

GAZING ON THE MYSTERY: THE TEMPLE TRADITION OF
SEEKING THE FACE OF GOD IN ANCIENT JUDAISM

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When Moses was told to build the tabernacle, the LORD said to him: 'Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may *dwell* in their midst' (Exod.25.8). When this was translated into Greek, it became: 'And you shall make for me a holy place, and I shall *be seen* among you.' (Lxx Exod.25.7)¹. Why the difference?

The Pentateuch was translated into Greek in Alexandria during the reign of Ptolemy II (285-247BCE), or so the traditional story says². The actual process may have been more complicated, but the Greek Pentateuch almost certainly originated in Egypt and raises the question: Why did a Jew in Egypt think that the LORD dwelling in the sanctuary meant that he was seen there? Our modern idea of the invisible presence of the LORD in the holy place cannot have been what a third century Jew in Egypt understood by the presence of the LORD in the holy place.

Whether or not the LORD could be 'seen' was a matter of some controversy. One strand in the Old Testament - and the strand that has had a disproportionate influence on reconstructions of Old Testament theology - was that of the Deuteronomists, so called because their ideals were drawn from, and expressed in, Deuteronomy. They were emphatic that the LORD could not be seen: for them, the meeting with the LORD at Sinai had been just a voice. 'The LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of words but *saw no form* ; there was only a voice' (Deut.4.12). The people saw the Glory of God and they saw God speaking with a human being (Deut.5.24), but there was no form. Presumably this meant a human form. The other account of the meeting at Sinai says that Moses, Aaron and his family, and the elders, 'saw the God of Israel; and there was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness' (Exod.24.10). God had feet; and at Sinai they saw a form.

Moses asked to see the Glory of the LORD, and was told that he could see his goodness and know his Name, but he could not see the face/presence³ of the LORD, 'for man shall not see me and live' (Exod.33.20). The tradition is ambiguous here: the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend (Exod.33.11) and he spoke to him from between the two cherubim over the *kapporet* (Exod.25.22); neither of these instances says that the LORD was actually seen. They could have been understood in the Deuteronomist's sense of sensing the presence and hearing the voice. But Aaron was told that, when he entered the holy of holies, the LORD would appear in the cloud over the *kapporet* (Lev.16.2), so perhaps Moses did see the LORD when he stood in the same place. And Moses did see *the*

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, I cite the chapter and verse numbers of the English versions of the Bible.

² As told in *The Letter of Aristeeas* , 172-181, 301-311

³ Face and presence are the same word in Hebrew: *panim* .

form of the LORD: this was the distinction that set him apart from the other leaders of Israel. ‘With [Moses] I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in dark speech; and he beholds *the form* of the LORD’ (Num.12.8). We shall return to this.

The Deuteronomists also show a distinct hostility towards both temple and monarchy. Samuel warned the people that a king would be a disaster (1 Sam.8.10-18), and, as their account of the monarchy unfolds, most of the kings are shown to fall far short of their ideal. It is remarkable to have a national history presented as a catalogue of bad kings, and the destruction of the capital city blamed on their behaviour (2 Kgs 23.3-4). The Deuteronomists also disapproved of the temple. It was designed by foreigners, and Solomon had to impose forced labour on his own people to build it (1 Kgs 5.1-18); the cost was enormous, and Solomon had to sell part of his kingdom to the king of Tyre to pay the debts (1 Kgs 9.10-14). Given that this major set of primary sources is hostile to king, temple and the very idea of theophany, any attempt to reconstruct the situation in the first temple is fraught with difficulties.

Even their description of the temple omitted certain details which are found elsewhere. These are not random details, but significant for our quest. It is as though the Deuteronomists wanted to rewrite the past and remove whatever theophany had implied. The Chronicler and the Deuteronomist both wrote accounts of Solomon’s temple. The Chronicler said David had received a plan for the temple from the LORD, just as Moses had received detailed instructions on Sinai how to build the tabernacle as the place where the Lord dwelt in the midst of his people (Exod.25.8). Deuteronomy implies that Moses did not receive any plan for the tabernacle; on Sinai he received only the ten commandments: ‘He added no more’ (Deut.5.22). The plan David received included the golden chariot throne (1 Chron.28.18-9), but the Deuteronomist does not mention this. David had appointed temple musicians ‘to invoke, to thank and to praise the LORD, the God of Israel’ (1 Chron.16.4), but the Deuteronomist does not mention them. Solomon set up a veil of blue, purple, crimson and white linen fabric to screen the cherubim of the holy of holies (2 Chron.3.14), and the Deuteronomist does not mention this either. All of these – the chariot throne, the music and the veil - are important for understanding how the LORD appeared in the temple.

