which seems appropriate here. In prerabbinic apocalyptic and mantic wisdom literature, however, the term generally refers to revealed, esoteric knowledge, as do its Aramaic and Greek equivalents, *mandēa*³⁰ and γνῶσις.³⁰ In this literature, the verbal roots *hkm*, *byn*, and *ydʿ* (whence *daʿat*) are very frequently juxtaposed, as at Dan 2:21:

יהב חכמתא לחכמין ומנדעא לידעי בינה

He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who know understanding.

At Qumran, *daʿat* refers to the special, esoteric knowledge of the sect.³¹ 1QS 4.22 is of special interest:

להבין ישרים בדעתא עליון וחכמת בני שמיים להשכיל תמימי דרך

to instruct the upright in the knowledge of the Most High and to teach the wisdom of the heavenly ones to those of perfect conduct.

The knowledge and wisdom to which this passage refers are of divine origin and associated with the angels. Moreover, *lēhabin* here means to instruct, rather than to study.

On these grounds, I have argued that the *merkabah* restriction is an ancient unit of tradition that was inherited by the rabbis of the first century CE from the apocalyptic tradition (the verb *hayah* and the variant *wē-hebin*

³⁰Even in nonmantic wisdom literature, *daʿat* usually means revealed knowledge of, and obedience to, God. See Bo Reicke, "*Daʿat* and *Gnosis* in Intertestamental Literature," in E. Earle Ellis and Max Wilcox, eds., *Neotestamentica and Semitica: Studies in Honour of Matthew Black* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1969) 245–55; Ithamar Gruenwald, "Knowledge and Vision: Towards a Definition of Two 'Gnostic' Concepts in the Light of their Alleged Origins," *IOS* 3 (1973) 63–107, reprinted in idem, *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism*, 65–123; Morray-Jones, "Merkabah Mysticism," 160–79.

³¹See further, William David Davies, "'Knowledge' in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Matthew 1:25–30," *HTR* 46 (1953) 113–39, reprinted in idem, *Christian Origins and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962) 119–44; J. Licht, "The Doctrine of the Thanksgiving Scroll," *IEJ* 6 (1956) 1–13 and 89–101; Helmer Ringgren, "Qumran and Gnosticism," in Ugo Bianchi, *Le Origini dello Gnosticismo: Colloquio di Messina, 13–18 Aprile 1966* (Studies in the History of Religions [Suppl. to *Numen*] 12; Leiden: Brill, 1967) 379–88; A. R. C. Leane, *The Rule of Qumran and its Meaning* (London: SCM and Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966) 121–22; E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (London: SCM and Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977) 259 and 312–18; Morray-Jones, "Merkabah Mysticism," 174–79.

suggest that it may originally have been formulated in the past tense³²). In this context, the term *ḥakam* does not denote a scholar in the rabbinic sense, but rather a mantic sage, such as Daniel, who possesses esoteric knowledge and is skilled in visionary-mystical technique. The term *yahid* does not carry the numerical significance that it acquires in the context of the Mishnah but simply means “an individual” or possibly, by analogy with occurrences of the term elsewhere, an ascetic “solitary.”³³ Thus, the unit of tradition originally meant that no individual (or ascetic) was competent to expound (that is, teach about, or express an opinion concerning) Ezekiel’s vision unless he was a mantic sage who could do so on the basis of his own visionary-mystical experience and esoteric knowledge. It was, then, originally a statement about competence and only acquired halakhic significance in the context of rabbinism, where the original meaning was changed in several ways. Most importantly, the term *ḥakam* was understood in its rabbinic sense, and so the unit was taken to mean that only an ordained rabbi (that is, a talmudic sage) was permitted to involve himself in *māʾašeh merkabah*.³⁴

³²At *t. Hag.* 2.1, *y. Hag.* 77a, and *b. Hag.* 14b, Yoanan b. Zakkai cites the *merkabah* restriction as though it were an ancient unit of tradition, and critical analysis confirms that the story preserves the unit in its premishnaic form. However, the talmudic tradition that Yoḥanan b. Zakkai was the authoritative source of the merkabah-mystical tradition is a false construction imposed by the talmudic redactors on their sources, which originally had exactly the opposite meaning, namely, that Yoḥanan, unlike Eleazar b. Arakh and Eliezer b. Hyrcanus, did *not* have access to the esoteric and mystical tradition. This explains why the hekhalot writers cite other tannaitic authorities but never Yoḥanan, which would be astonishing if their intention was to invoke spurious talmudic authority for their compositions. See Morray-Jones, “Merkabah Mysticism,” 229–301.

³³At *m. Taʿanit* 1.4, *t. Taʿanit* 1.7, and *b. Taʿanit* 10a–b, the *yēḥidim* are ascetic intercessors (for rain) on behalf of the community. André Neher (“Échos de la secte de Qumran dans la littérature talmudique,” in *Les manuscrits de la Mer Morte, colloque de Strasbourg*, 25–27 Mai 1955 [Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1957] 48–54) identified the *yēḥidim* with the *ḥasidim riʾšonim*. It is certainly true that some *ḥasidim*, such as Honi the “circle-drawer,” seem also to have been *yēḥidim*. Neher also associated them with the *yahad* (community) of Qumran and argued that they were avowed celibates (the Mishnah, however, states that they were not). *Iḥidaya* is an important term in Syriac Christian “protomonasticism,” where it refers to a celibate ascetic whose heart and mind are “single” for Christ. It is sometimes translated by the Greek μοναχός, but in the early Syriac sources does not yet carry the full sense of “monk.” See A. F. J. Klijn, “The ‘Single One’ in the Gospel of Thomas,” *JBL* 81 (1962) 271–78; Gilles Quispel, “L’évangile selon Thomas et les origines de l’ascèse chrétienne,” in *Aspects du judéo-christianisme, colloque de Strasbourg*, 23–25 avril 1964 (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1965) 35–41; F. E. Morard, “Monachos, moine: histoire du terme grec jusqu’au IV^e siècle,” *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 20 (1973) 332–411; Sebastian Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem* (2d ed.; Cistercian Studies Series 124; Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1992) 136–39.

³⁴The above paragraph summarizes Morray-Jones, “Merkabah Mysticism,” 99–228.

B and C are formally connected units of tradition. C is clearly a warning against heretical speculations and/or visionary-mystical practices associated with the *kabod*, which were held to compromise the unity of God. Interpretation of B, however, is less straightforward, and it is not clear whether “before” (*lě-panim*) and “behind/after” (*lě-ʾaḥor*) should be understood in spatial or temporal terms. Gerd A. Wewers adopts the latter interpretation, taking B and C to be comments on A2 (*maʿaseh bēreʾšit*) and A3 (*ha-merkabah*) respectively.³⁵ Although this view finds some support in later rabbinic sources,³⁶ it is unlikely to be correct since B2d must, if temporal, refer to the future. Christopher Rowland argues that B’s fourfold formula refers to the subjects of apocalyptic revelation: the mysteries of the celestial and infernal worlds, the beginning of creation, and its eschatological fulfillment.³⁷ Alon Goshen-Gottstein, however, has suggested that the whole of B–C originally applied to the vision of the merkabah and that B referred to the dimensions of the body of God (that is, the glory) with its surrounding brightness as described in Ezek 1:27–28.³⁸ Even though this analysis is less convincing than Rowland’s, there is evidence that both “spatial” and “temporal” interpretations were current in the early period.³⁹ Whatever the unit’s original meaning, B–C evidently refers to matters that were regarded as forbidden, and the mishnah as a whole thus represents the strand of

³⁵Wewers, *Geheimnis*, 4–13; but compare Morray-Jones, “Merkabah Mysticism,” 103–8.

³⁶*t. Hag.* 2.7; *y. Hag.* 77c; *b. Hag.* 11b and 16a; *Sifre Num* §103 and *Tg. Ezek* 2:10. See further n. 39 below.

³⁷Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, esp. 75–189.

³⁸Alon Goshen-Gottstein, “Mah le-Maʿalah u-mah le-Maʿtah, mah le-Phanim u-mah lě-ʾAḥor,” *Proceedings of the Tenth World Congress of Jewish Studies, August 16–24, 1989* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1990) Division C, Hebrew Section, 61–68 [Hebrew]. Note that the English summary of contents wrongly translates the title of this article as “One does not expound the Story of Creation: Why?” Goshen-Gottstein (p. 67 n. 49) refers to a forthcoming article with this title, but I am not aware that it has been published.

³⁹At *t. Hag.* 2.7, *y. Hag.* 77c, and *b. Hag.* 11b, the formula is applied to Deut 4:32: “Ask now concerning the former days. . . ask from one end of the heavens to the other. . .,” combining both the spatial and the temporal interpretations. Rashi (commentary to *b. Hag.* 12a) understands 2a–c to be spatial dimensions and suggests that what is forbidden is inquiry into the preexistent formless space (*tohu wa-bohu*) beyond the boundaries of the world, which is conceived of as a box or cube. This is highly reminiscent of the teaching found in the (third century CE or later) esoteric “Book of Creation” (*Sepher Yēširah*); see Scholem, *Major Trends*, 75–78; and idem, “Jezira,” *EncJud* 9 (1971) 104–11, for introductory discussion and bibliography and, further, Peter Hayman, “The Temple at the Centre of the Universe,” *JJS* 37 (1986) 176–82; and idem, “Was God a Magician?” *JJS* 40 (1989) 225–37. The earliest citation of the formula, however, occurs in connection with a merkabah vision and fully vindicates Rowland’s interpretation; see Ezekiel the Tragedian *Exagoge* 83–89 and, further, Pieter W. van der Horst, “Moses’ Throne Vision in Ezekiel the Dramatist,” *JJS* 34 (1983) 21–29, reprinted in idem, *Essays on the Jewish World of Early Christianity* (Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus 14; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990) 63–71.

rabbinic opinion that was hostile toward the esoteric and mystical tradition, especially as it was developed in circles outside rabbinic control.

The story of the four who went into *pardes* is found in the Tosefta and both Talmuds as part of a collection of material appended to this mishnah (called by Halperin the "Mystical Collection"⁴⁰). The meaning of the story and its tradition-historical background are disputed matters, however, and it is therefore necessary to defer consideration of Paul's account until the Jewish sources have been evaluated.⁴¹

At this juncture, I ask the reader to refer to pages 210–17 for a presentation based on the version of *t. Hag.* 2.1 (according to MS Vienna),⁴² which combines three units of material: the story itself (A) and two parables appended by way of commentary, one of a king's *pardes* (B) and the other of a highway passing between two roads (C).⁴³ Unit A also occurs at *y. Hag.* 77b, *b. Hag.* 14b–15b, and *Cant. R.* 1.28⁴⁴ (= 1.4.1⁴⁵). Both the Jerusalem and the Babylonian Talmuds incorporate additional material (indicated in square brackets) about the arch-heretic Elisha b. Abuyah, otherwise known as 'Aḥer ("the Other One"), but only a small proportion of this material is common to both sources.⁴⁶ The Babylonian Talmud also includes additional material about Ben Zoma and Aqiba. Neither the Babylonian Talmud nor *Song of Songs Rabbah* include B and C, which occur within the "Mystical Collection" in the Jerusalem Talmud, but in different contexts.⁴⁷ C is also found, in an altogether different context, in *'Abot de-Rabbi Natan* (version a) chapter 28.⁴⁸

⁴⁰Halperin, *Merkabah*, 65–105.

⁴¹The following discussion is a highly summarized account of my own work in progress, which I hope to publish in due course as part of a revised and extended version of my doctoral dissertation.

⁴²See Saul Lieberman, ed., *The Tosefta According to Codex Vienna* (4 vols.; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1962) 2. 381; and M. S. Zuckerman, ed., *Tosefta: Based on the Erfurt and Vienna Codices* (2d ed., 1937; reprinted Jerusalem: Wahrman, 1963) 234.

⁴³The strange story of Joshua b. Hananiah and Simeon b. Zoma, which occurs after C in MSS Vienna and London, but before B in MS Erfurt, and which is also found at *y. Hag.* 77a, *b. Hag.* 14b, and *Gen. R.* 2.4, is too long and complex to be considered here.

⁴⁴In Samson Dunskey, ed., *Midraš Rabbah: Šir ha-Širim* (Jerusalem: Devir, 1980) 27 [Hebrew].

⁴⁵In H. Freedman and M. Simon, eds., *Midrash Rabbah: Translated into English with Notes, Glossary and Indices* (10 vols.; London: Soncino, 1961) 9.2. 46–47 (see Simon's introduction to the text, vii–viii, on the confusing reference system adopted here).

⁴⁶*y. Hag.* 77b–c (most of the Jerusalem Talmud's material is also found at *Ruth R.* 6.4 and *Qoh. R.* 7.8.1); *b. Hag.* 15a–b.

⁴⁷*y. Hag.* 77c (B) and 77a (C).

⁴⁸Salomon Schechter, ed., *Aboth De Rabbi Nathan* (1887; reprinted Hildesheim/New York: Olms, 1979) 43b; Judah Goldin, trans., *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955) 118. See further text note *kk* below.

The geonic commentators of the tenth and eleventh centuries interpreted the story in the light of the hekhalot traditions. Rashi explains that the four men "ascended to heaven by means of a name,"⁴⁹ while Hai Gaon of Pumbeditha, in a frequently quoted responsum, offers a detailed explanation of the story in terms of the hekhalot mystical practices.⁵⁰ Hai's younger contemporary Ḥananel b. Ḥushiel offers a similar interpretation:

Pardes was used as a term for the Garden of Eden, which is reserved for the righteous. Thus it is that place in 'Arabot wherein the souls of the righteous are stored. And it is explained in the hekhalot that the sages who were worthy of this matter used to pray, cleanse themselves of all defilement, fast, immerse and purify themselves. Then they would employ the names and gaze into the palaces and see how the angelic guards stand, and how one palace follows on after the one before it.⁵¹

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the *pardes* story was interpreted in terms of the prevailing view of *ma'aseh merkabah* as gnosticizing (or merely Greek philosophical) cosmological speculation.⁵² Wilhelm Bousset was the first modern scholar to take the geonic interpretation seriously, even though he believed the hekhalot traditions to be post-talmudic.⁵³ Scholem, however, argued that the talmudic story should be interpreted in the light of the hekhalot literature as the Geonim affirmed.⁵⁴

⁴⁹Rashi *Commentary to b. Hag.* 14b.

⁵⁰See Bousset, "Himmelsreise," 153; Scholem, *Major Trends*, 49; Halperin, *Merkabah*, 3; idem, *Faces*, 6; and Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1988) 90; all of whom quote the first part of the responsum only. The complete text can be found in Bernhard M. Lewin, *Otzar ha-Geonim: Thesaurus of the Gaonic Responsa and Commentaries*, vol. 4: *Tractate Yom Tow, Chagiga and Maschkin* (Haifa/Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press Association, 1931) 3. 13–15; and a more complete translation can be found in Kaplan, *Meditation*, 26–27.

⁵¹Ḥananel *Commentary to b. Hag* 14b–15b; Ḥananel's commentary, like Rashi's, is included in the printed edition of the Babylonian Talmud.

⁵²Those who interpret the story thus include Heinrich Hirsch Grätz, *Gnosticismus und Judentum* (Krotoschin: Monasch, 1846) 56–101; Manuel Joël, *Blicke in die Religionsgeschichte zu Anfang des zweiten christlichen Jahrhunderts* (2 vols., 1880–83; reprinted as 2 vols. in 1; Amsterdam: Philo, 1971) 1. 163–70; Wilhelm Bacher, *Die Agada der Tannaiten* (2 vols.; Strassburg: Trübner, 1884) 1. 333; Moriz Friedländer, *Der vorchristliche jüdische Gnosticismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1898) 57–60; N. I. Weinstein, *Zur Genesis der Agada* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1901) 198; David Neumark, *Geschichte der jüdischen Philosophie* (2 vols.; Berlin: Reimer, 1907–28) 1. 48–95. More recently, a similar view has been expressed by Israel Isaac Efron, *Ancient Jewish Philosophy* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1964) 56–59.

⁵³See n. 1 above.

⁵⁴Scholem, *Major Trends*, 52–53; and idem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 14–19. In this interpretation, Scholem was followed by Bietenhard (*Die himmlische Welt*) who, however, developed Bousset's theory of a connection with 2 Corinthians 12 before Scholem did.

Scholem's hypothesis has been developed by several scholars.⁵⁵ Of particular importance for what follows is André Neher's suggestion that *pardes* was a term for the heavenly temple.⁵⁶ Neher argued that texts such as Ezekiel chapters 1, 10–11, 40–48 and Isaiah 6 indicate that visionary experience was associated with the sanctuary from an early period, and that merkabah/hekhalot mysticism was a development, and relocation in heaven, of the temple cult tradition. He suggested that the mishnaic tractate *Middot*, which describes a journey into the temple, was originally a book of esoteric, visionary-mystical instruction, and that the *pardes* story was a fragment that had become detached from its original context, in which the mystical experience was still deemed to occur within the context of the earthly temple.

Scholem's theory has also had its critics. Johann Maier, while accepting that the story refers to the vision of the merkabah, believed the original meaning to be that the four interpreted Ezekiel 1 in the light of apocalyptic imagery of the heavenly cult and temple, and that the story was only later understood to refer to a visionary ascent.⁵⁷ Ephraim E. Urbach argued that the theme of ascent to the heavenly temple appears only in the Babylonian version (A11–19 and A53–60) and is therefore a later interpretation of the story, which in the earlier form represented by the Tosefta and the Jerusalem Talmud was simply an allegory of contemplative exegesis of Ezekiel's merkabah vision.⁵⁸ Others have argued that, if the components unique to the Babylonian Talmud are disregarded, there is nothing in the story itself (apart from its context in the "Mystical Collection") to suggest that it was originally concerned with *ma'aseh merkabah* at all. In his earlier study, Halperin found no evidence that the story originally referred to any kind of mysticism or esotericism, and argued that the hekhalot parallels were attempts to explain the Babylonian version.⁵⁹ He has subsequently modified his position to the extent of conceding that the redactor of the Babylonian Talmud has borrowed from the hekhalot tradition,⁶⁰ but maintains that this tells us nothing about the original form of the story, which must, he argues, have been a metaphor intended to convey something (he is not sure what)

⁵⁵Arnold Goldberg, "Der verkannte Gott: Prüfung und Scheitern der Adepten in der Merkawamystik," *ZRGG* 26 (1974) 17–29; Wewers, *Geheimnis*, 171–88; Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic*, 86–92. Joseph M. Baumgarten ("The Book of Elkesai and Merkabah Mysticism," *JSJ* 17 [1986] 212–25) finds interesting parallels between the *pardes* story and the visions of Elkesai.

⁵⁶André Neher, "Le voyage mystique des quatre," *RHR* 140 (1951) 59–82.

⁵⁷Maier, "Gefährdungsmotiv," 28–40; and idem, *Kultus*, 18–19, 140–46.

⁵⁸Urbach, "Masorot," 12–17. Urbach's point that A11–19 are not part of the original story is almost certainly correct, but on A53–60 see further below.

⁵⁹Halperin, *Merkabah*, 86–99.

