

Chapter Two

THE LADDER OF JACOB

Jacob left Beer Sheba and went off toward Haran. He happened on a certain place and decided to spend the night there, since the sun had set. He took some of the stones from the place and put them down at his head; then he lay down in the place to sleep. He had a dream; a ladder was stuck into the ground and its top reached up to heaven, and the angels of God were going up and down on it. And the Lord was standing over him and He said, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land upon which you are lying I am giving to you and your descendants. And your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, so that you will spread out westward and eastward, to the north and to the south; by you and your descendants will all the families of this land be blessed. And I will be with you and watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this spot; I will not leave you until I have done what I have just said." Jacob woke up from his sleep and said, "The Lord is indeed present in this place, though I did not know it!" And he took fright and said, "How fearsome is this place! This is the very house of God, and that is the gateway to heaven." Early that morning Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar, and he poured oil on its top. And he called the place by the name Bethel, although previously the city was called Luz. Then Jacob made a vow: "If God is with me and watches over me on the journey that I am making, and gives me food to eat and clothes to wear, so that I return safely to my father's house—then the Lord shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up

as a pillar, will be a temple of God, and everything that You give to me I will tithe back to You.” (Gen. 28:10–22)

The story of Jacob’s dream-vision at Bethel was highly significant for ancient readers of the Bible: it marked the first time that God appeared to Jacob or addressed him directly and was thus the start, in a sense, of his career as one of God’s chosen servants. At the same time, a few things in this brief passage were puzzling. Why, to begin with, had Jacob dreamt of a ladder and angels at all? Could not God simply speak to him with words alone, as He had spoken earlier to Abraham (Gen. 15:17–20)? And what were the ladder and the angels intended to communicate? Finally, Jacob’s reaction to the dream was puzzling. After he wakes up, “he took fright and said, ‘How fearsome is this place!’” Surely the content of the dream itself seemed altogether positive and reassuring—what could have frightened Jacob?

These were the sorts of questions out of which ancient biblical interpretation developed. For it is certainly not hard to imagine young pupils in olden times asking their teacher just such things about Jacob’s dream, or listeners to a sermon on this text quizzing the preacher about such matters once he was done. Bit by bit, and often in highly creative fashion, ancient interpreters managed to come up with answers—not only to the questions mentioned, but to all manner of queries touching on the whole of the Bible’s stories, laws, prophecies, and songs. A good answer—one that seemed to solve the problem, or at least addressed it in some novel fashion—would be adopted willingly by teachers and preachers (now they would know what to say!) and so passed on to future generations. Sometimes, however, different explanations would vie with one another for a long time before one of them won out in public opinion; indeed, it sometimes happened that no single explanation succeeded in eliminating all the others. In fact, that is what happened in the case of Jacob’s dream.

One very early answer to the questions posed above is to be found in the writings of Philo of Alexandria, a first-century Jewish scholar who lived in the Greek-speaking city of Alexandria, Egypt. Commenting on the dream narrative, Philo observed:

Perhaps as well [Jacob] caught a glimpse of his own [future] life in this visionary ladder. . . . The affairs of men are by their very nature comparable to a ladder because of their irregular course. For a single day (as someone well put it) can carry the person set on high downward and lift someone else upward, for it is the nature of none of us to remain in the same circumstances, but rather to undergo all manner of changes. . . . So the path of human affairs goes up and down, subjected to unstable and shifting happenstance. (Philo, *On Dreams*, 1:150, 153–56)

For Philo, the ladder in the dream seems to have been intended to communicate the “ups and downs” that lay in store for Jacob (and which characterize human affairs in general). If so, one can well imagine Jacob’s anxiety upon awakening: it is one thing to know in a general way that life is not always sweet for everyone, but quite another to have a vision implying that tough times may lie just ahead in one’s own life. As will be seen presently, Philo’s comment in its broad outline is paralleled by exegetical traditions attested elsewhere, both in the roughly contemporaneous writings of the biblical apocrypha and pseudepigrapha and in later, rabbinic texts. But these other sources hardly speak with one voice: there were, as already indicated, several competing approaches to Jacob’s dream.

Changing of the Guard

One well-known approach focused on the biblical passage’s assertion that the angels were “going up and down” on the ladder. In Hebrew, going *up and down* (more literally, “ascending and

descending”) is the normal order of things—as it is indeed in English as well. In fact, the laws of gravity being what they are, in quite a few languages things are said first to go up and then, afterward, down. But in the case of angels, this order raised a slight exegetical difficulty: since angels are normally located in heaven, one would expect them first to have gone *down* on the ladder, and only subsequently *up*. If the biblical passage maintains the opposite, it seemed to ancient interpreters a reasonable inference that the particular angels in question must have already been on the earth—on some mission or other—before the ladder appeared; they then ascended on the ladder to heaven while some other angels descended at the same time. It remained only to discover what their particular mission had been.

One hypothesis was that these angels had been sent down to earth to accompany Jacob on the trek from his father’s house to that of his uncle Laban in Aram (that is, the journey from Beer Sheba to Haran mentioned in the first sentence of the biblical passage cited). They went with him from his parents’ house as far as Bethel. If, at that point in the journey, they ascended to heaven, perhaps it was because they were unable to accompany him the rest of the way:

The angels that accompany a person within the land of Israel cannot accompany him outside of the land. [Therefore, the angels who were said to be] *ascending*—these were the ones who had accompanied him within the land of Israel; *and descending*—these were the ones who were to accompany him outside of the land [to Aram].
(*Genesis Rabba* 68:12)

Seen in this light, what happened at Bethel was a kind of “changing of the guard”: the angels who ascended were immediately replaced by another cohort that descended on the same ladder.

Angels Had Been Exiled

Another possibility was that the angels were already on earth because they had been sent down on some previous mission quite unrelated to Jacob. Looking backward from chapter 28 of Genesis, a reader could not but notice that a group of angels had been mentioned not long before, in chapter 18: there, three angels had appeared to Abraham and Sarah at Mamre, and not long afterward (chapter 19) two of the three were sent to destroy the city of Sodom and save Lot from its wreckage. Perhaps, interpreters theorized, these were the very same angels who subsequently ascended on Jacob's ladder. But why should they have waited so long before returning to heaven?

Said R. Levi in the name of R. Samuel bar Nahman: [they were] ministering angels [i.e., the angels that serve God in highest heaven]. But since they had revealed the *mysteria* of God, they were cast out of their [heavenly] domain for 138 years. . . . Said R. Hama b. R. Hanina: [they were cast out] because they had been arrogant and said, "For we are about to destroy this place" (Gen. 19:13). (*Genesis Rabba* 50:9)

According to this overall approach, these angels were ministering angels¹ and thus naturally belonged in the highest part of heaven. If they were still on earth at the time of Jacob's dream-vision, it must be that they were being punished for something. R. Levi cites one opinion: at the time of the destruction of Sodom, the angels had warned Lot of the impending disaster by saying, "Who else do you have here? Sons-in-law, your sons and daughters, and anyone else that you have in the city—bring them out of this place. *For, we are about to destroy this place; the outcry made against them to the Lord has become so great that the Lord has sent us to destroy it*" (Gen. 19:12–13). Apparently, the

angels gave out too much information. All they had really needed to say to Lot and his family was, "Get out." By mentioning the outcry that led to God's divine verdict against Sodom, and even mentioning the fact that they themselves had been sent by God, the angels were, according to this opinion, revealing far more than was called for, things that were in the category of divine *mysteria* and thus normally kept from human beings. The explanation given by R. Ḥama b. R. Ḥanina is slightly different. The very wording of the angels' warning—"For, *we* are about to destroy this place"—seemed terribly immodest. Were not the angels merely executing God's decree that the place be destroyed? Even Lot, no saint in the rabbinic reckoning, reworded their warning in the very next verse: "The *Lord* is about to destroy the city" (Gen. 19:14). Attributing the destruction to themselves thus seemed to be an instance of overweening pride on the angels' part, one that might have brought on the punishment of being exiled from heaven.

