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

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

*This article is based in part on papers presented at Oxford University, Faculty of Theology (28 November 1991); University of Michigan, Department of Near Eastern Studies/Program on Religion (5 February 1992); and Princeton University, Department of Religion (6 May 1993).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[8]On the traditions concerning the *kabod*, and early Jewish "divine agency" traditions in general, see Gilles Quispel, "Gnosticism and the New Testament," *VC* 19 (1965) 65–85, reprinted in J. Philip Hyatt, ed., *The Bible in Modern Scholarship* (Nashville/New York: Abingdon, 1965) 252–71, and in Gilles Quispel, *Gnostic Studies* (2 vols.; Istanbul: Netherlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Institut in het Nubije Osten, 1974–75) 1. 196–212; idem, "The Origins of the Gnostic Demiurge," in P. Granfield and J. A. Jungmann, eds., *Kyriakon: Festschrift Johannes Quasten* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1970) 271–76, reprinted in Quispel, *Gnostic Studies* 1. 213–20; idem, "Ezekiel 1:26 in Jewish Mysticism and Gnosis," *VC* 34 (1980) 1–13; and idem, "Judaism, Judaic Christianity and Gnosis," in A. H. B. Logan and A. J. M. Wedderburn, eds., *The New Testament and Gnosis: Essays in Honour of Robert McL. Wilson* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983) 46–68; Alexander Altmann, "Saadya's Theory of Revelation: its Origin and Background," in idem, *Studies in Religion, Philosophy and Mysticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969) 140–60; Christopher Rowland, "The Visions of God in Apocalyptic Literature," *JSJ* 10 (1979) 137–54; and idem, *The Open Heaven*, 94–113 and 280–89; Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (SJLA 25; Leiden: Brill, 1977); and idem, *Paul the Convert*, 34–71; Jarl E. Fossum, "Jewish-Christian Christology and Jewish Mysticism," *VC* 37 (1983) 260–87; and idem, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord* (WUNT 36; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1985); Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Jewish Monotheism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988); Carey C. Newman, *Paul's Glory-Christology: Tradition and Rhetoric* (NovTSup 69; Leiden: Brill, 1992); Margaret Barker, *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God* (London: SPCK, 1992); C. R. A. Morray-Jones, "Transformational Mysticism in the Apocalyptic-Merkabah Tradition," *JJS* 43 (1992) 1–31.

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

> When a man wants to descend to the merkabah, he should invoke סוריה, the Prince of the Countenance, and adjure him a hundred and twelve times by מטטרוסיאי יהוה, who is called מטטרוסיאי צורמק מטטריאל מטפגר, אשרוליאי זבודיאל זהרריאל מנדאל שקדזניאי אדהיבירון ואדיריירון יהוה, the God of Israel.
>
> Let him not add to the hundred and twelve times, neither let him subtract therefrom! If he adds or subtracts, "his blood is on his own head" (Josh 2:19)! Rather, while his mouth is pronouncing the names, let the fingers of his hands count one hundred and twelve times. Then he will descend and master the merkabah.[11]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[18]*b. Ḥag.* 14b and parallels.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The talmudic *maʿaśeh merkabah* traditions are mostly appended to the mishnah-lemma *m. Ḥag.* 2.1, which reads as follows:

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

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

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

[26]MSS Parma and Kaufmann.

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

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

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

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

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

[28]The mishnah is thus explained at *t. Ḥag.* 2.1 and *b. Ḥag.* 11b.

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

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

יהב חכמתא לחכימין ומנדעא לידעי בינה

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

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

להבין ישרים בדעת עליון וחכמת בני שמים להשכיל תמימי דרך

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

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

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

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

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

suggest that it may originally have been formulated in the past tense[32]). In this context, the term *ḥakam* does not denote a scholar in the rabbinic sense, but rather a mantic sage, such as Daniel, who possesses esoteric knowledge and is skilled in visionary-mystical technique. The term *yaḥid* does not carry the numerical significance that it acquires in the context of the Mishnah but simply means "an individual" or possibly, by analogy with occurrences of the term elsewhere, an ascetic "solitary."[33] Thus, the unit of tradition originally meant that no individual (or ascetic) was competent to expound (that is, teach about, or express an opinion concerning) Ezekiel's vision unless he was a mantic sage who could do so on the basis of his own visionary-mystical experience and esoteric knowledge. It was, then, originally a statement about competence and only acquired halakhic significance in the context of rabbinism, where the original meaning was changed in several ways. Most importantly, the term *ḥakam* was understood in its rabbinic sense, and so the unit was taken to mean that only an ordained rabbi (that is, a talmudic sage) was permitted to involve himself in *maʿaśeh merkabah*.[34]

