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## ASCENT TO HEAVEN IN THE EARLY JEWISH APOCALYPSES

WSTĄPIENIE DO NIEBA WE WCZESNYCH APOKALIPSACH ŻYDOWSKICH

**STRESZCZENIE:** W artykule zostaje poddany analizie motyw wstępowania do nieba we wczesnych apokalipsach żydowskich. Autor analizuje powody niebiańskich podróży oraz wyodrębnia funkcje tekstów, które je opisują. Motyw wniebowstąpień zostaje ukazany w kontekście opowiadań pochodzących ze starożytnego Bliskiego Wschodu oraz starożytnego Izraela. Autor analizuje najstarsze żydowskie opowiadanie o podróży do zaświatów, które zawarte jest w *Księdze Czuwających* (1 Hen 1–36) oraz motywy wniebowstąpień zawarte we wczesnych tradycjach o Henochu, Mojżeszu i Lewim. W sposób szczególny zwraca on uwagę na istnienie trzech głównych tematów uzasadniających niebiańskie podróże, które były już obecne w przekazach mezopotamskich: uzyskanie autorytetu, osiągnięcie wiedzy niedostępnej zwykłemu śmiertelnikowi oraz uzyskanie nieśmiertelności. Wczesne apokalipsy żydowskie mocno podkreślają kontrast między nieśmiertelnym życiem aniołów i zniszczalną ziemską egzystencją człowieka. Szczególną ich nowością w stosunku do wcześniejszych przekazów jest ciekawość dotycząca losu dusz ludzkich po śmierci i szczegółów sądu ostatecznego. Autor konkluduje, że motyw nadziei na przyszłe życie najbardziej odróżnia bliskowschodnią literaturę apokaliptyczną od tekstów powstałych w okresie hellenistycznym i rzymskim. Teksty te głoszące, że śmiertelni mogą przechodzić ze sfery ziemskiej do sfery niebiańskiej, wpływały na przemianę tradycyjnej wizji świata starożytnego Bliskiego Wschodu i Izraela oraz miały ogromne konsekwencje dla rozwoju chrześcijaństwa.

**SŁOWA-KLUCZE:** Apokalipsy żydowskie, *Księga Czuwających*, tradycja Henochicka  
**KEYWORDS:** Jewish apocalypses, *the Book of the Watchers*, Enoch tradition

“Who has ascended to heaven and come down?” asks the weary sage Agur in Prov. 30:4. Much of the biblical tradition, as edited by priestly writers and Deuteronomists, would answer, “no one”. Nonetheless, the motif of ascent to heaven became relatively popular in post-biblical Judaism, and a sub-genre of apocalypses was devoted to describing such alleged experiences. In part, this development reflects a widespread interest in the world beyond in late antiquity, throughout the Hellenistic world. In part, it responded to con-

cerns and experiences that were specifically Jewish. I will focus here on the earliest Jewish ascent apocalypses<sup>1</sup>. I will examine the ostensible purposes of the heavenly travels, and reflect on the functions that may be attributed to the texts describing them.

## 1. ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN PRECEDENTS

The idea that a human being could journey to the world beyond and return was no innovation of ancient Judaism. The oldest near eastern stories of such journeys are found already in the Sumerian literature from the third millennium BCE, and they are developed in the Akkadian literature of the following millennia<sup>2</sup>. The best known and most influential of these is the epic journey of Gilgamesh to the land of the living, in search of an antidote to death<sup>3</sup>. Gilgamesh travels through the mountain where the sun sets in the west and comes eventually to the shore of the sea that encircles the earth. He is ferried by a boatman to the land of the living to meet with Utnapishtim, the flood hero, who had been taken away to live with the gods. Utnapishtim gives him a twig from the tree of life. Despite the apparent success of his mission, Gilgamesh ultimately fails when he loses the precious twig. Access to the land of the living may not be utterly impossible, but it is clearly beyond the reach of most mortals, and even Gilgamesh, who is two-thirds divine, cannot secure it in a lasting way.

Other Mesopotamian stories about journeys to the world beyond are also somewhat pessimistic. Etana, the first king after the Flood according to

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<sup>1</sup> For reviews of this material see I. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, Leiden 1980, pp. 29–72; A.F. Segal, *Heavenly Ascent in Hellenistic Judaism, Early Christianity and their Environment*, ANRW II.23.2 1980, pp. 1352–1368; M. Dean-Otting, *Heavenly Journeys: A Study of the Motif in Hellenistic Jewish Literature*, Frankfurt 1984; J.D. Tabor, *Things Unutterable. Paul's Ascent to Paradise in its Greco-Roman, Judaic, and Early Christian Contexts*, Lanham [MD] 1986; idem, *Heaven, Ascent to*, ABD 3, p. 91–94; M. Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses*, New York: Oxford, 1993; J.J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, Grand Rapids [MI] 1998<sup>2</sup>, pp. 43–84, 177–193, 241–255; J.E. Wright, *The Early History of Heaven*, New York 2000.

<sup>2</sup> G. Widengren, *The Ascension of the Apostle and the Heavenly Book*, Uppsala 1950; J.E. Wright, *The Early History*, pp. 26–51.

<sup>3</sup> S. Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, New York 1989, pp. 39–153; A.R. George, *Epic of Gilgamesh: the Babylonian epic poem and other texts in Akkadian and Sumerian, translated and with an introduction*, London 1999.

the Sumerian King List, is called “the shepherd who ascended to heaven”<sup>4</sup>. Etana’s quest is for “the plant of birth” so that he might have an heir. He is carried aloft by an eagle, which he had saved from certain death. After they have ascended three leagues, Etana apparently loses his nerve, and asks to be brought back to earth. One fragment of the myth, however, reports that they pass through the gate of the gods, and it is unclear whether the ascent ultimately succeeds<sup>5</sup>. In either case, access to the realm of the gods is deemed to be not entirely impossible, but virtually so for most humans.

The story of Adapa, who ascends to heaven and is offered the bread and water of life only to refuse them, on the advice of the god Ea, confirms this impression<sup>6</sup>. Descent to the Netherworld is even more hazardous, as can be seen from the story of the Sumerian goddess Inanna and her Akkadian counterpart Ishtar, who descend to the Netherworld and are trapped there, and only rescued with great difficulty by the gods<sup>7</sup>. Enkidu, the companion of Gilgamesh, is also trapped in the Netherworld in the fragmentary Sumerian myth, “Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Netherworld”<sup>8</sup>. Gilgamesh pleads for him, but all the gods can do is open a vent to allow Enkidu’s ghost to come up to speak to him.