King Solomon’s temple dedication prayer looks as though something was added that contradicted the original words of the prayer⁴. Solomon prayed: ‘I have built thee an exalted house, a place for thee to dwell in for ever’ (1 Kgs 8.13), but later in the prayer we find him saying: ‘Will God indeed dwell on earth? Behold heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have built’ (1 Kgs 8.27). The temple was to be the place of the Name: ‘the place of which thou hast said, “My Name shall be there”’ (1 Kgs 8.29). Nobody can be sure what this meant, but the same distinction is found in the Deuteronomist’s account of Nathan’s warning to King David. Here the contrast is first between a permanent temple and a tent: ‘Would you build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house since the day I brought up this people of Israel from Egypt to this very day,

⁴ This addition occurs also in the Chronicler’s account, 2 Chron.6.18.

but have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling' (2 Sam.7.6). Then there is the promise of a future house, but for the Name: '[Your son] shall build a house for my Name ...' (2 Sam.7.13). We are invited to believe that the LORD was not 'in' the temple, and so the purpose of building the tabernacle [and the later temple] is immediately called into question.
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Since the Deuteronomists and their successors were a major influence on the formation of the Old Testament – they were largely responsible for the collection and preservation of the texts that survived the destruction in 597 BCE, for example - there is a complex problem facing any attempt to reconstruct the original temple. There may be complete texts that never became canonical - 1 Enoch is a good example - and there may have been earlier versions of the Hebrew text underlying the present form, as the Qumran fragments suggest. The reason for the exclusion and alteration of those texts is very likely to be that they were evidence for the position the Deuteronomists sought to supersede. Any reconstruction that relies on 'their' written evidence is therefore at a distinct disadvantage. Since conventional scholarship takes 'their' canonical texts as the norm, a great deal had to be 'undone' before any real progress can be made. Nevertheless, there are places in the Old Testament where the older temple is still visible, and these texts are our starting point.

The Psalms envisaged the LORD in Zion: the LORD dwelt, *yašab*, there (Ps.9.11). His dwellings *miškanot* were on his holy hill (Ps.43.3; also Ps 84.1 and Ps.84.7 'The God of gods will be seen in Zion). This was the place of his Glory: 'I love the habitation of thy house, and the place where thy Glory dwells' (Ps.26.8). The LORD was enthroned in the holy of holies that represented heaven. 'The LORD is in his holy temple, the LORD's throne is in heaven ...' (Ps.11.4). He was enthroned on the cherubim in the holy of holies (Pss.80.1; 99.1), but the Deuteronomist did not mention the throne. Had we only the Deuteronomists' description of the temple, we should not know there had been a real throne there. Isaiah says that in the year King Uzziah died he saw⁵ the King, the LORD of Hosts enthroned in the temple, in the midst of the seraphim (Isa.6.1-3).

*When Isaiah saw the LORD enthroned, he learned that his train filled the temple and his Glory filled the whole earth (Isa.6.1, 3), but the Greek text of Isaiah 6.1 says that his Glory [rather than his train] filled the temple. The enthroned LORD gave forth a radiance which was the Glory. The Targum here, agreeing with the Greek text, says that 'the brilliance of his Glory' filled the temple, and Isaiah exclaimed that he had seen 'the Glory of the Shekinah of the Eternal King'. [This phrase is used also in Tg. Isa.33.17]. The Psalmist sang: 'Thou who art enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth' (Ps.80.1)⁶. 'O LORD... shine forth! Rise up, O judge of the earth...' (Ps.94.1-2). God shines forth from Zion (Ps.50.2), and the same verb *yapa* 'appears also in the blessing of Moses, an old poem attached to the end of*

⁵ He saw, *ra'ah* - not *hazah*, which implies a visionary experience since related nouns mean seer and vision. It must have been customary to use the word *ra'ah* for a vision of the LORD.

⁶ The Targum here shows that losing sight of the face was being in exile. 'You whose Shekinah dwells among the cherubim... restore us from our exile and make the brightness of your countenance shine upon us.'

Deuteronomy: when the LORD came from Sinai and dawned from Seir, 'he shone forth' from Paran with his host of angels (Deut.33.2). The Greek here uses the word for epiphany: 'The LORD epephanen from Seir...' (Lxx Deut.33.2). There is a clue in this ancient poem to the context of this 'shining forth': it happened when the LORD became King (Deut.33.5). Shining was the sign of the presence of the King, and his presence protected the city. 'Is not the LORD in Zion? Is not her King in her?' (Jer.8.19). Epiphany was linked to the Kingdom of God.