⁶⁰Halperin, *Faces*, 34–37 and 199–208.

about the lives and actions of the four *dramatis personae*. Schäfer, arguing that the reading “went in. . . and came out” is to be preferred over “went up. . . and came down” (A9–10; A41–42), suggests that the story was originally an allegory of four types of rabbinic teachers who “entered the garden” of Torah scholarship with differing results.⁶¹ An intermediate position is adopted by Rowland, who argues that the story originally referred to theosophical Torah exegesis.⁶² Others have looked further afield for explanations: Henry A. Fischel maintains that the story is a warning about the dangers of Epicurean philosophy and that *pardes* was a term for the school of Epicurus, which originally met and lived together in a garden,⁶³ while Samson H. Levey has suggested that *prds* should be vocalised *parados* (short for *παράδοσις* = “authoritative tradition”) and that the four undertook a study of Christian tradition about Jesus.⁶⁴ According to these interpretations, then, the story does not refer to ecstatic mysticism and is therefore of no relevance to the visionary experience of Paul.

Several commentators have looked for a key to the story’s meaning in the traditions found in other rabbinic sources about the four *dramatis personae*. This quest has usually involved identification of the three other than Aqiba as representatives of different kinds of (usually Gnostic) heresy which could result from uncontrolled esoteric and/or mystical activity or, alternatively, from involvement in non-Jewish speculative philosophy.⁶⁵ One or other of the three has occasionally been identified as a Christian.⁶⁶ It should

⁶¹Peter Schäfer, “New Testament and Hekhalot Literature: The Journey into Heaven in Paul and in Merkabah Mysticism,” *JJS* 35 (1984) 19–35, reprinted in idem, *Hekhalot-Studien*, 234–49; for a critical response to this hypothesis, see Young, “The Ascension Motif,” 77–80. Schäfer states (*Hekhalot-Studien*, 248), “What Scholem has demonstrated is nothing but a classic example of what S. Sandmel called ‘parallelomania.’” It will be obvious that I disagree with this dismissive evaluation. Schäfer’s criticism of Scholem’s methodology, however, is at least partly justified, and I have therefore tried to take account of the methodological principle that he enunciates (*Hekhalot-Studien*, 249): “It is only possible to make a reliable assertion concerning the relationship of Hekhalot Literature and the New Testament. . . if the respective literatures are analysed in their own structure.”

⁶²Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, 309–40.

⁶³Henry A. Fischel, *Rabbinic Literature and Greco-Roman Philosophy: A Study of Epicurea and Rhetorica in Early Midrashic Writings* (Leiden: Brill, 1973) 1–34.

⁶⁴Samson H. Levey, “The Best Kept Secret of the Rabbinic Tradition,” *Judaism* 21 (1972) 454–69; and idem, “Akiba: Sage in Search of The Messiah; A Closer Look,” *Judaism* 41 (1992) 334–45. Compare Solomon Zeitlin, “The Plague of Pseudo-Rabbinic Scholarship,” *JQR* 63 (1972–73) 187–203.

⁶⁵This approach was initiated by Grätz (*Gnosticismus*, 56–101), who identified Ben Azzai as an ascetic and encratic Gnostic, Ben Zoma as a speculative Gnostic, and Elisha b. Abuyah as an antinomian Gnostic.

⁶⁶Neumark (*Geschichte der jüdischen Philosophie*, 1. 93) and Neher (“Voyage Mystique,” 81–82) both argue that Elisha became a Christian, while Leopold Löw (*Die Lebensalter in der*

be noted that the four *dramatis personae* are elsewhere associated with one another in a nonmystical context.⁶⁷ A factor common to the traditions concerning all four is their reputation for outstanding Torah scholarship, but of the four only Elisha b. Abuyah is widely regarded as a heretic and renegade. The traditions collated by the talmudic redactors stress the contrast between his great learning and, after his apostasy, his contempt for the law, willful immorality, and collaboration with the Romans.⁶⁸ Ben Azzai and Ben Zoma, by contrast, are generally presented in a favorable light. Ben Azzai is portrayed as a person of exceptional sanctity. His celibacy is mentioned in several sources,⁶⁹ but there is no indication that this behavior was associated with heretical beliefs. The traditions concerning his death are somewhat confused. He appears in a list of martyrs at *Lam. R.* 2.2.4, but this is of doubtful historical value.⁷⁰ Other sources record that he recited Ps 116:15, the verse applied to him in the *pardes* narrative (A22–23), with reference to the death of God's saints.⁷¹ There is evidence to suggest that Ben Zoma was involved in esoteric matters and suspected of unorthodox beliefs about the creation,⁷² but on the whole the tradition speaks respectfully of his wisdom.⁷³ Neither Ben Azzai nor Ben Zoma, despite

jüdischen Literatur [Szegedin: Burger, 1875] 57–58) and Levey (“Secret”) make the same suggestion of Ben Zoma. The latter suggestion is based on a parallel between Ben Zoma’s use of the image of the spirit hovering like a dove upon the waters of Creation (*b. Hag.* 14b and parallels: see n. 43 above) and the New Testament accounts of Jesus’ baptism, first observed by S. Schechter (“On the Study of the Talmud,” in idem, *Studies in Judaism* [3 vols.; Philadelphia: Macmillan and New York: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1896–1924] 2. 102–25, esp. 112–13, reprinted in idem, *Studies in Judaism: A Selection* [New York: Meridian and Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1958; reissued as *Studies in Judaism: Essays on Persons, Concepts and Movements of Thought in Jewish Tradition* (New York: Atheneum, 1970)] 53–71, esp. 61–62).

⁶⁷*ARN(a)* 23–26 (Goldin, *Fathers*, 101–13); *ARN(b)* 33–35 (Anthony J. Saldarini, trans., *The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan, Version B* [Leiden: Brill, 1975] 194–205); text of both versions in Schechter, *Aboth De Rabbi Nathan*, 38a–42a.

⁶⁸See n. 46 above.

⁶⁹y. *Soṭa*. 1.2; *b. Soṭa* 4b; *b. Yebamot* 63b.

⁷⁰See Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (2 vols.; rev. ed.; ed. Geza Vermes, Pamela Vermes, Fergus Millar, and Matthew Black; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1973–79) 1. 552.

⁷¹*Gen. R.* 62.2; *Exod. R.* 50.3.

⁷²The story of Ben Zoma and Joshua b. Hananiah (see n. 43 above) seems to make this point. *Gen. R.* 4.6 states that Ben Zoma “shook the world” with his exegesis of Gen 1:7. At *Gen. R.* 5.4 and *Midrash Tehillim* Ps 93:3, Ben Zoma (var. Ben Azzai) apparently identifies the archangel Metatron, in this context a “demiurgic” Logos figure, with the “voice of God upon the waters” (Ps 29:3), although the reading Metatron is uncertain (see Morray-Jones, “Transformational Mysticism,” 30, and the references cited there).

⁷³See, for example, *m. Soṭa* 9.15; *m. Ber.* 1.5; *b. Soṭa* 49b; *b. Hor.* 2b.

their great learning, was ever ordained, and they are frequently cited together as examples of outstanding “disciples” (*talmidei-ḥakamim*).⁷⁴ Elisha was never ordained either and appears together with Ben Azzai and Ben Zoma in another context:

There are three disciples (*talmidei-ḥakamim*) [who are significant for dreams]: if one sees Ben Azzai in a dream, he may hope for saintliness (*ḥasidut*); if Ben Zoma, he may hope for wisdom; if ṾAher, let him fear punishment.⁷⁵

It emerges that the four characters in the *pardes* narrative have one thing in common: their reputation as outstanding scholars. One (Elisha) is famous for his heresy and wickedness, and at least two of the others (Aqiba and Ben Azzai) for their saintliness. Torah scholarship and moral rectitude do not, then, in themselves explain why Aqiba was able to avoid the dangers that overcame the other three, lines A41–49 (*Song of Songs Rabbah*) notwithstanding. What these three have in common against Aqiba is the fact that they were never ordained, and it is somewhat surprising that the significance of this has never before, to my knowledge, been recognized. The point is surely that Aqiba, alone of the four, was a *ḥakam* according to the rabbinic definition of terms (that is, an ordained rabbi). The others, despite their great learning, were merely *talmidei-ḥakamim* and so their involvement in *maʿaseh merkabah* led them to disaster. It is apparent, then, that the story was composed or adapted by an early redactor of the “Mystical Collection” to be an illustration of the *merkabah* restriction in the Mishnah (only a *ḥakam* may expound the *merkabah*), which is the lemma upon which the “Mystical Collection” hangs. Thus, the four names convey the essential point of the story in this context.

The interpretations that deny an intrinsic connection between the talmudic *pardes* story and *maʿaseh merkabah* must therefore be discounted. The question whether the story implies mystical or merely exegetical activity, however, remains to be decided. It is clear from A53–60 that the redactor of the Babylonian Talmud understood it in terms of a heavenly ascent, but the other sources are more ambiguous. This question is bound up with that of the relationship between the talmudic and hekhalot traditions.

The *pardes* story appears in two of the hekhalot compilations: *Hekhalot Zutarti* (HZ), preserved in MSS Munich 22 (M) and New York (N); and *Merkabah Rabbah* (MR), preserved in MSS New York (N) and Oxford (O).

⁷⁴t. *Qidd.* 3.9; y. *Maʿaser Š.* 53d; b. *Sanh.* 17b.

⁷⁵b. *Ber.* 57b; also at *ARN(a)* 40. *ARN(b)* 46 associates wisdom with Ben Azzai, fear of sin with Ben Zoma, and calamity with ṾAher.

Both *HZ(N)* and *MR(N)* include additional material, but differ from each other. Halperin presents this material as three different texts,⁷⁶ but this is quite misleading. It is evident that all four sources contain the same basic text, which has been expanded in different ways by the redactors of *HZ(N)* and *MR(N)*.⁷⁷ The following table shows how the material appears in Schäfer's *Synopse*:⁷⁸

	<i>HZ</i>		<i>MR</i>	
	(M)	(N)	(N)	(O)
A:	§338	§344	§671	§671
B:	§339	§345	§672	§672
C:	§346	—	§673	§673

§§340–43 have nothing to do with the *pardes* story and appear only in *HZ(N)*, as do §§344–45. Thus, in *HZ(M)*, §346 follows on from §339. For the sake of clarity, the basic text is shown below in bold print, significant variations being noted within square brackets, [.]. Material unique to *MR(N)* is shown in normal print within braces, { }. Material unique to *HZ(N)* is shown in normal print, within angled brackets and underlined, < >. The following discussion will concern the basic text only.

- A 1a R. Aqiba said:**
- A 1b We were four who went into *pardes*. One looked and died, one looked and was stricken, one looked and cut the shoots, and I went in in peace and came out in peace.**
- A2a Why did I go in in peace and come out in peace?**
[*HZ(N)* and *MR(N)* omit A2a]
- A2b Not because I am greater than my fellows, but my deeds [*MR(N)* and *HZ(N)*: they] have caused me to fulfill the teaching that the sages have taught in their Mishnah: “Your deeds will bring you near and your deeds will keep you afar.”**

⁷⁶Halperin, *Faces*, 202–4 (texts 3/4, 5, and 7).

⁷⁷The fact that these expansions occur in the same manuscript is probably not significant, since they are evidently derived from different sources. Moreover, this manuscript seems to be the work of more than one copyist (see Schäfer, *Synopse*, ix).

⁷⁸In Rachel Elior's edition of *Hekhalot Zutarti* (*Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* suppl. 1; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1982), this material occurs at lines 42–58. Elior's text follows MS New York, with variant readings given in the apparatus on page 44.

B1a And these are they that went into *pardes*: Ben Azzai and Ben Zoma and 'Aher and R. Aqiba.

B1b {R. Aqiba said to them: Beware! When you approach the pure marble stones, do not say, "Water! Water!"—according to what is written: "The speaker of lies shall not endure before my sight."}

B2a Ben Azzai [*MR(O)*: Ben Zoma] looked <into the sixth palace and saw the brilliance of the air of the marble stones with which the palace was paved (זיו אור מבני שיש אשר סלולות בדיכל) and his body could not bear it, and he opened his mouth and asked them: "These waters—what is the nature of them?"> and died. Of him, scripture says: "Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his saints."

B2b Ben Zoma [*MR(O)*: Ben Azzai] looked <at the brilliance in the marble stones (בזיו באבני שיש) and thought that they were water, and his body could bear that he did not ask them, but his mind could not bear it> and was stricken <— he went out of his mind>. Of him scripture says: "Have you found honey? Eat what is enough for you. . . ." etc.

B2c Elisha b. Abuyah looked [*HZ(N)*: went down] and cut the shoots. <In what way did he cut the shoots? They say that whenever he went into the synagogues and study-houses and saw children succeeding in Torah-study, he used to speak over them and they would be silenced, and> of him, scripture says: "Do not let your mouth lead your flesh into sin. . . .!"

B2d {They say that when Elisha went down to the Merkabah he saw Metatron to whom permission had been given to sit for one hour in the day to write down the merits of Israel. He said, "The sages have taught: On high there is neither standing nor sitting, neither rivalry nor contention, neither division nor affliction." He entertained the thought that there might perhaps be two powers in heaven. At once, they led Metatron outside the curtain and punished him with sixty lashes of fire, and permission was given to Metatron to burn the merits of 'Aher. A heavenly voice came forth and they [sic] said: "Return, backsliding children (Jer 3:22)—except for 'Aher!"}

B2e R. Aqiba went in [*HZ(N)* and *MR(N)*: went up] in peace and came out [*HZ(N)* and *MR(N)*: came down] in peace. Of him, scripture says: "Draw me, we will run after you. . . ."

C1 R. Aqiba said:

C2a At that time, when I went up to the heavenly height, I made more signs in the entrances of רקיע than in the entrances of my house,

C2b and when I arrived at the curtain (פרגוד), angels of destruction came forth to do me violence.⁷⁹ The Holy One, blessed be he, said to them: “Leave this elder alone, for he is worthy to behold my glory” (ראוי להסתכל בכבודי) [*MR(N)*: to behold me (להסתכל בי)].

It can be seen that whereas A and C are both first-person accounts by R. Aqiba, B is, like the talmudic versions, a third-person narrative. It therefore seems probable that the unit originally comprised A and C only, and that B (basic text) has been taken over from the talmudic sources by a subsequent redactor. This impression is confirmed by a Geniza fragment of *Hekhalot Zutarti*, where the material in A and B occurs in a different order:⁸⁰

A/B1 R. Aqiba said:

A/B2 We four were going into *pardes*, and these are they [sic]: Ben Azzai and Ben Zoma, Ḥeḥir [sic] and I, Aqiba.

A/B3 Ben Azzai looked and died. Ben Zoma looked and was stricken. Ḥeḥir looked and cut the shoots. I went up in peace and came down in peace.

A/B4 Why did I go up in peace and come down in peace?

A/B5 Not because I am greater than my fellows, but my deeds caused me to fulfill what was taught by the sages in the Mishnah: “Your deeds will bring you near and your deeds will keep you afar.”

C1 R. Aqiba said:

C2a When I went up to the heavenly height, I set down a sign in the entrances of רקיע, more than in the entrances of my house,

C2b and when I arrived behind the curtain, angels of destruction came and wanted to drive me away, until the Holy One, blessed be he, said to them: My sons, leave this elder alone, for he is worthy to behold my glory.

C2c Of him, scripture says: Draw me, we will run after you. . . .”

⁷⁹צאו מלאכי חבלה לחבלני, alternatively: “to destroy me.” Note that the qualifying noun and the infinitive are from the same root. See Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, The Talmud and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (2 vols. in 1, 1886–90; reprinted Brooklyn: Traditional, 1950) 419b–420b.

⁸⁰Geniza Fragment T.-S.K21.95.B (Schäfer, *Geniza-Fragmente*, 88, lines 6–15). Compare Halperin, *Faces*, 203 (text 6).

The awkward transition from first to third person in A/B2 indicates that the names of the four have been added by a redactor who was familiar with the Babylonian Talmud, A3–5. Therefore A/B3 will originally have read “one. . . one. . . one. . . and I. . .” as in *HZ/MR*, A1b. The underlying text of the fragment is thus virtually identical with *HZ/MR*, A and C, save that C2b, “. . . and wanted to drive me away” is closer to the Babylonian Talmud, A55. The only other significant difference is that the fragment includes the application to Aqiba of Cant 1:4 (C2c), which in the *HZ/MR* version occurs only in the section derived from talmudic sources (B2e). Since C2c reverts to the third person, it is probable that the redactor of the fragment has also adopted this item from the talmudic versions.

A2a–b (= A/B4–5 of the fragment) is parallel to *Cant. R.*, A41–49. The fact that *Song of Songs Rabbah* employs the first person only at this point suggests that the hekhalot version has priority as far as this item is concerned. Moreover, this explanation of Aqiba’s success is incompatible with the meaning of the talmudic versions (that he, unlike the others, was an ordained *hakam*). C2b corresponds to the Babylonian Talmud, A53–60 which, however, renders it in the third person. It cannot be a coincidence that God’s statement that Aqiba is “worthy to behold my glory (*ra’uy lēhistakkel bi-kēbodi*)” uses the language of *m. Hag.* 2.1 B–C. Here, too, the hekhalot version must have priority over the Babylonian Talmud, which changes *lēhistakkel* to *lēhištammeš*.⁸¹

These observations suggest that the hekhalot writings have preserved a form of the *pardes* narrative that was quite different from that found in the talmudic sources, though B (basic text) has been added by a redactor who was familiar with a talmudic version. When this addition is discounted, it can be seen that the hekhalot version was originally a statement by or attributed to Aqiba that he and three unnamed individuals “went into *pardes*,” that the other three met with disaster, and that he alone went in/up and came out/down safely, despite the opposition of the angels, through the merit of his deeds. Since the other three were not identified, the meaning of the story cannot have been that they were not, like Aqiba, *hakamim*. Indeed, Aqiba refers to them as *haberim* (A2b = A/B5, whence *Song of Songs Rabbah*, A41–50), a term which implies equality of status (“fellows”

⁸¹Scholem (*Major Trends*, 358 n. 17) and Maier (*Kultus*, 145–46) have shown that the curious expression *lēhištammeš bi-kēbodi* (“to make use of my glory”) refers to theurgic pronunciation of the divine name, originally in the context of the temple cult. Nonetheless, *lehistakkel* is likely to be the better reading, by reference to *m. Hag.* 2.1.

or “colleagues”) and, possibly, comembership of a formal (perhaps esoteric) “fellowship” (*ḥaburah*).⁸²

It appears, then, that there are two basic versions of the *pardes* story. One, the first-person account in the hekhalot recensions, explains Aqiba’s success as a consequence of his deeds and does not name the three who came to grief. In the second (talmudic) version, which is expressed in the third person, Aqiba’s success is due to his being an ordained *hakam* and so the names of the three who were not *hakamim* convey the essential point of the story, which is an illustration of the *merkabah* restriction. There are two possible explanations of the relationship between these two versions.

First, if the talmudic version is held to have priority, the redactor of the original hekhalot version must have failed to see the point of the talmudic story, excerpted from it the story of Aqiba, changed the narrative into the first person, dropped the other three names, the significance of which he did not understand and which were irrelevant to his main concern (Aqiba’s heavenly ascent), added the motif of angelic opposition, and provided an alternative explanation of Aqiba’s success. This version in turn influenced *Song of Songs Rabbah* (A43–49) and the Babylonian Talmud (A53–60). Later redactors of the hekhalot version reinserted the names and the scriptural verses associated with them (B, basic text), which they derived from the talmudic versions, but did not convert this material from the third to the first person.