Whichever explanation one chooses, the idea that these heavenly angels had been exiled would account for their presence on earth at the time of Jacob's dream. They then ascended on the ladder and resumed their rightful place in the supernal realm.

A REAL LADDER

One subtle fact is often missed in connection with this midrash or the previous one (that is, the exegetical motif that we have called the "Changing of the Guard"). The starting assumption of both is that the actual content of Jacob's dream had nothing to do with a ladder or angels. Gen. 28:12 may say, "He had a dream," but what follows immediately is not a description of the dream at all but an account of something else that took place while Jacob was asleep and busy dreaming: suddenly, a real ladder was

stretched between earth and heaven, and some real angels ascended and descended on it. The narrative then goes on to detail God's words to Jacob while he was asleep. One might adjust the previous translation of the biblical narrative to reflect this other way of reading:

Jacob left Beer Sheba and went off toward Haran. And he happened on a certain place and decided to spend the night there, since the sun had set. He took some of the stones from the place and put them down at his head; then he lay down in the place to sleep. He had a dream. *Meanwhile*, a ladder was stuck into the ground and its top reached up to heaven, and the angels of God went up and down on it.

And [in the dream] the Lord was standing over him and He said, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land upon which you are lying I am giving to you and your descendants. . . ." Jacob woke up from his sleep and said, "The Lord is indeed present in this place, though I did not know it!" And he took fright and said, "How fearsome is this place! This is the very house of God, and that is the gateway to heaven."

This approach to the biblical passage had much to recommend it. In removing the ladder and the angels from the dream, it eliminated in one deft stroke the most puzzling aspect of the narrative. All that was left now in the dream were God's own words to Jacob, and these were quite straightforward. In so doing, these midrashists also succeeded in making God's manner of communicating with Jacob no different from His method of communicating with Abraham in Gen. 15:17-20: in both cases, God speaks to the person in a deep sleep, but in both He uses only words and not visual symbols, saying in both cases what lies in store for the person's progeny.

Angels Descended to Admire Jacob

Such success notwithstanding, the above explanations are lacking in at least one regard. The biblical text says the angels were *ascending and descending*. Now, the exiled angels might well have ascended because their allotted punishment was over, or because of some act of divine clemency, but why should other angels then go down? One might, of course, say—in keeping with the “Changing of the Guard” motif—that Jacob still needed to be escorted the rest of the way to Laban’s house. But if so, why should the exiled angels, who, after all, had accompanied Jacob part of the way and who were thus already in place, have departed so quickly without completing the job?²

In fact, even the “Changing of the Guard” midrash had not really handled this problem successfully. It had created an ad hoc “rule,” according to which angels who accompany someone within the land of Israel are not authorized to accompany him outside of the land.³ But by any reckoning, Bethel (or Jerusalem, with which, curiously, “this place” in the biblical story was sometimes identified)⁴ does not sit on the border between the land of Israel and Aram; the new angels would thus have a lot of accompanying to do right in the land of Israel before entering their supposed province of activity. If the second group of angels could operate both inside the land of Israel and outside, why couldn’t the first?

Perhaps it was because of such considerations that a slight variation on the overall approach of these explanations is found elsewhere in rabbinic writings. According to this other approach, the ladder in the story is still a real ladder and the angels are real angels; unlike the previous versions, however, their ascending and descending had nothing at all to do with *escorting* Jacob. Instead, the angels were intent on catching a glimpse of the righteous fellow, and his sleeping at Bethel provided them with an opportunity.

It was for that reason that a multitude of angels, a continuous stream of them, went down on the ladder and back up again while Jacob slept.

Indeed, the Genesis text itself offered some support for this reading. It said that “a ladder was stuck into the ground and its top reached up to heaven, and the angels of God were going up and down *on it*.” The word *bô* (“on it”) in Hebrew might equally well be rendered *upon him*. If so, the text would be indicating the purpose of the angels’ descent was to arrive directly next to Jacob himself—presumably, to see him up close. Alternately, “upon him” might be interpreted as an elliptical phrase—as if what the text were really saying was that the angels were descending to look *upon him*,⁵ to catch a glimpse of the righteous Jacob asleep on the ground.

One early passage that depends on this line of interpretation is found in the New Testament:

Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these.” And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.” (John 1:50–51)

Many commentators have recognized in the words “the angels of God ascending and descending” an allusion to Gen. 28:12; but it is not simply an allusion to the biblical verse but the biblical verse as interpreted in the sense described above. That is, the word *bô* is being understood as “upon him” (here, “upon the Son of man”) and not “on it,” that is, the ladder.⁶ In keeping with this same approach,

R. Ḥiyyah the Great and R. Yannai [disagreed on this verse], the one claimed [they were] ascending and descending on the ladder

while the other said [they were] ascending and descending on Jacob (*Genesis Rabba* 68:12).⁷

What about the order of the verbs, “ascending and descending”? Apparently—as John 1:50–51 shows—in this midrash the order was not taken to be significant. After all, the act of admiring Jacob might imply hundreds, perhaps thousands, of angels going down to take a look. If so, the verbs “ascending and descending” refer to continuous, simultaneous activity—some angels go up while others go down—in which case the order in which the verbs appear makes no difference.

Given such a scenario, there was no need to explain why, once having descended, the angels went back up again; heaven was, after all, their home. Nevertheless, some versions of this midrash specify that the angels not only *descended* to look at Jacob but also *ascended* to look at him,⁸ since Jacob’s portrait, by an old midrashic tradition,⁹ was engraved on God’s own heavenly throne:

It is written: “Israel in whom I [God] am glorified” (Isa. 49:3).¹⁰ You [Jacob] are the one whose portrait is engraved above [on the heavenly throne. The angels thus] ascended to see his portrait and descended to see him [the real Jacob] asleep. (*Genesis Rabba* 68:12)

One of the most characteristic features of rabbinic midrash is the blending—and sometimes, the confusing—of exegetical motifs that were originally quite separate from one another. A good example of this phenomenon is the treatment of Gen. 28:12 in the Palestinian targums, which combine a number of elements seen thus far:

And he dreamt that there was a ladder fixed in the earth and its top reached the heavens, and the two angels who had gone to Sodom and had then been exiled from Heaven for having revealed secrets of the Master of the world and had thus been wandering about

until Jacob left his father's house, whereupon they lovingly accompanied him to Bethel—now they ascended to the upper heavens and called out: Come and see the faithful Jacob, whose portrait is fixed on the Glorious Throne, since you have desired to see him. Then the other holy angels of the Lord went down to see him. (*Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Gen. 28:12; cf. *Targum Neophyti* ad loc.)