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

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

[34]The above paragraph summarizes Morray-Jones, "Merkabah Mysticism," 99–228.

B and C are formally connected units of tradition. C is clearly a warning against heretical speculations and/or visionary-mystical practices associated with the *kabod*, which were held to compromise the unity of God. Interpretation of B, however, is less straightforward, and it is not clear whether "before" (*lĕ-panim*) and "behind/after" (*lĕ-ʾaḥor*) should be understood in spatial or temporal terms. Gerd A. Wewers adopts the latter interpretation, taking B and C to be comments on A2 (*maʿaśeh bĕreʾšit*) and A3 (*ha-merkabah*) respectively.[35] Although this view finds some support in later rabbinic sources,[36] it is unlikely to be correct since B2d must, if temporal, refer to the future. Christopher Rowland argues that B's fourfold formula refers to the subjects of apocalyptic revelation: the mysteries of the celestial and infernal worlds, the beginning of creation, and its eschatological fulfillment.[37] Alon Goshen-Gottstein, however, has suggested that the whole of B–C originally applied to the vision of the merkabah and that B referred to the dimensions of the body of God (that is, the glory) with its surrounding brightness as described in Ezek 1:27–28.[38] Even though this analysis is less convincing than Rowland's, there is evidence that both "spatial" and "temporal" interpretations were current in the early period.[39] Whatever the unit's original meaning, B–C evidently refers to matters that were regarded as forbidden, and the mishnah as a whole thus represents the strand of

[35]Wewers, *Geheimnis*, 4–13; but compare Morray-Jones, "Merkabah Mysticism," 103–8.

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

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

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

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

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

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

At this juncture, I ask the reader to refer to pages 210–17 for a presentation based on the version of *t. Ḥag.* 2.1 (according to MS Vienna),[42] which combines three units of material: the story itself (A) and two parables appended by way of commentary, one of a king's *pardes* (B) and the other of a highway passing between two roads (C).[43] Unit A also occurs at *y. Ḥag.* 77b, *b. Ḥag.* 14b–15b, and *Cant. R.* 1.28[44] (= 1.4.1[45]). Both the Jerusalem and the Babylonian Talmuds incorporate additional material (indicated in square brackets) about the arch-heretic Elisha b. Abuyah, otherwise known as ʾAḥer ("the Other One"), but only a small proportion of this material is common to both sources.[46] The Babylonian Talmud also includes additional material about Ben Zoma and Aqiba. Neither the Babylonian Talmud nor *Song of Songs Rabbah* include B and C, which occur within the "Mystical Collection" in the Jerusalem Talmud, but in different contexts.[47] C is also found, in an altogether different context, in *ʾAbot de-Rabbi Natan* (version a) chapter 28.[48]

[40]Halperin, *Merkabah*, 65–105.

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

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

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

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

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

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

[47]*y. Ḥag.* 77c (B) and 77a (C).

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

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

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

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

[49]Rashi *Commentary to b. Ḥag.* 14b.

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

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

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

[53]See n. 1 above.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[59]Halperin, *Merkabah*, 86–99.

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

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

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

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

[62]Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, 309–40.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[68]See n. 46 above.

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

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

[71]*Gen. R.* 62.2; *Exod. R.* 50.3.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[74]*t. Qidd.* 3.9; *y. Maʿaśer Š.* 53d; *b. Sanh.* 17b.

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

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

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

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

A1a R. Aqiba said:

A1b We were four who went into *pardes*. One looked and died, one looked and was stricken, one looked and cut the shoots, and I went in in peace and came out in peace.