If, on the other hand, the original hekhalot version is accorded priority, a much simpler reconstruction is possible. The original, first person account did not give the names of the three who came to grief and explained that Aqiba succeeded, despite the opposition of the angels, through the merit of his deeds. The redactor of the earliest talmudic version (probably the Jerusalem Talmud, which omits A2–5) took this story, expressed it in the third person, and made it into an illustration of the *merkabah* restriction by adding the names of the three *talmidei-ḥakamim*. The hekhalot version was subsequently expanded by the addition of details from the third-person talmudic version (HZ/MR, B, basic text).

The second reconstruction is so much the more economical that the conclusion that the hekhalot version has priority seems inescapable. It follows, then, that an early redactor of the talmudic “Mystical Collection” made a preexistent story about Aqiba’s ascent to the *merkabah*, in the face of angelic opposition, into an illustration of the *merkabah* restriction by identifying the three unnamed characters as *talmidei-ḥakamim*. It should be noted, however, that his source, which is preserved at HZ/MR, A and C,

⁸²The word is used of those present at Neḥunyah b. ha-Qanah’s trance-ascent to the *merkabah* at *Hekhalot Rabbati* 14.3 (Schäfer, *Synopse*, §203).

and in the Geniza fragment (though somewhat obscurely), must already have been among the traditions associated with the mishnah, the language of which it employs (*ra'uy lēhistakkel bi-kēbodi*, C2b). According to this source, the *pardes* is located “behind the *pargod*” (C2b), which can only mean: in the celestial Holy of Holies, where the glory of God resides.⁸³ Thus, the source from which the talmudic versions are derived refers quite explicitly to both an ascent to the heavenly temple and the vision of the glory, and cannot have been understood in any other terms.

Once this is recognized, the details of the story fall into place. The alteration by some sources of “went in” to “went up,” and “came out” to “came down” (A9–10; A41–42; *HZ/MR*, B2e) may be less significant than Schäfer supposed, since both pairs of expressions were used in the context of the temple. The disasters that befell the three other than Aqiba were evidently a consequence of their having “looked.” The pretalmudic version makes it clear that the object at which Aqiba, alone of the four, was worthy to look was the divine glory in the Holy of Holies (C2b). Of those who were not found worthy, that one should have died hardly requires further explanation. Scripture itself associates the vision of God with extreme danger and the risk of death.⁸⁴ The second was evidently injured in some way, which seems natural enough, even though the precise meaning is not quite clear. The geonic commentators understood that Ben Zoma was afflicted with madness,⁸⁵ as does *HZ(N)* (B2b). In the pretalmudic version, it seems to be implied that both the death and the injury were inflicted by the “angels of destruction,” who only desisted from attempting to injure (or destroy) Aqiba at God’s command (*HZ/MR*, C2b).⁸⁶ It should be noted that

⁸³On the term *pargod*, which must mean here the curtain before the celestial Holy of Holies, corresponding to the veil (*paroket*) of the earthly temple, see Halperin, *Merkabah*, 169 n. 99. The same usage occurs at *b. Hag.* 15a in connection with Elisha b. Abuya’s account to R. Meir of his condemnation by a *bat-qol* in the heavenly temple (*y. Hag.* 2.1 [77b] places this event in the earthly temple, and does not use the term *pargod*). According to MSS Vatican 134 and Munich 95 of the Babylonian Talmud, but not the printed edition, the word is also found, with the same meaning, in the story (on the same page) of Elisha’s disastrous encounter with the angel Meṭaṭron, whom he took to be a “second power.” Elisha’s statement to Meir must be a reference to this story. See further, P. S. Alexander, “3 Enoch and the Talmud,” *JSJ* 18 (1987) 54–68; but compare C. R. A. Morray-Jones, “Hekhalot Literature and Talmudic Tradition: Alexander’s Three Test Cases,” *JSJ* 22 (1991) 17–36.

⁸⁴Exod 33:20, etc. On the mystical tradition in midrashic literature that the Israelites’ experience at Sinai involved an “initiatory death” and transformation, see Chernus, *Mysticism*, 33–73; and Morray-Jones, “Transformational Mysticism,” 23.

⁸⁵Rashi, Hai Gaon, and Ḥananel (see nn. 49–51 above) all interpret the expression in this way.

⁸⁶Compare the angelic gatekeepers described at *Hekhalot Rabbati* 15.8 and 17.6 (Schäfer, *Synopse*, §213 and §224; translated in Alexander, *Textual Sources*, 122–23 [following Wertheimer’s chapter divisions: 17.8 and 19.6]). See further n. 17 above.

the expression *mal'akei-ḥabbalah* refers to a species of demonic angel,⁸⁷ which implies that the protectors of the realm of the merkabah were regarded as such in the early tradition.⁸⁸ The Babylonian Talmud's alternative, "ministering angels" (A54), is deliberately "softer" and reflects a concern to guard against the possibility of association between the demonic principle and God.⁸⁹ With regard to the fate of the third individual, the expression "cut the shoots" is evidently associated with the garden image. Although the meaning is not immediately apparent, it seems that some kind of sacrilege is intended.⁹⁰

The preexistent heavenly temple, found in several rabbinic sources⁹¹ and in Philo,⁹² is a central image of the apocalyptic-mystical tradition.⁹³ *T. Levi* 3.4 states,

⁸⁷See, for example, *b. Qidd.* 72a.

⁸⁸The tradition of Solomon's mastery over the demons, whom he compelled to assist him in the building of the temple (see the *Testament of Solomon*, for example), may reflect a similar conception. The construction of the temple, which embodies the order of the cosmos (see further below pp. 202–6), was regarded as a means of subduing the demonic and destructive powers of the primeval chaos waters, over which God is enthroned upon his merkabah. On this theme, see David Neiman, "The Supercalial Sea," *JNES* 28 (1969) 243–49; John Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985) esp. 18–21; Halperin, *Faces*, 227–49; Margaret Barker, *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem* (London: SPCK, 1991) 18–20, 62–67. Thus, it is not surprising that the mystic should be assaulted by demons of destruction when he attempts to enter the celestial sanctuary.

⁸⁹Halperin (*Faces*, 157–249) has shown this to be a recurring theme in the rabbinic treatment of the merkabah traditions. The substitution of "drive me away" (the Babylonian Talmud, A54; Geniza fragment, C2b) for "do me violence" (*HZ/MR*, C2b) is similarly explained (see n. 79 above).

⁹⁰According to *y. Hag.* 77b–c and parallels (see n. 46 above), this means that Elisha killed young students of the Torah, or that he persuaded them to abandon their studies (in *Song of Songs Rabbah*, by "speaking a word" over them, which almost certainly means pronouncing a magic spell: compare *HZ[N]*, B2c). These explanations, however, are derived from an independent body of tradition concerning Elisha and tell us nothing about the meaning of the expression "cut the shoots" in the pretalmudic version of the *pardes* story, which did not name Elisha.

⁹¹See, for example, *Gen. R.* 69.7; *Pēsiqta' Rabbati* 20.4; *Tanḥ. Naso* 19; *b. Sanh.* 94b; *Tg. Isa.* 1:1–6; *Tg. Ket.* 1 Chr 21:15. Elsewhere, the temple is regarded as the source of the creation of the world: *t. Yoma* 4:6; *b. Yoma* 54b; *Gen. R.* 1.4; *Tanḥ. Qēdošim* 10. See further, Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (7 vols.; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1911–38) 1. 12–13; Avigdor Aptowitz, "Beit ha-Miqdaš šel Ma'alal 'al pi ha-'Aggadah," *Tarbiš* 2 (1931) 137–53 and 257–77 [Hebrew].

⁹²Philo *Spec. leg.* 1.66.

⁹³See Maier, *Kultus*; Hayman, "Temple"; Martha Himmelfarb, "Apocalyptic Ascent and the Heavenly Temple," in Lull, *SBL Seminar Papers*, 26. 210–17; and Allan J. McNicol, "The Heavenly Sanctuary in Judaism: A Model for Tracing the Origin of the Apocalypse," *JReIS* 13 (1987) 66–94. On the ancient roots of this idea, see Jon D. Levenson, "The Temple and the World," *JR* 64 (1984) 275–98.

In the uppermost heaven of all dwells the Great Glory in the Holy of Holies superior to all holiness.⁹⁴

This source describes a cosmos of three, rather than seven heavens. The same model is implied by *1 Enoch* 14.8–25, a text that is crucial for our understanding of this tradition.

⁸And behold I saw the clouds: And they were calling me in a vision; and the fogs were calling me; and the course of the stars and the lightnings were rushing me and causing me to desire; and in the vision, the winds were causing me to fly and rushing me high up into heaven. ⁹And I kept coming (into heaven) until I approached a wall which was built of white marble and surrounded by tongues of fire; and it began to frighten me. ¹⁰And I came into the tongues of fire and drew near to a great house which was built of white marble, and the inner wall(s) were like mosaics of white marble, the floor of crystal, ¹¹the ceiling like the path of the stars and lightnings between which (stood) fiery cherubim and their heaven of water, ¹²and flaming fire surrounded the wall(s), and its gates were burning with fire. ¹³And I entered into the house, which was hot like fire and cold like ice, and there was nothing inside it; (so) fear covered me and trembling seized me. ¹⁴And as I shook and trembled, I fell upon my face and saw a vision. ¹⁵And behold there was an opening before me (and) a second house which is greater than the former and everything was built with tongues of fire. ¹⁶And in every respect it excelled (the other)—in glory and great honor—to the extent that it is impossible for me to recount to you concerning its glory and greatness. ¹⁷As for its floor, it was of fire and above it was lightning and the path of the stars; and as for its ceiling, it was flaming fire. ¹⁸And I observed and saw inside it a lofty throne—its appearance was like crystal and its wheels like the shining sun; and (I heard?) the voice of the cherubim; ¹⁹and from beneath the throne were issuing streams of flaming fire. It was difficult to look at it. ²⁰And the Great Glory was sitting upon it—as for his gown, which was shining more brightly than the sun, it was whiter than any snow. ²¹None of the angels was able to come in and see the face of the Excellent and the Glorious One; and no one of the flesh can see him—²²the flaming fire was round about him, and a great fire stood before him. No one could come near unto him from among those that surrounded the tens of millions (that stood) before him. ²³He needed no council, but the most holy ones who are near him neither go far away at night nor move away from him. ²⁴Until then I was prostrate on my face covered and trembling. And the Lord called me with his own mouth and said to me, “Come near to me, Enoch, and to my holy

⁹⁴H. C. Kee, trans., “Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs,” *OTP* 1. 789.

Word.”⁹⁵ And he lifted me up and brought me near to the gate, but I
(continued) to look down with my face.⁹⁵

This is unmistakably a merkabah vision, and the terrifyingly dangerous nature of the vision of the glory is emphasized (*1 Enoch* 14.21–25). The circumspect nature of Enoch’s “looking” (*1 Enoch* 14.25) is reminiscent of the *pardes* story. “Tens of millions” of angelic guardians who prevent access to the presence are mentioned (*1 Enoch* 14.22), and only God’s direct invitation persuades Enoch that he may enter safely (*1 Enoch* 14.24). The three-stage sequence of the ascent appears to be modeled on the Jerusalem sanctuary.⁹⁶ The wall of white marble, which seems to correspond to the boundary of (the first) heaven (*1 Enoch* 14.9), is analogous to the wall surrounding the inner courts of the temple, or perhaps to the *soreg* (balustrade) beyond which no Gentile was allowed to pass.⁹⁷ The two concentric houses (*1 Enoch* 14.10–17) correspond to the sanctuary and the Holy of Holies. These three stages of Enoch’s visionary journey must correspond to the three celestial levels of the cosmology of the early sections of *1 Enoch*, in the third and highest of which is also found the “paradise of righteousness” or, in Aramaic, the *pardes qušta*.⁹⁸

This correspondence between the Garden of Eden, which is also the future paradise of the righteous, and the heavenly sanctuary is confirmed by *Jub.* 3.9–13, 8.19, and 2 *Bar.* 4.2–7. *Questions of Ezra* 1.19–21 places the throne of glory “opposite the garden” in the seventh heaven. A few late midrashim describe the garden of paradise as a succession of seven halls or chambers, of gold, silver, and precious stones, to which the various classes of the righteous are allocated.⁹⁹ One source has only three chambers.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵E. Isaac, trans., “1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch,” *OTP* 1. 20–21.

⁹⁶See further, Maier, *Kultus*, 127.

⁹⁷*m. Mid.* 2.3; *b. Yoma* 16a; Josephus *Bell.* 5.193.

⁹⁸*1 Enoch* 32.3 and 77.4. See further, J. T. Milik and Matthew Black, eds., *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumran Cave 4* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976) 40–41 and 231–36.

⁹⁹See especially *Yalqut Šimʿoni Bēreʾšit* 1.20 (Arthur B. Hyman, Isaac Nathan Lerer, and Isaac Shilon, eds., *Yalqut Šimʿoni* [5 vols. in 9; Jerusalem: Kuk, 1973–91] 1. 68–71) and *Seder Gan-ʿEden*, recension B (in Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash* 3. 131–40), where the Garden of Eden and the temple are closely associated (note that Jellinek’s recension A [2.52–53] is identical with *Yalqut Šimʿoni Bēreʾšit* 1.20). This image of paradise must be derived in part from Ezekiel 28:13–14. See further Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1. 21–23.

¹⁰⁰*Maʿašeh bē-Rabbi Joshuaʿ ben Levi* in Moses Gaster, “The Sefer ha-Maʿašiyot,” appendix to *Judiḥ “Montefiore” College Reports for the Years 1894–5 and 1895–6* (Ramsgate: Judith “Montefiore” College, 1896) 96–97 [Hebrew]. This is an extended version of the story of how Joshua b. Levi was permitted to enter paradise during his lifetime in the company of the angel of death, also found at *b. Ketub.* 77b. A longer, and probably later, version of the

The division of the righteous in the world to come into seven hierarchical classes is found in several midrashic sources,¹⁰¹ at y. *Ḥag.* 77a, and at 4 *Ezra* 7.92–98, where the seventh class is said to behold the vision of God. A threefold division is also recorded.¹⁰² In these sources, then, the traditions of the Garden of Eden or paradise, the celestial levels, the heavenly temple, and the hekhalot are intertwined; and the common factor is the idea of a holy place in which God's glory may be seen.¹⁰³ The three-level cosmology is almost certainly older than the more elaborate seven-level version.¹⁰⁴ The two models appear to correspond to the hierarchic structure of the temple in the following way:¹⁰⁵

The Sevenfold Model	The Threefold Model
1. Within the <i>soreg</i>	1. Within the <i>soreg</i> [or: the wall around the inner temple]
2. The Court of Women	
3. The Court of Israel	
4. The Court of Priests	
5. Beyond the altar	
6. The sanctuary building	2. The sanctuary building
7. The Holy of Holies	3. The Holy of Holies

story in Jellinek (*Bet ha-Midrash*, 2. 48–51) has seven houses. See further Ginzberg, *Legends* 5. 31–32. On the importance of Joshua b. Levi in the merkabah tradition, see Chernus, *Mysticism*, 33–43; and Halperin, *Faces*, 253–57, 309–13, and 345–46.

¹⁰¹See, for example, *Lev. R.* 30.2; *Midrash Tēhillim* Ps 11:6. See further, Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1. 11, 21; 4. 118; and 5. 30–33; Goldberg, “Rabban Yohanan's Traum: Der Sinai in der frühen Merkawamystik,” *Frankfurter judaistische Beiträge* 3 (1975) 1–27, esp. 11–13.

¹⁰²*ARN(b)* 43. *Seder Gan-Eden* has seven classes of the righteous but three walls around the Garden.

¹⁰³Compare the merkabah vision in paradise in *Adam and Eve* 25–29. Another common feature linking the inner sanctuary with the Garden of Eden is that both are guarded by cherubim (see *Tanḥ. Bēre'šit* 1.25), as of course are the hekhalot.

¹⁰⁴The sevenfold model is most commonly found in rabbinic sources, for example, *Lev. R.* 29.11; *ARN(a)* 37; *Pēsiqta' Rabbati* 20.4; and *Midrash ha-Gadol* Exod 7:1 (Mordecai Margulies, ed., *Midrash ha-Gadol on the Pentateuch: Exodus* [Jerusalem: Quq, 1956] 108–9). A few sources record, in addition, alternative traditions that enumerate two or three heavens: for example, b. *Ḥag.* 12b; *Midrash Tēhillim* Ps 114:2; and *Deut. R.* 2.32 (to 6:4), though the parallel text published by Lieberman, *Debarim Rabbah. Edited for the First Time from the Oxford ms. No. 147* (Jerusalem: Wahrman, 1940) 65, has seven only. See further, Young, “The Ascension Motif,” 89–91.

¹⁰⁵The following analysis of the sevenfold structure of the temple is based on *m. Kelim* 1.6–9, which lists ten areas of increasing holiness in Jerusalem, the first three of which are outside the temple. In this source, differing opinions are expressed about the precise divisions between the levels, and so the following model, based on the opinion of R. Jose, is provisional only (compare Neher, “Voyage Mystique,” 73–76). The idea that there were seven levels of holiness within the temple, however, seems to have been generally recognized. The threefold model is based on *1 Enoch* 14, discussed above. On the association

The image of the temple as a garden can be further explained by reference to the descriptions of Solomon's temple found in the Bible, which state that the inner walls of the sanctuary were covered with carvings of gourds, flowers, and palm trees, all overlaid with gold.¹⁰⁶ Rabbinic traditions about this "gold of *parwayim*" (2 Chronicles 6) associate it with the Garden of Eden, from which it was said to come,¹⁰⁷ and say that the trees made from this gold bore golden fruit.¹⁰⁸ These traditions are also preserved in the medieval treatise *Massekhet Kelim*,¹⁰⁹ which states that the temple contained

seventy-seven tables of gold, and their gold was from the walls of Eden which had been revealed to Solomon. . . . and trees of gold of *parwayim* which used to bear fruit, six hundred and sixty-six myriads of talents of pure gold which came from beneath the tree of life in the holy garden. (*Massekhet Kelim* 5, 7)

Much earlier, in the *Genesis Apocryphon* from Qumran, *parwayim* is evidently a term for paradise.¹¹⁰ It appears, then, that the interior of the sanctuary was both a replica of its celestial counterpart¹¹¹ and an image of the primordial and future paradise, with which the heavenly temple was closely connected if not identified.¹¹²

between the sevenfold structure of the temple, the seven days of creation, and the enthronement of the *kabod*, see Levenson, "The Temple and the World," 288–93. On the sevenfold structure of the heavenly temple in the liturgical cycle at Qumran, see Newsom, *Songs*.

¹⁰⁶1 Kgs 6:18–36; 2 Chr 3:5–6; 4:21. Compare Ezek 40:31–34; 41:17–26.

¹⁰⁷*b. Yoma* 45a; *Num. R.* 11.3; *Tanh. Bērešit* 4.33; *Tanh. Naso* 9. See further Ginzberg, *Legends*, 5, 29 n. 77.

¹⁰⁸*Num. R.* 11.3; *Cant. R.* 4.17 (= 3.10.3).

¹⁰⁹Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash*, 2, 88–91. See J. T. Milik, "Notes d'épigraphie et de topographie palestinienne," *RB* 66 (1959) 567–75, who gives a French translation.