Here we have the motif “Exiled Angels,” whose one-time ascent was designed to account for the word order of “ascending and descending.” Once in heaven, however, these exiled angels invite their angelic brethren to go down and admire the faithful Jacob. This element belongs not to the “Exiled Angels” motif at all but to that of “Angels Descended to Admire Jacob.” (The connection to this motif is solidified by the next clause, which explicitly mentions Jacob's portrait engraved on the heavenly throne.)¹¹ Note, however, how this second motif has been slightly modified. Originally, there was a continuous flow of angels up and down, as attested in John 1:50–51 and *Genesis Rabba* 68:12; in the latter text, the ascending angels were going up to see Jacob's portrait etched on the heavenly throne, while the descending ones were going down to see Jacob in person. In the targumic version, however, the arriving, formerly exiled, angels call out to the other angels, who, being stationed in heaven, have apparently already seen Jacob's portrait etched on the heavenly throne. They are therefore told to go down to see the sleeping Jacob in person, “since you have desired to see him.” Thus, two originally quite separate explanations of the ascending and descending angels have been successfully fused in the targumic tradition.

Rise and Fall of Empires

All the motifs seen thus far separate the ladder and the angels from the content of Jacob's dream. But to most readers of the Bible this separation must have appeared artificial; surely the ladder

and the angels were part of the dream, a significant part! A number of interpreters, therefore, sought to explain these elements (as Philo did) as symbolic, indeed, as a symbolic announcement of Jacob's own future.

The following midrashic explanation of Jacob's vision exists in several forms; the most widely attested is a remark attributed to R. Samuel b. Nahman:¹²

And he dreamt that a ladder was set on the ground and its top reached to the heavens and the angels of God were going up and down on it. . . . Said R. Samuel b. Nahman: Is it possible that these were the ministering angels [whose job it is to serve before God in Heaven]? Were they not instead the guardian angels of the nations of the world (*sarei 'ummot ha'olam*)? He [God] showed him [Jacob] Babylon's angel climbing up seventy rungs [of the ladder] and going down again. Then He showed him Media's angel going up and down fifty-two, and then Greece's going up and down one hundred and eighty. Then Rome's went up and up, and he [Jacob] did not know how many [rungs it would ascend]. Jacob took fright at this and said: "Oh Lord, do you mean that this one has no descent?" God said to him: "Even if you see him reach the very heavens, I will still cause him to go down, as it is written, 'Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, from there I will bring you down, says the Lord'" [Obad. 1:4].

R. Samuel b. Nahman's point of departure is a question already mentioned: if the angels in Jacob's dream were (as the biblical text calls them) the "angels of God"—presumably the highest class of angels, God's "ministering angels"—what were they doing going up and down a ladder stuck into the earth rather than serving God in the loftiest regions of heaven? The answer he gives is that, despite the phrase "*angels of God*" in the biblical text, these angels were not in fact God's ministering angels but the angelic "princes"

of the nations mentioned in the book of Daniel (Dan. 10:13, 20, etc.), each of whom is assigned to watch over a different country or people. Their “ascending and descending” (in that order), therefore, had great significance: what Jacob saw was actually a visual representation of the rise and fall of empires, specifically, those foreign empires which would dominate his own descendants in time to come.¹³ And so, our midrash specifies that the angels that Jacob saw were, in turn, the guardian angels of Babylon, Media, Greece, and Rome. The seventy rungs that the guardian angel of Babylon ascends represent the seventy years of the Babylonian captivity as specified in Jer. 25:11–12, 29:10, and later Jewish writings; the number of rungs ascended by the guardians of Media and Greece similarly correspond to traditional chronology.¹⁴ But what of Rome? Its angel kept going up and up—no wonder Jacob is frightened! It was bad enough for Jacob to see that his descendants were to be dominated by a succession of foreign empires, but according to this dream, the Roman domination would go on for centuries and centuries and seemed, in fact, to have no end. It was then that God reassured him with a verse from the book of Obadiah, “Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, from there I will bring you down, says the Lord.” These words, addressed by the biblical prophet to the nation of Edom, seemed particularly appropriate in context since, by a well-worn midrashic act of identification, Edom, along with its founder, Esau, were typologically identified with the Roman empire.¹⁵ Rome’s domination might thus appear endless right now, but its guardian angel, like the previous ones, would eventually have to end its climb on the ladder and go back down.

Of all the interpretations of Jacob’s dream examined thus far, this last one certainly had the most to recommend it. Every element of the narrative was well accounted for: the ladder and the angels, God’s (now necessary) words of reassurance to Jacob, and Jacob’s fear on awakening. Indeed, by this interpretation Jacob was

understood to have had a full revelation of his descendants' future, much as Abraham had at the "covenant between the pieces" in Genesis 15. (In particular, the motif "Abraham Saw a Dire Future" may have served as a model for "Rise and Fall of Empires.")¹⁶ What is more, if one imagines this interpretation being put forward by a Jewish sage of the late third or early fourth century, at a time when Roman dominion over the Jewish people and their national homeland did indeed seem utterly unchallengeable and destined to last forever, the interpretation of Jacob's dream it espouses must appear as a inspiring message of hope in the most trying of times: even the greatest of obstacles can eventually be overcome if one only has the patience and courage to outlast it.

Ensnared on the Staircase of History

A somewhat similar, but nevertheless distinct, explanation of Jacob's dream is sometimes conjoined with this one:

R. Berekhya and R. Ḥelbo and R. Simeon b. Yosina: R. Meir explained the verse, "Despite all this they still sinned; they did not believe despite his miracles" (Ps. 78:32). This refers to Jacob who did not believe and did not ascend [the ladder]. God said to him: "Jacob, if you had believed and gone up, you would never have had to go down again; but now, since you have not believed and have not gone up, your children will become entangled with nations and ensnared with empires, [and will go] from empire to empire, from Babylon to Media and from Media to Greece and from Greece to Rome." He said to Him: "Ruler of the universe, forever?" Said God to him, "Do not fear, my servant Jacob, and do not be dismayed, Israel" [Jer. 30:10].¹⁷

At first glance, this passage might appear to be rather similar to "Rise and Fall of Empires": once again we have the ladder and

the four empires. But here, strikingly, it is not the four guardian angels who are to ascend the ladder; in fact, there is no mention of these guardian angels, just the four empires themselves. Instead, apparently, it is Jacob himself who is asked to ascend. Unfortunately, Jacob loses his nerve; he does not sufficiently trust in God and so does not go up (that is, he “did not believe and did not ascend”). As a result, his descendants will now become “ensnared with empires,” going from one to the next, “from Babylon to Media and from Media to Greece and from Greece to Rome.” That is, since Jacob did not ascend, his children will have to—but they will not have an easy time of it. Apparently, Babylon, Media, Greece, and Rome are the four rungs of this ladder: Jacob’s descendants are to go (as the text says) “from empire to empire” by *climbing*, slowly making their way to the top. But since they will become “entangled” and “ensnared,” impeded in their climb, the ascent will not be rapidly accomplished. If only Jacob had trusted in God, he himself would have gotten over these rungs unscathed! But since he did not believe, rough times are in store.

