

REVELATION AND RAPTURE: THE TRANSFORMATION
OF THE VISIONARY IN THE ASCENT APOCALYPSES

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As far as I know, the first person to comment on some of the questions about the nature of apocalypticism that concerned the Uppsala Colloquium was Baraies the Teacher, a third-century disciple of Mani. His words are preserved for us in the Cologne Mani Codex, that remarkable compilation of information about the life of Mani from the great apostle himself and from his immediate followers.¹ Although antiquity is not necessarily an indicator of reliability, I think we have something to learn from Baraies, who calls our attention to an aspect of many apocalypses that seems to me quite important, but that has been given relatively little attention.

One of the sections of the Codex attributed to Baraies contains brief citations from and summaries of five otherwise unknown apocalypses ascribed to some of the earliest biblical patriarchs: Adam, Seth (here, Sethel), Enosh, Shem, and Enoch, in that idiosyncratic order, followed by several passages from the letters of Paul describing his ascent to the third heaven and other revelations to him.² These excerpts are intro-

1. The Codex is now available with German translation and notes in L. Koenen and C. Römer (eds. and trans.), *Der Kölner Mani-Kodex: Über das Werden seines Leibes* (Abhandlungen der Rheinisch-Westfälischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Papyrologica Coloniensia, 14; Opladen, 1988). It was originally published and translated by L. Koenen and A. Henrichs, 'Der Kölner Mani-Codex (P. Colon. inv. nr. 4780). *PERI TES GENNES TOU SOMATOS AUTOU*', *ZPE* 19 (1975), pp. 1-85; 32 (1978), pp. 87-199; 44 (1981), pp. 201-318; 48 (1982), pp. 1-59. The first half of the Codex has been translated into English in R. Cameron and A.J. Dewey, *The Cologne Mani Codex* (P. Colon. inv. nr. 4780): 'Concerning the Origin of His Body' (Texts and Translations, 15, Early Christian Literature Series, 3; Missoula, MT, 1979).

2. At the head of this section, where the attribution should appear, there is a lacuna. For the attribution to Baraies, whose words appear elsewhere in the Codex as well, see Henrichs and Koenen, 'Mani-Kodex', *ZPE* 19 (1975), pp. 80-81 n. 80*.

duced to make the point that Mani stands in a long line of spiritual leaders, each at the head of a community like Mani's.

Let him who is willing listen and note how each of the forefathers showed his own revelation (*apokalypsis*) to his chosen, whom he chose and gathered together in the generation in which he appeared, and wrote it down to leave to posterity. He made known to them things having to do with his rapture, and they preached about it to those outside . . . So then during the period and course of his apostleship each one spoke concerning what he had seen and wrote it down as a memoir, and also about his rapture (p. 47).¹

The apocalypses Baraies cites are not otherwise known to us from canon lists or quotations.² They show many points of continuity with the preserved Jewish apocalypses and some of the early Christian ones, but they also exhibit a number of parallels to gnostic works.³ We tend to assume that the extant Jewish apocalypses were written in Palestine and Egypt, although there has been some recent interest in a Babylonian provenance for the earliest Enochic works.⁴ Could these apocalypses also be Babylonian? This might account both for Baraies's knowledge of them and our lack of knowledge, as well as for some of their peculiar traits.

As the notes below suggest, the apocalypses attributed to Enosh and Shem seem remarkably similar. I wonder if they are really two separate texts.

1. Parenthetical references are to pages of the Mani Codex. All translations from the Codex are mine; I have consulted the translations of Koenen-Römer and Cameron-Dewey.

2. *The Catalogue of Sixty Canonical Books* (in *New Testament Apocrypha* [ed. E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher; trans. R. McL. Wilson; Philadelphia, 1963], I, p. 51) mentions an apocryphal book of Adam without any indication of whether it is an apocalypse; none of the other names found in the Mani Codex appear in the other canon lists published in Hennecke-Schneemelcher (I, pp. 42-52). Nor are there any references under these names in M.R. James, *The Lost Apocrypha of the Old Testament* (London and New York, 1970).