A2a Why did I go in in peace and come out in peace?
[*HZ*(N) and *MR*(N) omit A2a]

A2b Not because I am greater than my fellows, but my deeds [*MR*(N) and *HZ*(N): they] have caused me to fulfill the teaching that the sages have taught in their Mishnah: "Your deeds will bring you near and your deeds will keep you afar."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

C1 R. Aqiba said:

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

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

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

A/B1 R. Aqiba said:

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

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

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

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

C1 R. Aqiba said:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

or "colleagues") and, possibly, comembership of a formal (perhaps esoteric) "fellowship" (*ḥaburah*).[82]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The preexistent heavenly temple, found in several rabbinic sources[91] and in Philo,[92] is a central image of the apocalyptic-mystical tradition.[93] *T.Levi* 3.4 states,

[87]See, for example, *b. Qidd.* 72a.

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

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

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

[91]See, for example, *Gen. R.* 69.7; *Pĕsiqtaʾ Rabbati* 20.4; *Tanḥ. Naso* 19; *b. Sanh.* 94b; *Tg. Isa.* 1:1–6; *Tg. Ket.* 1 Chr 21:15. Elsewhere, the temple is regarded as the source of the creation of the world: *t. Yoma* 4:6; *b. Yoma* 54b; *Gen. R.* 1.4; *Tanḥ. Qĕdošim* 10. See further, Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (7 vols.; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1911–38) 1. 12–13; Avigdor Aptowitzer, "Beit ha-Miqdaš šĕl Maʿalah ʿal pi haʾAggadah," *Tarbiṣ* 2 (1931) 137–53 and 257–77 [Hebrew].

[92]Philo *Spec. leg.* 1.66.

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

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

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

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

[94]H. C. Kee, trans., "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," *OTP* 1. 789.

Word." [25]And he lifted me up and brought me near to the gate, but I (continued) to look down with my face.[95]

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

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

[95]E. Isaac, trans., "1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch," *OTP* 1. 20–21.

[96]See further, Maier, *Kultus*, 127.

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

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

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

[100]*Maᶜaśeh bĕ-Rabbi Joshuaᶜ ben Levi* in Moses Gaster, "The Sefer ha-Maᶜaśiyot," appendix to *Judith "Montefiore" College Reports for the Years 1894–5 and 1895–6* (Ramsgate: Judith "Montefiore" College, 1896) 96–97 [Hebrew]. This is an extended version of the story of how Joshua b. Levi was permitted to enter paradise during his lifetime in the company of the angel of death, also found at *b. Ketub.* 77b. A longer, and probably later, version of the story in Jellinek (*Bet ha-Midrasch*, 2. 48–51) has seven houses. See further Ginzberg, *Legends* 5. 31–32. On the importance of Joshua b. Levi in the merkabah tradition, see Chernus, *Mysticism*, 33–43; and Halperin, *Faces*, 253–57, 309–13, and 345–46.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Much earlier, in the *Genesis Apocryphon* from Qumran, *parwayim* is evidently a term for paradise.[110] It appears, then, that the interior of the sanctuary was both a replica of its celestial counterpart[111] and an image of the primordial and future paradise, with which the heavenly temple was closely connected if not identified.[112]

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

[106]1 Kgs 6:18–36; 2 Chr 3:5–6; 4:21. Compare Ezek 40:31–34; 41:17–26.

[107]*b. Yoma* 45a; *Num. R.* 11.3; *Tanḥ. Bĕre'šit* 4.33; *Tanḥ. Naso* 9. See further Ginzberg, *Legends*, 5. 29 n. 77.

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

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

[110]1QapGen 2.23. In their edition, Nahman Avigad and Yigael Yadin (*A Genesis Apocryphon* [Jerusalem: Magnes, 1956] 34) indicated that the reading is uncertain, but it has been generally accepted. See P. Grelot, "Parwaim, des Chroniques à l'Apocryphe de la Genèse," *VT* 11 (1961) 30–38, esp. 37; Geza Vermes, trans., *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (3d ed.; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987) 253.