This overall scenario sets the reader up for the punch-line of this midrash, the biblical verse cited at the end, “Do not fear, my servant Jacob, and do not be dismayed, Israel” (Jer. 30:10). A normal reader would see the two halves of this verse as virtually synonymous: “Israel” is another name for Jacob, and “fear” and “be dismayed” are near-synonyms. But “Jacob” might also be differentiated from “Israel,” the former referring to the patriarch himself and the latter to the nation descended from him. Moreover, the word normally translated as “dismayed” here, *tht*, can, if one wishes, be understood to derive from the root *nht*, meaning “go down,” “descend” (and not from *hth*, “dismay”). This is precisely the playful switch being proposed by this midrash. For, by substituting this other meaning, the midrashist can make God out to be simultaneously telling Jacob not to fear and “Israel” (that is, Jacob’s descendants) *not to go down*, not to give up because of

the difficulties of the climb in which they are engaged.¹⁸ For this pun to work, of course, one has to imagine the personified people of Israel halfway up a ladder somewhere—that is to say, one has to have precisely the picture presented by this midrash, in which Jacob’s descendants are in the midst of the rough climb that leads “from Babylon to Media and from Media to Greece and from Greece to Rome.”

AN ANCIENT MIDRASH ON JACOB’S DREAM

I wish now to consider an ancient, and certainly a rather strange, treatment of Jacob’s dream, the one found in a short biblical pseudepigraphon called the *Ladder of Jacob*.¹⁹ Known only from the medieval Slavonic *Tolkovaya Paleya*, this text exists in a number of versions; in addition to retelling Jacob’s dream itself, it contains a prayer²⁰ and angelic revelation nowhere present in the biblical narrative. The Slavonic text is clearly a translation from a now-lost Greek version; it appears likely to me that the Greek is itself a translation from an original Aramaic or Hebrew text dating from, roughly speaking, the Second Temple period.²¹

There are many mysterious elements in this text that I cannot explain; here I would like simply to examine an area of overlap between its basic understanding of Jacob’s dream and some of the rabbinic explanations just surveyed. Jacob’s dream-vision is presented in the opening verses:

Jacob then went to Laban, his uncle. He found a place and, laying his head on a stone, he slept there, for the sun had gone down. He had a dream. And behold, a ladder was fixed on the earth, whose top reached to heaven. And the top of the ladder was the face of a man, carved out of fire. There were twelve steps leading to the top of the ladder, and on each step to the top there were human faces, on the right and on the left, twenty-four faces, including their

chests. And the face in the middle was higher than all that I saw, the one of fire, including the shoulders and arms, exceedingly terrifying, more than those twenty-four faces. (*Lad. Jac.* 1:1–6)

Here, Jacob's dream has undergone a radical transformation. Instead of a ladder with angels, what Jacob sees here are human heads—a fiery head at the very top of the ladder, and then human faces to the left and right side of each of the ladder's twelve steps. Such a ghoulish display might indeed explain why Jacob was frightened when he awoke—but what is the point of it all? The head at the very top of the ladder seems to have been generated by the biblical text itself. It says of the ladder that “its top reached up to heaven,” but the Hebrew word for “top” (*rōš*) can also mean “head.” Taken in this sense, the biblical text would seem to be saying that the ladder had an actual head on it—hence, the fiery head in our text. But what of the twenty-four faces?

The author leaves us to wonder about these things until chapter 5, when the angel Sariel comes to tell Jacob the meaning of his visionary dream:

Then he [the angel] said to me [Jacob]: “You have seen a ladder with twelve steps, each step having two human faces which kept changing their appearance. The ladder is this age, and the twelve steps are the periods of this age, and the twenty-four faces are the kings of the lawless²² nations of this age. Under these kings the children of your children and the generations of your sons will be tested;²³ they [the foreign kings] will rise up because of²⁴ the wickedness of your offspring. And they [the foreign kings] will make this place empty by four ascents because of the sins of your offspring. And upon the property of your forefathers a palace will be built, a temple in the name of your God and your fathers' [God], but in anger against your children it will be made deserted, until the fourth descent of this age.²⁵ For you saw earlier²⁶ four figures, the

ones who happened upon²⁷ the steps (the ascending and descending angels [were]²⁸ the figures in the middle of the steps). The Most High will raise up kings from your brother Esau's children's children, and they will *succeed*²⁹ all the rulers of the peoples of the earth who have done evil to your descendants. And they will be given over into his power and *they* will suffer *him* against their will. He will hold them by force and rule over them, and they will not be able to oppose him until the day he *decrees*³⁰ upon them to serve idols and to offer sacrifices to the dead. And he will command that all people in his kingdom be forced to do this. And *there will be some* who will be guilty of such an offence; some of your family will serve the Most High, and some will worship idols.³¹ Know, Jacob, that your descendants will be exiles in a strange land, and they will afflict them with slavery and inflict wounds on them every day. But the Lord will judge the people for whom they slave." (*Lad. Jac. 5:1–17*)

It is not hard to see a certain similarity between the very beginning of this explanation of Jacob's dream and the last rabbinic motif examined above, "Ensnared on the Staircase of History." In both, the steps of the ladder are taken to represent successive stages in the history of Israel. Here, however, the climb is not from one empire to the next, Babylon through Rome; instead, the ladder's twelve steps represent the "twelve periods of this age," while the two faces adorning each step, twenty-four in all, are the twenty-four "kings of the lawless nations of this age." If so, what Jacob sees is a vision of his descendants' future, an age of foreign domination divided into twelve periods. This foreign domination, the text says, will come about as a result of the "wickedness" of Jacob's offspring—it is, in other words, a divine punishment.

That much is clear. At this point, however, the text goes off in another direction and we hear no more about the staircase of history. Instead, there is a mention of "four ascents" and the

destruction of the Jerusalem temple (“And . . . a palace will be built, a temple in the name of your God and your fathers’ [God], but in anger against your children it will be made deserted”). The temple will remain deserted until the “fourth descent.” The “four ascents” and the desolation that will last until the “fourth descent” are reminiscent of another midrashic motif examined above, “Rise and Fall of Empires,” in which the four ascending and descending angels represent the four kingdoms or empires that will rule over the Jewish people. The last of the four empires is Rome, and only its final descent will bring to an end the period of foreign domination revealed to Jacob in his dream. Having mentioned these four ascents, our text then goes on to describe Israel’s suffering under Roman domination in greater detail. Esau, typologically Rome, may have been the biblical Jacob’s brother, but it is from his progeny that will arise evil kings who will oppress the Jewish people. Ultimately they will even force some Jews to give up the worship of their God and serve idols instead. This will be the final outrage, to be followed soon, apparently, by Rome’s downfall.