¹¹⁰1QapGen 2.23. In their edition, Nahman Avigad and Yigael Yadin (*A Genesis Apocryphon* [Jerusalem: Magnes, 1956] 34) indicated that the reading is uncertain, but it has been generally accepted. See P. Grelot, "Parwaim, des Chroniques à l'Apocryphe de la Genèse," *VT* 11 (1961) 30–38, esp. 37; Geza Vermes, trans., *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (3d ed.; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987) 253.

¹¹¹On the correspondence between the earthly and heavenly temples see *y. Ber.* 4.6 (8c) = *Cant. R.* 4.11 (= 4.4.9); *Midrash Tēhillim* Ps 30.1; *Tanh. wa-Yaqhel* 7. See further Aptowitzer, "Beit ha-Miqdaš Šēl Ma'alāh," 145–53; William David Davies, *The Gospel and the Land* (Berkeley/London: University of California Press, 1974) 131–54; and, especially, Barker, *The Gate of Heaven*.

¹¹²On the antiquity of this theme, see Levenson, "The Temple and the World," 297–98; Margaret Barker, *The Older Testament: The Survival of Themes from the Ancient Royal Cult in Sectarian Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1987) 127 and 233–45; and idem, *The Gate of Heaven*, 57–103. A different, but closely related image is that of the tower in the vineyard (Isa 5:1–7). Jörg Baumgarten ("4Q500 and the Ancient Conception of the Lord's Vineyard," *JJS* 40 [1989] 1–6) has shown that this was identified with the heavenly

These observations explain the parable of the King's garden in the Tosefta (B1–9): the “garden” represents the sanctuary with the Holy of Holies on the ground floor, while the “upper chamber” is the empty chamber on the floor above.¹¹³ This is confirmed by *m. Mid.* 5, which states that workmen were lowered in boxes from this chamber to the Holy of Holies “lest they should feed their eyes on the Holy of Holies” (compare the Tosefta, B8–9). The criminal action of “cutting the plants” therefore implies desecration of the sanctuary.

Maier finds a reference in the parable of the two paths (C1–17) to *I Enoch*'s statement that the celestial temple was “hot like fire and cold like ice” (*I Enoch* 14.13).¹¹⁴ In the Jerusalem Talmud and *ʿAbot de-Rabbi Natan* (a), however, the parable appears in contexts that do not support this interpretation, and so it is doubtful whether it originally had this meaning. Nonetheless, it may be that the redactor of the Tosefta's version did make the association suggested by Maier, which would explain why he chose to include it here.

The investigation thus far has shown, then, that the rabbinic tradition of the four who entered *pardes* was originally associated with the mishnaic tradition concerning *māʿašeh merkabah* and that the earliest form of the story referred quite unambiguously to a visionary ascent to the heavenly temple. The earliest talmudic document, the Tosefta, was compiled in its final form during the middle to late fourth century, but the “Mystical Collection” in which the story occurs is clearly older than any of the talmudic documents themselves and must have been compiled in the third or very early fourth century at latest.¹¹⁵ The hekhalot version of the *pardes* story has been found to be earlier still and must have been part of a complex of tradition associated with the mishnaic *merkabah* restriction before it was reworked by the redactor of the “Mystical Collection.”¹¹⁶ The most conser-

temple in paradise as early as Qumran. At Mark 12:1–11 and parallels, the citation of Ps 118:22–23 is strongly suggestive of the temple/paradise association: consider the context in which these two verses occur (Ps 118:19–29).

¹¹³Note that this interpretation does not apply to the parable in the Jerusalem Talmud which occurs in a different context and has a completely different meaning.

¹¹⁴Maier, “Gefährdungsmotiv,” 26–27. For alternative interpretations, see Halperin, *Merkabah*, 94–97; and Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, 316.

¹¹⁵See Halperin, *Merkabah*, 105.

¹¹⁶Schäfer (*Der verborgene und offenbare Gott*, 68–69 and 112) has shown that the opening paragraphs of *Hekhalot Zutarti*, immediately preceding the story of the four, contain several echoes of *m. Hag.* 2.1. He further states that the story appears to be a “foreign body” within *Merkabah Rabbah* and that, as a redactional unit, it is “much more securely anchored” in *Hekhalot Zutarti*. In the light of these observations, it seems not at all improbable that the context within which the story came to be associated with the mishnah was an early version

vative possible estimate would therefore date the composition of the story to the early third century, and there is no reason to assume that the attribution to Aqiba (late first and early second century) in the original first-person version is inaccurate. Aqiba was strongly devoted to the Song of Songs, which was associated in the mystical tradition (especially the *škur qomah*) with the vision of the body of the *kabod*. This text provides ample grounds for the idea that this vision occurs in a garden, and the term *pardes* may well be derived from Cant 4:13 (*pardes rimmonim*). At *m. Yad.* 3.5, Aqiba compares the Song of Songs to the Holy of Holies:

R. Aqiba said: "God forbid! No man in Israel ever disputed about the Song of Songs, that it does not render the hands unclean, for all the ages are not worth the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel—for all the Writings are holy, but the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies."

Thus, the accuracy of the hekhalot sources' attribution of the *pardes* narrative to Aqiba, though not proven, is by no means inherently unlikely.¹¹⁷ It may even be the case that a preexistent unit of tradition, which was already associated with the *merkabah* restriction (itself of prerabbinic origin), was either appropriated by Aqiba or subsequently attributed to him. Whoever the original author of the unit may have been, he evidently used the word *pardes* as a technical term for the Holy of Holies in the highest heaven, where God appears in his glory upon the *merkabah*. He evidently expected his readers to understand this usage, which was deeply rooted in the prerabbinic and pre-Christian tradition of the visionary ascent.

Part two of this article will explore the relevance of this material for our understanding of Paul's ascent into paradise (2 Corinthians 12), the extraordinary claim that he based upon it, and the epochal significance of this mysterious event.

of *Hekhalot Zutarti* or, to put the matter differently, that *Hekhalot Zutarti* has preserved the stratum of tradition in which this association first occurred. Since the association must have preceded the composition of the "Mystical Collection," Gruenwald's dating (*Apocalyptic*, 142) of *Hekhalot Zutarti* to the second or third century CE may well be at least partially correct. See further, Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 75–83, on the antiquity of the theurgic contents of *Hekhalot Zutarti*.

¹¹⁷This possibility raises a question mark over the assumption that "no authentic texts have been recovered in which the sages involved describe their own experiences" (Young, "The Ascension Motif," 83, who expresses a widespread view).

[Texts follow]

Tosefta

Jerusalem Talmud

A1

A2 Four men went into *pardes*:

A3

A4 Ben Azzai and Ben Zoma,

A5 'Aher and R. Aqiba.^a

A6 One looked and died;

A7 one looked and was stricken;

A8 one looked and cut the shoots;

A9 one went up in peace

A10 and came down in peace.^b

Four men went into *pardes*:

One looked and died;

one looked and was stricken;

one looked and cut the shoots;

one went in in peace

and came out in peace.

A11

A12

A13

A14

A15

A16

A17

A18

A19

A20 Ben Azzai^c looked and died.

A21 Of him, scripture says:

A22 "Precious in the eyes of the LORD

A23 is the death of his saints."^d

Ben Azzai looked and was stricken.

Of him, scripture says:

"Have you found honey?

Eat what is enough for you. . . "^e

A24 Ben Zoma^f looked and was stricken.

A25 Of him, scripture says:

A26 "Have you found honey?

Ben Zoma looked and died.

Of him, scripture says:

"Precious in the eyes of the LORD

A27 Eat what is enough for you. . . "^{e,g}

A28

A29

is the death of his saints."^d

Babylonian Talmud

Our rabbis taught:

Four men went into *pardes*
and these are they:
Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma,
ʾAḥer, and R. Aqiba.

R. Aqiba said to them:^h
When you approachⁱ
the pure marble stones,^j
do not say
“Water! Water!”
—according to what is written:
“The speaker of lies
shall not endure
before my sight.”^k

Ben Azzai looked and died.^l

Of him, scripture says:
“Precious in the eyes of the LORD
is the death of his saints.”^d

Ben Zoma looked and was stricken,

and of him scripture says:
“Have you found honey?

Eat what is enough for you,
lest you be filled with it
and vomit it.”^e

Song of Songs Rabbah

We read in a mishnah: A1

Four men went into *pardes*: A2
A3
Ben Azzai and Ben Zoma A4
ʾAḥer and R. Aqiba A5

A6
A7
A8
A9
A10

A11
A12
A13
A14
A15
A16
A17
A18
A19

Ben Azzai looked and A20
was stricken,
and of him it is said: A21
“Have you found honey? A22
Eat what is enough for A23
you. . . ”^e

Ben Zoma looked and died, A24

and of him it is said: A25
“Precious in the eyes of A26
the LORD
is the death of his saints.”^d A27
A28
A29

Tosefta

Jerusalem Talmud

A30

A31

A32 Elisha^m looked and cut the shoots.

A33

A34

A35

ʔAher cut the shoots.

Who is ʔAher?

Elisha ben Abuyah, who used to kill the masters of Torah.

[Additional material about Elisha]

A36 Of him, scripture says:

A37 "Do not let your mouth

A38 lead your flesh into sin. . ."ⁿ

A39

A40

Of him, scripture says:

"Do not let your mouth

lead your flesh into sin. . . " etc."ⁿ

—that he ruined the work

of his own hands.^o

[Additional material about Elisha]

A41 R. Aqiba went up in peace

A42 and came down in peace.^p

A43

A44

A45

A46

A47

A48

R. Aqiba went in in peace

and came out in peace.

A49

A50 Of him, scripture says:

A51 "Draw me,

A52 we will run after you. . ."^q

A53

A54

A55

A56

A57

A58

A59

A60

Of him, scripture says:

"Draw me,

we will run after you. . ."^q

*Babylonian Talmud**Song of Songs Rabbah*

Aḥer cut the shoots	A30
Rabbi Aqiba came out in peace	A31

[Additional material about B. Zoma]

ʔAḥer cut the shoots.	Elisha b. Abuyah cut the shoots.	A32
		A33
		A34
		A35

[Additional material about Elisha]

Of him, scripture says:	And of him it is said:	A36
"Do not let your mouth	"Do not let your mouth	A37
lead your flesh into sin. . ." ⁿ	lead your flesh into sin. . ." ⁿ	A38
		A39
		A40

[Additional material about Elisha]

R. Aqiba went up in peace	R. Aqiba went in in peace	A41
and came down in peace. ^r	and came out in peace, ^s	A42
	and he said,	A43
	Not because I am greater	A44
	than my fellows,	A45
	but thus taught the sages	A46
	in a mishnah: ^t	A47
	"Your deeds will bring you	A48
	near	
	and your deeds will keep you	A49
	far." ^u	
Of him, scripture says:	—and of him it is said:	A50
"Draw me,	"... The king has brought me	A51
we will run after you. . ." ^q	into his chambers." ^v	A52
Even R. Aqiba		A53
—the ministering angels		A54
wanted to drive him away.		A55
The Holy One, blessed be he,		A56
said to them:		A57
Leave this elder alone,		A58
for he is worthy		A59
to make use of my glory. ^{cc}		A60

*Tosefta**Jerusalem Talmud*

[Additional material about Elisha]

- B1 They employed a parable:^w
 B2 To what may the matter be compared?
 B3 To the garden^x of a king
 B4 with an upper chamber^y
 B5 built above it.
 B6 What should a man do?
 B7 Look,^z
 B8 only let him not
 B9 feed his eyes^{aa} on it.

... to the garden^x of a king
 with an upper chamber^y
 built above it.

One may look,
 but not
 damage (it).^{bb}

- C1 They employed another parable:^{dd}
 C2 To what may the matter be compared?
 C3 To a highway^{ff}
 C4 which passes between
 C5 two roads,^{gg}
 C6 one of fire and one of snow.
 C7 He who turns aside this way
 C8 is scorched by the fire.^{hh}
 C9 He who turns aside that way
 C10 is scorched by the snow.ⁱⁱ
 C11 What should a man do?
 C12 Let him walk in the middle
 C13 —only let him not turn aside,
 C14 neither this way nor that way.^{jj}
 C15
 C16
 C17

This teaching^{ee} is like

two paths,^{gg}
 one of fire and one of snow.
 He who turns to this side
 dies in the fire.
 He who turns to that side
 dies in the snow.
 What should one do?
 One should walk in the middle.

*Babylonian Talmud**Song of Songs Rabbah*

[Additional material about Aqiba]

B1
B2B3
B4
B5
B6
B7
B8

B9

*Abot de-Rabbi Natan (a)^{kk}*They employed a parable:
To what may the matter be compared?C1
C2To a courtyard^{ff}
which passes between
two roads,^{gg}
one of fire and one of snow.
If one walks on the side of the fire,
lo, one is scorched by the fire;^{hh}
but if one walks on the side of the snow,
lo, one is stricken by the cold.ⁱⁱ
What should one do?
Let him walk between the two of themC3
C4
C5
C6
C7
C8
C9
C10
C11
C12
C13
C14
C15
C16
C17and take care of himself,
lest he be scorched by the fire
or stricken by the cold.

^a*Tosefta*, MS London, omits A4–A5.

^b*Tosefta*, MS Erfurt, omits A6–A10.

^c*Tosefta*, MS London: “Ben Zoma.”

^dPs 116:15

^eProv 25:16

^f*Tosefta*, MS London: “Ben Azzai.”

^g*Tosefta*, MS London, completes the verse, as in the Babylonian Talmud.

^hThe Babylonian Talmud, MS Vatican 134, adds: “to the sages”; MS Oxford adds: “to his disciples.”

ⁱThe Babylonian Talmud, MSS Vatican 171 and London: “Beware! When. . .”

^jThe Babylonian Talmud, MS Vatican 134, omits “pure.”

^kPs 101:7.

^lThe Babylonian Talmud, MS Vatican 171: “and was cut off.”

^m*Tosefta*, MS Erfurt: “Aḥer.”

ⁿQoh 5:5. The verse continues: “. . . and say not before the angel (LXX: τοῦ θεοῦ) that it is an error. Why should God become angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands?”

^oAllusion to Qoh 5:5 (see the previous note).

^p*Tosefta*, MS Erfurt: “. . . went in. . . and came out. . .”

^qCant 1:4a.

^rThe Babylonian Talmud, MS Göttingen: “. . . went in. . . and came out. . .”

^sHalperin reports (*Merkabah*, 78 n. 41) that a text of *Song of Songs Rabbah* cited by R. Martini (*Pugio Fidei* [Leipzig: n.p., 1687] 320) has: “. . . went up. . . and came down. . .”

^t*Song of Songs Rabbah* (edition): כך שנו חכמים במשנה. Martini’s citation (see the previous note) omits במשנה. MS Vatican 76,3 supports the edition. MS Munich 50,2 reads: כך אמרו במשנה. Parallels in *Hekhalot Zutarti* tend to support the inclusion of במשנה. See Halperin, *Merkabah*, 78 n. 42.

^um. ^vEd. 5.7.

^vCant 1:4b.

^w*Tosefta*, MS Vienna, omits: “They employed.”

^xפרדס.

^yHalperin (*Merkabah*, 67, 73, 93, etc.) translates עלייה as “balcony,” but this is conjectural. See further above, p. 207.

^z*Tosefta*, MS Erfurt: “Only look.”

^{aa}*Tosefta*, MS Vienna: יוין את עיניו. *Tosefta*, MS London: יוין את עיניו. *Tosefta*, MS Erfurt: יוין עיניו. Zuckermann erroneously prints יוין עיניו (and, in his apparatus, יוין for MS Vienna and the printed edition), which would mean “remove his eyes.” See Saul Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-Fshutah: A Comprehensive Commentary on the Tosefta* (8 vols.; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1955–73) 5. 1291 [Hebrew].

^{bb}The Jerusalem Talmud: עליו להציץ אבל לא לגוע. Halperin (*Merkabah*, 93) and Jacob Neusner (*The Talmud of the Land of Israel: A Preliminary Translation and Explanation* [35 vols. projected; Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1982–] 20. 53): “. . . look, but not touch.”

^{cc}השתמש. The hekhalot parallels read להסתכל (“to behold”) for להשתמש. See further above, p. 199 n. 81.

^{dd}*Tosefta*, MS Erfurt: “Another saying—they employed a parable:”

^{ee}התורה הזו.

^{ff}*Tosefta*, MS Vienna: אִיסְטְרִסְא; *Tosefta*, MS London: אִיסְטְרִסְא; *Tosefta*, MS Erfurt: אִיסְטְרִסְא; *ARN(a)*: אִיסְטְרִסְא, which could mean either (as translated above) “a courtyard” or “a military troop” (these are two different words with the same spelling). Jacob Neusner (trans., *The Tosefta* [6 vols.; New York: Ktav, 1977–86] 2. 313) evidently adopts the *ARN(a)* reading and renders: “platoon.”

^{gg}*Tosefta* (all MSS) and *ARN(a)*: דרכים; the Jerusalem Talmud: שבילים.

^{hh}*Tosefta*, MS Vienna, reads גבוה באור: "is exalted (perhaps: "exceeds") in the fire." However, Lieberman follows the other MSS and the printed edition, which give נכה, as does *ARN(a)*.

ⁱⁱ*Tosefta*: as previous note, save that MS London omits the word completely here. *ARN(a)*: לוקה בצנה.

^{ij}*Tosefta*, MS Erfurt: ". . . and let him not turn aside, this way or that way."

^{kk}The context in which this parable appears in *'Abot de-Rabbi Natan (a)* is indicated by the immediately preceding passage, which reads, "Rabbi Judah ben Ilai says: 'Everyone who makes words of Torah primary and worldly affairs secondary will be made primary in the world to come. (He who makes) worldly affairs primary and words of Torah secondary will be made secondary in the world to come.'"

Paradise Revisited (2 Cor 12:1–12): The Jewish Mystical Background of Paul's Apostolate

Part 2: Paul's Heavenly Ascent and its Significance*

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Part one of this article examined the Jewish sources that record the story of four individuals who “entered *pardes*,” three of whom came to grief while R. Aqiba, alone, survived unscathed. The story is preserved within a talmudic compilation of materials concerning *ma‘aseh merkabah* (an esoteric, visionary-mystical tradition associated with Ezekiel 1),¹ in *Song of Songs Rabbah*,² and in two “merkabah-mystical” hekhalot compilations: *Hekhalot Zutarti* and *Merkabah Rabbah*.³ Several scholars have adopted the

*Part one appeared in *HTR* 86:2 (1993) 177–217.

¹*r. Hag.* 2.1; *y. Hag.* 77b; *b. Hag.* 14b–15b. All three texts are translated in part 1, pp. 210–15.

²*Cant. R.* 1.28 (= 1.4.1). *Cant* 1:4 is applied to Aqiba in the story as recorded in the talmudic sources. For a translation of this text, see part 1, pp. 210–15.