Nonetheless we have some cases where people are said to negotiate the round-trip successfully. Enmeduranki, the ante-diluvian king of Sippar and ancestor of the baru guild of diviners, was taken up to the divine assembly and shown the arts of divination and the heavenly tablets<sup>9</sup>. Geo Widengren argued that “this divine wisdom, imparted to the ruler at the occasion of his enthronement, is not any exclusive right only belonging to mythical Enmeduranki. On the contrary! It is a distinctive trait of the Mesopotamian royal ideology that the ruler is endowed by the gods with surpassing knowledge and heavenly wisdom”<sup>10</sup>. Whether the endowment with wisdom always en-

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<sup>4</sup> J.V. Kinnier-Wilson, *The Legend of Etana*, Warminster [UK] 1985; S. Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, pp. 189–202; B.R. Foster, *From Distant Days. Myths, Tales and Poetry of Ancient Mesopotamia*, Bethesda–Maryland 1995, pp. 102–114.

<sup>5</sup> S. Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 200, concludes her translation with this passage. Foster, however, concludes with the descent to earth, without the plant (*From Distant Days*, p. 103).

<sup>6</sup> S. Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, p. 182–88; B.R. Foster, *From Distant Days*, pp. 97–101.

<sup>7</sup> S. Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, p. 154–62; B.R. Foster, *From Distant Days*, pp. 78–84.

<sup>8</sup> See T. Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness. A History of Mesopotamian Religion*, New Haven 1976, p. 212.

<sup>9</sup> W.G. Lambert, *Enmeduranki and Related Matters*, JCS 21 (1967), pp. 126–38. Another ante-diluvian sage, Utuabzu, was also believed to have ascended to heaven. See R. Borger, *Die Beschwörungsserie ‘bit meseri’ und die Himmelfahrt Henochs*, JNES 33 (1974), pp. 183–196.

<sup>10</sup> G. Widengren, *The Ascent of the Apostle*, p. 12.

tailed a heavenly ascent, however, is not so clear. We also find a case of a human being who descends to the Netherworld and returns, if only in a dream. An Assyrian prince, Kumma, is said, in a tablet from Asshur from the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE, to have had this experience at his own request. He awakes in terror, a chastened man<sup>11</sup>. There is also some evidence of Akkadian rituals for ascent to heaven and descent to the Netherworld<sup>12</sup>.

This rather scattered evidence from ancient Mesopotamia gives some impression of the reasons why some people in antiquity wanted to transcend the limitations of earthly existence. I would suggest that there are three fundamental themes in these stories. Ascent to heaven, or the claim to have ascended to heaven, is a way to establish authority of a revealer, or of a king, such as Enmeduranki. Related to this is the desire for knowledge and revelation, curiosity about things beyond the range of human knowledge. A distinct theme, no less fundamental is the desire for eternal life, which figures prominently in the stories of Gilgamesh and Adapa, and indirectly in that of Etana, who sought immortality in his progeny. In these stories, however, that desire is frustrated.

## 2. ANCIENT ISRAEL

The culture of ancient Israel was part of the wider culture of the Semitic world. Here too the basic understanding was that heaven was the Lord's while the earth was the proper domain of human beings. After death, people would descend to Sheol, where the dead could not even praise the Lord. Again, some exceptions were possible, but their exceptional nature was emphasized. In the cryptic phrase of Genesis, Enoch walked with the *elohim*, and was not, for the *elohim* took him<sup>13</sup>. Presumably he was taken to live with the *elohim* (angels or divine beings) either in heaven or at the ends of the earth, like Utnapishtim. Elijah, more spectacularly, was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind<sup>14</sup>. While Moses was explicitly said to have died, the fact that

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<sup>11</sup> E.A. Speiser, *A Vision of the Nether World*, ANET, pp. 109–110. See H.S. Kvanvig, *Roots of Apocalyptic. The Mesopotamian Background of the Enoch Figure and of the Son of Man* (WUNT 61), Neukirchen-Vluyn 1988, pp. 389–441.

<sup>12</sup> T. Abusch, *Ascent to the Stars in a Mesopotamian Ritual: Social Metaphor and Religious Experience*, in: J.J. Collins, M. Fishbane (ed.), *Death, Ecstasy and Otherworldly Journeys*, Albany 1995, pp. 15–39.

<sup>13</sup> Gen 5:21–24. See J.C. VanderKam, *Enoch and the Growth of an Apocalyptic Tradition* (CBQMS 16), Washington DC 1984, pp. 30–31.

<sup>14</sup> 2 Kgs 2:11.

no one knew his burial place allowed for later speculation about his “disappearance” and possible apotheosis<sup>15</sup>. While Enoch and Elijah had gone up to heaven, however, they were not said to have come down, even if Elijah was expected to make a cameo appearance before the eschaton.

The idea of a round-trip to heaven for purposes of revelation was probably implied in the claim of prophets to have stood in the council of the Lord. According to Jeremiah, the lack of such an experience disqualified a prophet as inauthentic: “For who has stood in the council of the Lord so as to see and to hear his word?” (Jer 23:18). We have several descriptions of such experiences, in the case of Micaiah ben Imlah in 1 Kgs 22, Isaiah and Ezekiel, although it is sometimes unclear whether the prophet is in heaven or in the temple on earth. What is remarkable about these scenes, however, is their focus on the divine audience. The description of the surroundings is minimal and there is no description at all of an ascent. Ezekiel’s great vision of the new Jerusalem is a journey in the spirit (as also his vision of the abominations of the old Jerusalem) but it is not a journey to heaven. Nonetheless, the prophets are given temporary admission to the divine council, and this would seem to imply that they have ascended to heaven. This alleged experience established their authority and reliability.

It is possible that similar access was granted to the king, in the pre-exilic period. In Psalm 110 he is invited to sit at the Lord’s right hand, although here again it is possible that the reference is to a temple ritual<sup>16</sup>. The line between temple and heaven is often blurred in any case. Similar access to the divine council is promised to the High Priest Joshua in Zechariah 3, after his trial, which also took place in heaven: “If you will walk in my ways and keep my requirements [...] I will give you the right of access among those standing here”<sup>17</sup>.

Ancient Israel, like ancient Mesopotamia, then, held a rather restrictive view of access to the world beyond. Ascent to heaven was not altogether impossible, but it was severely limited, and little curiosity is expressed about it. Of course this restraint may be due in part to the editors of the biblical corpus. Deuteronomy famously asserted that the word of the Lord was not in heaven that one should ask, who will ascend to heaven and bring it down

<sup>15</sup> Deut 34:5–6. On the later speculation see J.D. Tabor, *Returning to the Divinity: Josephus’s Portrayal of the Disappearances of Enoch, Elijah and Moses*, JBL 108 (1989), pp. 225–238; C. Begg, *Josephus’s Portrayal of the Disappearances of Enoch, Elijah and Moses: Some Observations*, JBL 109 (1990), pp. 691–693.