The text of the *Ladder of Jacob* is rather difficult, but if I have understood it correctly, it appears to be an amalgam of two quite separate motifs (very much as two different approaches were combined in the passage from *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* seen earlier). The **basic motif** “Staircase of History”—or at least a version of it, which we might call “The Twelve Steps of the Staircase,” in which each step represents a different period and its two kings—seems to have been the original basis of this text. At some point, however, an editor or copyist familiar with the “Rise and Fall of Empires” motif resolved to insert it in this text. This was done in a rather sloppy manner. The angel in chapter 5 refers to the “four ascents” in Jacob’s dream—in fact, he goes out of his way to remind Jacob twice that that is what he saw, “For you have seen the fourth figure . . . ,” “For you saw earlier four figures” *But*

these reminders are just a bluff. In fact, there was no mention of four ascents or a “fourth figure” in the original account of the dream in chapter 1, since the interpolator has apparently limited himself to tampering with chapter 5 alone. There could thus be no clearer announcement that this whole section about the Romans and the “four ascents” was stuck in after the original text had been composed. The lack of agreement between what the dream itself contains (chapter 1) and what the angel says it contained (chapter 5) makes this obvious.

There is another indication that, indeed, the whole section about Rome is an insertion. The last two sentences in the passage quoted are apparently an allusion to the enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt: “Know, Jacob, that your descendants will be exiles in a strange land, and they will afflict them with slavery and inflict wounds on them every day. But the Lord will judge the people for whom they slave.” This is a nearly exact quote of Gen. 15:13–14. It certainly cannot refer to the period of Jewish suffering under the Romans—the subject of the insertion that just precedes it—because by no stretch of the imagination could it be said that the Jews were “exiles in a strange land” under the Romans: they were at home in their own land, but being ruled by foreigners. In other words, it bears no connection to the sentence that precedes it; it does, however, continue the theme of Israel’s future oppression that was being discussed before the section about Rome began. Indeed, if we cut out the whole section about Rome, we get a fairly smooth interpretation of Jacob’s dream as it was presented in chapter 1:

Then he [the angel] said to me [Jacob]: “You have seen a ladder with twelve steps, each step having two human faces which kept changing their appearance. The ladder is this age, and the twelve steps are the periods of this age, and the twenty-four faces are the kings of the lawless nations of this age. Under these kings the

children of your children and the generations of your sons will be tested; they [the foreign kings] will rise up because of the wickedness of your offspring. . . . Know, Jacob, that your descendants will be exiles in a strange land, and they will afflict them with slavery and inflict wounds on them every day. But the Lord will judge the people for whom they slave.”

The verses that follow these continue the theme of Egyptian slavery and ultimate redemption, but the subject of Roman domination does not return.³²

When were the “four ascents” and the description of Roman domination inserted in the original text? It is difficult to say for sure, but this part of the text must certainly postdate the revolt against Rome and the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E. Indeed, it is not difficult to imagine how the insertion came to be made. At the time of the temple’s fall, the original text of the *Ladder of Jacob* had presumably been around for some years, but although this text contained vague predictions of a dire future for Israel, it made no clear reference to the cataclysmic destruction of God’s own house. If the *Ladder of Jacob* were to continue to enjoy its prophetic reputation, some specific reference to the Romans and the destruction had to be made. And so one was inserted: an allusion to the “Rise and Fall of Empires” motif—in which Rome features prominently as the fourth empire—was stuck into the existing text.

THE TWELVE STEPS OF THE STAIRCASE

The material about Rome and the destruction of the Jerusalem temple was thus added to a text that already contained its own, rather different, explanation of Jacob’s dream-vision. What can be deduced about this original exegetical motif? As was already observed, it bears a fundamental similarity to the “Ensnared on

the Staircase of History” motif described earlier. In fact, both that rabbinic text and the original version of the *Ladder of Jacob* are, as mentioned, variants of the same basic motif, “Staircase of History.”

In order to understand how this motif was first created, we must return to the biblical text. Jacob sees a ladder in his dream and is frightened. What is frightening, this motif asserts, is the *ladder itself*. In this respect it bears some resemblance to Philo’s explanation of Jacob’s dream, with which we began. The difference is that, while Philo wished to relate the “irregular course” symbolized by the ladder to Jacob’s own life, the “Staircase of History” motif relates it to the life of Jacob’s descendants, the people of Israel: the ladder represents the coming ages of history, and Jacob sees the terrible things that lie in store for his offspring. No wonder he says, “How fearsome is this place!” In thus explaining Jacob’s dream as foretelling what will happen to his descendants, the “Staircase of History” motif seems to be suggesting a connection between Jacob’s dream-vision at Bethel and Abraham’s dream-vision in the “covenant between the pieces,” narrated in Genesis 15. There Abraham is warned that his descendants will be enslaved in Egypt—and, in later, midrashic elaborations of this passage, he is warned about the subsequent domination of his offspring by other foreign powers.³³ The “Staircase of History” motif seems designed to suggest that Jacob, Israel’s immediate ancestor, received at Bethel a similar warning about his descendants’ future oppressors.

In both variants of this basic motif, the fact that the Bible mentions certain angels ascending and descending on the ladder is relatively unimportant: their traveling up and down the ladder of future ages probably holds no particular significance for Jacob, save perhaps that, in the hard times to come, his progeny will be watched over and protected. But the whole point is the frightening display of the ladder and the domination of Jacob’s descendants that it foretells, domination by foreign kings.

Why does the version of this motif in the *Ladder of Jacob* specify that the coming ages are divided into twelve steps? The whole idea of the display of future history does have certain obvious affinities with other Second Temple texts, many of which likewise conceive of time as divided up into a certain number of periods or units (usually ten, but sometimes twelve).³⁴ It seems to me unlikely that any more precise significance be attributed to the number twelve in context, especially since, for this original version of the text, the tribulations of Jacob's progeny will start with the period of slavery in Egypt and not with the Babylonian exile (as per the rabbinic motifs); twelve is simply a great many difficult periods for the Jewish people to live through before the messiness of history will be resolved.³⁵ In short, I do not think the twelve steps offer any clue as to when, precisely, the *Ladder of Jacob* was written.

Other clues, however, do exist. The first has already been mentioned: the very fact that the material about the Roman destruction of the temple has been added to an earlier version suggests that the original *Ladder of Jacob* must go back to before the great Jewish revolt of 68–70 C.E. How much earlier is difficult to guess. The twelve equal steps and the twenty-four faces on them highlight the fact that, for this author, Jewish history consists of an unbroken series of foreign oppressors. It is difficult to imagine someone holding such a view during the period of the revolt of the Maccabees or that of their immediate Hasmonean successors; whatever the author's opinion of them might have been, he would probably not have depicted them as *foreign* rulers, the "kings of the lawless nations." If this bit of evidence is to be taken seriously, then the *Ladder of Jacob* might well be thought to have originated in a pre-Maccabean text. This is certainly possible; if so, the interpolator's reluctance to retouch chapter 1 may represent not sloppiness so much as an unwillingness to make more than a minimum number of changes in a text that was already an

old classic and whose opening sentences, therefore, might not easily be tampered with. On the other hand, the absence of any reference to the *Ladder of Jacob* elsewhere in Second Temple writings—as well as the fact that it survived only in the Slavonic *Paleya*—make such an early date of composition problematic. Alternately, it might be possible to assign to this work a date in the early to mid-first century C.E., at a time when Maccabean nationalism had faded into dim memory and when the later Hasmoneans seemed so linked to Hellenism and foreign powers—indeed, subsequently, to the Romans themselves—as to be classifiable as foreign rulers, even if homegrown.