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

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

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

Maier finds a reference in the parable of the two paths (C1–17) to *1 Enoch*'s statement that the celestial temple was "hot like fire and cold like ice" (*1 Enoch* 14.13).[114] In the Jerusalem Talmud and *'Abot de-Rabbi Natan (a)*, however, the parable appears in contexts that do not support this interpretation, and so it is doubtful whether it originally had this meaning. Nonetheless, it may be that the redactor of the Tosefta's version did make the association suggested by Maier, which would explain why he chose to include it here.

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

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

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

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

[115]See Halperin, *Merkabah*, 105.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[Texts follow]

	Tosefta	*Jerusalem Talmud*
A1		
A2	Four men went into *pardes*:	Four men went into *pardes*:
A3		
A4	Ben Azzai and Ben Zoma,	
A5	ʾAḥer and R. Aqiba.[a]	
A6	One looked and died;	One looked and died;
A7	one looked and was stricken;	one looked and was stricken;
A8	one looked and cut the shoots;	one looked and cut the shoots;
A9	one went up in peace	one went in in peace
A10	and came down in peace.[b]	and came out in peace.
A11		
A12		
A13		
A14		
A15		
A16		
A17		
A18		
A19		
A20	Ben Azzai[c] looked and died.	Ben Azzai looked and was stricken.
A21	Of him, scripture says:	Of him, scripture says:
A22	"Precious in the eyes of the LORD	"Have you found honey?
A23	is the death of his saints."[d]	Eat what is enough for you. . . "[e]
A24	Ben Zoma[f] looked and was stricken.	Ben Zoma looked and died.
A25	Of him, scripture says:	Of him, scripture says:
A26	"Have you found honey?	"Precious in the eyes of the LORD
A27	Eat what is enough for you. . . "[e,g]	is the death of his saints."[d]
A28		
A29		

Babylonian Talmud	*Song of Songs Rabbah*	
Our rabbis taught:	We read in a mishnah:	A1
Four men went into *pardes*	Four men went into *pardes*:	A2
and these are they:		A3
Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma,	Ben Azzai and Ben Zoma	A4
ʾAḥer, and R. Aqiba.	ʾAḥer and R. Aqiba	A5
		A6
		A7
		A8
		A9
		A10
R. Aqiba said to them:[h]		A11
When you approach[i]		A12
the pure marble stones,[j]		A13
do not say		A14
"Water! Water!"		A15
—according to what is written:		A16
"The speaker of lies		A17
shall not endure		A18
before my sight."[k]		A19
Ben Azzai looked and died.[l]	Ben Azzai looked and was stricken,	A20
Of him, scripture says:	and of him it is said:	A21
"Precious in the eyes of the LORD	"Have you found honey?	A22
is the death of his saints."[d]	Eat what is enough for you. . ."[e]	A23
Ben Zoma looked and was stricken,	Ben Zoma looked and died,	A24
and of him scripture says:	and of him it is said:	A25
"Have you found honey?	"Precious in the eyes of the LORD	A26
Eat what is enough for you,	is the death of his saints."[d]	A27
lest you be filled with it		A28
and vomit it."[e]		A29

	Tosefta	*Jerusalem Talmud*
A30		
A31		
A32	Elisha[m] looked and cut the shoots.	ʾAḥer cut the shoots.
A33		Who is ʾAḥer?
A34		Elisha ben Abuyah, who
A35		used to kill the masters of Torah.
		[Additional material about Elisha]
A36	Of him, scripture says:	Of him, scripture says:
A37	"Do not let your mouth	"Do not let your mouth
A38	lead your flesh into sin. . . "[n]	lead your flesh into sin. . . " etc.[n]
A39		—that he ruined the work
A40		of his own hands.[o]
		[Additional material about Elisha]
A41	R. Aqiba went up in peace	R. Aqiba went in in peace
A42	and came down in peace.[p]	and came out in peace.
A43		
A44		
A45		
A46		
A47		
A48		
A49		
A50	Of him, scripture says:	Of him, scripture says:
A51	"Draw me,	"Draw me,
A52	we will run after you. . . "[q]	we will run after you. . . "[q]
A53		
A54		
A55		
A56		
A57		
A58		
A59		
A60		