<sup>16</sup> H.J. Kraus, *Psalms 60–150*, Minneapolis [MN] 1989, p. 346–347. On the later interpretation of this passage see M. Hengel, *Setze dich zu meiner Rechten! Die Inthronisation Christi zur Rechten Gottes und Psalm 110,1*, in: M. Philonenko (ed.), *Le Trône de Dieu*, Tübingen 1993, pp. 108–194.

<sup>17</sup> Zech 3:7. See C.L. Meyers, E.M. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1–8* (AB 25B), New York 1987, p. 195.

(Deut 30:12). Even where ascent seems to be implied, as in the case of the prophets, it is not described. Moreover, ascent to heaven is invoked more than once in taunt songs, to deride the hybris of Gentile kings. So the king of Babylon is compared to Helal ben Shachar, Day Star son of Dawn: “You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God. I will sit on the mount of assembly on the heights of Zaphon; I will ascend to the tops of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High’”(Isa 14:12–14). Ezekiel taunts the king of Tyre: “Because your heart is proud and you have said, ‘I am a god’; ‘I sit in the seat of the gods in the heart of the seas’; yet you are but a mortal, and no god” (Ezek 28:2). A similar taunt is directed against Nabonidus by the clergy of Babylon: “(It was) he (who) stood up in the assembly to praise hi[m]self: ‘I am wise, I know, I have seen (what is) hid[den]. (Even) if I do not know how to write (with the stylus), yet I have seen se[cret things]’”<sup>18</sup>. These taunts lend some support to the view of Widengren that the claim of ascent to heaven was part of Near Eastern royal ideology, although they fall well short of establishing it as a constant element<sup>19</sup>. They also show that such claims sometimes met with considerable skepticism in the ancient world. Such skepticism was more prominent in the Greek world, where it found expression in the satires of Menippus of Gadara in the third century BCE and those of Lucian of Samosata, who wrote his *Nekyamanteia* and *Icaromenippus* in the second century CE. In the older biblical and Near Eastern sources, the skepticism was not philosophical but arose from political dissent.

### 3. THE BOOK OF THE WATCHERS

The earliest Jewish account of an otherworldly journey, in which the journey itself is a focus of interest, is found in the *Book of the Watchers* in 1 Enoch 1–36. While this book can be classified as an apocalypse in terms of its macro-genre<sup>20</sup>, it is clearly a composite work and experimental in its literary genre. George Nickelsburg distinguishes five main sections:

1. an introduction, in chapters 1–5;
2. the rebellion of the angels, in chapters 6–11;
3. Enoch’s vision of heaven, chapters 12–16;
4. Enoch’s journey to the West, chapters 17–19;

<sup>18</sup> The Verse Account of Nabonidus: A.L. Oppenheim, *Nabonidus and the Clergy of Babylon*, ANET, p. 314.

<sup>19</sup> G. Widengren, *The Ascension of the Apostle*, p. 7–21.

<sup>20</sup> J.J. Collins, *The Jewish Apocalypses* (Semeia 14), Missoula [MT] 1979, pp. 21–49.

5. Additional journey traditions. These include

- a list of accompanying angels, in chapter 20;
- journey back from the west in 21–27;
- journey to the east, in 28–33 and
- journeys to the four corners of the earth, in 34–36<sup>21</sup>.

It seems likely that this text grew incrementally, but the actual history of composition is obscure.

The ascent proper is found in the third of these sections, chapters 12–16. Since Enoch is not mentioned at all in chapters 1–11, it is reasonable to assume that this is an addition to the story of the Watchers, but that story provides the occasion for Enoch's ascent. He is given a message to deliver to the fallen Watchers, informing them that they will have neither mercy nor peace. But they then prevail on him "to write out for them the record of a petition that they might receive forgiveness, and to take the record of their petition up to the Lord in heaven" (1 Enoch 13:4)<sup>22</sup>. The purpose of his ascent, then, is intercession. This is usually taken to be a task of priests<sup>23</sup>. He takes the petition up to the heavenly temple. There are manifold connections between priests and angels, as can be seen explicitly in the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* from Qumran<sup>24</sup>. The depiction of the fallen Watchers, who are told that "you ought to intercede for men, not men for you", has been taken as a critique of the Jerusalem priesthood in the Hellenistic period<sup>25</sup>. Moreover, in the *Book of Jubilees* Enoch is said to have burned the incense of the sanctuary (Jub 4:25), certainly a priestly function. Yet he is not called a priest in the *Book of the Watchers*, but a scribe. No doubt, many priests were scribes, and scribes priests. The two roles are certainly not incompatible. But it is Enoch's scribal role that is emphasized here – specifically, his ability to write out a petition. Nickelsburg claims that "Enoch's call to preach to the rebel angels imitates the form of biblical prophetic commissioning" especially Ezekiel 1–2<sup>26</sup>. Again, there are clear analogies in the message of

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<sup>21</sup> G.W.E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature Between the Bible and the Mishnah*, Minneapolis 2005<sup>2</sup>, p. 46. See also G.W.E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1. A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch, Chapters 1–36; 81–108* (Hermeneia), Minneapolis 2001, pp. 129–332.

<sup>22</sup> Translations of 1 Enoch are taken from that of M.A. Knibb, *1 Enoch*, in: H.F.D. Sparks (ed.), *The Apocryphal Old Testament*, Oxford 1984, pp. 169–319.

<sup>23</sup> So, e.g. M. Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses*, New York 1993, p. 20.

<sup>24</sup> C.A. Newsom, 'He has Established for Himself Priests': Human and Angelic Priesthood in the Qumran Sabbath Shirot, in: L.H. Schiffman (ed.), *Archaeology and History in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha 8), Sheffield, 1990, pp. 101–120.

<sup>25</sup> D.W. Suter, *Fallen Angel, Fallen Priest: The Problem of Family Purity in 1 Enoch 6–16*, HUCA 50 (1979), pp. 115–135.

<sup>26</sup> G.W.E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, p. 50.

judgment that he is told to convey. But no prophet was asked to write out a petition for the accused. The role of the intercessor here has been modified in light of the legal practice of the literate Hellenistic age. In view of the implicit critique of the priesthood that many scholars have detected in the story of the fallen angels, we may wonder whether there is not a contrast here between the angel-priests, who have failed in their role of intercession, and the human scribe who assumes that role in their place; in short, whether Enoch is not substituting a new kind of intercession for that of the priesthood. The efficacy of this kind of intercession requires ecstatic experience on the part of the visionary scribe. In this respect there is indeed an analogy with the commissioning of a prophet.