AN OVERVIEW

The case of Jacob's dream provides a good example of how ancient biblical interpreters sometimes sought to reckon with a text that, on the one hand, was potentially puzzling but, on the other, afforded interpreters an opportunity to put a particular "spin" on the Bible's words. At first glance, of course, the image of the ladder and the ascending and descending angels could not have been particularly troubling. It must have seemed to be a visual embodiment of the special connection between heaven and the particular spot on which Jacob was sleeping—a spot that, as Jacob goes on to say, is the very "house of God" and the "gateway of heaven." As for the angels, their going up and down must have simply been a way of showing that this connection with heaven was active and ongoing; if their presence on the ladder served any other purpose, was it not to symbolize the divine protection that God went on to promise Jacob directly when He spoke to him in his dream? But precisely because all these things are subsequently *spoken*, the visual image itself must also have appeared somewhat unnecessary. Was its purpose simply to be some kind of illustration of God's words? Or was this image intended to make some other point?

This question about the purpose of the image apparently stands behind the motifs “Changing of the Guard,” “Exiled Angels,” and “Angels Descended to Admire Jacob.” All of these, we have seen, took a minimalist approach to the dream, excluding the angels and the ladder from its content and seeing in its words only a confirmation of the divine grant of land to Jacob and his descendants. The ladder, according to common approach of these motifs, was thus a real ladder and *not* part of the dream, and the angels who went up and down on it were quite unrelated to God’s words of encouragement. Such an approach required, however, a separate explanation for the ascending and descending angels. “Angels Descended to Admire Jacob” took what seems like the most direct approach, asserting that the purpose of these (multiple) ascents and descents was to permit the angels to take a look at the sleeping Jacob in the flesh. That such a motif is reflected relatively early—in John’s Gospel—suggests that it preceded the other two not only in simplicity but chronologically as well. In this motif, because it envisages myriads of angels ascending and descending on a single ladder, the order “ascending/descending” was unimportant: clearly, some angels must have been going up, returning to heaven, while other angels were going down. But this basic scheme came to be elaborated at a certain point: the originally separate midrashic motif of “Jacob’s Face Engraved on the Heavenly Throne” was eventually combined with this one, so that the angels now descended to see Jacob and ascended to see his image on the heavenly throne. In fact, we saw how the targumic tradition succeeded in blending *three* originally distinct motifs—“Exiled Angels,” “Angels Descended to Admire Jacob,” and “Jacob’s Face Engraved on the Heavenly Throne”—into a single whole.

It is also noteworthy that interpreters of this school used the occasion to assert what was hardly evident in the biblical text itself: even at this early stage of his life, they say, Jacob was a

paragon of virtue. Thus Jacob is called “Jacob the righteous,” and it was precisely his righteousness that caused the exiled angels to wish to accompany him on his journey, or caused the heavenly angels to wish to go down and see this remarkable human being in person.

Meanwhile, other interpreters had taken the opposite tack and included the ladder and the angels in the dream itself. What did these signify? As mentioned, they seemed, on the face of things, altogether positive. At a relatively early stage, however, some interpreters wished to find in Jacob’s dream the equivalent of Abraham’s dream-vision in Genesis 15, where it had been foretold to him that “your offspring will be strangers in a land not theirs, and they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years” (Gen. 15:13). If such a glimpse of the future was afforded to Abraham, ought not Israel’s more immediate ancestor, Jacob, have been shown the same thing—or more? Out of such considerations developed the basic motif “Staircase of History”: Jacob saw at Bethel the steps or stages through which his descendents would have to climb in future centuries. This motif is first attested in a text to which was added, in rather clumsy fashion, a new section describing Roman oppression and the destruction of the Jerusalem temple. This fact alone argues that the “Staircase of History” is a fairly old motif, certainly antedating 70 C.E., and possibly even going back to pre-Maccabean times.

At some point, this motif came to be combined specifically with the theme of the four empires that will oppress the Jews—a theme attested in the book of Daniel and elsewhere (though the identity of the four was apparently somewhat different there).³⁶ Now the ladder came to have only four rungs: Babylon, Persia-Media, Greece, and Rome, each of which constituted an obstacle to the ascent of the ladder: thus was created the daughter-motif, “Ensnared on the Staircase of History.” To this scheme was added the punch-line from Jer. 30:10, “Do not fear, my servant Jacob, and

don't go down, Israel." Citing this biblical verse added an element of hope to the old staircase motif: Keep the faith, Israel, and keep on climbing!

Probably at a somewhat later date was created a rival motif, "Rise and Fall of Empires." This was a midrashic triumph in two respects: It accounted perfectly for the angels in the dream as well as the ladder (whereas "Staircase of History" had essentially omitted the angels). Moreover, it had an even more specific message of hope: God had promised to end the rise of Edom/Rome, even though it looked like their climb would never end (Obad. 1:4). This motif's precise chronological relation to the staircase motif cannot be determined for sure, but since a better midrash usually tends to circulate more freely and eventually drives out a lesser one (a kind of anti-Gresham's law), it seems to me probable that "Rise and Fall of Empires" came about *after* "Staircase of History" even in its four-empires configuration; indeed, the element of the four empires in the staircase motif may well have served as a direct inspiration for the "Rise and Fall" motif. The fact that rabbinic texts attribute the "Staircase of History" motif to R. Meir, a *tanna* of the second century C.E. and "Rise and Fall of Empires" to an *amora* who lived more than a century later might support this relative dating.

Meanwhile, what of the biblical Jacob? According to the Genesis account, after his vision of the ladder he continued his journey to his uncle Laban's house, where he met and eventually married his two cousins, Leah and Rachel, and fathered his twelve sons, the future twelve tribes of Israel. He also had a daughter, Dinah—and it is the story of her rape by Shechem, the son of Hamor, that constitutes the background of our next examination of ancient biblical interpretation.

CHAPTER TWO
THE LADDER OF JACOB

¹That is, the highest class of angels (corresponding to the “angels of holiness” and “angels of the presence” at Qumran and in the book of *Jubilees*). Presumably, it is their being called “angels of God” in Gen. 28:12 that led to this conclusion: their normal place was serving God in the heavenly sanctuary. (On this there is a vast literature: see especially M. J. Davidson, *Angels at Qumran: A Comparative Study of 1 Enoch 1–36, 72–108, and Sectarian Writings from Qumran* (Sheffield: Academic, 1992) and D. Dimant, “Men as Angels: The Self-Image of the Qumran Community,” in A. Berlin, ed., *Religion and Politics in the Ancient Near East* (Bethesda: University of Maryland Press, 1996), 93–103. If so, what were these “angels of God” doing so far away from Him, on earth?

²The motif of forced exile might have suggested that, once the period decreed for the angels’ punishment had reached an end, fairness dictated that they could no longer be kept a single day longer on earth. Perhaps for that reason, *Genesis Rabba* 50:9 specifies the exact length of time of their sentence (138 years). If Jacob’s falling asleep and dreaming coincided with the very last minute of the 138th year, that might explain why the angels were allowed to reenter heaven before having escorted Jacob the whole way. But such an explanation is not given explicitly in any of the extant versions of this midrash.