³In Peter Schäfer, ed., *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 2; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1981) §§338–46 (*Hekhalot Zutarti*) and §§671–73 (*Merkabah Rabbah*); also idem, ed., *Geniza-Fragmente zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 6; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1984) 88, lines 6–17 (*Hekhalot Zutarti*). Translations may be found in part 1, pp. 196–98.

suggestion, first offered by Wilhelm Bousset,⁴ that this story indicates the background in Jewish mystical tradition of Paul's account of his ascent to paradise (2 Cor 12:1–12).⁵ The traditional interpretation of the rabbinic *pardes* story, however, has been challenged by scholars who have argued that the story was originally nonmystical in intent and only came to be associated with *ma'aseh merkabah* when it was so interpreted, in the third or fourth century CE, by the redactor(s) of the talmudic "Mystical Collection."⁶ According to this view, the hekhalot sources, which interpret the story as an account of Aqiba's ascent to the merkabah (the divine throne-chariot), are derivative of the talmudic tradition if not actually post-talmudic. Although several scholars have, in recent years, perceived the potential significance of Jewish mysticism for the study of Paul and other early Christian writers,⁷ uncertainty concerning the original meaning and tradition history of the *pardes* story has inhibited further exploration of its relevance to Paul's experience, as recorded in 2 Corinthians 12.

Analysis of this problem began with a consideration of *m. Hag.* 2.1, the lemma on which the talmudic "Mystical Collection" depends.⁸ The mishnah states that no individual was permitted to "expound *ha-merkabah* [that is,

⁴Wilhelm Bousset, "Die Himmelsreise der Seele," *ARW* 4 (1901) 147–48.

⁵Hans Windisch, *Der zweite Korintherbrief* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1924) 375–76; Hans Bietenhard, *Die himmlische Welt im Urchristentum und Spätjudentum* (WUNT 2; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1951) 91–95 and 161–68; Gershom G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition* (2d ed.; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1965) 14–19.

⁶Ephraim E. Urbach, "Ha-Masorot 'al Torat ha-Sod bi-Tēquphat ha-Tanna'im," in idem, R. J. Zvi Werblowsky, and Ch. Wirszubski, eds., *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gershom G. Scholem on His Seventieth Birthday by Pupils, Colleagues and Friends* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967) 12–17 [Hebrew]; David J. Halperin, *The Merkabah in Rabbinic Literature* (AOS 62; New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1980) 86–99; and idem, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision* (Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 16; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1988) 34–37, 199–208; Peter Schäfer, "New Testament and Hekhalot Literature: The Journey into Heaven in Paul and in Merkabah Mysticism," *JJS* 35 (1984) 19–35, reprinted in idem, *Hekhalot-Studien* (Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 19; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1988) 234–49.

⁷Morton Smith, "Observations on Hekhalot Rabbati," in Alexander Altmann, ed., *Biblical and Other Studies* (Studies and Texts 1; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963); John W. Bowker, "'Merkabah' Visions and the Visions of Paul," *JJS* 16 (1971) 157–73; Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1982) esp. 368–86; James D. Tabor, *Things Unutterable: Paul's Ascent to Paradise in its Greco-Roman, Judaic and Early Christian Contexts* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986); Brad H. Young, "The Ascension Motif of 2 Corinthians 12 in Jewish, Christian and Gnostic Texts," *Grace Theological Journal* 9 (1988) 73–103; Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1990) esp. 34–71.

⁸Part 1, pp. 185–86.

Ezekiel 1]" unless he was a *hakam* ("sage"). In the prerabbinic, apocalyptic milieu from which the rabbis of the first and second centuries inherited this unit of tradition, the term *hakam* originally referred to a "mantic sage" who possessed esoteric knowledge and visionary-mystical experience (*da'at*). Within the context of rabbinism, however, it assumed the meaning "rabbi." The restriction is associated with a concern to safeguard the traditions concerning God's glory (*kabod*), or appearance in human form upon the merkabah, against potentially heretical interpretations, in particular the so-called "two powers heresy." That Paul's christology was profoundly influenced by such traditions is now widely recognized.⁹ The talmudic versions of the *pardes* story and the version in *Midrash Rabbah* narrate the story in the third person and identify the three who came to grief as Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, and Elisha b. Abuyah. Whereas Aqiba was an ordained rabbi (*hakam*), these three were never ordained and are referred to in other sources as "disciples of the sages" (*talmidei-hakamim*). Thus, the talmudic version of the story (followed by *Midrash Rabbah*) is an illustration of the restriction concerning *ma'aseh merkabah* recorded at *m. Hag. 2.1*. In the hekhalot sources, the story takes the form of a first-person narrative attributed to Aqiba, into which material derived from the talmudic version, employing the third person, has been interpolated. Only in the interpolated third-person material are the three who came to grief identified. The essential point of the talmudic version (only a *hakam* may safely involve himself in *ma'aseh merkabah*) is therefore absent in the original hekhalot account. According to this version, Aqiba states that the merit of his deeds rendered him, in God's eyes, "worthy to behold my glory" (*ra'uy lehistakkel bi-kēbodi*).

These considerations led to the conclusion that an early redactor of the "Mystical Collection" adapted the first-person version found in the hekhalot sources and made it into an illustration of *m. Hag. 2.1* by adding the names of the three *talmidei-hakamim*. Linguistic affinity between the hekhalot version and the mishnah (*ra'uy lehistakkel bi-kēbodi*) indicates, however, that the two units of tradition were already associated prior to the talmudic adaptation of the story. It was observed that the context in which this association first occurred may well have been an early version of *Hekhalot Zutarti*.¹⁰ In any event, the first-person account in the hekhalot sources is clearly older than the talmudic versions. It must, therefore, predate the "Mystical Collection" in its present form and may go back to Aqiba himself, or to his

⁹See, especially, Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 40–71; and Carey C. Newman, *Paul's Glory-Christology: Tradition and Rhetoric* (NovTSup 69; Leiden: Brill, 1992). Further references to scholarship on the traditions concerning the *kabod* and their crucial importance for our understanding of the christology of Paul and other early Christian writers are given in Part 1, n. 8.

¹⁰Part 1, 207–8 n. 116.

circle. This original version of the story refers unambiguously to an ascent to the heavenly temple in the face of fierce opposition on the part of demonic “angels of destruction” (*malPakei-habbalah*), who perform the function of the terrifying angelic guardians of the gateways, as described in the hekhalot sources.¹¹ In this version, the term *pardes* is used without explanation as a technical term for the Holy of Holies in the highest heaven, where the glory of God resides. This usage was found to be derived from ancient traditions that identified the Garden of Eden with the heavenly sanctuary. According to these traditions, the heavenly temple (to which its earthly counterpart was believed closely to correspond) embodied the structure of the universe, so that ascent through the heavenly levels was also a journey “inward” through the temple’s concentric areas of increasing holiness to the Holy of Holies at the center. While the majority of sources, including the hekhalot writings, describe a sevenfold division of this structure, others record an alternative, probably older, threefold model. It is not clear which of these two models was employed in the original story of Aqiba’s ascent to the heavenly sanctuary, or *pardes*, but the story is certainly rooted in an apocalyptic and visionary-mystical tradition that is considerably older than the first century CE.

We can now turn to Paul’s account of his ascent to paradise and see how it is illumined by these traditions. 2 Cor 12:1–12 reads as follows:

¹It is necessary for me to boast. Though it is not profitable, yet I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord (ὁπτασίας καὶ ἀποκαλύψεις κυρίου¹²): ²I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—was caught up to the third heaven (ἀρπαγέντα. . . ἕως τρίτου οὐρανοῦ). ³And I know that this man—whether in the body or outside of the body I do not know, God knows—⁴was caught up into paradise (ἡρπάγη εἰς τὸν παράδεισον) and heard unutterable words which it is not permitted for a human to speak (ἄρρητα ῥήματα ἃ οὐκ ἐξὸν ἀνθρώπῳ λαλῆσαι). ⁵On behalf of this man I will boast, but on behalf of myself I will not boast, save in my weaknesses. ⁶So if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will be speaking the truth, but I refrain, lest anyone should give me credit beyond what he sees in me or hears from me, ^{7a}even considering the exceptional nature of the revelations (καὶ τῇ ὑπερβολῇ τῶν ἀποκαλύψεων). ^{7b}Therefore,

¹¹See, for example, *Hekhalot Rabbati* 15.8–16.2 (Schäfer, *Synopse*, §§213–15).

¹²It seems most natural, *contra* (among others) Jörg Baumgarten (*Paulus und die Apokalyptik: Die Auslegung apokalyptischer Überlieferungen in den echten paulinischen Briefen* [WMANT 44; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1975] 136–46), to interpret κυρίου here as an objective genitive, rather than a genitive of authorship. This will be confirmed by the following analysis.

lest I should be too exalted, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, an angel of Satan to strike me (ἐδόθη μοι σκόλοψ τῇ σαρκί, ἄγγελος Σατανᾶ ἵνα με κολαφίζῃ), lest I should be too exalted.⁸ Three times, I called upon the Lord about this, that he/it might leave me (ἵνα ἀποστῇ ἀπ' ἐμοῦ), but he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for (my) power is perfected in weakness."⁹ Rather, then, I will boast most gladly of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell over me.¹⁰ Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities on behalf of Christ—for whenever I am weak, I am powerful.¹¹ I have become foolish—you have compelled me, for I ought to be commended by you! For I was inferior to the "super-apostles" in nothing, even if I am nothing!¹² Indeed, the signs of an apostle were performed among you with all endurance, with signs and wonders and works of power!

In order to understand this passage, we must first take account of its context.¹³ Paul is at this point engaged in a defense of his apostolic authority, which his opponents have challenged.¹⁴ The frame within which 2

¹³It is assumed in what follows that 2 Corinthians 10–13 is a separate textual unit, probably part of the "severe letter" of 2 Cor 2:3–4, 9; 7:8, 12. For a recent discussion of this issue, including an excellent overview of relevant scholarship, see N. H. Taylor, "The Composition and Chronology of Second Corinthians," *JSNT* 44 (1991) 67–87. See also Georg Strecker, "Die Legitimität des paulinischen Apostolates nach 2 Korinther 10–13," *NTS* 38 (1992) 566–86.

¹⁴It is not possible to go into the difficult question of the exact identity of Paul's opponents here, but it seems certain that they were Jewish Christians of some kind and claimed "visions and revelations" of their own. See further, J. B. Lightfoot, "St. Paul and the Three," in idem, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (London: Macmillan, 1874) 283–355, especially 353–55; Ernst Käsemann, "Die Legitimität des Apostels. Eine Untersuchung zu II Korinther 10–13," *ZNW* 41 (1942) 33–71; H. J. Schoeps, *Paul: The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961) 74–87; Gerhard Friedrich, "Die Gegner des Paulus im 2. Korintherbrief," in Otto Betz, Martin Hengel, and Peter Schmidt, eds., *Abraham unser Vater: Juden und Christen im Gespräch über die Bibel, Festschrift für Otto Michel zum 60. Geburtstag* (AGJU 5; Leiden: Brill, 1963) 181–221; C. K. Barrett, "Paul's Opponents in 2 Corinthians," *NTS* 17 (1970–71) 233–54; and idem, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Black, 1973) 302–6; John J. Gunther, *St. Paul's Opponents and their Background* (NovTSup 35; Leiden: Brill, 1973) esp. 298–307; E. Earle Ellis, "Paul and his Opponents," in Jacob Neusner, ed., *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty* (SJLA 12; Leiden: Brill, 1975) 264–98, reprinted in E. Earle Ellis, *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity* (WUNT 18; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1978) 80–115; John Howard Schütz, *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority* (SNTSMS 26; London/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975) 165–86; Bengt Holmberg, *Paul and Power: the Structure of Authority in the Primitive Church as reflected in the Pauline Epistles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 45–48 and 77–79; Dieter Georgi, *The Opponents of Paul in Second Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) esp. 32–39; Tabor, *Things Unutterable*, 21–45; Frances Young and David F. Ford, *Meaning and Truth*

Corinthians 10–13 is set is thus very similar to that indicated by Galatians 1–2.¹⁵ In both cases, Paul's defense is that his apostolic commission comes directly from God or Christ, and not through human mediation (2 Cor 10:8; 13:10; Gal 1:1; 1:12; 2:7).¹⁶ A similar claim is, of course, part of the standard opening formula of his letters (for example, Rom 1:1–7), but only in Galatians and 2 Corinthians 10–13 does he emphasize so strongly that his authority is independent of any human chain of transmission. In 2 Corinthians 11, Paul explains that he is driven to "boast" of his visionary experience, against his own wishes and better judgement, only in response to the claims of his opponents. Normally, he refrains from such boasting (2 Cor 12:6; compare Rom 15:17–19). He thus makes it clear that he is describing an experience of which he would much rather not speak (or, at least, that he would rather not commit to writing), but that he feels forced to do so by the exigencies of the situation. Even so, he refers only obliquely to the central content of the revelation (2 Cor 12:4). It seems to follow, then, that this vision is somehow crucial to Paul's claim to apostolic authority. Elsewhere, 1 Cor 9:1 ("Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?") indicates forcefully that Paul bases this claim on his vision, or visions, of Christ.

in 2 Corinthians (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 206–20; Ralph P. Martin, "The Opponents of Paul in 2 Corinthians: An Old Issue Revisited," in Gerald F. Hawthorne and Otto Betz, eds., *Tradition and Interpretation in the New Testament: Essays in Honor of E. Earle Ellis for His 60th Birthday* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans and Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1987) 279–89; Jerry L. Sumney, *Identifying Paul's Opponents: The Question of Method in 2 Corinthians* (JSNTSup 40; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990); Newman, *Glory-Christology*, 229–40; Strecker, "Die Legitimität des paulinischen Apostolates," 570–73. The influential study of Hans Dieter Betz, *Der Apostel Paulus und die sokratische Tradition* (BHT 45; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1972) has shown that in 2 Corinthians 10–13 Paul makes extensive use of Greek apologetic techniques, especially irony, in defending himself against these opponents. Betz's penetrating analysis of the literary form of these chapters, however, does not justify all of his conclusions regarding their content, and his suggestion that 2 Cor 12:1–12 is merely a parody of a heavenly ascent, not an autobiographical account, is entirely unconvincing. See further, Christopher Forbes, "Comparison, Self-Praise and Irony: Paul's Boasting and the Conventions of Hellenistic Rhetoric," *NTS* 32 (1986) 1–30.

¹⁵See the cogent arguments of John Knox, "'Fourteen Years Later': A Note on the Pauline Chronology," *JR* 16 (1936) 341–49. See further, Lightfoot, *Galatians*, 183; Donald Wayne Riddle, *Paul, Man of Conflict: A Modern Biographical Sketch* (Nashville: Cokesbury, 1940) 118–24 and 205.

¹⁶See, in addition to the works cited in n. 14 above, Ernst Benz, *Paulus als Visionär: eine vergleichende Untersuchung der Visionsberichte des Paulus in der Apostelgeschichte und in den paulinischen Briefen* (Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur; Abhandlungen der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse 1952.2; Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1952) 77–121; Helmut Saake, "Paulus als Ekstatiker: Pneumatologische Beobachtungen zu 2 Kor. xii 1–10," *NovT* 15 (1973) 152–60; Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, 379–80.

As many scholars have remarked, a central theme of this passage is Paul's contrast between his own weakness and the power of Christ.¹⁷ This contrast resolves the difficult situation in which he finds himself: if he does not "boast" he has no answer to the claims of his opponents, but to do so is to commit the very error for which he has castigated them (2 Cor 10:12). 2 Cor 12:8b–12 shows that he has modeled his position on the example of Jesus: just as the power of God was made manifest by the weakness of Jesus, so Paul's weakness manifests the power of Christ. Thus, Paul's very "nothingness" is the basis of his claim to be "inferior in nothing" to the so-called super-apostles. In this way, he makes it clear that his boasting is of the power of Christ, rather than of his own attainment (compare 1 Cor 1:26–2:5).

Warnings against self-exaltation with regard to visionary experience are quite common in the hekhalot literature. Aqiba's "disclaimer" in the original *pardes* story ("Not because I am greater than my fellows"¹⁸) is a case in point. Compare *Ma'aseh Merkabah* §24:¹⁹

R. Ishmael said: שְׁקִרְחַיִּי, the Angel of the Presence, said to me: "Son of the noble ones, do not exalt yourself above all your companions, and do not say, 'Even I, out of them all, have been worthy!'—for this has not come about through your effort or through your power, but by the power of your Father who is in heaven."

This warning is given to Ishmael after he has uttered, by charismatic revelation, the names of the angelic gatekeepers who guard the approach through the seven hekhalot to the merkabah. When challenged by Nehunyah b. ha-Qanah as to his right to do this, Ishmael responds:

I did not do it for my own honour, but for the glory of the King of the Universe.²⁰

¹⁷See, for example, Georgi, *Opponents*, 279–80; Hans Lietzmann, *An die Korinther I–II* (HNT 9; completed by Werner Georg Kümmel; 5th ed.; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1969) 152–77; Hans Dieter Betz, "Der Apostel Paulus," 97–100; Barrett, *Commentary*, 305–6; Gunther, *Opponents*, 100–101; Rudolf Karl Bultmann, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985) 218–30; Tabor, *Things Unutterable*, 34–38; Strecker, "Die Legitimität des paulinischen Apostolates," 577–79.

¹⁸See part 1: *HZ/MR*, A2b (p. 196); Geniza fragment A/B5 (p. 198); *Cant. R.* A44–45 (p. 213).

¹⁹Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, appendix C, 113; Schäfer, *Synopse*, §584; Naomi Janowitz, *The Poetics of Ascent: Theories of Language in a Rabbinic Ascent Text* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989) 54 (lines 0779–0784); Michael D. Swartz, *Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism: An Analysis of Ma'aseh Merkabah* (Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 28; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1992) 242.

²⁰*Ma'aseh Merkabah* §26: Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 113; Schäfer, *Synopse*, §586; Janowitz, *Poetics*, 55 (lines 0812–20); Swartz, *Mystical Prayer*, 242.

Paul's unwillingness to boast on his own account is at least consistent with these traditions.

This reticence explains the curious formulation of 2 Cor 12:2–5. Morton Smith interpreted these verses literally, arguing that the “man in Christ” is Jesus, rather than Paul himself.²¹ This interpretation, however, is unable to account for 2 Cor 12:7a, in which Paul makes it clear that the “revelations” (ἀποκαλύψεις) referred to in 2 Cor 12:1 are in fact his own. The vast majority of commentators, from Irenaeus onward,²² have recognized that Paul must be speaking of his own experience. This understanding of the passage has been challenged by M. D. Goulder,²³ who argued that the terms ἀποκαλύψεις and ὅπτασίαι have different meanings within Paul's vocabulary. According to Goulder, Paul was unable to compete with his opponents' claim to have experienced heavenly ascents, with accompanying angelic revelations (ὀπτασίαι), and was, moreover, vehemently opposed to such practices:

Where Paul can compete is in ἀποκαλύψεις, the second category of heavenly experiences, incursions of the divine on earth—in fact he has had so many such experiences that God gave him the stake in the flesh to slake his pride. But the ὀπτασίαι were a most dangerous claim. Once it is accepted that a man has been to heaven, and has been given a message by an angel, his power is virtually unlimited.²⁴

Goulder's exegesis must, however, be rejected. In the first place, it requires us to understand that Paul was prepared to “boast” of the experience of an unknown third party (in Goulder's view, a friend), while at the same time denying the validity of such claims. Second, Goulder cites no external evidence to support his proposed distinction between ἀποκαλύψεις and ὀπτασίαι.²⁵ His argument at this point is circular: the sole basis for the proposed distinction is his exegesis of the passage which, in turn, is based on this distinction. Admittedly, we should not assume that the two terms are precisely synonymous, but there are no grounds for the assumption that the distinction is between “heavenly” and “earthly” visions. It seems more probable that ὀπτασία (= Hebrew *mar'ah* or *hazon*?) refers to the visual element of the experience and ἀποκαλύψεις (*gilluy* or *‘erwah*?) to its auditory or conceptual content. Finally, the issue at stake between Paul and his opponents does not concern visions of angels, but visions “of the Lord”

²¹Morton Smith, “Ascent to the Heavens and the Beginning of Christianity,” *ErJb* 50 (1981) 403–29.