Enoch's experience, however, is more complicated than that of the typical prophet. The late Ioan Culianu distinguished three main types of apocalypses according to the manner of the revelation: those whose hero is called from above, those whose hero is a victim of accident or illness (such as Er, in the myth of Er), and those whose hero strives to obtain a revelation. The last category he dubbed "Quest Apocalypses"<sup>27</sup>. Enoch combines the Call and the Quest. The Quest aspect appears in his incubation by the waters of Dan, where he reads out the petition until he falls asleep. Dan, of course, was an old sacred site in Israelite tradition, and was also close to the Hellenistic shrine of Pan<sup>28</sup>. It is possible that some form of incubation ritual was associated with the site. Other apocalyptic visionaries of the Hellenistic and Roman periods also take measures to initiate their experiences. (Daniel fasts in Daniel 10, and Ezra eats the flower that is in the field, in 2 Esdras 9:26). These measures distinguish the apocalyptic visionaries from the classical biblical prophets. Unlike some other visionaries (such as Isaiah), Enoch is not formally invested or commissioned in heaven, but the authorization of his message and role must be reckoned nonetheless among the functions of his ascent.

The actual account of the ascent describes in some detail the progression of Enoch through the heavenly temple until he comes to the throne of God. The description of the throne, again, is indebted to Ezekiel, and is rightly recognized as an important document in the development of Jewish mysticism<sup>29</sup>. Herewith we come to another function of the ascent texts which would come to the fore in later Jewish mysticism: the contemplation of the divine throne. The experience here is not one of union, but of height-

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<sup>27</sup> I.P. Culianu, *Psychanodia I*, Leiden 1983, p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> G.W. Nickelsburg, *Enoch, Levi, and Peter. Recipients of Revelation in Upper Galilee*, JBL 100 (1981), pp. 575-600.

<sup>29</sup> I. Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, pp. 32-37.



ened presence, as is often the case in Jewish and Christian mysticism<sup>30</sup>. The written account of Enoch's experience enables the reader to share in it. This contemplation of the heavenly world also seems to be a major function of the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* from Qumran<sup>31</sup>.

Like the visions of Isaiah or Ezekiel, that of Enoch does not dwell on the throne vision as its final purpose. Enoch is again given a message of judgment to convey to the Watchers. Central to this message is the diagnosis of their error: "Why have you left the high, holy, and eternal heaven, and lain with the women and become unclean with the daughters of men, and taken wives for yourselves? [...] And you were spiritual, holy, living an eternal life, but you became unclean upon the women" (15:3). More is at issue in the ascent of Enoch than the reporting of judgment. There is also a contrast between two levels of existence, the immortal life of the angels and the corruptible life of human beings on earth. The *Book of the Watchers* claims that one can pass from one kind of existence to the other: the fallen angels presumably lose their immortality while the human Enoch ascends to the level of the immortal, although he does not immediately remain there. This issue of access to eternal life will figure more directly in several other Jewish ascent apocalypses.

The ascent of Enoch in 1 Enoch 12–16, then, touches on all three of our fundamental themes: it establishes the authority of Enoch, provides information about the heavenly temple and divine throne, and touches on the question of eternal life. The remainder of the *Book of the Watchers* expands the revelation, and provides more specific information about life after death. After Enoch has received his message for the Watchers, he is taken on a tour to the ends of the earth, which is extended in several units through chapters 17–36. This material is different in kind and in interest from the ascent to the divine throne for the purpose of intercession. It is not an ascent to heaven, but a tour of places that are not normally accessible. Much of what Enoch sees can only be attributed to cosmological curiosity – the storehouses of the wind, the foundations of the earth, and so forth<sup>32</sup>. It has been noted that the model of the earth implied in these journeys was already antiquated in the Hellenistic age: it is "conceived as a flat surface upon which one can travel to a certain point where it ends and drops off into a vast chasm – the classic

<sup>30</sup> B. McGinn, *Love, Knowledge, and Mystical Union in Western Christianity: Twelfth to Sixteenth Centuries*, "Church History" 56 (1987) 7; *The Foundations of Mysticism*, New York 1991, p. xvii.

<sup>31</sup> C.A. Newsom, *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*. A Critical Edition, Atlanta 1985, p. 59, describes the Songs as "a quasi-mystical liturgy designed to evoke a sense of being present in the heavenly temple".

<sup>32</sup> See M.E. Stone, *Lists of Revealed Things in Apocalyptic Literature*, in: F.M. Cross et al. (ed.), *Magnalia Dei. The Mighty Acts of God*, Garden City [NY] 1976, pp. 414–452.

ancient Near Eastern model of the earth”<sup>33</sup>. At the end of heaven and earth is the fiery prison for the stars of heaven and the host of heaven (18:14–15). This provides a link with the story of the Watchers, who are said in 10:13 to be shut up in a prison of fire for all eternity, after they have been confined for seventy generations under the hills of the earth. The theme of judgment runs through much of Enoch’s travel, and a major purpose of the account is to lend an aura of realism to the judgment by associating it with specific places, even if these are places that no one but Enoch has seen.

The eschatological focus of Enoch’s tour can be seen most clearly in chap. 22 and chapters 24–27. In chapter 22, Enoch sees “in the west a large and high mountain, and a hard rock and four beautiful places, and inside it was deep and wide and very smooth” (22:1–2). He is told that these places are intended for “the spirits of the souls of the dead”, until the day of judgment. The spirits are divided into various categories: righteous, sinners, victims of murder and a second category of sinners<sup>34</sup>. The location, inside a mountain in the west, recalls the journey of Gilgamesh through the mountain where the sun sets, but there is no Mesopotamian precedent for the separation of souls on the basis of their conduct in life<sup>35</sup>. Orphic influence has been detected in the chamber of the righteous, which has a spring of water and light<sup>36</sup>. This passage is unique among the Jewish apocalypses in failing to locate the abode of the righteous in heaven, and it probably reflects an early tradition. What is typical of the apocalypses, however, is the curiosity about the fate of the souls or spirits of people after death.

Equally typical is the interest in the final judgment. Enoch sees “a high mountain, whose summit is like the throne of the Lord”, where God will sit “when he comes down to visit the earth for good” (25:3). Near it is a beautiful fragrant tree, the tree of life, from whose fruit life will be given to the righteous. It is planted “in a holy place, by the house of the Lord” (25:5). Later (chap. 32) he encounters another tree, over the mountains to the east, which is identified as the tree of wisdom from which Adam and Eve ate. Two distinct trees are implied in Genesis, but the way they are separated here

<sup>33</sup> J.E. Wright, *The Early History*, p. 121.

<sup>34</sup> The text is corrupt. In 22:9 we are told that there are three divisions rather than four. See G.W.E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch 1*, pp. 302–303, on the literary history of this chapter.

<sup>35</sup> See M.T. Wacker, *Weltordnung und Gericht. Studien zu 1 Henoch 22*, Würzburg: Echter, 1982, pp. 173–177; G.W.E. Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism*, Cambridge [MA] 2006<sup>2</sup>, pp. 168–171.