Works attributed to Adam, Seth, and Shem appear among the Nag Hammadi tractates, but it is clear that they are not the apocalypses Baraies quotes. There is a point of contact with the Nag Hammadi *Apocalypse of Adam*, which describes Adam as an exalted figure like the Adam of Baraies's apocalypse. But the Nag Hammadi *Apocalypse of Adam* does not contain an ascent. The works attributed to Seth and Shem do not show any real parallels to the apocalypses Baraies quotes.

3. For example, Seth is of course a particularly important figure for some gnostics; both Enosh and Shem are pondering the nature of creation when their revelations take place (pp. 52, 55); the 'posterity of the Spirit of Truth' (p. 55) to whom Enosh hands down his writing has a gnostic ring to it.

4. J.C. VanderKam, *Enoch and the Growth of an Apocalyptic Tradition* (CBQMS, 16; Washington, DC, 1984).

The content of the revelations in the apocalypses Baraies cites is quite varied, including individual eschatology,¹ cosmology,² angelology,³ and a vision of the heavenly throne room,⁴ but at least as far as I can tell from the excerpts and summaries, collective eschatology does not appear.

For Baraies, the patriarchs were apostles, like Paul and like Mani, and his picture of the setting of the apocalypses imposes the pattern of Manicheism on them. 'He made known to them things having to do with his rapture, and they preached about it to those outside. . .'. None of the passages he cites gives any indication of a group of followers; indeed the very existence of a group for the earliest of the patriarchs would be problematic.

In his comments, Baraies gives the fact of rapture equal weight with the content of revelation.⁵ This emphasis on rapture is especially striking, because Mani's revelations came to him not through ascent but from his heavenly twin. The emphasis on rapture, then, does not represent a reading back of Manichean practice onto the apocalypses, but Baraies's understanding of the apocalypses he knew.

While Baraies singles out only two elements, revelation and rapture, in his discussion of apocalypses, the portions of the apocalypses he chose to quote suggest another. The excerpts and attendant summaries are quite brief, with little detail about the content of revelation, but three of the five passages describe an experience in which the visionary becomes like the angels.

1. Individual eschatology is the primary concern of the passage from the *Apocalypse of Enoch*, in which Enoch is taken to see the places where the righteous are rewarded and the wicked punished (pp. 58-60).

2. As noted above, the setting for the revelations of both Enosh and Shem is their consideration of questions having to do with the nature of creation. It therefore seems likely that the apocalypses include cosmological revelations, although none appears in the material quoted by Baraies.

3. Baraies's summary mentions various types of angels as the subject of the revelation to Adam (p. 49).

4. A heavenly throne room descends to Shem as he stands on the high mountain to which he has been carried (p. 56).

5. In the excerpts, all of the patriarchs except Adam are explicitly described as experiencing a supernatural journey, although not necessarily to heaven. Both Enosh and Shem are taken not to heaven but to high mountains (pp. 53, 55), like Ezekiel at the start of his vision of the eschatological temple (Ezek. 40.2). In both apocalypses the verb *harpazo* is used for the mode of transportation. Adam is reported in the summary to have seen various types of angels in the course of his revelation, strongly suggesting ascent, and there is a lacuna in the text at the point in the excerpt where the rapture might have been mentioned (bottom of p. 48).

Adam, we are told in Baraies's summary, 'became more exalted than all the powers and angels of creation' (p. 50). Seth's claim is slightly more modest: 'When I heard these things, my heart rejoiced, and my understanding was changed, and I became like one of the greatest angels' (p. 51). Shem does not claim full angelic status, at least in the excerpt quoted by Baraies. Rather, following great physical agitation, a voice lifts him by his right hand and breathes into him, bringing him 'an increase of power and glory' (p. 57).

No such transformation appears in the portion of the Apocalypse of Enosh quoted, but the description of Enosh's fear when the spirit seized him to transport him is very close to the one associated with Shem's transformation (p. 53),¹ and I would not be surprised if the complete apocalypse included a transformation. The excerpt from the Enoch apocalypse contains a less elaborate description of fear in reaction to the arrival of seven angelic revealers, but without a transformation (p. 59). Again it is possible that the complete apocalypse contained one, since the preserved Enochic apocalypses are so rich in transformations.