Babylonian Talmud	*Song of Songs Rabbah*	
Aḥer cut the shoots		A30
Rabbi Aqiba came out in peace		A31
[Additional material about B. Zoma]		
ʾAḥer cut the shoots.	Elisha b. Abuyah cut the shoots.	A32
		A33
		A34
		A35
	[Additional material about Elisha]	
Of him, scripture says:	And of him it is said:	A36
"Do not let your mouth	"Do not let your mouth	A37
lead your flesh into sin. . . "[n]	lead your flesh into sin. . . "[n]	A38
		A39
		A40
[Additional material about Elisha]		
R. Aqiba went up in peace	R. Aqiba went in in peace	A41
and came down in peace.[r]	and came out in peace,[s]	A42
	and he said,	A43
	Not because I am greater	A44
	than my fellows,	A45
	but thus taught the sages	A46
	in a mishnah:[t]	A47
	"Your deeds will bring you near	A48
	and your deeds will keep you far."[u]	A49
Of him, scripture says:	—and of him it is said:	A50
"Draw me,	". . . The king has brought me	A51
we will run after you. . . "[q]	into his chambers."[v]	A52
Even R. Aqiba		A53
—the ministering angels		A54
wanted to drive him away.		A55
The Holy One, blessed be he,		A56
said to them:		A57
Leave this elder alone,		A58
for he is worthy		A59
to make use of my glory.[cc]		A60

	Tosefta	*Jerusalem Talmud*	*Babylonian Talmud*	*Song of Songs Rabbah*
		[Additional material about Elisha]	[Additional material about Aqiba]	
B1	They employed a parable:[w]			B1
B2	To what may the matter be compared?			B2
B3	To the garden[x] of a king	... to the garden[x] of a king		B3
B4	with an upper chamber[y]	with an upper chamber[y]		B4
B5	built above it.	built above it.		B5
B6	What should a man do?			B6
B7	Look,[z]	One may look,		B7
B8	only let him not	but not		B8
B9	feed his eyes[aa] on it.	damage (it).[bb]		B9
			Abot de-Rabbi Natan (a)[kk]	
C1	They employed another parable:[dd]		They employed a parable:	C1
C2	To what may the matter be compared?	This teaching[ee] is like	To what may the matter be compared?	C2
C3	To a highway[ff]		To a courtyard[ff]	C3
C4	which passes between		which passes between	C4
C5	two roads,[gg]	two paths,[gg]	two roads,[gg]	C5
C6	one of fire and one of snow.	one of fire and one of snow.	one of fire and one of snow.	C6
C7	He who turns aside this way	He who turns to this side	If one walks on the side of the fire,	C7
C8	is scorched by the fire.[hh]	dies in the fire.	lo, one is scorched by the fire;[hh]	C8
C9	He who turns aside that way	He who turns to that side	but if one walks on the side of the snow,	C9
C10	is scorched by the snow.[ii]	dies in the snow.	lo, one is stricken by the cold.[ii]	C10
C11	What should a man do?	What should one do?	What should one do?	C11
C12	Let him walk in the middle	One should walk in the middle.	Let him walk between the two of them	C12
C13	—only let him not turn aside,			C13
C14	neither this way nor that way.[jj]			C14
C15			and take care of himself,	C15
C16			lest he be scorched by the fire	C16
C17			or stricken by the cold.	C17