<sup>36</sup> T.F. Glasson, *Greek Influence on Jewish Eschatology*, London: SPCK 1961, p. 19. On Orphic eschatology see M. Herrero de Jáuregui, *Orphic Ideas of Immortality: Traditional Greek Images and a New Eschatological Thought*, in: M. Labahn, M. Lang (ed.), *Lebendige Hoffnung – Ewiger Tod?! Jenseitsvorstellungen im Hellenismus, Judentum und Christentum*, Leipzig 2007, pp. 289–313; F. Graf, S. Iles Johnston, *Ritual Texts for the Afterlife. Orpheus and the Bacchic Gold Tablets*, London 2007.

probably reflects different stages of composition. Adam and Eve only appear in chapter 32. The earlier story of the fall of the Watchers ignores the myth of Adam and seems to imply a quite different explanation of the origin of sin. The tree of life here is not found in the Garden of Righteousness, but near the mountain of the Lord. This recalls Ezekiel 28, where the king of Tyre is taunted that he was “in Eden, the garden of God” (vs. 13) and on “the holy mountain of God” (vs. 14), with the implication that the two locations are one. Both Ezekiel and Enoch are probably reflecting a different tradition from what we find in Genesis 2–3. The judgment of the damned is located in an “accursed valley”, presumably Gehenna. Some of Enoch’s vision, then, concerns not the ends of the earth but the center of it, in the environs of Jerusalem. Nonetheless, as J.E. Wright has observed, they concern the mythical places of the earth<sup>37</sup>. The places of punishment are located at the ends of the earth, on the edge of the abyss. The waiting places of the dead are inside the mountain in the west, but the place of reward of the righteous is in the center of the earth, around the throne of God. The *Book of the Watchers*, then, provides an exceptional and rather archaic view of the mythical world where the afterlife of humanity is located. One function of the narrative is surely to affirm that view of the world, which must have been put in question by the spread of Hellenistic cosmology. The narrative, however, is not a disinterested account of cosmology. Much of it has to do with the theme of judgment, of the stars as well as of humanity. This interest is by no means exceptional in the Hellenistic era. All the Jewish apocalypses have a major interest in the fate of the dead<sup>38</sup>.

#### 4. OTHER EARLY ENOCH TRADITIONS

The validation of Enoch’s authority is only implicit in the *Book of the Watchers*. Elsewhere in the corpus it is addressed explicitly: Enoch imparts instruction to his children “according to that which appeared to me in the heavenly vision, and which I know from the words of the holy angels and understand from the tablets of heaven” (93:2). None of the narratives of Enoch’s ascent describe his consultation of the tablets. It has been suggested plausibly that he is given this privilege by analogy with the ancient Sumer-

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<sup>37</sup> J.E. Wright, *The Early History*, p. 123

<sup>38</sup> See J.J. Collins, *Apocalyptic Eschatology as the Transcendence of Death*, CBQ 36 (1974), 21–43 (= idem, *Seers, Sibyls and Sages in Hellenistic-Roman Judaism*, Leiden 1997, pp. 75–98).

ian king, Enmeduranki<sup>39</sup>. In accordance with the associations of the tablets of destiny, the range of Enoch's revelation is extended to include history as well as cosmology. The cosmology undergoes gradual development. We hear no more of chambers for the souls of the dead, or of a cosmic mountain in the middle of the earth. Rather, the abode of the righteous is transferred to heaven. We find this already in the Epistle of Enoch which may be older than the Book of Daniel<sup>40</sup>. There the righteous are promised that the gate of heaven will be opened to them and that they will be companions to the stars of heaven (1 Enoch 104:2–6). The wicked, in contrast, will be wretched in Sheol.

This is also the case in the latest component of 1 Enoch, the *Similitudes*, which were probably written around the time of Christ<sup>41</sup>. There, as in the *Book of the Watchers*, Enoch ascends to heaven on a storm-cloud (39:3). In this case, however, he has no mission of intercession for the Watchers. He is there simply to discover the mysteries of heaven. Immediately, we are told, "I saw another vision, the dwelling of the righteous and the resting-places of the holy. There my eyes saw their dwelling with the angels and their resting-places with the holy ones, and they were petitioning and supplicating and praying on behalf of the sons of men" (39:4–5). Later we are told that the wicked go down "into the flames of torment of Sheol" (63:10). Enoch is given no tour in the *Similitudes*, but he does learn various astronomical and cosmological secrets. The primary emphasis of the book, however, is on the judgment, and the role therein of the figure called "that Son of Man" who is subject to God but nonetheless sits on a throne of glory<sup>42</sup>.

The most controversial part of the *Similitudes* is undoubtedly the epilogue to the visions found in 1 Enoch 70–71. There are really two epilogues here, and it is unlikely that they come from the same author<sup>43</sup>. First, we are told that "it came to pass after this that, while he was living, his name was lifted from those who dwell upon the dry ground to the presence of that Son of Man and to the presence of the Lord of Spirits. And he was lifted on the chariots of the spirit and his name vanished among them. And from that

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<sup>39</sup> J.C. VanderKam, *Enoch and the Growth of an Apocalyptic Tradition*, pp. 43–45; idem, *Enoch. A Man for all Generations*, Columbia [SC] 1995, pp. 6–8.

<sup>40</sup> J.C. VanderKam, *Enoch. A Man for all Generations*, pp. 89–101.

<sup>41</sup> See J.J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, p. 177–178. See the discussion in G. Boccaccini (ed.), *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man. Revisiting the Book of Parables*, Grand Rapids 2007, pp. 415–496.

<sup>42</sup> J.J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, New York 1995, pp. 177–182.

<sup>43</sup> See the discussion of the structure by G.W.E. Nickelsburg, *Discerning the Structure(s) of the Enochic Book of Parables*, in: G. Boccaccini (ed.), *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man*, 23–47, and M.A. Knibb, *The Structure and Composition of the Parables of Enoch*, *ibid.*, pp. 48–64.

day I was not counted among them, [i.e. human beings] and he placed me between two winds between the north and the west, where the angels took the cords to measure for me the place for the chosen and the righteous. And there I saw the first fathers and the righteous who from the beginning of the world dwelt in that place" (70:1–4).

This passage provides a fitting conclusion to the *Similitudes*. The ascent on the chariots of the spirit recalls that of Elijah, and parallels Enoch's ascent at the beginning of the *Similitudes* in chapter 39. There is a clear homology between his ascent as a visionary and his final ascent to the abode of the righteous. This passage also makes a clear distinction between Enoch and "that Son of Man", a distinction that seemed to be presumed throughout his visions<sup>44</sup>.