The *Book of the Watchers*, almost the earliest of the apocalypses and a work of great influence, contains the first ascent to heaven in Jewish literature. Heaven is here understood as a temple, and although Enoch is not actually transformed when he ascends to the heavenly temple, he is able to stand before God like a heavenly priest, that is, an angel.² After his ascent, his journey to the ends of the earth shows that he is indeed a fit companion for angels (*I En.* 17–36). This claim appears to have its roots in the prophetic claim to participation in the divine council.³

In 2 *Enoch* the ascent is clearly a reworking of the ascent in the *Book of the Watchers* in combination with the tour to the ends of the earth,⁴ and the transformation that Enoch undergoes is in large part a development of themes from the *Book of the Watchers*. Here, as

1. Shem: 'Then the appearance of my face was changed so that I fell to the ground. And my vertebrae shook, while my feet could not support my ankles.' Enosh: 'My heart became heavy, and all my limbs shook. My vertebrae were violently shaken, and my feet did not support my ankles.'

2. For heaven as a temple in *I En.* 14–16, see G.W.E. Nickelsburg, 'Enoch, Levi, and Peter: Recipients of Revelation in Upper Galilee', *JBL* 100 (1981), pp. 575–90.

3. M. Himmelfarb, 'From Prophecy to Apocalypse: The *Book of the Watchers* and Tours of Heaven', in A. Green (ed.), *Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible through the Middle Ages* (New York, 1986), pp. 149–51.

4. G.W.E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah* (Philadelphia, 1981), p. 185.

Enoch prostrates himself before God's throne in the seventh heaven, God orders the angel Michael to extract Enoch from his body, anoint him with fragrant oil, and dress him in a special garment, a process that suggests priestly investiture. When Michael has done so, Enoch discovers that he has become 'like one of the glorious ones: there was no observable difference' (22.10).¹ After the transformation God reveals to him secrets never revealed before, not even to the angels (ch. 24).

The process of transformation is taken about as far as it can go in *3 Enoch* or *Sefer Hekhalot*, as this hekhalot work is more properly known. *Sefer Hekhalot*, which is formally an apocalypse, reports the revelations of the angel Metatron to R. Ishmael, the hero of many other hekhalot works. Metatron begins the revelations with his own story: he was Enoch son of Jared until God took him to heaven and exalted him over all his creations, making him his second in command (ch. 4; nos. 5-6, 886-87).² This is surely the greatest success story ever told, although there are attempts in other works and even within *3 Enoch* itself (ch. 16; no. 20) to reduce Metatron's status, suggesting that not everyone was entirely comfortable with Enoch's success.³

According to *Sefer Hekhalot*, Enoch becomes Metatron by growing into a being of enormous size with seventy-two wings (ch. 9; nos. 12, 893). After this transformation God provides his new servant with a glorious throne (ch. 10; nos. 13, 894) and a splendid robe (ch. 12; nos. 15, 896). If the robe is intended to suggest priestly investiture, this is never made explicit. But in his edition of *3 Enoch*, H. Odeberg quoted a reference to eight garments of Metatron from a work entitled *Alphabet of Metatron* found in a manuscript in the British Museum.⁴ As P. Alexander notes in his translation of *Sefer Hekhalot*, eight is the number of the high priest's garments.⁵ A passage found in only a

1. Trans. F.I. Andersen, '2 (Slavonic Apocalypse of) Enoch', in J.H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Garden City, NY, 1983), I, pp. 138-39.

2. For *3 Enoch*, chapter references refer to P. Alexander, '3 (Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch', in Charlesworth, *OTP*, I, pp. 223-315. For *3 Enoch* and other hekhalot texts discussed here, references introduced by 'no.' are to units of P. Schäfer in collaboration with M. Schlüter and H.G. von Mutius, *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Texte und Studien zum antike Judentum, 2; Tübingen, 1981).