[a]*Tosefta*, MS London, omits A4–A5.
[b]*Tosefta*, MS Erfurt, omits A6–A10.
[c]*Tosefta*, MS London: "Ben Zoma."
[d]Ps 116:15
[e]Prov 25:16
[f]*Tosefta*, MS London: "Ben Azzai."
[g]*Tosefta*, MS London, completes the verse, as in the Babylonian Talmud.
[h]The Babylonian Talmud, MS Vatican 134, adds: "to the sages"; MS Oxford adds: "to his disciples."
[i]The Babylonian Talmud, MSS Vatican 171 and London: "Beware! When. . . "
[j]The Babylonian Talmud, MS Vatican 134, omits "pure."
[k]Ps 101:7.
[l]The Babylonian Talmud, MS Vatican 171: "and was cut off."
[m]*Tosefta*, MS Erfurt: "Aḥer."
[n]Qoh 5:5. The verse continues: ". . . and say not before the angel (LXX: τοῦ θεοῦ) that it is an error. Why should God become angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands?"
[o]Allusion to Qoh 5:5 (see the previous note).
[p]*Tosefta*, MS Erfurt: ". . . went in. . . and came out. . . "
[q]Cant 1:4a.
[r]The Babylonian Talmud, MS Göttingen: ". . . went in. . . . and came out. . . "
[s]Halperin reports (*Merkabah*, 78 n. 41) that a text of *Song of Songs Rabbah* cited by R. Martini (*Pugio Fidei* [Leipzig: n.p., 1687] 320) has: ". . . went up. . . . and came down. . . "
[t]*Song of Songs Rabbah* (edition): כך שנו חכמים במשנה. Martini's citation (see the previous note) omits במשנה. MS Vatican 76,3 supports the edition. MS Munich 50,2 reads: כך אמרו בעלי המשנה. Parallels in *Hekhalot Zuṭarti* tend to support the inclusion of במשנה. See Halperin, *Merkabah*, 78 n. 42.
[u]*m. ʿEd.* 5.7.
[v]Cant 1:4b.
[w]*Tosefta*, MS Vienna, omits: "They employed."
[x]פרדס.
[y]Halperin (*Merkabah*, 67, 73, 93, etc.) translates עלייה as "balcony," but this is conjectural. See further above, p. 207.
[z]*Tosefta*, MS Erfurt: "Only look."
[aa]*Tosefta*, MS Vienna: יזין את עיניו. *Tosefta*, MS London: יזון את עיניו. *Tosefta*, MS Erfurt: יזין עיניו. Zuckermandel erroneously prints יזיז עיניו (and, in his apparatus, יזו for MS Vienna and the printed edition), which would mean "remove his eyes." See Saul Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-Fshuṭah: A Comprehensive Commentary on the Tosefta* (8 vols.; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1955–73) 5. 1291 [Hebrew].
[bb]The Jerusalem Talmud: עליו להציץ אבל לא לגעת. Halperin (*Merkabah*, 93) and Jacob Neusner (*The Talmud of the Land of Israel: A Preliminary Translation and Explanation* [35 vols. projected; Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1982–] 20. 53): ". . . look, but not touch."
[cc]שראוי להשתמש בכבודי. The hekhalot parallels read להסתכל ("to behold") for להשתמש. See further above, p. 199 n. 81.
[dd]*Tosefta*, MS Erfurt: "Another saying—they employed a parable:"
[ee]התורה הזו.
[ff]*Tosefta*, MS Vienna: איסתרטיא; *Tosefta*, MS London: איסרטיא; *Tosefta*, MS Erfurt: איסטרטיא; *ARN(a)*: איסטרטיא, which could mean either (as translated above) "a courtyard" or "a military troop" (these are two different words with the same spelling). Jacob Neusner (trans., *The Tosefta* [6 vols.; New York: Ktav, 1977–86] 2. 313) evidently adopts the *ARN(a)* reading and renders: "platoon."

[gg]*Tosefta* (all MSS) and *ARN(a)*: דרכים; the Jerusalem Talmud: שבילים.
[hh]*Tosefta*, MS Vienna, reads גבוה באור: "is exalted (perhaps: "exceeds") in the fire." However, Lieberman follows the other MSS and the printed edition, which give נכוה, as does *ARN(a)*.
[ii]*Tosefta*: as previous note, save that MS London omits the word completely here. *ARN(a)*: לוקה בצינה.
[jj]*Tosefta*, MS Erfurt: ". . . and let him not turn aside, this way or that way."
[kk]The context in which this parable appears in *ʾAbot de-Rabbi Natan (a)* is indicated by the immediately preceding passage, which reads, "Rabbi Judah ben Ilai says: 'Everyone who makes words of Torah primary and worldly affairs secondary will be made primary in the world to come. (He who makes) worldly affairs primary and words of Torah secondary will be made secondary in the world to come.'"