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*Some key texts are hard to read. What might the original of Psalm 68.35 have been? 'Terrible is God in his sanctuary, the God of Israel, he gives power and strength to his people.' The Hebrew is not 'in' but 'from' your sanctuaries, mimmiqdašeyka, but the Greek read this the initial m as b, thus giving 'in' or 'among', and then understood holy places as 'holy ones'⁷, angels. 'God is terrible among his angels.' Several versions⁸ read 'sanctuary', singular. But there is another possibility; the consonants of terrible, nr', look very similar to n'r, glorious, shining, and so the text could have been 'God shines from his sanctuary.' There is a similar picture in Psalm 76.4, where God is 'shining' in Zion, more majestic than the 'mountains ***', the final word being opaque. The Greek versions here show the same confusion between nr' and n'r: the Lxx has 'you shine forth', from n'r, whereas Theodotion has 'fearful', from nr'. Psalm 76.4 could therefore be describing God as shining or fearful, 'greater than the *** mountains' or, reading hrry as hdry,⁹ as in Ps 110.3 which is another similar context, 'more glorious than the glories of the holy place'. The problem in both Psalm 68.35 and Psalm 76.4 seem*

When David brought the ark to Jerusalem, before he made plans for the temple that was built by his son, he appointed musicians. Music, along with the throne and the veil, were not mentioned in the Deuteronomists' account of the first temple. We have seen the significance of the throne and the divine plan in reconstructing the older beliefs about the LORD appearing in the temple, but what of the music? The Levites were appointed to serve before the ark of the LORD, to 'invoke, to thank and to praise the LORD the God of Israel' (1 Chron.16.4). The Holy One was 'enthroned on the praises of Israel' (Ps.22.3), and the congregation praised and glorified the LORD and stood in awe of him (Ps.22.23). Hallelujah, usually translated 'Praise the LORD', is familiar in its original form. Apart from Psalm 135.3, it always occurs at the beginning or end of the Psalm, and when it occurs at the beginning, the Greek simply transliterated: 'Allelouia' (Lxx Pss 105, 110, 111, 112, 106, 134, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150)¹⁰. It must have been a significant temple term whose meaning was known to those who needed the Scriptures in Greek. At the beginning of the Psalm it addresses the congregation - a plural form: 'Praise the LORD' - but the Hebrew root *hll* means not only 'praise' but also 'shine'. Should we perhaps understand Psalm 22 as 'Make Him shine, make Him glorious, stand in awe of him.' The Hallelujah at the beginning of the Psalms would then be an

⁷ Some Mss have *hagiois*, others *hosiois*. The meaning is the same.

⁸ Thus Syriac, Targum and St Jerome.

⁹ The letters *d* and *r* look similar in Hebrew and are often confused.

¹⁰ At the end of the psalms there is either translation, paraphrase or nothing: Lxx Pss 104, 105, 112, 114, 115, 134,145, 146, 147, 148.

instruction to the musicians to cause the LORD's face to shine, to invoke His presence. 'Make the Lord shine forth!' This was the first duty of the Levites: 'To invoke, to thank and to praise the LORD,' and so they sang: 'Thou who art enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth!' (Ps 80.1). The Levites made music when the temple was consecrated - another detail omitted by the Deuteronomist. They sang 'with one voice' and then the cloud of the Glory of the LORD filled the temple (2 Chron.5.11-4). Once the LORD had been enthroned in his temple, the music invited the LORD to shine forth from the holy of holies, to show Himself as King. 'For sovereignty belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations (Ps.22.28)¹¹. This would explain why the Deuteronomists did not mention the music.

The radiant Glory of the Presence was later known as the Shekinah, 'the indwelling', and Kabbalah, the temple tradition as it survived and developed during the Christian era, used ritual and even magical practices to draw down the Shekinah which had again departed into heaven. A major study of the Kabbalah suggested, on the basis of the later texts and their temple imagery, that drawing the Shekinah down into the holy of holies had been at the heart of the original temple service. 'On the ground of these parallels, we can seriously consider the possibility that the Temple service was conceived as inducing the presence of the Shekinah in the Holy of Holies...'¹². In the original temple, *drawing down* would not have been necessary, since the presence of the LORD was there in the midst, but calling on the LORD to appear does seem to have been at the heart of the original temple cult. Perhaps this is why the first Christians called upon the LORD to appear: '*Maranatha*', Come LORD.

Germanus, Patriarch of Constantinople, writing about 6700 Ad knew that Alleluia meant 'Come Lord'. In his *Exposition of the Divine Liturgy* 29 he said it meant ;' God comes and appears. Sing praise and hymns.'

Seeing the Glory and beauty of the LORD in the temple is a recurring theme, and not only in the Psalms. Isaiah saw the LORD in the midst of the seraphim, the burning ones (Isa.6.1-3). He must have seen through the veil to the Glory beyond. In other words, the LORD was shining forth for him; the veil between heaven and earth had been taken away. The Deuteronomist did not mention the temple veil. Isaiah promised the upright that they too would see 'the King in his beauty', whilst sinners would fear the devouring fires of eternity (Isa.33.14,17) - the fires of the holy place. The Psalmist longed to see (*hazah*, so the visionary sense) the beauty, *no'am*, of the LORD and to contemplate his temple (Ps.27.4). The *beauties* of the LORD are linked to the fullness of joy in his presence, and learning the path of life (Ps.16.11). The Psalmist prays: 'Let your work be made clear to your servants,

¹¹ This pattern appears at the climax of the Book of Revelation. The multitude in heaven sing 'Hallelujah' and then the LORD appears on earth, riding forth from heaven with his angels (Rev.19.1,3,7,11-16).