This epilogue, however, is complemented by another one in chapter 71. In this case we are told that "my spirit was carried off, and it went up into the heavens" (1 Enoch 71:1). There he is met by the archangel Michael, who shows him all the secrets of the end of heaven and all the storehouses of the stars and the lights. Then he is again transported "to the highest heaven" (71:5). From this it appears that there are at least two heavens, more probably three<sup>45</sup>. This detail is significant, as the rest of 1 Enoch only envisions one heaven. The multiple heavens in chapter 71 are a strong indication that this chapter is a secondary addition. In the highest heaven, Enoch sees the heavenly temple. Most remarkably, Enoch is greeted, "You are the Son of Man who was born to righteousness" (71:14). I am not sure that Enoch is necessarily identified with "that Son of Man" whom he had seen in his visions. Throughout the *Similitudes*, there is a close parallelism between the righteous on earth and their counterparts in heaven. The heavenly Son of Man is the Righteous One *par excellence*. It may be that Enoch is being greeted in language that emphasizes his similarity to the heavenly figure<sup>46</sup>. Other righteous people will likewise be assimilated to Enoch and will walk in his way. It is true, however, that the later Enoch tradition emphasizes

<sup>44</sup> J.J. Collins, *The Son of Man in First Century Judaism*, NTS 38 (1992), pp. 448–466 (see pp. 453–454), contra M. Casey, *The Use of the Term 'Son of Man' in the Similitudes of Enoch*, JSJ 7 (1976), 25–26; idem, *Son of Man. The Interpretation and Influence of Daniel 7*, London: SPCK 1979, p. 105. Casey's argument was based on one manuscript, Abbadianus 55, which has a different reading in 70:1, but the difference is due to the omission of one word and is most probably accidental. Four or five other manuscripts have now come to light that support the minority reading, but the text-critical judgment stands. See my comments in: A.Y. Collins, J.J. Collins, *King and Messiah as Son of God*, Grand Rapids 1008, pp. 91–92.

<sup>45</sup> H. Bietenhard, *Die himmlische Welt im Urchristentum und Spätjudentum* (WUNT 2), Tübingen 1951, p. 11; J.E. Wright, *The Early History*, p. 141.

<sup>46</sup> J.J. Collins, *The Son of Man in First Century Judaism*, pp. 456–457.

his heavenly transformation<sup>47</sup>. In 2 Enoch he is stripped of his earthly garments, anointed with oil and clothed in glorious garments (2 Enoch 9:17–18) so that he becomes “like one of the glorious ones, and there was no apparent difference”<sup>48</sup>. In the much later 3 Enoch, or *Sepher Hekhalot*, he becomes Metatron, enlarged to the size of the world and enthroned on a throne of glory<sup>49</sup>. His assimilation to the Son of Man in 1 Enoch 71 is certainly a step in this development. It may well have been intended to counter the Christian identification of Jesus as the Danielic Son of Man, although there is no explicit polemic in this regard. Enoch too becomes a paradigm of divinization, or angelification. He is presented as a man taken up and transformed in heaven, with a clear implication that those who walk in his ways may hope for a similar fate.

## 5. MOSES AND LEVI

Thus far we have focused on the Enoch tradition, which is the main locus of heavenly ascent in pre-Christian Judaism. Leaving aside a problematic text in the Dead Sea Scrolls<sup>50</sup>, we have only two non-Enochic Jewish stories of ascent that can be dated to the pre-Christian period. One is the dream of Moses in Ezekiel the Tragedian, and the other is the dream of Levi in the *Aramaic Apocryphon of Levi*.

In Moses dream, he sees a man enthroned on the summit of Mt. Sinai<sup>51</sup>. This “man”, presumably God, vacates the throne and bids Moses sit

<sup>47</sup> This point is made by J.R. Davila, *Of Methodology, Monotheism and Metatron*, in: C.C. Newman, J.R. Davila, G.S. Lewis, *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism*, Leiden 1999, pp. 11–12.

<sup>48</sup> See Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, 40, who argues for the priestly character of Enoch’s investiture.

<sup>49</sup> 3 Enoch 4:1. P. Alexander, 3 (*Hebrew Apocalypse of Enoch*), OTP 1, p. 258. See further A.A. Orlov, *The Enoch-Metatron Tradition* (TSAJ 107), Tübingen 2005.

<sup>50</sup> See M. Smith, *Ascent to the Heavens and Deification in 4QM<sup>a</sup>*, in: L.H. Schiffman (ed.), *Archaeology and History in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, pp. 181–188; J.J. Collins, *A Throne in the Heavens: Apotheosis in Pre-Christian Judaism*, in: J.J. Collins, M. Fishbane (ed.), *Death, Ecstasy, and Otherworldly Journeys*, 43–58; idem, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, London 1997, pp. 143–147; P. Alexander, *The Mystical Texts. Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice and Related Manuscripts*, London–New York 2006, pp. 85–92. A new, controversial, interpretation of this text proposed by I. Knohl, *The Messiah Before Jesus*, Berkeley [CA] 2000.

<sup>51</sup> For the text, see Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.29.4–5; C.R. Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors II: Poets*, Atlanta 1989, 363–365. See also P.W. van der Horst, *Moses’ Throne Vision in Ezekiel the Dramatist*, JJS 34 (1983), pp. 21–29.

on it, wearing a crown and holding a scepter. The dream is interpreted as a symbolic expression of Moses' leadership and knowledge, but it surely implies a tradition of the apotheosis of Moses. The ultimate inspiration of this tradition is found in Exod 7:1: "I have made you a god to Pharaoh". The divinity of Moses was linked with the ascent of Mt. Sinai by Philo, who was probably drawing on older tradition<sup>52</sup>. The enthronement of Moses clearly establishes his authority. It is not clear whether his exaltation was assumed to be permanent.

The other pre-Christian Jewish ascent is that of Levi in the *Levi Apocryphon* from Qumran, which is later adapted in the Greek *Testament of Levi*. The Apocryphon is very fragmentary. The relevant passage is found in 4Q213a:

Then I was shown a vision [  
in the vision of visions and I saw the heaven[s  
beneath me, high until it reached to the heaven[s  
to me the gates of heaven, and an angel]<sup>53</sup>

Henryk Drawnel argues that "the author of the Document was wittingly building on the Enochic visionary tradition in order to adapt it to his own purposes: creation of priest and visionary in one person"<sup>54</sup>. The most interesting variation over against the Enoch tradition is that Levi ascends through more than one heaven, although the text does not yet attest the numbered series that we find in later apocalypses. The corresponding passage in the Greek *Testament of Levi* is preserved in two recensions<sup>55</sup>. In one of these, Levi ascends through three heavens. In the third, "you will stand near the Lord, and you will be a minister to him, and you will announce his mysteries to men" (T. Levi 2:6–10). In the other recension, there are seven heavens, but Levi is only said to ascend through the first three. Then he is told: "Do not marvel at these; for you will see four other heavens more brilliant and incomparable"<sup>56</sup>. The description of the seven heavens in the following chapter proceeds at first from the bottom, through the first three, and then changes direction and proceeds downward from the highest heaven. There can be lit-

<sup>52</sup> Philo, *De Vita Mosis* 1.155–158. See W. Meeks, *Moses as God and King*, in: J. Neusner (ed.), *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough*, Leiden 1968, pp. 354–371.