³This idea may have been a development of another ad hoc rule, namely, that one angel cannot perform more than one task; this rule is evoked to explain why Abraham sees three angels, rather than a single one, at Mamre: one had been sent to heal Abraham from his recent circumcision, a second to destroy Sodom, and a third to save Lot from the destruction. On this, see Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1:198; Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 56; *Targum Neophyti* Gen. 18:1 and parallels; b. *Baba Metzi’a* 86b and parallels: and my *Traditions of the Bible*, 341–42. It is well known that the three angels acquired a Trinitarian interpretation in Christian exegesis, and some scholars have alleged that the rule of “one angel per task” was created by the rabbis specifically to counter this Christian interpretation. But the presence of this explanation in

the writings of Josephus makes such a possibility most unlikely. Besides, the appearance of three angels when a single one would have been sufficient was certainly puzzling, especially since groups of angels are otherwise rare in biblical narrative.

⁴See below.

⁵In this case, the missing verb might be *הסתכל* (to gaze or contemplate) or *הביט* (look at, consider), both of which are regularly followed by the preposition “-ב”. See in this sense *Midrash Tanhuma* (Buber ed.), ad loc.

⁶For a fuller discussion, see my *In Potiphar's House* (San Francisco: Harper-Collins, 1990), 115.

⁷The continuation of this passage actually presents a variant on the admiring angels motif; it finds in the phrase “descending upon him” a somewhat negative connotation and so, building on the ancient midrashic theme of the rivalry between angels and humans, suggests that the angels actually went down *בו*, in order to harm Jacob or curse him. See *Genesis Rabba* 68:12.

⁸That is, they associate the word *בו*, now understood as an elliptical way of saying “in order to gaze upon him,” with both verbs: the angels went up to gaze upon him and they went down to gaze upon him.

⁹This motif developed out of the statement, “its top reached to heaven”; the same words might be understood as “his head reached to heaven” and thus to refer not to the ladder but to Jacob. I have discussed the origins of this tradition in *In Potiphar's House*, 112–20.

¹⁰Here, the word “glorified” in Isaiah is being interpreted rather more concretely as “beautified.” In other words, God is saying that His throne (and, by extension, His own being) is beautified by Israel (another name for Jacob) since his portrait adorns it.

¹¹The whole idea that the ascending angels actually *invite* the others to behold the faithful Jacob is unique here and may itself be connected to an entirely different motif, created for the story of the binding of Isaac, whereby the angels call out to one another in wonderment at Abraham and his son. This motif is attested in *Targum Neophyti* and *Pseudo-Jonathan* and in the *Fragment Targum*; see M. Bernstein, “The Angels at the Aqedah: A Study in the Development of a Midrashic Motif,” *DSD* 7 (2000):277. As I seek to explain elsewhere

(“Exegetical Notes on 4Q225,” *DSD* [forthcoming, 2006]), the original purpose of these angels at the Aqedah came to be forgotten in later times and a new purpose had to be invented: the motif of their calling to one another in wonderment at the virtue of Abraham and Isaac came to replace the now-forgotten purpose, and that motif may have been subsequently transferred to this expression of angelic wonderment at the sleeping Jacob. After all, couldn’t the angels have observed the faithful Jacob at any other point in his life, either by going down to earth (which they seem to be able to do elsewhere just fine without a ladder!) or simply by looking down from heaven?

¹²A Palestinian *amora* of the late third and early fourth centuries. This midrash is found in similar versions in *Genesis Rabba* (printed editions) 68 (end); *Exodus Rabba* 32:7, *Leviticus Rabba* 29:2, *Midrash Tanhuma*, *Vayyetze* 2; *Pesiqta deR. Kahana* 23 (Mandelbaum ed., 334); *Midrash ha-Gadol* Gen. 28:12; *Midrash Tehillim* 78:6; *Yalqut Shim’oni*, *Vayyetze* 121; *Yalqut Yirmiyah* 312; J. Mann, *The Bible as Read and Preached in the Old Synagogue* (Hebrew Section) (New York: KTAV, 1971), 171.

¹³Indeed, this midrash gives a new coloring to the words of the biblical text. “And your progeny will be like the dust of the earth, and you will extend westward and eastward, north and south” (Gen. 28:14)—these words are no longer a prediction of Israel’s expansion and power but of its subjection and dispersion. What Jacob sees in the vision of the ladder is his own descendants’ exile and subsequent domination by foreign peoples. Similarly, “I will be with you and guard you wherever you shall go” (Gen. 28:15) now sounds like a divine assurance that, despite the terrible times to come, Israel will never be completely abandoned. No wonder, then, that the biblical text says about Jacob when he awakens from this vision, “And he was afraid and said, ‘How fearsome is this place!’” (Gen. 28:17).

¹⁴For these figures in rabbinic tradition, see *Seder ‘Olam*, chaps. 29, 30 (Rattner ed., 133, 141); cf. b. *Megillah* 12a and parallels. Note also D. Flüsser, “The Four Empires in the Fourth Sibyl” in idem, *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1988), 317–44; and J. L. Kugel, “The Ladder of Jacob,” *HTR* 88 (1995): 212. One late version of this midrash specifies that the Roman period of domination is to last five hundred years; see Mann, *The Bible as Read and Preached*, 171.

¹⁵See my *Traditions of the Bible*, 358, 366–67.

¹⁶See my discussion of this motif in *Traditions of the Bible*, 299–301.

¹⁷Margulies, *Vayyiqra Rabba*, 671–72. For other versions, see above, note 12.

¹⁸Indeed, this midrash apparently seeks to locate the two halves of Jer. 30:10 in two different time-frames: “Do not fear, my servant Jacob,” was uttered by God when He first showed Jacob the ladder and asked him to climb it. But Jacob lost his nerve, and so the second half of the verse, “and do not be dismayed, Israel”—in the sense of “And do not *go down*, Israel”—was then uttered by God to Jacob’s descendants.

¹⁹This work is found in an eclectic translation by Horace Lunt (based on published texts and several unpublished manuscripts) in J. H. Charlesworth, *OTP* 2:401–12; a translation by A. Pennington of two published recensions of the *Ladder of Jacob* is found in H. D. Sparks, *AOT*, 453–63. Previously, a translation of the text had appeared in M. R. James, *LAOT*, 96–103 based on G. N. Bonwetsch, “Die apokryphe ‘Leiter Jakobs’,” *Nachrichten von der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen* (1900): 76–87. I am most grateful to Professor Lunt, my teacher in Slavonic, for having given me copies of the manuscripts used in the preparation of his translation. The work has been the subject of some recent articles; for bibliography see A. Orlov, “The Face as the Heavenly Counterpart of the Visionary in the Slavonic Ladder of Jacob,” in *Studies in Scripture in Early Judaism and Christianity* 9, ed. C. A. Evans (Sheffield, U. K. Sheffield Academic Press, forthcoming).

²⁰See R. Leicht, “*Qedushah* and Prayer to Helios,” *JSQ* 6(1999): 140–76.