¹² M Idel *Kabbalah. New Perspectives*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988, p.168.

and your Glory to their children, and may the beauty, *no 'am*, of the LORD God be upon us...’ (Ps.90.17, my translation). The Greek text understood this beauty as brilliant splendour, *lamprotes*. This was the King shining forth - epiphany.

Seeing the beauty could be described as seeing the face/presence of the LORD. ‘I shall behold thy face’, sang the Psalmist (Ps.17.15). He had prayed to the LORD in his distress, and knew that the LORD could visit him by night (Ps.17.3). ‘I shall be satisfied with your form, *ʾmunah*, on my waking’ (Ps.17.15, my translation)¹³. He expected to see *the form* of the LORD. There are several examples of these ‘night visions’: the young Samuel at Shiloh saw and heard the LORD during the night, even though the word of the LORD was rare at the time, and there was no vision ‘breaking through’, *nipras* (1 Sam.3.1,21, translating literally). Solomon went to the ancient holy place at Gibeon and saw the LORD in a dream by night (1 Kgs 3.5-15). He saw the LORD again, after he had built the temple, but we are not told where this vision occurred (1 Kgs 9.1). Daniel was granted a vision by night of ‘one like a man’ (Dan.7.2, 13), and Zechariah saw in the night a man on a red horse (Zech.1.8).

There are no details in these texts of who was seen, what the ‘form’ was like. The face/presence is described as beauty and Glory, but most frequently it is light that brings prosperity and deliverance, and seeing the face of the LORD is the response to prayer. ‘Lift up the light of thy face upon us, O LORD’ (Ps.4.6, my translation). ‘Let thy face shine on thy servant, save me in thy steadfast love’ (Ps.31.16). When the LORD hid his face, there was disaster: ‘Thou didst hide thy face, I was dismayed’ (Ps.30.7). ‘Why dost thou hide thy face? Why dost thou forget our affliction and oppression?’ (Ps.44.24). ‘Hide not thy face from thy servant; for I am in distress, make haste to answer me.’ (Ps.69.17). ‘Do not hide thy face from me in the day of my distress!’ (Ps.102.2). In despair Israel felt that the LORD did not see: ‘My way is hid from the LORD ...’ (Isa.40.27). When the faithful worshipper saw the light of the LORD, he knew that he was secure: ‘The LORD is my light and my salvation: whom shall I fear?’ ‘Thou hast said. “Seek ye my face.” My heart says to thee “Thy face O LORD do I seek.” Hide not thy face from me. (Ps.27.1, 8-9). ‘Blessed are the people... O LORD, who walk in the light of your face/presence (Ps.89.15).

There is a curious episode in the Infancy Gospel of James¹⁴, which may show one way in which the LORD revealed his face. Joachim and Anna, who were to become the parents of Mary the mother of Jesus, were childless, and Joachim was told that he could not offer gifts in the temple because he had not raised a child. As the great day of the LORD [the feast of Tabernacles?] drew near, Joachim learned that Anna was, at last, pregnant. He took his gifts to the temple, and said to himself, ‘If the LORD has forgiven me, the plate that is upon the high priest’s forehead will make this clear to me’. Joachim presented his offering and watched as the high priest went to the altar, ‘and he saw no sin in himself’. ‘Now I know that the LORD has become propitious unto me and hath forgiven all my sins’. What had Joachim seen? Did he perhaps see the golden plate shining? Since the golden plate was engraved

¹³ The Greek has ‘I shall be satisfied by seeing your Glory’.

¹⁴ An early Christian text attributed to James, the first bishop of Jerusalem.

with the Name, did it function as an oracle, and when it shone, did the worshipper know that the LORD had made his face/presence shine on him? (Infancy Gospel of James 4.5-5.1).

Three times a year according to the ancient calendars - at the feast of unleavened bread, at the feast of weeks and at the feast of booths - the men of Israel had to make a pilgrimage to the temple, 'to appear before the LORD' (Exod.23.17; 34.23; Deut.16.16). 'To appear before the LORD' is the usual translation, but the Hebrew actually says: three times a year shall all your men *see the face of the LORD*. It became the custom to read the letters differently, even though the Psalms show clearly what the original meaning must have been. There are many examples: here is one.