<sup>53</sup> H. Drawnel, *The Aramaic Levi Document from Qumran* (JSJSup 86), Leiden 2004, pp. 224–228, 356–357; M.E. Stone, J.C. Greenfield, *Aramaic Levi Document*, in: G. Brooke et al., *Qumran Cave 4. XVII. Parabiblical Texts, Part 3* (DJD XXII), Oxford 1996, p. 31.

<sup>54</sup> H. Drawnel, *An Aramaic Wisdom*, p. 227.

<sup>55</sup> See R.H. Charles, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, APOT 2, pp. 304–306.

<sup>56</sup> T. Levi 2:9. Trans. M. de Jonge, H. Hollander, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. A Commentary*, Leiden 1985, p. 132.

tle doubt then that the vision of three heavens is original, and is expanded secondarily<sup>57</sup>.

Levi's vision in the *Testament* reaches its climax in T. Levi 5:

And the angel opened to me the gates of heaven, and I saw the holy temple and the Most High upon a throne of glory. And he said to me: Levi, I have given to you the blessings of the priesthood until I come and sojourn in the midst of Israel. Then the angel brought me down to the earth and he gave me a shield and a sword and said: execute vengeance on Shechem because of Dinah.

The goal of the ascent, then, is the authorization of Levi's priesthood, and the legitimation of his violent action against Shechem. The vision is unusual among the apocalyptic ascent narratives insofar as it is not at all concerned with the theme of eternal life. It is closer to the older ascents of the prophets or to a figure like Enmeduranki than to the later apocalypses.

## 6. THE PLURALITY OF HEAVENS

The idea of three heavens had old precedents in Mesopotamia, as indeed did the seven heavens<sup>58</sup>. It may have been implied in the biblical phrase שְׁמַי שְׁמַיָּים that phrase has also been taken as a hyperbolic reference to the height and expanse of heaven<sup>59</sup>. The three heavens had some currency in Judaism around the turn of the era, as we can see from the Levi Apocryphon, 1 Enoch 71 and St. Paul's famous reference to a man who was caught up to the third heaven, whether in the body or out of the body, in 2 Corinthians 12:2<sup>60</sup>. It is unlikely that all references to three heavens can be attributed to Christian scribes taking the ascent of Paul as normative<sup>61</sup>.

<sup>57</sup> Contra J.E. Wright, *The Early History*, pp. 147–148, who relies on the text-critical judgment of H.J. de Jonge, *Die Textüberlieferung der Testamente der zwölf Patriarchen*, in: M. de Jonge (ed.), *Studies on the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: Text and Interpretation*, Leiden 1975, pp. 45–62.

<sup>58</sup> See A. Yarbro Collins, *The Seven Heavens in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses*, in: J.J. Collins, M. Fishbane (ed.), *Death, Ecstasy, and Otherworldly Journeys*, pp. 64–65 (= eadem, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism*, Leiden 1996, pp. 27–28), following F. Rochberg-Halton, *Mesopotamian Cosmology*, in: N.S. Hetherington (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Cosmology: Historical, Philosophical, and Scientific Foundations of Modern Cosmology*, New York 1993, pp. 398–407, especially 401.

<sup>59</sup> J.E. Wright, *The Early History*, p. 55.

<sup>60</sup> On 2 Corinthians 12, see J.D. Tabor, *Things Unutterable*.

<sup>61</sup> J.E. Wright, *The Early History*, p. 148.



In the late first and early second century CE, however, we see the emergence of a new form of heavenly journey, where the visionary ascends through a numbered sequence of heavens, usually seven – the number found in the second recension of the *Testament of Levi*, the Greek *Apocalypse of Moses*, *2 Enoch*, the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and the (Christian) *Ascension of Isaiah*<sup>62</sup>. The long recension of *2 Enoch* has ten heavens, but in the shorter one, Enoch comes into the presence of the Lord in the seventh heaven (*2 Enoch* 20–21). The *Apocalypse of Abraham* does not describe an ascent through numbered heavens, but in chapter 19 Abraham is said to stand on the seventh firmament. Both *2 Enoch* and the *Apocalypse of Abraham* are indebted to the Enochic tradition. *2 Enoch* is obviously a re-telling of Enoch's ascent and commission<sup>63</sup>. The *Apocalypse of Abraham* derives the figure of Azazel, chief of the fallen angels, from the *Book of the Watchers*, as Rubinkiewicz has noted<sup>64</sup>. *3 Baruch* deviates from the usual number, and only describes 5 heavens. Some scholars have argued that the climactic chapters of the book have been lost, but this does not appear to be the case. It may well be, however, that *3 Baruch* presupposes a schema of seven heavens and changes it for its purpose, to make the point that the visionary does not ascend all the way to the presence of God<sup>65</sup>. The seven heavens are associated with the seven planets in Hermetic texts, Mithraic monuments and Celsus' discussion of the Mithraic mysteries, but not in Jewish or early Christian texts<sup>66</sup>. Nonetheless, it is difficult to avoid the impression that the late emergence of the seven-heaven cosmology in Jewish and Christian texts was prompted by the Hellenistic cosmology of seven spheres and planets surrounding the earth<sup>67</sup>. Admittedly, the apocalypses do not reproduce this cosmology accurately. They typically put the planets, sun, moon and stars in one or two heavens<sup>68</sup>. But the rather sudden popularity of the seven story heavens may nonetheless reflect the influence of Hellenistic cosmology, however garbled. The triumph of the seven-heaven cosmology, however, was by no means complete. Other, simpler, cosmologies persist into the Christian period, as can be seen from such works as the Latin *Life of Adam and Eve* and the *Testament of Abra-*

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<sup>62</sup> A. Yarbro Collins, *The Seven Heavens*.

<sup>63</sup> G.W.E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, p. 221.

<sup>64</sup> R. Rubinkiewicz, *Apocalypse of Abraham*, OTP 1, p. 685.

<sup>65</sup> D.C. Harlow, *The Greek Apocalypse of Baruch (3 Baruch) in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity*, Leiden 1996, pp. 34–76.

<sup>66</sup> A. Yarbro Collins, *The Seven Heavens*, p. 86.

<sup>67</sup> On Hellenistic cosmology see M.R. Wright, *Cosmology in Antiquity*, London 1995.

<sup>68</sup> J.E. Wright, *The Early History*, p. 183.

ham. Conversely, some apocalypses count a larger number of heavens. The J recension of 2 Enoch has ten<sup>69</sup>.