²²Irenaeus *Adversus haereses* 5.5.1.

²³M. D. Goulder, “The Visionaries of Laodicea,” *JSNT* 43 (1991) 15–39, esp. 18–20.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 19.

²⁵Barrett (*Commentary*, 307) observed that Luke uses ὀπτασία of earthly visions; Goulder (“Visionaries,” 19 n. 1) acknowledges this observation, but discounts it.

(2 Cor 12:1). Earlier in the letter, he has characterized his opponents as “false apostles” who have disguised themselves as apostles of Christ but are in reality agents of Satan, the deceiver (2 Cor 11:13–15). These opponents boast in order to be recognized as Paul’s equals (2 Cor 11:12), which must mean that they too claim to have experienced “visions and revelations” of Christ (not a lesser angel). Paul clearly regards this claim as spurious, but he is forced to counter it by referring to his own genuine vision of the Lord. Nowhere does he contest the validity of such experience in principle: indeed, to do so would be to undermine the very basis of his own apostolic claim.

Although forced to cite his vision in defense of his apostolic authority, Paul is unwilling to claim it as a personal attainment. The “man in Christ” formula thus reflects his discomfort over the issue of “boasting” and may represent an attempt to observe the pseudepigraphic convention of the apocalyptic-mystical tradition,²⁶ even though to do so completely would of course defeat his purpose. The formula may also possess a deeper, mystical significance. I have elsewhere pointed out that in the apocalyptic-merkabah tradition the ascent into heaven and the vision of the *kabod* (whom Paul identifies with Christ) involves a transformation of the visionary into an angelic or supra-angelic likeness of this glory or divine image, and that this seems to be the background of Paul’s concept of “glorification” (for example, Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18).²⁷ The “man in Christ” is thus Paul’s “heavenly self” or “apostolic identity,” which is conformed to the image of the enthroned and glorified Christ and therefore possesses “power” and divinely conferred authority. “This man” is contrasted with Paul’s earthly, human self.²⁸ Thus, just as Paul’s earthly personality is conformed to that of the earthly Jesus (characterized by “weakness,” 2 Cor 12:9–11), so his “heavenly being” is conformed to the image of Christ-as-*kabod* (characterized by “power”). We may compare 2 Cor 4:18 (“while we live, we are

²⁶Rowland (*The Open Heaven*, 242–45) and Segal (*Paul the Convert*, 58–59) interpret the formula in this way.

²⁷See C. R. A. Morray-Jones, “Transformational Mysticism in the Apocalyptic-Merkabah Tradition,” *JJS* 43 (1992) 1–31. Compare Tabor, *Things Unutterable*, 10–19, and Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 34–71. In the passages cited above, Paul extends this promise of transformation (which is apparently both a future event and an ongoing process) to all those who have become “participating members” of the glorified body of Christ. It seems that the transformational aspect of the heavenly ascent was at an early period transferred to the rite of baptism. This transference is also found in Gnostic and Syriac Christian sources, and a few Jewish texts associate reception of the divine name, which is a key element of the heavenly transformation in the apocalyptic-merkabah tradition, with ritual immersion. See further, April D. De Connick and Jarl Fossum, “Stripped Before God: A New Interpretation of Logion 37 in the Gospel of Thomas,” *VC* 45 (1991) 123–50.

²⁸Compare Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, 384–86.

always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh") and Gal 2:20 ("it is no longer I who live, but Christ within me"). The same theme occurs at Eph 2:6, where the author states that God "raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places," while Eph 4:24 speaks of "the new self, created according to the likeness of God." Returning to 2 Corinthians 12, it is Paul's identity with the celestial "man in Christ" (on whose behalf he is willing to boast, 2 Cor 12:5) that is the source of his power and authority although, paradoxically, it is his personal "weakness" that enables this power to be manifest. This theme of conformity with Christ is at the heart of Paul's apostolic claim (compare 1 Cor 11:1; 1 Thess 1:6). As James D. Tabor has commented,

The apostle is the mediator of divine power in the world and the guarantor of the "success of the enterprise." He not only speaks "in" or "for" Christ, but in a representative sense *is* Christ manifest in the world.²⁹

In 2 Cor 12:6, Paul explains his unwillingness, under normal circumstances, to boast of his mystical attainments on the grounds that he wishes to be given credit only for his words and deeds. This idea is picked up in 2 Cor 12:11–12, in which he explains that he has been compelled to abandon his usual restraint and to commend himself because of the Corinthians' failure to commend him despite the "signs and wonders and works of power" that he has performed among them. These works, which Paul evidently feels should preclude his need to boast, are the evidence of his apostolic authority and clearly connected in his mind with the "visions and revelations" by which this authority was conferred upon him. He seems here to be making a claim for himself that is reminiscent of the opening sections of *Hekhalot Rabbati*, where the merkabah adept is said to possess seven kinds of "greatness" (presumably, related in some way to the sevenfold cosmic structure of the hekhalot):³⁰

²⁹Tabor, *Things Unutterable*, 23.

³⁰*Hekhalot Rabbati* 1.2–2.3 (Schäfer, *Synopse*, §§81b–93), abbreviated where indicated. On this passage, see Peter Schäfer, "Gershom Scholem Reconsidered: The Aim and Purpose of Early Jewish Mysticism" (12th Sacks Lecture; Oxford: Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies, 1986) 15–16; reprinted as idem, "The Aim and Purpose of Early Jewish Mysticism," in idem, *Hekhalot-Studien*, 292–93; and idem, *Der verborgene und offenbare Gott: Hauptthemen der frühen jüdischen Mystik* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1991) 41–44, now available in English as idem, *The Hidden and Manifest God* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992) 43–45; Halperin, *Faces*, 440–41; Gerd A. Wewers, "Die Überlegenheit des Mystikers: zur Aussage der Gedulla-Hymnen in Hekhalot Rabbati 1,2–2,3," *JSJ* 17 (1986) 3–22. Wewers has translated the passage in full (excluding Schäfer, *Synopse*, §93). See also Peter Schäfer, ed., *Übersetzung der Hekhalot Literatur* (4 vols. [vol. 1 as yet unpublished];

^{1.2}Greatness beyond them all (גדולה מכולם),³¹ (that he is able) to bind (the angels) to himself,³² (compelling them) to admit him and lead him into the chambers of the palace of 'Arabot-Raqia' and to place him on the right of the throne of glory, and (that he is able), when he stands opposite מעצש-יהוה, the God of Israel,³³ to see all that is done before the throne of his glory and to know all that is going to happen in the world.

^{1.3}Greatness beyond them all, for he sees and discerns all the deeds of men, even when they are performed in secret, distinguishing between worthy and disgraceful actions. If a man steals, he knows it and recognizes him. If one commits adultery, he knows it and recognizes him. If one murders, he knows it and recognizes him. . . .

^{1.4}Greatness beyond them all, for anyone who raises his hand against him and strikes him will be clothed with plague and covered with leprosy and crowned with boils. Greatness beyond them all, for anyone who speaks evil of him will have cast upon him plagues of ulcers, dreadful wounds and sores dripping pus.

^{1.5}Greatness beyond them all, for he is set apart from all the sons of men, feared in all his characteristics and honored by those above and those below. . . .

^{1.6}Greatness beyond them all, for all creatures before him are like silver to a smith. He knows which silver is blemished and which has been purified. He examines a family (and discerns) how many bastards there are, how many sons of impure intercourse there are, how many eunuchs there are, how many men with severed members there are. . . .

^{2.1}Greatness beyond them all, for everyone who hardens his face against him will be struck blind. . . .

^{2.2}Greatness beyond, for the heavenly *bet-din* blows the plain note, then the tremolo, then the plain note again, and they pronounce the

Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 17, 22, 29; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1987-) 2. 1-10.

³¹The precise meaning of this unique expression is unclear. Schäfer ("Gershom Scholem Reconsidered," 15-16; idem, *Übersetzung*, 2. 1-10; idem, *Die verborgene und offenbare Gott*, 41-43) offers: "Greatest of all is the fact that. . . ." ("Die alle übertreffende Größe besteht darin, daß. . . .") but compare Wewers ("Überlegenheit," 5-9) "One greatness among them all is. . . ." ("Eine Größe von ihnen allen ist. . . ."; Schäfer notes that this is possible). Halperin (*Faces*, 440) offers: "Greater than all of them: . . .," which conveys the probable sense of the expression but not the grammatical construction. Wewers ("Überlegenheit," 9 n. 36) suggests that Exod 18:11 and/or *m. 'Abot* 6.5-7 may lie behind the expression.

³²Following Wewers ("Überlegenheit," 5); Schäfer (*Übersetzung*, 2. 2): "that they [i.e. the angels] bind themselves to him" ("daß sie sich ihm verbinden").

³³See the following note.

lesser ban, then the lesser ban again, then the greater ban, three times every day since the time when permission was given to the pure, to the humble, to the meek, to the discerning, to the upright, to the pious, to the chosen, to those set apart, to the righteous and to the perfect, to descend and ascend to the merkabah, to say: "Let him be under a ban!" to *שַׁעֲשֵׁי-יְהוָה*, the God of Israel,³⁴ to him, to his glorious throne, to the crown of his head, to the *bet-din* on high, to the *bet-din* below, to all the host of heaven, and to all his ministers who stand before him, attending to the merkabah and serving him.

^{2,3}R. Ishmael said: It is taught thus concerning the vision of the merkabah—one who attends the merkabah has permission to stand up only in these three cases: before the king, before the high priest, and before the sanhedrin when the *Nasi* is present. But if the *Nasi* is not present, he may not stand up even before the sanhedrin. And if he does stand up, "his blood is upon his own head" because he lessens his days and shorten his years.

This text is, admittedly, more crudely melodramatic than Paul's statement, but the claim that it makes is essentially similar. Supernatural power and authority are conferred upon the one who attains to the vision of the merkabah, and this person functions as God's emissary and (eschatological?) judge of both Israel and the angels. In Peter Schäfer's words, "The Merkavah

³⁴According to the majority of the manuscripts: *יְהוָה בְּנִידוֹ לְשַׁעֲשֵׁי-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל*. Schäfer (*Übersetzung*, 2. 9) and Wewers ("Überlegenheit," 8), assuming *שַׁעֲשֵׁי-יְהוָה* to be God himself, translated the preposition ל by "for" ("für"), implying that the adept is empowered to pronounce the ban on God's behalf. The use of the construction ל . . . לומר to mean "to say. . . on behalf of," however, would be unusual. Alternatively, the preposition may be interpreted as an expression of the genitive, connecting *שַׁעֲשֵׁי-יְהוָה*: "and to pronounce the ban of *שַׁעֲשֵׁי-יְהוָה*, the God of Israel." MS Munich 22, which substitutes של for ל, evidently understands the construction in this way, but expression of the genitive by ל, rather than של, is rare in rabbinic Hebrew. By far the most natural interpretation of ל . . . לומר is "to say. . . to" (or, which amounts to the same thing, "to say. . . with regard to"). The problem is that this would apparently mean that the adept is empowered to excommunicate God, which seems unlikely. The interpretation, however, is supported by MSS Vatican 228 and Leiden Or. 4730, which substitute נגד for ל. This can only mean "to pronounce a ban against" and is therefore *lectio difficilior*. In *Merkabah Rabbah* (Schäfer, *Synopse*, §678) the formula: *יְהוָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל* is appended to the name of the angelic viceregent Metatron (see Schäfer, *Der verborgene und offenbare Gott*, 111), and angels whose names include the *יְהוָה*-element are very frequently encountered in the hekhalot literature (see further, Morray-Jones, "Transformational Mysticism," 7–10, and the references cited there). It may, therefore, be that *שַׁעֲשֵׁי-יְהוָה* is here the angelic head of the celestial hierarchy. This interpretation is supported by the observation that in *Hekhalot Rabbati* 1.2 the adept stands beside (on the right of) God's throne, but opposite *שַׁעֲשֵׁי-יְהוָה*. If this view is correct, the meaning is that the adept's authority is second only to that of God himself, that it exceeds that of the heavenly and earthly courts, and that he is empowered to judge and excommunicate even the celestial viceregent and his retinue. Compare 1 Cor 6:3: "Do you not know that we are to judge angels?"

mystic is the chosen one of God to whom messianic qualities are ascribed.”³⁵ Gerd A. Wewers infers that this passage was written against the background of a social environment that the writer perceived as hostile and toward which he adopted an attitude of patient, passive suffering based on the “servant” model encountered in prophecy and the Psalms.³⁶ Despite his personal powerlessness, the adept is vindicated by the intervention of divine power on his behalf and possesses divinely conferred authority to pass eschatological judgment on his adversaries. Like Schäfer, Wewers observes “that the mystic aligned his self-portrayal with eschatological individuals (Elijah, the messiah) and saw himself as corresponding closely to these figures (or identified himself with them?).”³⁷

The adept’s superior, revealed knowledge is opposed to that conferred by exoteric and halakhic Torah scholarship, which indicates that his opponents are members of the scholastic rabbinic establishment. Wewers suggests that this composition may be a response to a specific historical situation, although it can no longer be identified. The writer’s viewpoint, however, is similar to that of several (Jewish and Christian) apocalyptic authors, and it is probably better to regard the passage as one product of a tradition that was adapted, over the course of several centuries, by many different sectarian groups in situations of conflict with others, more powerful than themselves. The situation inferred by Wewers is in several respects very similar to that addressed by Paul who, in his claim to conformity with Christ, assumes the “servant” role. The statement that the merkabah adept’s authority is given “to the pure, to the humble, to the meek” is reminiscent of Paul’s contrast between “power” and “weakness.”

The visionary ascent to heaven of which Paul is driven to boast seems, then, to be of crucial importance to his claim to apostolic authority and power. There are grounds, moreover, for supposing that this was a merkabah vision, with Christ identified as the enthroned *kabod*. This hypothesis will be strengthened if clear parallels can be demonstrated between Paul’s account and the hekhalot/talmudic *pardes* story.

The relationship between the “third heaven” of 2 Cor 12:2 and the “paradise” of 2 Cor 12:4 requires consideration. Are verses 2 and 3–4 to be understood sequentially or in parallel? If a seven-heaven cosmology is assumed, either interpretation is theoretically possible, but it seems most unlikely that Paul would have based his claim to apostolic authority on an ascent merely to the third of seven heavens, which would hardly qualify as an “exceptional” revelation (2 Cor 12:7a). Moreover, our analysis of the

³⁵Schäfer, “Gershom Scholem Reconsidered,” 16 (= idem, *Hekhalot-Studien*, 293). Compare Tabor on Paul (*Things Unutterable*, 23; quoted above p. 274).

³⁶Wewers, “Überlegenheit,” 20–23.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 21.

Jewish mystical tradition has shown that *pardes* was a term for the celestial Holy of Holies in the uppermost heaven. The seven-heaven model must, then, imply a “two-stage” ascent, first to the third heaven and subsequently to paradise in the seventh.³⁸ There is, however, no parallel for this in apocalyptic or Jewish mystical literature. Normally, the ascent through all six lower levels to the seventh is described (or at least mentioned) unless (as at Rev 4:1–2, for example) the visionary proceeds directly to the highest heaven without mention of intervening levels. Nowhere, to my knowledge, does the elevator stop, so to speak, on only one intermediate floor. Since there is evidence for an alternative, and probably earlier, three-heaven cosmology, it seems most natural to assume that this is the model employed by Paul.³⁹ This assumption is confirmed by the elegant analysis of Hans Bietenhard,⁴⁰ who has demonstrated that 2 Cor 12:1–5 are a symmetrical composition, the second half of which repeats and expands upon the first. Thus, 2 Cor 12:5 picks up the theme of “boasting” introduced in 2 Cor 12:1 and adds the theme of “weakness,” while 2 Cor 12:3–4 repeats the statement in 2 Cor 12:2 (“paradise” = “the third heaven”) with an additional report of a secret, unutterable revelation. It seems virtually certain, then, that Paul’s paradise was located in the uppermost of three heavens.

The continuation of the *pardes* story in *Hekhalot Zutarti* deserves consideration:⁴¹

- A R. Aqiba said: At that time, when I ascended to the merkabah, a *bat-qol* went forth from beneath the throne of glory, speaking in the Aramaic tongue. In this tongue, what did it say?
- B “Before the LORD made heaven and earth, he established. . . <corrupt word⁴²>. . . in Raqiaʿ, to go in by and to come out by [scribal gloss:

³⁸Rowland (*The Open Heaven*, 380–82) and Tabor (*Things Unutterable*, 115–20) interpret the passage in this way.

³⁹Ralph P. Martin (*Second Corinthians* [Word Biblical Commentary 40; Waco: Word, 1986] 401–3) and Young (“The Ascension Motif,” 90), for example, have defended this interpretation.

⁴⁰Bietenhard, *Himmlische Welt*, 162–68.

⁴¹Schäfer, *Synopse*, §§348–52; Rachel Elior, *Hekhalot Zutarti* (Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought Suppl. 1; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1982) 23–25, lines 59–99. The opening words, “R. Aqiba said: At that time, when I ascended to the Merkabah, a *bat-qol* went forth. . . , etc.” are also found in the two manuscripts of *Merkabah Rabbah* that contain the *pardes* story (Schäfer, *Synopse*, §674). See further, Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 77–78; Schäfer, *Der verborgene und offenbare Gott*, 56–59; and idem, *Übersetzung*, 3. 17–24.

⁴²This word is different in all five manuscripts in Schäfer, *Synopse* and in the Geniza fragment 7.T.–S.k21.95.B. (in Schäfer, *Geniza-Fragmente*, 90–91) but none of the versions is meaningful (O: בנייה; N: בנרביא; D: כוניה; M40: כנוכה; M22: בניזבא; G7: כמירבא). (O = Oxford; N = New York; D = Dropsie; M40 = Munich 40; M22 = Munich 22; G7 = Geniza fragment.)

and. . . <corrupt word>. . . means nothing other than 'gateway' (מבוי)]. He established the irrefutable name, with which to design the entire universe.

- C "And what man is able
 To ascend on high?
 To ride the chariot-wheels?
 To descend below?
 To explore the world?
 To walk on the dry ground?
 To behold his splendor?
 To [?] unbind⁴³ his crown?
 To be transformed into his glory?⁴⁴
 To utter praise?
 To combine letters?
 To utter names?
 To behold what is on high?
 And to behold what is below?
 To know the meaning of the living?
 And to see the vision of the dead?
 To walk in rivers of fire?
 And to know the lightning?