- *In Exodus 23.15 and 34.20, the text should be read 'none shall see my face with empty hands', or it could mean 'none shall see my face in an unworthy state'.¹⁵*
- *In Exodus 23.17 'each male yr'h to the face/presence of the LORD', the verb is read as a Niph'al, yera'eh and so the verse becomes 'each male shall appear before the face of the LORD'. The Samaritan text, however, has the accusative particle here instead of 'to' and so that the letters yr'h must be read as the Qal form, yir'eh: 'each male shall see the face of the LORD'.*
- *In Exodus 34.23 the accusative particle occurs, and so there is no doubt that the verb yr'h is to be read as a Qal form: 'each male shall see the face of the LORD...'*
- *In Exodus 34.24 the infinitive construct form of the verb, lr'wt is Qal; the Niph'al would be lhr'wt. The text must mean: 'When you go up to see the face/presence of the LORD three times a year.'*
- *In Deuteronomy 16.16 the text is like Exodus 34.23, and so a Qal form is required: 'each male shall see the face of the LORD.'*
- *In Deuteronomy 31.11 there is the Qal infinitive construct and so it means: 'When all Israel comes to see the face of the LORD your God...'*
- *In 1 Samuel 1.22, Hannah planned to take her son 'to see the face of the LORD'.*
- *In Isaiah 1.12 there is the Qal infinitive construct and so it must mean 'when you come to see my face...'*
- *In Psalm 42.2 the Psalmist longs to see God: 'My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and see the face of God?'*

For all the examples the Hebrew Lexicon¹⁶ says that the Qal form should be read in every case. 'The verbs in all these passages were originally Qal, afterwards pointed Niph'al, to avoid the expression 'see the face of Yahweh'.

Why should this have happened? The pilgrims with clean hands and a pure heart who are worthy to make go to the holy place - 'Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD, and who shall

¹⁵ *reyqam* can mean either.

¹⁶ Brown, Driver, Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962 edition, pp. 811, 908

stand in his holy place? (Ps.24.3) - are described as *seeking the face* of the God of Jacob¹⁷, and promised blessing and vindication (Ps.24.5-6). They prayed: 'May God be gracious to us and bless us, and make his face to shine upon us' (Ps.67.1) - a sign of favour that would bring prosperity. The Greek here has 'May the LORD *epiphantai* his face upon us' (Lxx Ps.66.1). Epiphany. The pilgrims prayed to that the One enthroned on the cherubim would shine forth: 'Restore us O God; let thy face shine that we may be saved' (Ps.80.1,3,7,19); and the great high priestly blessing prayed that each person would see the face of the LORD. 'May the LORD bless you and keep you. May the LORD make his face/presence shine upon you and be gracious to you/give you life. May the LORD make his presence rise upon you and give you peace (Num 6.24-6)¹⁸. Jesus said: 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God' (Matt.5.8), and the climax of the Book of Revelation shows the servants of God and the Lamb standing before the throne and seeing his face (Rev.22.4).

It seems that seeing the face of the LORD was very important in early Christian teaching, one of the many elements restored from the original temple that had been suppressed or obscured in the Hebrew Scriptures. St John began his Gospel by declaring; 'We have seen his Glory' (John 1.14).

The Targums, which cannot be dated with certainty, but which preserve ancient tradition, treat the 'face' texts in various ways. All the Targums of Exodus and Deuteronomy reflect the Niph'al reading of the verb *yr'h*: they all understand that it was the people who appeared before the LORD, and not the LORD who appeared to the people. In the Targum of the Psalms, however, the LORD *does* appear, but the manner of the appearing is modified.

- The 'face' is replaced by the Shekinah' e.g. Tg Pss 22.24; 27.8; 30.7; 42.2; 44.24 (which has 'the Shekinah of your Glory'), 69.17; 88.14; 102.2; 143.7;
- or it can be replaced by 'the brightness'¹⁹ of the face e.g. Tg.Pss 4.6; 11.7; 24.6; 31.16;
- or it can be replaced by 'the splendour' of the face Tg. Pss 13.1; 67.1; 119.135;
- or it can be replaced by 'the Glory' of the face Tg.Ps.17.15.

Hiding the face becomes 'removing the Shekinah' as in Tg.Ps.22.24.²⁰ A key verse such as Psalm 17.15: 'I shall behold thy face in righteousness; when I awake I shall be satisfied with beholding thy form' becomes: 'In truth I shall see the brightness of your countenance; at the time when I awake, I shall be satisfied with the Glory of your face'. Psalm 42.2b: 'When

¹⁷ The Hebrew is literally 'those who seek your face, Jacob'.