The apocalypses, of course, are mythological rather than scientific documents. They typically include a variety of cosmological mysteries, but all pay considerable attention to the punishment of the damned, which is located in a heaven rather than in Sheol in the later apocalypses<sup>70</sup>, and to the abode of the blessed. This attention is related to their predominant interest in moral formation, by impressing on their readers the ultimate consequences of righteous or impious actions.

## CONCLUSION

In his classic study of the ascent of the soul, Wilhelm Bousset, argued that the ecstatic ascent of the visionary was nothing other than an anticipation of the heavenly journey of the soul after death<sup>71</sup>. From the texts we have reviewed, it is clear that this is an over-generalization. There were old, if limited, traditions of ascent to heaven in the ancient Near East, which had as their focus the authority of the visionary rather than immortality, and some of the early Jewish ascents, such as those of Levi and Moses, are still of this type. In the *Books of Enoch*, however, and in the ascent apocalypses of the first century CE and later, there is a pervasive interest in life after death. The increased availability of this hope marks the main difference between the ascent literature of the Hellenistic and Roman periods and the older traditions of the ancient Near East.

Various factors contributed to the hope for a heavenly afterlife in Hellenistic Judaism, including questions of theodicy and the desire for retribution in times of persecution. But this hope was too widespread in the Hellenistic world to be explained by inner-Jewish factors alone<sup>72</sup>. All the major cultures

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>70</sup> In 3 Baruch, there are punishments in the first three heavens. In 2 Enoch there are places of punishment in the second and third heavens. The idea that spirits are tortured in a place above the earth but close to it is found already in Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* (Republic 6.29). Cf. Plutarch, *De facie in orbe lunae* 27–29; *De genio Socratis* 590B.

<sup>71</sup> W. Bousset, *Die Himmelsreise der Seele*, "Archiv für Religionswissenschaft" 4 (1901), p. 136.

<sup>72</sup> A.F. Segal, *Life after Death. A History of the 'Afterlife in Western Religion'*, New York 2004 is one of the few volumes that attempts to put the Jewish belief in the afterlife in its international context. See also M. Labahn, M. Lang (ed.), *Lebendige Hoffnung – Ewiger Tod?! Jenseitsvorstellungen im Hellenismus, Judentum und Christentum*, Leipzig 2007, especially pp. 289–412.

with which the Jews came in contact in the Second Temple period, Persian, Greek, and Roman, had stories of ascending visionaries and of heavenly immortality. Scholars like Bousset and Richard Reitzenstein looked to Persia as the source of the phenomenon. More recent scholarship has been skeptical of this theory because of the difficulty of dating Persian traditions that are preserved in sources from the Byzantine period or the Middle Ages<sup>73</sup>. The relevance of the Greek and Roman material cannot be denied. From the sixth century on, the belief in the immortality of the soul was spread by Pythagoreans and Orphics, and it was given great prominence in the philosophy of Plato. Increasingly the abode of the blessed was transferred to the heavens. A memorial commemorating the Athenians who died in the battle of Potidaea in 432 BCE states “the ether has received their souls, the earth their bodies”<sup>74</sup>. Around the same time, Aristophanes joked about “what people say, that when we die we straightaway turn to stars”<sup>75</sup>. The popularity of astral immortality in the Hellenistic period is attested in epitaphs<sup>76</sup>. It can be no coincidence that the first clear reference to individual resurrection in the Hebrew Bible, in Daniel 12, says that the wise will shine like the splendor of the firmament, and those who lead the common people to righteousness like the stars forever and ever<sup>77</sup>. This hope is essentially similar to the belief of Cicero in the *Somnium Scipionis* that “all those who have preserved, aided, or enlarged their fatherland have a special place prepared for them in the heavens, where they may enjoy an eternal life of happiness”<sup>78</sup>.

This is not to suggest that belief in immortality can be viewed as a cultural borrowing. In fact, Hellenistic influence is more pronounced in the later apocalypses; the cosmology of the *Book of the Watchers* is largely informed by older Near Eastern traditions.

The accounts of ascents in such authors as Cicero (primarily in the *Somnium Scipionis*) and Plutarch<sup>79</sup> are colored by Platonic philosophy, which regarded the spirit or soul as the true seat of the personality and the upper

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<sup>73</sup> See especially I.P. Culianu, *Psychnodia*. Also A.F. Segal, *Heavenly Ascent*, pp. 1342–1343. For a recent discussion of Persian apocalypticism and the problems of dating see A. Hultgård, *Persian Apocalypticism*, in: J.J. Collins (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*. 1. *The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Christianity*, New York 1998, pp. 39–83. The main Persian account of an otherworldly journey is the late Pahlavi Book of Arda Viraf, but there are indications that the motif is much older in Iranian tradition.

<sup>74</sup> G. Kaibel (ed.), *Epigrammata graeca ex lapidibus conlecta*, Berlin: Reimer, 1978, 2 (cited by J.E. Wright, *The Early History*, p. 115).

<sup>75</sup> *Peace* 832–834.

<sup>76</sup> F. Cumont, *Lux Perpetua*, Paris 1949, pp. 142–288.

<sup>77</sup> J.J. Collins, *Daniel* (Hermeneia), Minneapolis 1993, pp. 393–394.

<sup>78</sup> Cicero, *Republic* 6.13.

<sup>79</sup> *De genio Socratis* 589F–592E.; *De sera numinis vindicta* 563B–568A.

heavens as the realm of purest spirit. Among Jewish authors, only Philo of Alexandria fully appropriated this philosophy<sup>80</sup>. But even in such an unphilosophical work as the *Book of the Watchers*, there is a contrast between the high and holy heaven, which the proper home of holy immortal beings, and the corruptible earth. The novelty of the Hellenistic age was the spread of the belief that mortals could pass from one realm to the other. An adequate explanation of this phenomenon would have to explore the *Zeitgeist* of the Hellenistic age and its expression in diverse local traditions, a task that goes well beyond the limits of this paper<sup>81</sup>. But however this development is to be explained, it transformed the traditional worldview of Israel and the ancient Near East and had enormous consequences for the development of Christianity.

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<sup>80</sup> For the motif of heavenly ascent in Philo, see A.F. Segal, *Heavenly Ascent*, pp. 1354–1358.

<sup>81</sup> See J.Z. Smith, *Native Cults in the Hellenistic Period*, “History of Religions” 11 (1971), pp. 236–249; J.J. Collins, *Jewish Apocalyptic against its Hellenistic Near Eastern Environment*, BASOR 220 (1975), pp. 27–36 (= *Seers, Sibyls and Sages*, pp. 59–74); *Cosmos and Salvation: Jewish Wisdom and Apocalyptic in the Hellenistic Age*, “History of Religions” 17 (1977), pp. 121–142 (= *Seers, Sibyls and Sages*, pp. 317–338).