- D "And who is able to explain, and who is able to see? First of all it is written: 'For no man may see me and live' (Exod 33:20); and in the second place it is written: 'For God speaks to man, and he lives' (Deut

In the following gloss, all except G7 give a different form again. (O: רזון בה; N: רזון בה; D, M40: רזון בה; M22: רזונה; G7: מדבא). Schäfer (*Übersetzung*, 3. 18 nn. 14 and 19) has argued that G7 gives the best reading, since the gloss at least agrees with the text (assuming כ to be the preposition "like" or "as"). Scholem (*Jewish Gnosticism*, 77–78) and Ithamar Gruenwald (*Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* [AGJU 14; Leiden: Brill, 1980] 148) both translated "vestibule" on the basis of the gloss (מבוי; G7 reads: מיביאה). Possibly, בניא ("building") should be read.

⁴³Reading לא־שרא (thus O, D, M22) as 'afa'el infinitive of שרי (M40: לא־שרא [meaningless]; N omits this word). Compare Scholem (*Jewish Gnosticism*, 78), "to dwell with," and see Schäfer, *Übersetzung*, 3. 19 n. 11.

⁴⁴This expression is uncertain, but highly significant. The manuscripts read as follows: N: למשחבא באיקרא ("to be praised in glory"; Scholem [*Jewish Gnosticism*, 78] offers "to praise the glory"); M22: למיח סבא ביקרא (meaning uncertain, perhaps: "to become old [or learned] with honor"; O: למחפכא ביקריה; D, M40: למחפכא ביקרא. The above translation is based on O. If the reference is to the divine glory (note that in the previous lines the possessive suffix refers to God), it must mean either: "to be transformed into his glory" (as above) or ". . . by his glory." Alternatively, it may refer to the mystic's own glory: "to be transformed in his glory." D and M40 are identical, save that they omit the possessive suffix. They could therefore mean "to be transformed into the (divine) glory," or ". . . by the (divine) glory," or ". . . in glory." Whatever the precise meaning, the reading of these three manuscripts is an important witness to the theme of "transformational mysticism" in the hekhalot tradition.

5:21/24); and in the third place it is written: 'I saw the LORD sitting upon a throne. . . ' etc. (Isa 6:11).

E "What is his name?

ססייט כספן ורנין רנין גון גיניה⁴⁵ who is the completely Holy One, whose heavenly hosts are fire!

וּאֵשׁ יֵה שׁוּוֹה וְהִי צְבִי אֵשׁ בְּנֵין הוֹד כִּשֵּׁן נִגְוִי אֲבִירֹו . . . sitting on a high and exalted throne. . . Holy! Holy! Holy is the LORD of Hosts! The whole earth is full of his glory!' (Isa 6:1–3), ' . . . Blessed be the glory of the LORD from his place!' (Ezek 3:12),

אוֹרִיִּים פּוֹסִיקְסִיו הִיטָה שְׁחָקִי קִסְפָּה פִּטְקִי מְוִקוּ אֶפְהָה סִפְהָק סוֹפֶה יֵאִיִּךְ נִסְדָּה קָקָה סָקוֹס אֶמְסִי פִּטְהִי, before whom Israel⁴⁶ say: 'A glorious high throne from the beginning [is the place of our sanctuary]' (Jer 17:12).

F "His holy ones on high say: 'We see (him) like the appearance of lightning!' His prophets say: 'We see (him) in a dream-vision, like a man who sees visions in the night.' The kings who are upon earth say: 'He is, so to speak, like us, but he is greater than everything—and this is his glory, which is hidden from us.' Moses says to them, to these and those: 'Do not investigate with your words, but let him be praised in his place!' Therefore it is said: Blessed be the glory of the LORD from his place!"

This passage is significant in several respects. Section A states that Aqiba, like Paul, heard words when he ascended to paradise. B seems to refer, especially if the scribal gloss is correct, to the heavenly temple where the "irrefutable name" resides and, in any case, concerns the time before the creation of the universe, in other words, the forbidden mysteries of *ma'aseh bēre'shit*. C is a summary of the mysteries revealed to the ascending apocalyptic hero and the attainments of the merkabah adept.⁴⁸ There are several echoes of *m. Hag. 2.1*. As Schäfer has observed, the juxtaposition of three apparently contradictory verses (D) introduces, in a traditional rabbinic manner, the question "whether man can see God at all and, if so, then who, and what he looks like."⁴⁹ The answer to this question, according to what follows, is that exceptional individuals may, like Isaiah, behold God's name (the LORD), embodied in his glory. The following passage, of which E and

⁴⁵The magical names are given according to MS Oxford.

⁴⁶Following M22. The other manuscripts read ויש for וישראל (thus: "and there are those who say. . . ") but this reading is presumably based on an abbreviation.

⁴⁷N reads, "R. Aqiba says. . . "

⁴⁸Compare Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, 75–189.

⁴⁹Schäfer, *Der verborgene und offenbare Gott*, 56 (compare idem, *Übersetzung*, 3. 20 n. 1).

F are only the beginning, concerns the vision of the *kabod* and the mysteries of the divine name (of which the *kabod* is the embodiment). E establishes a link between the *kabod* in the preexistent celestial sanctuary and the earthly temple. F discusses the manner in which the *kabod* is seen by various categories of being. The saying attributed to “our rabbis” alludes to the esoteric doctrine of the *šīʿur qomah*. The section culminates in a warning, attributed to Moses, that this is not a matter for rational understanding or verbal definition. We may compare the following, from an anonymous medieval Yemenite commentary on the Song of Songs:⁵⁰

It was said in the presence of Rabban Gamaliel: Though created beings do not have permission to declare the true being of the Creator, they do have permission to declare His praise. How so? As it is written: “for no man shall see me and live” (Exod 33:20). Life depends upon his praise, but his true being is concealed.

The following sections of *Hekhalot Zutarti* contain detailed descriptions of the *ḥayyot* (holy living creatures), the merkabah, and the *kabod*, including much *šīʿur qomah* material and long strings of magical names of God. Thus, the words heard by Aqiba when he ascended to the merkabah in paradise, or the celestial sanctuary, concerned the central mysteries of *māʿāseh merkabah*: that is, the innermost mysteries of God’s being, which cannot and may not be described in words, but are only partially known and expressed through the medium of mystical praise. This is a remarkably close parallel to Paul’s “unutterable words which it is not permitted for man to speak” (2 Cor 12:4).⁵¹

The nature of Paul’s “thorn (or stake) in the flesh” (2 Cor 12:7b–8) has been the subject of much speculation.⁵² Most modern scholars, following

⁵⁰Published by Moriz Friedländer, “Tēhillat Piruš Šir-ha-Širim Mēʿorab mi-Lašon ʿEber wē-ʿArab,” in *Festschrift zum achtzigsten Geburtstage Moritz Steinschneider’s* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1896) Hebrew section, 49–59 (the quotation is on p. 58). On the antiquity of much of the material preserved by this source, see A. Marmonstein, “Deux renseignements d’Origène concernant les Juifs,” *REJ* 71 (1920) 195–99; and Saul Lieberman, *Midrāšei-Teiman* (2d ed.; Jerusalem: Wahrman, 1970) 12–19 [Hebrew]; see further idem, “Mišnat Šir-ha-Širim” (appendix D of Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*) 123–24. It is tempting, although perhaps overoptimistic, to conjecture that this tradition goes back to Rabban Gamaliel the Elder, who was the first of six *nēsi’im* to bear this name and title, and who was allegedly claimed as a teacher by Paul (Acts 22:3).

⁵¹*Contra*, for example, Käsemann, “Die Legitimität des Apostels,” 63–64, who argues that Paul uses this expression to emphasize the private, incommunicable nature of his experience and to deny that any claim to authority can be based on such experiences. See further n. 64 below.

⁵²For a useful summary of previous scholarship on this issue, see Martin, *Second Corinthians*, 410–23.

the earliest recorded church tradition,⁵³ and taking τῇ σαρκί literally, have argued that the expression refers to an illness or disability, also mentioned at Gal 4:13–14. Various “diagnoses” have been offered on the basis of these two passages.⁵⁴ Some commentators, rightly perceiving that the “thorn” is closely associated in Paul’s mind with his “exceptional” revelations, have suggested a nervous complaint (for example, epilepsy, hysteria, or migraine) caused by, or associated with, his ecstatic and visionary experience.⁵⁵ According to this view, the parallel expression ἄγγελος Σατανᾶ indicates that Paul believed that a demonic assault had caused his illness. Others have argued in favor of an interpretation first proposed by Chrysostom,⁵⁶ namely, that Paul is referring to a human enemy or enemies at whose hands he has suffered persecution.⁵⁷ This view has been persuasively defended by Terence Y. Mullins who, citing similar expressions in the Septuagint at Num 33:55, Ezek 28:24, and elsewhere, showed that Paul’s readers would have recognized σκόλωσ τῇ σαρκί as a literary idiom for an enemy.⁵⁸ Robert M. Price has pointed out, however, that this theory fails to account for the close connection that exists in Paul’s mind between the “thorn” and the visionary experience and suggested that the reference is to an angelic opponent similar to the gatekeepers of the hekhalot tradition, who attack and punish those deemed unworthy to ascend to the merkabah.⁵⁹ This view is consistent with Paul’s emphasis on his “weakness” and his dependence upon the power of Christ.

If Price’s interpretation is adopted, several noteworthy correspondences between Paul’s account and the Jewish *pardes* story become apparent. The “angel of Satan” is reminiscent of the demonic “angels of destruction” who

⁵³Irenaeus *Adversus haereses* 5.3.1; Tertullian *Pud.* 13.6; and *Marc.* 5.12.

⁵⁴See BAG, s.v. σκόλωσ, 441b–42a, and κολαφίζω, 763b–64a; and further, for example, Lightfoot, *Galatians*, 186–91; Neil Gregor Smith, “The Thorn that Stayed: An Interpretation of II Corinthians 12:7–9,” *Int* 13 (1959) 409–16; F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (NCB Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans and London: Marshall, Morgan, & Scott, 1980) 248–49; Gerhard Delling, σκόλωσ, *TDNT* 7 (1971) 409–13; Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 224–26.

⁵⁵Thus, for example: Windisch, *Der zweite Korintherbrief*; Karl Ludwig Schmidt, κολαφίζω, *TDNT* 3 (1965) 818–21.

⁵⁶Chrysostom *Hom.* 26 on 2 Corinthians.

⁵⁷Thus, for example: Ph. H. Menoud, “L’écharde et l’ange satanique (2 Cor. 12, 7),” in J. N. Sevenster and W. C. van Unnik, eds., *Studia Paulina in Honorem Johannis de Zwaan Septuagenarii* (Haarlem: Bohn, 1953) 163–71; Michael L. Barré, “Qumran and the Weakness of Paul,” *CBQ* 42 (1980) 216–27; Jerry W. McCant, “Paul’s Thorn of Rejected Apostleship,” *NTS* 34 (1988) 550–72.

⁵⁸Terence Y. Mullins, “Paul’s Thorn in the Flesh,” *JBL* 76 (1957) 299–303.

⁵⁹Robert M. Price, “Punished in Paradise (An Exegetical Theory on II Corinthians 12:1–10),” *JSNT* 7 (1980) 33–40. Price’s suggestion is in part anticipated by Windisch, *Der zweite Korintherbrief*, 382–90.

seek to "do violence" to Aqiba (*Hekhalot Zutarti* and *Merkabah Rabbah* C2b). We also recall that one of the four was "stricken" (*nipga*), and this is precisely the meaning of the verb *κολαφίζω* employed by Paul. If this correspondence is more than coincidental, the Pauline account and the *pardes* story at this point explain each other. This interpretation is by no means inconsistent with the theory of a nervous illness or reaction to ecstatic experience, which Paul believed to be caused by the angel's blows. Indeed, the geonic interpretation of the expression as referring to madness, which is not too far removed from that of the earliest Christian commentators, can be said to support this view. Finally, Paul's report that he besought Christ to make his tormentor leave him corresponds to God's intervention on behalf of Aqiba, "Leave this elder alone" (*Hekhalot Zutarti* and *Merkabah Rabbah* C2b; *Babylonian Talmud*, A58).⁶⁰

The cumulative weight of the evidence seems overwhelming: Paul's account of his ascent to paradise and the Jewish *pardes* story have common roots in the mystical tradition. An enigmatic quality, due to the reticent and elliptical manner of description, is common to both accounts. The correspondences of detail indicate that they are even more closely related than has previously been suggested. We may conclude, then, that Paul is describing an ascent to the heavenly temple and a merkabah vision of the enthroned and "glorified" Christ. The context in which his account occurs suggests that he bases his claim to apostolic authority on this vision. "Merkabah mysticism" was, therefore, a central feature of Paul's experience and self-understanding. Since this is so, there are no grounds for the assumption that his visions were purely spontaneous, involuntary events. It is quite probable that they were induced by the use of a mystical technique, which may have been less elaborate than some of those described in the hekhalot sources but cannot have been markedly different in its essentials.⁶¹ As Tabor has argued,⁶² the expression "caught up" (*ἀρπαγέντα*: 2 Cor 12:2; *ἡρπάγη*: 2 Cor 12:4) in no way implies the absence of such a

⁶⁰It has generally been assumed that "three times" implies three separate occasions. Given the fact that visions of Christ were a regular feature of Paul's experience (see further below, p. 284 n. 66), and if the reference is to a chronic or recurring complaint, this may be so. Price, however, has pointed out ("Punished," 35) that the text carries no such implication (compare Mark 14:35–39) and argued that Paul is describing a single event in his visionary experience. Young ("The Ascension Motif," 81) suggests, plausibly enough, that the "three times" corresponds to Paul's passage through the three celestial spheres.

⁶¹Compare Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 33–39. Young ("The Ascension Motif," 80, 84) is ambivalent on this point. On the one hand, he recognizes the background in Jewish mysticism of Paul's vision, but, on the other, he is anxious to distinguish between Paul's experience ("an extraordinary religious encounter") and "an extreme esoteric and sometimes self-induced mysticism." This proposed distinction appears to be motivated by theological considerations, however, and is not supported by historical analysis.

⁶²Tabor, *Things Unutterable*, 115–16.

technique, nor does the use of a mystical method imply that the experience is wholly "self-achieved" rather than divinely "granted."⁶³

Finally, the question of the historical event to which Paul refers remains to be considered. The majority of scholars have denied any connection between this event and Paul's visions recorded elsewhere. This view, however, is often associated with a tendentious desire to prove that visionary experience was of no more than marginal importance to Paul.⁶⁴ This is a distortion of the context in which 2 Corinthians 12 occurs, is contradicted by the whole record of Paul's career, and does not deserve serious consideration.⁶⁵ James D. Tabor and Alan F. Segal, on the contrary, maintain that visionary mysticism was a central feature of Paul's experience and that the practice of the heavenly ascent was repeated many times during his career.⁶⁶ This view is almost certainly correct, but the inference that Paul is

⁶³Compare *Ma'aseh Merkabah* §24, above p. 271.

⁶⁴Those who hold such a view include Käsemann, "Die Legitimität des Apostels," 67–71; idem, *Perspectives on Paul* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971) 134; William David Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: SPCK, 1948) 87, 196–97; Walter David Stacey, *The Pauline View of Man* (London: Macmillan and New York: St. Martin's Press, 1956) 139–40; Georgi, *Opponents*, 277–83; Walter Schmithals, *Die Gnosis in Korinth: Eine Untersuchung zu den Korintherbriefen* (2d ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965) 197–206; Lietzmann, *An die Korinther*, 155, 212; Barrett, "Paul's Opponents," 244–45; idem, *Commentary*, 302–6; Gunther, *Opponents*, 276–77; Russell P. Spittler, "The Limits of Ecstasy: an Exegesis of 2 Corinthians 12:1–10," in Gerald F. Hawthorne, ed., *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristical Interpretation: Studies in Honor of Merrill C. Tenney Presented by his Former Students* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 259–66; Bultmann, *Second Letter*, 218–30; Andrew T. Lincoln, "Paul the Visionary: The Setting and Significance of the Rapture to Paradise in II Corinthians XII 1–10," *NTS* 25 (1978) 204–20, esp. 211; idem, *Paradise Now and Not Yet: Studies in the Role of the Heavenly Dimension in Paul's Thought with Special Reference to his Eschatology* (SNTSMS 43; London/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 71–85; Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians, Translated with Introduction, Notes and Commentary* (AB 32A; Garden City: Doubleday, 1984) 542–46; William Baird, "Visions, Revelation and Ministry: Reflections on 2 Cor 12:1–5 and Gal 1:11–17," *JBL* 104 (1985) 651–62; Martin, *Second Corinthians*, 387–424; Ernest Best, *Second Corinthians* (Atlanta: Knox, 1987) 116–21 (an extreme example of this tendency); Sumney, *Identifying Paul's Opponents*, 167–68; and Strecker, "Die Legitimität des paulinischen Apostolates," 577. Bruce (*I and 2 Corinthians*, 245–50) denied a connection between 2 Corinthians 12 and any vision recorded in Acts, but did not downplay the significance of Paul's visions. On the position advanced by Goulder, see pp. 272–73 above.

⁶⁵See Tabor, *Things Unutterable*, 32–34, for a penetrating exposé of the "hidden agenda" underlying this approach, the aim of which is to produce a portrait of Paul that conforms to rationalist Protestant presuppositions. A few of the commentators cited in the previous note have argued that Paul's visions were important for him personally, but irrelevant to his apostolic claim or Christian belief. This is simply absurd.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 21; Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 34–71. Baumgarten (*Paulus und die Apokalyptik*, 143) has also emphasized the frequency of Paul's visionary experience but did not discuss the aspect of practical mysticism, nor did he think that Paul saw Christ on this occasion. See also Richard Reitzenstein, *Hellenistic Mystery Religions: Their Basic Ideas and Significance* (PTMS

describing only one among several such experiences, which occurred at some indeterminate point in his career, must be rejected on two counts: in the first place, this vision is evidently the basis of Paul's claim to apostolic authority (in defense of which he is compelled, against his will, to boast of it) and, second, he is at pains to give the event a precise historical location. A few scholars have identified the ascent to paradise with the conversion on the Damascus road,⁶⁷ but this suggestion is also unconvincing. In none of the accounts of this event in Acts (9:1–9; 22:6–11; 26:12–18) do we find any indication that a heavenly ascent was involved: the narrative model corresponds more closely to the apocalyptic motif of the revelatory descent of an angelic being. Nor is there any indication that Paul saw a vision of Christ in human form upon the celestial throne on this occasion: all three versions in Acts speak of a blinding light and a voice from heaven. Paul's own account of this event (Gal 1:15–16) does not indicate that it was a heavenly ascent or that it involved a vision of Christ upon the throne.⁶⁸ In this account, Paul uses the verb ἀποκαλύπτω but not the noun ὀπτασία. This point is not (*pace* Goulder) at all decisive, but it tends to support the impression given by Acts that the content of this experience was primarily auditory, not visual. Most important of all, no account of the Damascus road experience provides a point of contact with the imagery of the temple which was, as we have seen, at the heart of the paradise tradition.

A recorded vision of Paul remains which has attracted little attention from recent commentators, but seems to satisfy all the criteria demanded by the above analysis. This is the vision in the Jerusalem temple, reported in Acts 22 at the conclusion of Paul's defense speech on the temple steps.⁶⁹

15; trans. John E. Steely; Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1978) 426–500, esp. 468–71.