²¹The connection between this text and rabbinic exegetical traditions are, in my opinion, striking. These do not preclude an original Greek composition for the *Ladder of Jacob* but make it somewhat less likely. Moreover, the Hebrew words that survive in transcription in the text, along with other elements to be discussed below, likewise point in the direction of a Hebrew or Aramaic original. See also my brief discussion of this text in *In Potiphar’s House*, 117–19.

²²*bezakonbnb* (= Greek *ἄνομος*). The Greek word was frequently used by Hellenistic Jewish and Christian writers to describe foreign nations or individuals.

In this respect, indeed, it was used in a way quite similar to “godless” (ἄθεος) in the same literature; see W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, translated and revised by W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 72. Hence, Lunt’s translation “ungodly” is the functional equivalent. In the Septuagint, ἄνομος often translates Hebrew רשע.

²³In place of the word “interrogated” used by Lunt, we should probably read “tested” (Pennington translates “tried”). The Slavonic *istęzati* carries both meanings, and in context “tested” seems to make better sense. Tests in Second Temple writings were ordeals, indeed, long-term tribulations to be endured. See J. Licht, *Testing in the Hebrew Scriptures and Post-Biblical Judaism* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1973), 71–76. Alternately, this root might mean something like “afflict” or “torture” here (representing Greek ταπεινῶω = Heb. ענה), as does its modern Russian cognate.

²⁴The word translated by Lunt as “against” here is indeed Slavonic *na* (meaning, if followed by the accusative, “onto” or “against”), but the sense cannot be that these kings will rise up *against* Israel’s iniquity but because of it. That is, God will allow these wicked kings to arise because of the sins of His people. (So similarly, two sentences later, the text explains that this site will become deserted “in the [divine] anger against your children”). Hebrew and Aramaic על can mean both “against” and “because of,” and this is probably the source of the error.

²⁵The manuscripts differ on whether these are four “ascents” or “descents” as well as on the “fourth ascent.” On both see Lunt’s translation and notes, (*OTP* 2:407, 409). My own readings are chosen for reasons that will be clear presently.

²⁶Reading *pbrvo* for *pbrvoe* (“the first”).

²⁷The manuscripts read “struck” (*priraždjuštase*), but this makes little sense; the verb here probably represents Hebrew פגע (“strike” but also “chance upon,” “arrive at” cf. Gen. 28:10).

²⁸A conjectural emendation; the MSS read *i*, “and.”

²⁹The verb used in the text is *priimati* (“receive,” “accept”) but the picture of the new ruler hosting a party for Israel’s former tormentors makes little

sense. More likely it said something like “succeed” (*prēimati*), or possibly, “surpass.”

³⁰The Slavonic *mysl̄b* here probably represents Hebrew, עצה which is both “thought” and “plan,” “decree.”

³¹The text reads, in various forms, *Falkonagargail*. Previous translators have sought here the name of a specific deity—without any notable success. The sense of the passage is clear enough, even if the word itself has proven elusive. On reflection, it seems to me more likely that the original text spoke of apostasy in general rather than a specific foreign god; that is, the original text referred to what is called in Aramaic *pulḥana nokhriyya* (the equivalent of Hebrew ‘*abodah zarah*, literally, “foreign worship,” i.e., the worship of other gods) or more specifically *pulḥan gillulaya*, “the worship of idols.” Such an expression would be a vivid way of referring to apostasy, turning away from the God of Israel to worship mere images, that is, foreign gods. The verb usually used with this noun phrase is “to serve, worship” (‘*abad* in Hebrew, *peḥaḥ* in Aramaic), which would accord with our text’s “worship.” Nor is it difficult to imagine a Greek translator leaving this expression in the original Aramaic (or, for that matter, a Hebrew author having used the Aramaic expression rather than the Hebrew) in order to, as it were, distance himself or the reader from this horrible prospect—much as Victorian translators of French or Italian novels sometimes left what appeared to them indelicate formulations in the original language. If left in the original Aramaic, *pulḥan gillulaya* might then be understood as a reference to a specific deity, that is, a proper noun; if so, its transformation into *Falkonagargail* can be easily accounted for. Incidentally, something similar happened with the biblical expression “a foreign god” (‘*el zar*), which was transmuted into “the god Zar” in the *Paraleipomena Ieremiou* 7:29.

³²In fact, the text goes on to evoke those ancient neighbors, Edom and Moab (6:15), but Edom here is simply the biblical Edom and not Edom-as-Rome, as it was in the insertion.

³³See my *Traditions of the Bible*, 300–01, 312–18.

³⁴Daniel speaks of 70 weeks of years, and this figure, 490 years, is the equivalent of 10 jubilees, as J. Milik has pointed out in *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic*

Fragments of Qumran Cave 4 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 254; see also M. Black, *The Book of Enoch or 1 Enoch* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 288. The *Sibylline Oracles* speaks of ten periods, as do *1 Enoch* 91:12–17; 11QMelch, and *Barnabas* 4:4. On these ten periods, see Flüßer, “Four Empires.” The *Targum šeni* of the book of Esther (beginning) and *Pirqei deR. Eli’ezer* 11 both speak of ten kings whose reigns span all of human history (for the latter see the standard Warsaw edition [1852, reprinted many times], 28a and b). A number of Second Temple texts likewise speak of twelve periods or units, but there is no indication that they are based on a common tradition; twelve, like ten, was a conventional number, perhaps connected with the twelve months of the year and/or twelve hours of the day (cf. the specific mention of “hours” in *1 Enoch* 89:72, *Apoc. Abr.* 30:2). The twelve periods of *1 Enoch* 89:72 seem to extend from the end of the Babylonian exile until Alexander the Great (cf. Black, *1 Enoch*, 79, 273); our text’s twelve periods in “this age” may have been fashioned in accordance with this. In *2 Baruch* 26:1–27:15 future time is likewise divided into twelve parts, but these are more precisely twelve stages of misfortune and not specific periods of time (contrast 28:1–2); nor are they connected with foreign rulers, as is made clear by 53:6 and chapters 56–70. Some versions of *4 Ezra* 14:11–12 speak of the “age” being divided into twelve “periods”; see Stone, *Fourth Ezra* (Hermeneia) (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 414, 420–21. The *Apocalypse of Abraham* also speaks of twelve “times” of this age (29:2); see R. Rubinkiewicz, *L’apocalypse d’Abraham en vieux slave* (Lublin: Société des Lettres et des Sciences de l’Université de Lublin, 1987), 191–93.

³⁵On this see J. L. Kugel and R. Greer, *Early Biblical Interpretation*, LEC (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 40–51.

³⁶The most common hypothesis is: Babylonians, Medes, Persians, and Greeks. See Dan. 2:39–41; also M. J. Gruenthaner, “The Four Empires of Daniel,” *CBQ* 8 (1996), no. 1, 72–82 and no. 2, 201–12; C. Caragounis, “History and Supra-History: Daniel and the Four Empires,” in A. S. van der Woude, ed., *The Book of Daniel in the Light of New Findings* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1993), 386f.; and J. J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 166–70. Cf the four kingdoms of the fourth Sibylline Oracle, which are apparently present as well in 4Q243, 244 *Pseudo-Daniel*.