3. The classic passage is *b. Hag.* 15a. See Alexander, '3 Enoch', p. 268 n. a.

4. *3 Enoch or the Hebrew Book of Enoch* (Cambridge, 1928), p. 32.

5. '3 Enoch', p. 265 n. a to ch. 12.

single manuscript of *Sefer Hekhalot* (ch. 15B) refers to Metatron's activity in the heavenly temple.¹

The *Similitudes of Enoch* in its final form includes the transformation of Enoch into the heavenly son of man, a type of angelic figure (*I En.* 71.14).² But the *Similitudes'* use of material from the *Book of the Watchers* goes in a rather different direction from that of *2 Enoch* and *Sefer Hekhalot*. The transformation is simply announced rather than described, though it is preceded by an experience not unlike the overwhelming physical experience described in the apocalypses of Shem and Enosh (*I En.* 71.11). As far as I can tell, there are no priestly overtones to this transformation.

Now the transformations of *2 Enoch* and *Sefer Hekhalot* are quite extraordinary. Enoch does not become merely an angel, but an exalted angel. If it were not for the apocalypses of Adam and Seth quoted by Baraies, one might be inclined to treat this sort of transformation as the peculiarity of a couple of ill-understood texts about Enoch. But Baraies shows us that this type of transformation is more widespread. While Baraies's quotations indicate neither priestly elements nor the influence of the *Book of the Watchers*, they are so brief that it is impossible to draw any certain conclusions.

A somewhat different and more democratic notion of transformation appears in a larger number of apocalypses. Here transformation into an angel or a star—that is, a member of the heavenly host—is promised to the righteous as a reward after death. Daniel describes the fate of the righteous thus: 'Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of heaven, and those who turn many to righteousness, like stars for ever and ever' (12.3). The *Epistle of Enoch* promises the righteous that they 'will shine like the lights of heaven' (*I En.* 104.2) and 'have great joy like the angels of heaven' (104.4).³ Later the *Similitudes of Enoch* describes the righteous dead dwelling with angels (*I En.* 39.5), shining like fire (39.7), while in *2 Baruch* the righteous

1. '3 Enoch', p. 303. The manuscript is Bodleian 2257/4 (Neubauer), which is not included in Schäfer's *Synopse*. The passage appears also in a manuscript of the writings of the German Hasidic rabbi, Eleazer of Worms. The idea that Metatron served as heavenly high priest is explicit elsewhere in rabbinic literature (*Num R.* 12.12).

2. See the discussion of the relationship of ch. 71 to the rest of the *Similitudes* in J.J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity* (New York, 1984), pp. 151-53.

3. Trans. M.A. Knibb, '1 Enoch', in H.F.D. Sparks, *The Apocryphal Old Testament* (Oxford, 1984).

dead are promised first equality with the angels and the stars (51.10), and then splendor even greater than that of the angels (51.12).¹

In the *Ascension of Isaiah*, Isaiah reports that as he ascends through the seven heavens his glory increases until in the seventh heaven he finds himself fully the equal of the angels. But he remains inferior to the righteous dead (9.37-39).² The visionary of the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* is a dead soul, who, after he is found righteous, dons an angelic robe and joins the angels in their song (ch. 8).³

The *Apocalypse of Abraham* similarly suggests that Abraham achieves a kind of fellowship with the heavenly host; the song Abraham sings to protect himself during the ordeal of ascent turns out to be the song sung by the creatures of the divine throne (18.1-3). No relationship between Abraham's experience and the fate of the righteous after death is made explicit, but there is a hint of such an understanding in the mention of Azazel's garment, now set aside for Abraham (13.14). Abraham is never shown putting on the garment, and the garment is probably to be understood as reserved for after death, like the garments mentioned in the *Ascension of Isaiah* (8.26, 9.2).