¹⁸ The Syriac translator read *wyhnk*, 'and be gracious to you', as *wyhyk*, 'and give you life', but as the Hebrew letters *y* and *n* are similar and so the confusion is understandable. The question is: which was the original? The covenant with the priests was a 'covenant of life and peace' (Mal.2.5). One of Zechariah's symbolic staves was named 'beauty', *no'am*, and breaking that staff was the sign that the covenant had been broken (Zech.11.7,10). Perhaps Zechariah's sign of the broken staff related to losing the vision of the beauty of the LORD, or perhaps to losing the presence of the LORD in the temple. Both would have been consequences of the Deuteronomists' programme. Proverbs 29.18 warns that losing the vision results in social chaos. The text says, literally, where there is no prophetic vision, the people unravel. The Apocalypse of Weeks, an enigmatic history incorporated into 1 Enoch, described the Deuteronomists' purge as the time when the people in the temple lost their sight and godlessly forsook Wisdom (1 En.93.8).

¹⁹ *sbr*, which usually means 'hope'.

²⁰ See D M Stec, *The Targum of Psalms*, London and New York: T&T Clark/Continuum, 2004.

shall I come and behold the face of God?’ becomes: ‘When shall I come and see the splendour of the Shekinah of the LORD?’ Stec comments here: ‘The Targum of Psalms, in common with the Peshitta and some manuscripts on the Masoretic Text here has an active verb, whereas most of the manuscripts of the Masoretic text point *w’r’h* as a Niph‘al - appear.’ **Seeing the LORD in the temple must have been a part of the older tradition.**

*Philo suggests this. For him, writing in Alexandria in the first century CE, the very name Israel meant ‘the one who sees God’ and this ‘occurs twenty three times in the Philonic corpus, and is expressed or implied in some twenty six additional texts’.*²¹ *Philo does not explain it nor does he argue for it; he assumes that this meaning is well known, presumably because his Greek version of the Scriptures said that the LORD was seen in the holy of holies (Lxx Exod.25.8). Now ‘š r’h ’l [ish ra’ah el] is an unlikely origin for the name Israel, but there is another Hebrew word that could account for it: šwr, meaning ‘behold’*²². *It occurs in Job 34.29: ‘When he hides his face, who can behold him?’ and in Job 35.14 ‘Although you say you do not behold him’ (my translation). Job is full of archaic forms, so perhaps this is the origin of ‘Israel’, the one who beholds God. Perhaps Philo had lost touch with the more ancient root of the name, but knew it had to mean ‘he who sees God’ and provided his own approximation. It simply appears in his text: ‘for Israel means seeing God’ (Preliminary Studies 51); ‘Israel, he that sees God’, (Dreams I.171), ‘the nation that sees, even Israel’ (Dreams II.44), ‘Israel means seeing God’ (Dreams II.173); ‘Israel means seeing God’ (Questions on Genesis III.49), ‘Israel, a name meaning one who sees’ (Questions on Genesis IV. 233)²³. Sometimes we see Philo reading the Hebrew Scriptures in this way: ‘The sons of Israel’ (Lev. 15.31) becomes ‘the sons of the seeing one ...’. (Allegorical Interpretation III.15). 314*

At times he gives additional explanation to set the term in a wider context. ‘He calls Israel, though younger in age, his firstborn son in dignity, making it evident that he who sees God, the original cause of being, is the recipient of honour’ (Posterity and Exile of Cain 63). ‘He that sees God, drawn to Him by surpassing beauty [a reference to Isa.33.17], has been allotted as His portion to Him whom he sees’ (Posterity 92). ‘Ishmael means “hearkening to God.”. Hearing takes the second place, yielding the first to sight, and sight is the portion of Israel, the son free born and first born; for “seeing God” is the translation of Israel.’ (On Flight and Finding 208). Explaining Exodus 19.6, the royal priesthood and holy nation, Philo wrote: ‘Its high position is shown by the name; for the nation is called in the Hebrew tongue Israel, which, being interpreted is, “He who sees God...” The sight of the mind, the dominant element in the soul, surpasses all the other faculties of the mind, and this is wisdom which is the sight of the understanding’ (Abraham 57). ‘Israel’ could apply equally to the patriarch or to his descendents: ‘The precious offspring of Israel who has the clear vision of God’ (The Sacrifices of Cain and Abel 134). For Philo, those who lived in the knowledge of

²¹ J.Z.Smith ‘The Prayer of Joseph’ in *Religions in Antiquity. Essays in Memory of E.R. Goodenough*, ed. J Neusner, Leiden: Brill, 1970, pp. 253-94, p. 265.