⁶⁷John Knox (“Fourteen Years Later,” 346–49; and idem, “The Pauline Chronology,” *JBL* 58 [1939] 15–29) originally held this view but later retracted it (*Chapters in a Life of Paul* [New York/Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1950] 78 n. 3; see also the second, revised edition [Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987] 34 n. 1). Riddle (*Man of Conflict*, 62–63, 208–11) accepted Knox's original position, which has also been supported by Charles Henry Buck and Greer Taylor (*Saint Paul: A Study of the Development of His Thought* [New York: Scribner, 1969] 220–26). Buck and Taylor rightly recognized the importance of the vision for Paul's claim to apostolic authority but wrongly assumed that the basis of this claim was the Damascus road event.

⁶⁸*Contra* Seyoon Kim (*The Origin of Paul's Gospel* [WUNT 2/4; 2d ed.; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1984] 223–33) whose discussion, although excellent in many respects, rests on a false assumption. See further n. 82 below.

⁶⁹Stanislas Giet (“Nouvelles remarques sur les voyages de Saint Paul à Jérusalem,” *RevScRel* 31 [1957] 329–42) suggested in passing (p. 340) that this passage may correspond to 2 Cor 12:1–12 but, as far as I am aware, this suggestion has never been developed in detail. Robert Jewett (*A Chronology of Paul's Life* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979] 54–55) briefly considered the possibility, but mistakenly rejected it (see further below p. 287).

According to Acts, this vision occurred during his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion. In Galatians, Paul states that this first visit occurred three years after his conversion (Gal 1:18)⁷⁰ and fourteen years before his second visit (Gal 2:1). The vision is described as follows:

¹⁷After I had returned to Jerusalem and while I was praying in the temple, I came to be in a trance (γενέσθαι με ἐν ἐκστάσει) ^{18a}and to see him, saying to me: ^{18b}“Hurry, and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.” ¹⁹And I said: “Lord, they themselves know that in all the synagogues I used to imprison and beat those who believed in you, ²⁰and (that) while the blood of your witness Stephen was being shed I myself stood by approving and guarding the garments of those who were killing him.” ²¹Then he said to me: “Go, for I will send you (ἐξαποστελῶ σε) far away to the Gentiles.” ²²Up to this point, they [the crowd in the temple] listened to him, but then they shouted: “Remove this person from the earth, for it were not fitting for him to live (οὐ γὰρ καθῆκεν αὐτὸν ζῆν)!” (Acts 22:17–22)

If, as I have argued, the ascent to paradise means entry into the celestial Holy of Holies, this incident clearly corresponds to such an experience. Paul has been transported in his ecstatic trance (hence his uncertainty as to whether his body accompanied him⁷¹) from the earthly to the heavenly temple and into the celestial Holy of Holies, where he sees Christ as the enthroned *kabod*. As noted by Otto Betz,⁷² the account in Acts contains several echoes of Isaiah 6, which, as was discussed in part one of this article, is a centrally important text of the merkabah tradition. Acts 22:17 echoes Isa 6:1 (“I saw the LORD”), while Acts 22:21 (“I will send you”) must be derived from Isa 6:8 (“Whom shall I send?”) and Isa 6:12 (“until the LORD has sent everyone far away”). Here, then, is the account of Paul’s apostolic commission to the Gentiles, in the context of a merkabah vision of Christ as *kabod* in the celestial sanctuary, to which 2 Cor 12:1–12 refers (as, probably, does 1 Cor 9:1).

Acts 22:18b (“they will not accept your testimony”) seems to reflect Isa 6:9–13, verses that are fundamental to Paul’s theological theory of “hard-hearted Israel” (compare Acts 28:25–28). In the context of this speech, the implied reference to these verses of condemnation of Israel and predicted destruction of the Jewish state amounts to a statement that the divine glory

⁷⁰Or it occurred three years after his return to Damascus, shortly after the conversion.

⁷¹See Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, 383–84.

⁷²Otto Betz, “Die Vision des Paulus im Tempel von Jerusalem—App. 22,17–21 als Beitrag des Damaskuserlebnisses,” in Otto Böcher and Klaus Haacker, eds., *Verborum Veritas, Festschrift für Gustav Stählin zum 70. Geburtstag* (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1970) 113–23.

(Christ) has abandoned Israel in favor of the nations. Thus, whereas Isaiah was sent to Israel, Paul is sent to the Gentiles. This radical reinterpretation of the prophetic account explains the anger of his listeners (Acts 22:22), and it is intriguing to note that this is expressed in language reminiscent of *m. Hag.* 2.1C: "And whoever is not careful about the glory of his creator, it were fitting for him that he had not come into the world."

Robert Jewett has objected that Paul's public description of the vision in the temple in Acts 22 contrasts so strongly with his reticence in 2 Corinthians 12 that the two visions are unlikely to be the same.⁷³ This objection, however, overlooks the fact that the speech on the temple steps, which provides the context in which the public description occurs, is almost certainly a Lukan composition.⁷⁴ Several commentators have believed this to be true of the vision itself, arguing that it reflects Luke's concern to legitimize gentile Christianity by emphasizing its continuity with Judaism.⁷⁵ Betz regarded it as a Lukan commentary on the Damascus road event and believed it to be a literary device intended to place Paul's authority on the same level as that of the Twelve, to whom the risen Jesus had appeared in the Holy City.⁷⁶ On the other hand, Hans Conzelmann believes it to be an alternative version of the conversion/call story, derived by Luke from a nonhistorical tradition that associated the event with Jerusalem rather than Damascus.⁷⁷ Christoph Burchard has rightly disputed the suggestion of a tradition that was ignorant of the Damascus road story or denied its veracity, but he has

⁷³Jewett, *Chronology*, 54–55.

⁷⁴*Contra* Bruce, *The Speeches in the Acts of the Apostles* (Tyndale New Testament Lecture; London: Tyndale, 1942) 22–25. See, above all, Martin Dibelius, "The Speeches in Acts and Ancient Historiography," in idem, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles* (London: SCM, 1956) 138–85, esp. 158–61. On the speeches in general see, for example, Henry J. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts* (London/New York: Macmillan, 1958) 184–93; Martin Dibelius, "The Acts of the Apostles as a Historical Source," in idem, *Studies*, 102–8; F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (3d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 34–40; Eduard Schweizer, "Concerning the Speeches in Acts," in Leander E. Keck and J. Louis Martyn, eds., *Studies in Luke-Acts* (1966; reprinted Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 208–16; Fred Veltman, "The Defense Speeches of Paul in Acts," in Charles H. Talbert, ed., *Perspectives on Luke-Acts* (Perspectives in Religious Studies, Special Series 5; Danville, VA: Association of Baptist Professors of Religion, 1978) 243–56. Also relevant to this discussion are Benjamin J. Hubbard, "Commissioning Stories in Luke-Acts: A Study of their Antecedents, Form and Content," *Semeia* 8 (1977) 103–26; and idem, "The Role of Commissioning Accounts in Acts," in Talbert, *Perspectives*, 187–98.

⁷⁵See, for example, Dibelius, "Speeches" 158–61; Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971) 628–31; Volker Stolle, *Der Zeuge als Angeklagter: Untersuchungen zum Paulus-Bild des Lukas* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1973) 164–66, 210–12; Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, vol. 2: *The Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress, 1990) 268–84.

⁷⁶Betz, "Die Vision des Paulus im Tempel."

⁷⁷Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) 187–88.

also maintained that the story of the temple vision is derived from a nonhistorical tradition, the origins of which he believed to be beyond recovery.⁷⁸ The evidence considered above, however, suggests that this passage is an authentic unit of tradition and derives ultimately from Paul himself, even though the speech itself was composed by Luke out of traditional material and may well never have occurred. If the correspondence between Acts 22:22 and *m. Hag.* 2.1 is more than coincidental, then this verse must also be part of the authentic tradition derived from Paul, and not merely a literary device to conclude the speech (although Luke has used it for this purpose).⁷⁹ It would suggest, then, that the unit may well be derived from an actual confrontation between Paul and a Jewish, probably Pharisaic, audience at some point in his career. Thus, three stages in the development of the tradition are to be distinguished: (1) the vision itself, in Jerusalem, three years after the conversion; (2) Paul's own report(s) of the experience, including the outraged response of a Jewish audience; and (3) Luke's incorporation of such a report, at first or second hand, in the (probably fictitious) speech on the temple steps.

The temple vision of Acts 22 is thus almost certainly based, however indirectly, on an actual experience of Paul, to which 2 Cor 12:1–12 refers. Given the manner in which our information concerning this vision is mediated within the narrative of Acts, the location of the vision within the earthly temple should perhaps be questioned. The temple setting could, like that of Nehunyah's trance ascent in *Hekhalot Rabbati*,⁸⁰ be symbolic rather than historical. It may also be the case that Paul's actual vision was a purely mystical event, consisting of an imaginary ascent to the celestial temple, and that the physical location in the earthly temple is a misinterpretation on the part of Luke, who has taken his source too literally. If this interpretation of the data were adopted, we could no longer assume that Paul's vision actually occurred while he was in Jerusalem, and Luke's chronological location of the event would therefore also be called into question. The location is confirmed, however, with regard to both geography and chronology, by Paul's own testimony. It corresponds precisely to the point at which the rapture to paradise occurs in the narrative sequence of 2 Corinthians 11–12, in which Paul's account of his escape from Damascus

⁷⁸Christoph Burchard, *Der dreizehnte Zeuge: traditions- und kompositionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Lukas' Darstellung der Frühzeit des Paulus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970) 161–69. Interestingly enough, Burchard was prepared to speculate in a footnote (p. 165 n. 13), developing a suggestion of Menoud ("L'Écharde," 171), that it may have arisen out of speculation about Paul's vision in 2 Corinthians 12. This theory imposes an unnecessary strain upon the evidence. See further n. 81 below.

⁷⁹See Dibelius, "Speeches," 160.

⁸⁰*Hekhalot Rabbati* 13–23 (Schäfer, *Synopse*, §§198–250). See part 1, pp. 181–82.

is followed immediately by his vision.⁸¹ It seems most probable, then, that Paul's visionary ascent to the celestial sanctuary (= paradise) and apostolic commission to the Gentiles did occur in Jerusalem on the occasion of his first visit after his conversion. Although certainty is of course impossible, Luke's location of the event in the actual temple is therefore likely to be genuine.

It has emerged from this investigation that Paul's conversion on the Damascus road and his apostolic commission to the Gentiles in the celestial temple (= paradise) were almost certainly two separate events, the latter occurring three years after the former in Jerusalem, and probably in the temple.⁸² Though contrary to the prevailing assumption, this finding fits

⁸¹2 Cor 11:32–12:1; compare Acts 9:23–26. If Luke used 2 Corinthians 10–13 as a source, he will almost certainly have recognized that 2 Cor 12:1–12 referred to the temple vision that he recorded at Acts 22:17–22. It is, however, inconceivable that this gentile author was so familiar with the merkabah tradition that he was able to make up Acts 22:17–22, with its detailed allusions to that tradition, on the basis of 2 Cor 12:1–12, the language of which is relatively veiled. The account of the temple vision must therefore be derived from a Jewish source. To argue that this source was not Paul himself (see n. 78 above) is to complicate matters beyond necessity of reason.

⁸²Though not widely accepted, this position has been argued from the internal evidence of Acts by, for example, Rudolf Liechtenhan, *Die urchristliche Mission: Voraussetzungen, Motive und Methoden* (AThANT 9; Zürich: Zwingli-Verlag, 1946) 77–80; Anton Fridrichsen, "The Apostle and his Message," (UUÅ 3; Uppsala: Lundequistaka, 1947) 3–23; Benz, "Visionär," 91; Paul Gaechter, *Petrus und seine Zeit* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia-Verlag, 1958) 408–15; W. D. Davies, "The Apostolic Age and the Life of Paul," in *PCB*, 874 (§764a); Beda Rigaux, *The Letters of St. Paul* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1968) 61–62; Edward P. Blair, "Paul's Call to the Gentile Mission," *BR* 10 (1965) 19–33.

Kim's attempt to refute these arguments (*Origin*, 58–65) is both conjectural and tendentious. His statement that the temple vision "does not . . . seem to have been of decisive importance for Paul, for he never mentions it in his letters" (p. 65) is, in the light of the above analysis, completely wrong. The assumption that the conversion and the commission to the Gentiles were a single event is absolutely central to Kim's thesis, which is vitiated by this finding (see n. 68 above). Kim lists several passages of Paul's writings that have often been interpreted as references to the conversion (*Origin*, 3–31), but many of these may in fact be references to the commission in the temple (= paradise). Newman (*Glory-Christology*, 164–247) follows Kim's erroneous assumption.

James D. G. Dunn (*Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus as Reflected in the New Testament* [London: SCM, 1975] 97–114) offers a useful discussion of Paul's claim to apostolic authority but also assumes that the conversion and commission were a single event. Dunn also overlooks a crucial difference between Paul's vision of the risen Christ and the "pre-ascension" resurrection appearances to the disciple-apostles: Paul's visions are of the heavenly, glorified Christ-*kabod*. The Damascus road event implies (as argued above) a revelatory descent of the Christ-*kabod* or, alternatively, an "opening of the heavens" (as in Ezekiel 1), hence the supernatural blinding light which is markedly absent in the pre-ascension appearances. On the other hand, the commission in paradise (= the temple vision) was associated with a vision of the Christ-*kabod* enthroned in the celestial sanctuary at the climax of a mystical ascent.

with what we know of Paul's career: there is no evidence that he preached to the Gentiles, or claimed apostolic authority, during the three intervening years. Moreover, it seems inherently probable that it was the experience of Jewish opposition to the gospel that caused him to interpret Isaiah 6 in such radical terms and that this vision was, at least in part, a product of his intense frustration. There is nothing in any account of the Damascus road event to suggest it was the cause of this radical departure from his Jewish belief that cannot be explained as the reflection of hindsight on the divine purpose behind the initial revelation.⁸³ Rom 15:15–20 confirms this picture of events:

¹⁵But I have written to you in part boldly, to remind you, on account of the grace given to me by God ¹⁶to be a servant of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, administering the gospel of God as a priestly service (ἱερουργούντα τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ), that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁷In Christ Jesus, then, I have my boast in the things pertaining to God, ¹⁸for I will not presume to speak of anything except that which Christ has accomplished through me for the obedience of the Gentiles, by word and deed, ¹⁹through the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and around to Illyricum I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. ²⁰Thus, I aspire to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, so that I do not build on another's foundation.

Here, Paul characteristically emphasizes the independence of his apostolate from any human authority (Rom 15:20) but places the beginning of the gentile mission in Jerusalem (Rom 15:19). Moreover, he describes his apostolate to the Gentiles as the exercise of a priestly ministry (Rom 15:16). The references to boasting (Rom 15:17) and works of power (Rom 15:18–19) are reminiscent of 2 Corinthians 12.

Obviously, this finding has significant implications for the vexed question of the Pauline chronology. Broadly speaking, it tends to support a

⁸³Nowhere in Acts 9 is it stated that Paul received his commission to the Gentiles on the occasion of his conversion. We are told only that the knowledge of God's future purpose for Paul was vouchsafed to Ananias (Acts 9:15). Indeed, Acts 9:16 might be taken to imply that Ananias was forbidden to reveal this purpose to Paul ("I [Christ] myself will show him"). Acts 26:12–23 seems to be a compressed version of Acts 22:6–21, in which the contents of both the Ananias episode and the temple vision are assimilated to the Damascus road event. Since both speeches (and perhaps the Ananias episode itself) are Lukan compositions, this has no bearing on the authenticity of Acts 22:17–22 as a traditional unit deriving ultimately from Paul. At Gal 1:16, Paul does not state that he became aware of his commission to the Gentiles on the occasion of his conversion, merely that he now knows this to have been God's purpose when he first revealed his Son to him.

reconstruction based on the Epistles, rather than Acts, as proposed by John Knox, Donald Wayne Riddle, John Coolidge Hurd, Charles Henry Buck and Greer Taylor, Robert Jewett, and Gerd Lüdemann.⁸⁴ Since Gal 2:1 specifies a fourteen-year interval between the first visit to Jerusalem (when the paradise/temple vision occurred) and the second (the "Jerusalem conference"), 2 Corinthians 10–13 must have been written at about this time. As we observed above, both letters seem to have been written in the heat of the crisis over Paul's apostolic authority and hence concern the validity of the Gentile mission. Since 2 Corinthians 10–13 does not refer to the Jerusalem meeting, it may have been written shortly before this event, and Galatians shortly afterward. This complex issue, however, cannot be discussed in detail here. It is sufficient to have shown that the ecstatic ascent to paradise, the temple vision, and the apostolic commission to the Gentiles were one and the same revolutionary event. The impact of merkabah mys-

⁸⁴See Knox, "Fourteen Years Later," esp. 341; idem, "The Pauline Chronology," esp. 23–26; idem, *Chapters in a Life of Paul* (revised ed.; 1987; see n. 67 above) esp. 3–52; Riddle, *Man of Conflict*, esp. 13–20 and 185–223; Buck and Taylor, *Saint Paul*, esp. 3–19; Jewett, *Chronology*, esp. 7–24; John Coolidge Hurd, Jr., "Chronology, Pauline," *IDBSup* (1962) 166–67; idem, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians* (New York: Seabury, 1965) 3–42; idem, "Pauline Chronology and Pauline Theology," in W. R. Farmer, C. F. D. Moule and R. R. Niebuhr, eds., *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox* (London/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1967) 225–48; and idem, "The Sequence of Paul's Letters," *CJT* 14 (1968) 188–200; Gerd Lüdemann, *Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles: Studies in Chronology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984). See now John Knox, "On the Pauline Chronology: Buck-Taylor-Hurd Revisited," in Robert T. Fortna and Beverly R. Gaventa, eds., *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul and John in Honor of J. Louis Martyn* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990) 258–74. Since these scholars have tended to discount Acts as a source of reliable data, it is perhaps hardly surprising that none of them has identified the ascent to paradise with the temple vision, but the identification is consistent with, or requires only small adjustments to, the reconstructions that they have proposed. It allows the expression διὰ δεκατεσσάρων ἐτῶν in Gal 2:1 to be taken as consecutive with (rather than inclusive of) μετὰ ἔτη τρία in Gal 1:18, as seems most natural. Thus, Gal 1:15–17 refers to the conversion; Gal 1:18 states that Paul went up to Jerusalem three years after this event; and Gal 2:1 places the second visit to Jerusalem (the "Jerusalem conference") fourteen years later. It is probable that Gal 2:11–14 is not part of this chronological sequence, but refers to an earlier event (see Lüdemann, *Paul*, 20–21). It should be noted that Paul's protestation at Gal 1:21 implies that a different account of these events was being promulgated by his opponents, and this could be the basis of the muddled chronology of Acts.

The reconstruction proposed by James D. G. Dunn ("The Incident at Antioch [Gal 2:11–18]," *JSNT* 18 [1983] 3–57, reprinted in idem, *Jesus, Paul and the Law* [London: SPCK, 1990] 129–81) rests on the assumption that Gal 2:11–14 continues the chronological sequence of Gal 1:13–2:10. Giet ("Nouvelles remarques," 335–40) has argued that Gal 1:18, "Ἐπειτα μετὰ ἔτη τρία, means three years after Paul's stay in Damascus, the length of which is not specified, so that more than three years elapsed between the conversion and the first visit to Jerusalem, but this reading of the text seems very strained.

ticism upon human history has therefore been considerable, for it was at the very heart of Paul's experience and apostolic claim. Moreover, his merkabah vision of the enthroned and glorified Messiah provided the inspiration for his "gospel to the nations."