Experience much like the transformations described in the apocalypses appear in other types of literature from late antiquity as the goal of heavenly ascent. In the hekhalot texts, the culmination of ascent is often the visionary's participation in the heavenly liturgy as a manifestation of his equality with the angels, just as in the apocalypses.⁴ At the end of a series of hymns to be used to ascend (or in the terminology of some of the hekhalot texts, to descend) to the divine chariot, R. Ishmael says in *Hekhalot Rabbati*, 'All these songs R. Aqiba heard when he descended to the chariot, and he took hold of them and learned them as he stood before the throne of glory, the songs that his ministers were singing before him' (no. 106). In another section of *Hekhalot Rabbati*, we learn that when the visionary finally

1. J.J. Collins, 'Apocalyptic Eschatology as the Transcendence of Death', *CBQ* 36 (1974), pp. 21-43, discusses the fate of the righteous after death in texts from the last two centuries BCE. 2 *Baruch* does not fit within this timespan.

2. For a more extended discussion of Isaiah's transformation in the *Ascension of Isaiah*, see M. Himmelfarb, 'The Experience of the Visionary and Genre in the *Ascension of Isaiah* 6-11 and the *Apocalypse of Paul*', in A. Yarbro Collins (ed.), *Early Christian Apocalypticism: Genre and Social Setting* (*Semeia* 36; Atlanta, 1986), pp. 97-111.

3. I refer to the chapter divisions in O.S. Wintermute (trans.), 'Apocalypse of Zephaniah', in Charlesworth, *OTP*, I, pp. 497-515.

4. Himmelfarb, 'Heavenly Ascent and the Relationship of the Apocalypses and the *Hekhalot* Literature', *HUCA* 59 (1988), pp. 91-93.

gains admission to the last gate and arrives before the throne of glory, 'he begins to recite the song that the throne of glory sings every day' (no. 251). Remember that the song Abraham recites in the course of his ascent turns out to be the song of the throne of glory.

One goal of the rituals prescribed in the magical papyri is immortality or deification. In the so-called Mithras liturgy the initiate is to say of himself at the culmination of his ascent,

I, NN, whose mother is NN, who was born from the mortal womb of NN and from the fluid of semen, and who, since he has been born again from you today, has become immortal out of so many myriads in this hour according to the wish of god the exceedingly good—resolves to worship you. . . (PGM IV.645-51).¹

In another text contained in the same papyrus as the Mithras liturgy, the initiate says, 'I have been attached to your holy form. I have been given power by your holy name. I have acquired your emanation of the goods, Lord, god of gods, master, daimon' (PGM IV.216-19). After a string of magical words, the instructions conclude, 'Having done this, return as lord of a godlike nature which is accomplished through the divine encounter' (PGM IV.220-22).² In a system in which there are many deities, 'a godlike nature' probably means something not very different from taking one's place among the angels.

If the experiences described in the apocalypses are similar to those in the hekhalot texts, can the hekhalot texts give us a clue to the settings in which ascent apocalypses were written? The suggestion of continuity between the apocalyptists and the merkavah mystics goes back to Gershom Scholem, who based his argument on the similarity between the visions of the heavenly chariot, reported in rabbinic literature and the hekhalot texts, and those of the apocalypses.³ The hekhalot texts contain instructions for those who wish to achieve visions of the chariot. Scholem seems to have believed that the visions of the apocalypses represent the actual experiences of their authors, achieved the same way as the later merkavah mystics achieved their visions, although their authors did not choose to record the practices. Following Scholem, Ithamar Gruenwald points to ascetic practices as a

1. Trans. by M.W. Meyer in H.D. Betz (ed.), *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells* (Chicago, 1985), pp. 50-51.
2. Trans. by E.N. O'Neil in Betz, *Greek Magical Papyri*, pp. 41-42.
3. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (3rd edn; New York, 1961), p. 43.

point of continuity between the apocalypses and the hekhalot literature.¹

Most apocalypses do not refer to such practices, but there are several in which fasting and other types of asceticism do appear. Among the ascent apocalypses, in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, God commands Abraham to undertake a limited fast for forty days before sacrificing and receiving a revelation (9.7-8), but Abraham exceeds God's command by spending forty days in the wilderness in the company of the angel Iael, neither eating nor drinking (12.1-2). The *Ascension of Isaiah* depicts Isaiah as the head of group of prophets living in the wilderness, dressed in sackcloth, and eating wild herbs (2.8-11). The setting in which Isaiah's vision in the *Ascension of Isaiah* takes place (ch. 6) is very close to that of the vision of R. Neḥuniah b. haQanah in the famous passage in *Hekhalot Rabbati* (nos. 198-250): in both the visionary sits in the midst of his circle, reporting on what he sees. Since this scene is often presumed to represent the actual setting of the practice of merkavah mysticism, this parallel is particularly impressive.