²² Smith p.266 n. 2

²³ Also Leg.All. II.34; III.186; III.212; Conf. 56;72; 148, Migr. 113, 125, 201,

the One were rightly called 'sons of God', and he quoted Deuteronomy 14.1 'You are the sons of the LORD your God', and Deuteronomy 32.18, 'the Rock who begot you' (Greek: The God who begot you). They were exhorted to take their place under God's First born, the Logos, the chief and ruler of the angels, 'the Man after his image, and he that sees, that is, Israel' (*Confusion of Tongues* 145-6). **299**

Israel as 'the man who sees God' appears in rabbinic texts only in one late example²⁴ - the reason is obvious - but it was perpetuated by many Christian writers, all of whom could have drawn their inspiration from Philo. Seeing God always entailed understanding, an echo of the Enoch tradition that abandoning Wisdom meant losing the vision (1 En. 93.8). Israel as the one who sees God was applied in a variety of contexts to the patriarch Israel, to Jesus, or to the Church. Thus Eusebius, listing heroes of the Old Testament, wrote: 'Israel ... the changed name indicates a man who sees God'; and 'Israel means the one who sees God in the manner of the knowing and perceiving human mind' (*Preparation of the Gospel* 7.8 and 11.6). Clement of Alexandria explained that Israel had been punished by God because they had sinned wilfully. Their very name meant 'he that sees God, that is, understands God' (*Instructor* 1.9). Elsewhere he uses 'Israel' in another context - explaining how philosophy relates to theology. 'Philosophy is the study of Wisdom, and Wisdom is the knowledge of things divine and human, and their causes... He who has received previous training is at liberty to approach Wisdom, which is supreme, from which grows up the race of Israel ... He who is really endowed with the power of seeing is called Israel... (*Miscellanies* 1.5). Hippolytus applied the name Israel to Jesus: 'Having received, then, all knowledge from the Father, the perfect Israel, the true Jacob did show himself upon earth and conversed with men. And who is meant by Israel but a man who sees God?' He then links this to John 1.14 (*Against Noetus* 5). Origen argued that there was an Israel according to the flesh but also a spiritual Israel, and it was to those lost sheep that Jesus had been sent, (Matt.15.24) to those who saw God and who were citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem: 'Israel is interpreted to mean "a mind", or "man seeing God"' (*First Principles* 4.1.21-2). Macarius, expounded the theme of Israel leaving Egypt: 'For Israel is interpreted as being the mind contemplating God ... set free from the slavery of darkness, from the spiritual Egyptians' (*Homily* 47.5). Prayers in the Apostolic Constitutions apply Israel to the Church: 'For by [Christ] Thou hast brought home the Gentiles to Thyself for a peculiar people, the true Israel, beloved of God and seeing God.' 'O God Almighty... who art by nature invisible and yet art known to all reasonable natures who seek Thee with a good mind and art comprehended by those that seek after Thee with a good mind; the God of Israel, Thy people which truly see, and which have believed in Christ.' (*Apostolic Constitutions* 7.36 and 8.15) **475**

Most famously, the name Israel appears in *The Prayer of Joseph*, quoted by Origen in his *Commentary on John* as 'an apocryphal text presently in use among the Hebrews' (*Com. John* II.31). Jacob was recounting his struggle with the 'man' at Penuel, a place name meaning 'the face of God' (*Gen.*32.22-32). 'I Jacob, whom men call Jacob but whose name is Israel, am he whom God called Israel, a man seeing God, because I am the Firstborn of

²⁴ Midrash on Hosea 9.10 in *Seder Eliyyahu Rabbah* 27, see Smith p. 267.

every living thing to whom God gives life'. Jacob/Israel explained that he was the 'first minister before the face of God', an angel. Since Origen was writing about 230 CE, Israel as the man who sees God must have been known in Jewish circles well into the Christian era, since the Prayer of Joseph was 'in use', presumably in Palestine. Origen was born in Egypt, and he may well have known the early Gnostic text found in Egypt in 1945, part of the so called Nag-Hammadi library. Scholars named it 'On the Origin of the World (CG II.5), because it is an elaborate version of the Genesis creation story, peopled with heavenly beings. It describes a great chariot throne with cherubim and seraphim, surrounded by angels. On the right of the throne sat 'a first born called Israel', who was also named 'Jesus the Christ', and to the left of the throne sat the Virgin of the Holy Spirit.²⁵ Israel, the First born, was an angel of the Trinity. **321**

There are examples in the Old Testament of people who saw the LORD. Abraham saw the LORD (Gen.12.7; 17.1; 18/1), and Isaac (Gen.26.2, 24), and Jacob (Gen 28.12-17; 35.1). Moses was recognised as the servant of the LORD because he had spoken directly to the LORD and seen his form (Num.12.8, referring to Exod.3.2 and Exod.24.10; also Ben Sira 45.5). Gideon saw the angel of the LORD (Judg.6.12), as did the parents of Samson (Judg.13). The child Samuel saw the LORD at Shiloh (1 Sam.3.21), and we learn that the more ancient name for a prophet had been a seer (1 Sam.9.9), presumably one who saw the LORD. Philo implies as much, when he comments on this verse: 'He ... is called not only the seer, but the seer of God, that is Israel' (Who is the Heir 78). The appearance of the LORD is never described. Even Isaiah's great temple vision of the King, the LORD of Hosts, does not describe the LORD (Isa.6.1-5). Instead, we learn that His Glory fills the earth. It has been suggested that in second temple priestly texts and exegesis, the angels of the older temple, the hosts - whence the title LORD of Hosts - were described as the Glory²⁶. The ancient poem about the LORD dawning and shining with his host of holy ones (Deut.33.2), would have been understood as the LORD appearing in Glory. This is implied in Luke's account of the shepherds at Bethlehem: the **276**

