

question has been tackled by Raphael Patai,³⁷ who formulated a remarkable theory. He was well aware of the fact that all medieval literature that evokes the custom of *jus primae noctis* has been proven to be folkloristic and has no historical basis.³⁸ On the whole, Patai abided by these conclusions. He argued, however, that a special case should be made for the talmudic sources describing the same sort of custom. He claimed that since all the sources that are now considered legend and depict the practice in Christian medieval Europe were composed much later than the period they propose to describe, it is acceptable to discard them. In Judea, on the contrary, in the aftermath of the Bar Kokhbah revolt, the Romans actually put into practice such a law, as the "reliable" rabbinic sources claim.

Patai, as a folklorist, should have known better. If a motif of this sort could have appeared in a sixteenth-century document and upset the entire history of medieval Europe for the next two centuries, the same motif likewise could have cropped up in the fourth- or fifth-century Palestinian Talmud, falsely describing events of the second century.³⁹ In my opinion, the conclusions of the present article, which make the *jus primae noctis* narrative of the Palestinian Talmud nothing more than an apology for an inconvenient Judaic custom that is described cryptically in the Mishnah, undermine Patai's claim.⁴⁰ From a large repository of folkloristic material circulating worldwide, the *jus primae noctis* was conveniently drawn in order to explain and justify a custom that seemed to the rabbis to undermine their view of proper conduct in Jewish society.

³⁷Patai, "Jus Primae Noctis."

³⁸The myth was first rejected by Carl Schmidt, *Jus primae noctis: eine geschichtliche Untersuchung* (Freiburg: n.p., 1881). For more recent works upholding this view, see William D. Howarth, "'Droit du Seigneur': Fact or Fantasy," *Journal of European Studies* 1 (1971) 291-312; and Hermann F. W. Schmidt-Bleibtreu, *Jus Primae Noctis—Herrenrecht der ersten Nacht* (Bonn: Rohrscheid, 1988).

³⁹The *jus primae noctis* is now an accepted literary motif in folklore dictionaries. See, for example, Dov Noy [Neuman], *Motif Index of Talmudic-Midrashic Literature* (Ph.D. diss.; Ann Arbor Dissertation Series Microfilms, 1954) 725.

⁴⁰In this view I join several previous scholars, who reached the same conclusion based on different evidence. See Israel Levi, "Hanoucca et les jus primae noctis," *REJ* 30 (1898) 220-31, esp. 231; and more recently Moshe D. Herr, "Persecution and Martyrdom in Hadrian's Days," in David Asheri and Israel Schatzman, eds., *Studies in History* (Scripta Hierosolymitana 23; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1972) 101 n. 56.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁸Part 1, pp. 185-86.

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

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

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

¹⁰Part 1, 207-8 n. 116.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As many scholars have remarked, a central theme of this passage is Paul's contrast between his own weakness and the power of Christ.¹⁷ This contrast resolves the difficult situation in which he finds himself: if he does not "boast" he has no answer to the claims of his opponents, but to do so is to commit the very error for which he has castigated them (2 Cor 10:12). 2 Cor 12:8b–12 shows that he has modeled his position on the example of Jesus: just as the power of God was made manifest by the weakness of Jesus, so Paul's weakness manifests the power of Christ. Thus, Paul's very "nothingness" is the basis of his claim to be "inferior in nothing" to the so-called super-apostles. In this way, he makes it clear that his boasting is of the power of Christ, rather than of his own attainment (compare 1 Cor 4:26–2:5).

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

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

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

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

¹⁵See, for example, Georgi, *Opponents*, 279–80; Hans Lietzmann, *An die Korinther I–II* (HNT 9; completed by Werner Georg Kümmel; 5th ed.; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1969) 152–77; Hans Dieter Betz, "Der Apostel Paulus," 97–100; Barrett, *Commentary*, 305–6; Gunther, *Opponents*, 100–101; Rudolf Karl Bultmann, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985) 218–30; Tabor, *Things Unutterable*, 34–38; Strecker, "Die Legitimität des paulinischen Apostolates," 577–79.

¹⁶See part 1: *HZ/MR*, A2b (p. 196); Geniza fragment A/B5 (p. 198); *Cant. R.* A44–45 (p. 213).

¹⁷Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, appendix C, 113; Schäfer, *Synopse*, §584; Naomi Janowitz, *The Poetics of Ascent: Theories of Language in a Rabbinic Ascent Text* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989) 54 (lines 0779–0784); Michael D. Swartz, *Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism: An Analysis of Ma'aseh Merkabah* (Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 28; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1992) 242.

¹⁸*Ma'aseh Merkabah* §26; Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 113; Schäfer, *Synopse*, §586; Janowitz, *Poetics*, 55 (lines 0812–20); Swartz, *Mystical Prayer*, 242.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

²²Irenaeus *Adversus haereses* 5.5.1.