But aside from this last parallel the similarities between the practices of the apocalypses and the hekhalot literature are general rather than specific. As to the relationship between the picture in the *Ascension of Isaiah* and *Hekhalot Rabbati*, the passage in *Hekhalot Rabbati* is the only such description in hekhalot literature, although there are many places in which the instructions for ascent suggest that the would-be visionary is alone as he attempts his ascent.²

At this point we need to confront head-on a crucial fact that Scholem and others have ignored: the apocalypses are literature, indeed one might even say fiction. Scholem's position assumes that when the author describes the ascent, he is describing his own experience under someone else's name. But the relationship between the author and his hero is not nearly so direct; indeed the visionary takes his identity from traditions about a great figure of the past.

The question of whether the apocalypses represent a reflection of actual experience, whether of transformation or of other visionary phenomena, is an extremely difficult one, and I will only attempt to indicate a few guiding principles for approaching it. The answer is

1. 'Manicheism and Judaism in Light of the *Cologne Mani Codex*', in *From Apocalypticism to Gnosticism* (Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des antiken Judentums, 14; Frankfurt, 1988), p. 271.

2. See e.g. *Hekhalot Zūratī* (nos. 413-19), and the Ozhayah fragment from the Geniza; see P. Schäfer, *Geniza-Fragmente zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum, 6; Tübingen, 1984), pp. 2a/23-2b/24.

surely different for different apocalypses, and each needs to be considered in its own right.¹

Pseudonymity and literary connections at first seem to militate against actual experience, but we must also remember the 'conservative character of mystical experience', in the title of Steven Katz's essay,² the way in which undoubtedly genuine mystical experiences are shaped and informed, at least in the telling (and that is of course all we have), by the assumptions of the mystic's tradition.

On the other hand, it is clear that if visionary experience is reflected in the apocalypses, there are many mirrors between the experience and the text. Pseudonymity is perhaps the darkest mirror, the one we least understand. My own guess is that texts that describe a human being becoming not just an angel, but the most exalted angel of all, are more literary, and the relationship to experience is less direct, than texts that describe a somewhat more modest form of transformation.

Now I turn to a somewhat more tractable question, the function of the theme of transformation in the apocalypses. David Halperin has recently argued that the ascent of human beings to heaven to take their place among angels is actually an invasion of heaven, a displacement of the rightful inhabitants by young upstarts.³ He is concerned primarily with rabbinic literature and the hekhalot texts, but he considers the apocalypses too. For him Enoch's transformation into Metatron in *Sefer Hekhalot* is the most striking example of such displacement, which he reads in Freudian terms as an adolescent fantasy of surpassing and displacing adult figures of authority.

It is a brilliant reading, but I do not think it does justice to the range of uses of transformation in the apocalypses.⁴ I suggest instead that these descriptions of transformation be understood in the context of some of the major developments of the history of Judaism in the Second Temple period.

One result of the traumatic break with the traditions of the past caused by the destruction of the First Temple and the exile, it is often

1. Stone's discussion of 4 Ezra in this volume represents just such a consideration.

2. 'The "Conservative" Character of Mystical Experience', in Katz (ed.), *Mysticism and Religious Traditions* (New York, 1983), pp. 3-60.

3. 'Ascension or Invasion: Implications of the Heavenly Journey in Ancient Judaism', *Religion* 18 (1988), pp. 47-67; *idem*, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision* (Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum, 16; Tübingen, 1988), pp. 359-446.

4. For a more detailed discussion of this point, see my forthcoming review of Halperin, *Faces of the Chariot*, in *Critical Review of Books in Religion* 3 (1990), pp. 340-42.

argued, is a new feeling of distance between God and humanity, a feeling unknown in the religion of Israel before the exile. Ezekiel's vision of God on a chariot-throne is a response to the fact that the temple, once the center of religious experience, is no longer available. The appeal to creation in the work of the other great prophet of the exile, Second Isaiah, a new departure in prophetic literature, also reflects a sense of distance between Israel and the God of history.

Such distance makes prophecy problematic. In the post-exilic period, there is a gradual movement away from prophecy toward interpretation as a primary mode of religious authority. In Zechariah, a post-exilic prophet, prophecy has become interpretation, visions to be deciphered. This form then becomes one of the central modes of revelation in the apocalypses. Angels are usually the interpreters of these visions. The heroes of the Bible talked with God, but the heroes of the apocalypses, on the whole, talk with angels. The Hellenistic period sees the emergence of angels with names and to a certain extent distinctive identities. God is understood to dwell in the midst of myriads of angels, to whom he delegates the performance of various tasks.

Most attempts to describe the emergence of the angelologies of early Judaism are unable to shake off the feeling that the new developments represent a falling away from the heights of classical biblical religion.

Fundamentally the whole of angelology was an indication that the figure of God had receded into the distance and that the angels were needed as intermediaries between him, creation and man. . . This strictly-ordered, pyramid-like hierarchical system probably corresponded to a general religious need of the time, as it exercised a profound influence, not only on the Greek-speaking Judaism of the Diaspora and early Christianity, but through them on gnosticism and indeed on the whole of popular religion in late antiquity, as is shown by its significance for magic. Even neo-Platonism could not escape its influence.¹

Although he does not quite say so in this passage from *Judaism and Hellenism*, Martin Hengel's language (God 'has receded into the distance', neo-Platonism 'could not escape') strongly suggests that this new development is undesirable. Other scholars make this judgment quite openly.

Drawing on our discussion of the visionary's transformation in the apocalypses, I would suggest a somewhat different way of looking at

1. M. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period* (Philadelphia, 1974), I, p. 233.

the phenomenon.¹ In *By Light, Light*, E.R. Goodenough speaks of Philo's system as intended to solve 'the problem of the relation of the Unrelated', of how God could 'be brought into relationship with the world, in spite of the fact that He was essentially beyond relation'. Philo's solution to the problem is a variation on the standard ancient answer, to understand God through the image of the sun sending forth its rays, its brightness in no way diminished by the rays.²

Whatever the faults in Goodenough's reading of Philo, I suspect that he is correct to see the problem of distance as central to Philo, and, as Hengel too suggests, to many others in late antiquity. Once we have recognized how widely this problem was perceived, we realize that angels are not its cause but an attempt at its solution. The development of a picture of the world in which a large number of angels play so prominent a role should be understood not simply as a reflection of a sense of distance but as an attempt to overcome that distance. The idea that the heavens are full of angels assures human beings of contact with the sphere of the divine, if only its periphery.

What is more, it turns out that the boundaries between human beings and angels are not very clear. Despite its seven heavens and myriads of angels, a text like the *Ascension of Isaiah* does not really reflect a gulf between man and God. The righteous, according to this work, can expect to spend eternity as angelic beings contemplating God himself. To be sure, for most this experience is reserved until after death. But certain exceptional men can have a foretaste of it while still alive, thus serving as examples of the future intimacy with God to which all the righteous can look forward.

Thus Baraies the Teacher teaches us something important in his insistence on the intimate link between revelation and rapture or, one might say, between content and form. It is not only what God reveals to the visionary that is important, but the very fact that God is willing to bring a human being near to him. Under certain circumstances, according to the apocalypses, human beings can cross the boundary and join the angels. Clearly we need to rethink the pessimism so often attributed to the apocalypses.

1. For similar conclusions about the role of angelology in early Judaism, see L.W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (Philadelphia, 1988), pp. 22-35. Hurtado traces the negative view back to Bousset.

2. *By Light, Light: The Mystic Gospel of Hellenistic Judaism* (New Haven, 1935), p. 11.