²³M. D. Goulder, "The Visionaries of Laodicea," *JSTJ* 43 (1991) 15-39, esp. 18-20.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 19.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

²⁹Tabor, *Things Unutterable*, 23.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

³³See the following note.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

³⁶Wewers, "Überlegenheit," 20–23.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 21.

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

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

A R. Aqiba said: At that time, when I ascended to the merkabah, a *bat-qol* went forth from beneath the throne of glory, speaking in the Aramaic tongue. In this tongue, what did it say?

B "Before the LORD made heaven and earth, he established. . . <corrupt word>⁴². . . in Raqia', to go in by and to come out by [scribal gloss:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

E "What is his name?"

בנייה כספין רנין רנין עון נייה, ⁴⁵ who is the completely Holy One, whose heavenly hosts are fire!

... sitting on a high and exalted throne. . . . Holy! Holy! Holy is the LORD of Hosts! The whole earth is full of his glory!' (Isa 6:1-3). '... Blessed be the glory of the LORD from his place!' (Ezek 3:12),

אזיזים בוסקסיו דהס סחקה קספין פסקי בוקי אפה ספוק סופק יאיק ניסה קקה סקס דוס ואקיא דא אקסם פס"ה before whom Israel⁴⁶ say: 'A glorious high throne from the beginning [is the place of our sanctuary]' (Jer 17:12).

F "His holy ones on high say: 'We see (him) like the appearance of lightning!' His prophets say: 'We see (him) in a dream-vision, like a man who sees visions in the night.' The kings who are upon earth say: 'אלוקא כדר נה"ם' [corrupt text?]. But our rabbis⁴⁷ say: 'He is, so to speak, like us, but he is greater than everything—and this is his glory, which is hidden from us.' Moses says to them, to these and those: 'Do not investigate with your words, but let him be praised in his place!' Therefore it is said: Blessed be the glory of the LORD from his place!"

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

⁴⁵The magical names are given according to MS Oxford.

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

⁴⁷N reads, "R. Aqiba says. . ."

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁵⁰Published by Moriz Friedländer, "Tehillat Pirus Šir-ha-Širim Mē'orab mi-Lašon 'Eber wē-'Arab," in *Festschrift zum achtzigsten Geburtstag Moritz Steinschneider's* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1896) Hebrew section, 49-59 (the quotation is on p. 58). On the antiquity of much of the material preserved by this source, see A. Marmorstein, "Deux enseignements d'Origène concernant les Juifs," *REJ* 71 (1920) 195-99; and Saul Lieberman, *Midrešei-Teiman* (2d ed.; Jerusalem: Wahrmann, 1970) 12-19 [Hebrew]; see further idem, "Mišnat Šir-ha-Širim" (appendix D of Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*) 123-24. It is tempting, although perhaps overoptimistic, to conjecture that this tradition goes back to Rabban Gamaliel the Elder, who was the first of six *nēsī'im* to bear this name and title, and who was allegedly claimed as a teacher by Paul (Acts 22:3).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁵⁶Chrysostom *Hom.* 26 on 2 Corinthians.

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

⁵⁸Terence Y. Mullins, "Paul's Thorn in the Flesh," *JBL* 76 (1957) 299-303.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁷³Jewett, *Chronology*, 54-55.

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁷²Otto Betz, "Die Vision des Paulus im Tempel von Jerusalem—Apg. 22.17-21 als Beitrag des Damaskuserlebnisses," in Otto Böcher and Klaus Haacker, eds., *Verhorum Veritas. Festschrift für Gustav Stählin zum 70. Geburtstag* (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1970) 113-23.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁷⁹See Dibelius, "Speeches," 160.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lyric Autobiography: John Donne's *Holy Sonnets* *

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In her admirable study of autobiography, Janet Varner Gunn argued that the religious significance of the form "lies not in its literary function but in its anthropology,"¹ that is, in its role in articulating and creating human experience. She also stated that much literary discussion of autobiography serves to conceal its "strangeness" and "unruly behavior."²

Both of these points seem to me to be important, particularly if it is true that the human self is protean and receives a multiplicity of shapes according to the cultural forces that mold it. To adapt a figure used by William James, the mind is formed much as a stone is shaped by a sculptor: "In a sense the statue stood there from eternity. But there were a thousand different ones beside it, and the sculptor alone is to thank for having extricated this one from the rest."³ Surely one of the central cultural sculptors is autobiography, the form that claims above all others to possess the shape of the self. It follows that any claims to the "proper" or "best" form of

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¹Janet Varner Gunn, *Autobiography: Toward a Poetic of Experience* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982) 10.

²*Ibid.*, 11.

³William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (ed. Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis; The Works of William James; 3 vols.; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981) 1. 277.