Philo, a contemporary of St Luke, explained how 'seeing the LORD' was understood in his time, after centuries of Deuteronomists' influence. Beginning with the story of the tower of Babel, when the LORD came to see what was happening, Philo emphasised that such anthropomorphism was a concession to the human mind. God, he said, fills all things. 'He has made his powers [i.e. his angels, his Glory] extend through earth and water, air and heaven, and left no part of the universe without his presence, and uniting all with all has bound them fast with invisible bonds that they should never be loosed'. He continued with a warning: 'This divine nature which presents itself to us as visible and comprehensible and

²⁵ This description of the Trinity - the One enthroned, the first born called Israel and the Holy Spirit, is very like that in the Ascension of Isaiah, an early Christian text reworked from a Jewish original. Isaiah ascended to heaven and saw the Great Glory, God Most High, enthroned, and on the right he saw Jesus the LORD, and on the left he saw the angel of the Holy Spirit (Asc. Isa. 10.7; 11.32-3).

²⁶ See T N D Mettinger, *The Dethronement of Sabaoth*, Lund, 1982, p. 80.

everywhere, is in reality invisible, incomprehensible and nowhere' (Confusion of Tongues, 136-138). These ideas are perfectly compatible with the older temple tradition - that the Glory of the LORD was veiled by matter, but could shine through all the material world, and they survive in the Koran: 'Whithersoever ye turn, there is the Face of Allah' (2.115). What is missing is the original belief that the 'fullness of God' could be present in one human being (Col.1.19): 'We have seen his Glory' (John 1.14). 205

Trying to determine what was 'seen' or intended by the more ancient accounts of meeting the LORD, as this was understood in the original temple, is complicated by several factors. First is the blending of the tabernacle and temple traditions²⁷. When the final form of the Pentateuch was compiled, memories of the temple seeped into the ancient traditions of the tabernacle, and all these were heavily influenced by the Deuteronomists' assertion that the LORD could not be seen. The oldest Moses tradition knew the tent of meeting, located outside the desert camp, where the LORD descended in a pillar of cloud to meet with Moses at the door of the tent (Exod.33.7-11), or to send his spirit to the seventy elders (Num.11.14-17, 24-30), or to speak with Moses, Aaron and Miriam and to confirm the supremacy of Moses over Aaron and Miriam (Num.12. 1-8). The LORD then left. The tent of meeting outside the camp was not part of the priestly tradition; it belonged ultimately to the Deuteronomists' desert tradition, which denied that the LORD was continually present in the temple, and so had the LORD descending to meet his people and then leaving.

The other tent, the 'tabernacle' was a pre-figuring of the temple, but the two names [tabernacle and tent of meeting] were sometimes combined, which makes tracing the two traditions more complicated. Moses erected a tabernacle, *mškn*, 'in the midst' of the camp and furnished it like the temple: veil, table, lamp stand and ark (Exod.25.8-9). The people camped around it (Num.2.2). The LORD spoke from above the *kapporet* (Exod.25.22) or appeared there (Lev.16.2). The Glory came forth or shone forth from the holy of holies; 'descend' is never used to describe the presence of the LORD in the priestly tradition²⁸. The Glory 'abode', *škn*, on Sinai²⁹. The Glory entered the tabernacle when it was completed, and remained there (Exod.40.34-8), but here the tabernacle is called 'the *mškn* of the tent of meeting', fusing the two tents. The post exilic Priestly writer in the Pentateuch 'reformulated the ancient tent tradition under the influence of Jerusalemite temple theology'³⁰

The Glory of the LORD entered the tabernacle to take possession and consecrate it; the Glory entered the temple (1 Kgs 8.11); and Ezekiel had a vision of the Glory returning to take possession of the temple to be rebuilt in Jerusalem (Ezek.43.1-5). This Glory, he said, was like the vision he had seen when Jerusalem was destroyed. Ezekiel, a priest of the original temple (Ezek.1.3) has left us two descriptions of the Glory as he knew it, the only canonical descriptions of the Glory of the LORD. The Hebrew is, unfortunately, very difficult to read,

²⁷ Mettinger, pp.80-115

²⁸ Mettinger, p. 86.

²⁹ Thus the Authorised Version.

³⁰ Mettinger, p. 85, summarising the work of R.Schmitt

possibly because the subject matter is so strange³¹. Several words occur only here, for example *bzq* (Ezek.1.14), usually translated ‘flash of lightning’, and *qll*, ‘burnished’ (Ezek.1.7) which only occurs elsewhere in Daniel 10.6, another vision of a heavenly being. Masculine and feminine forms are mixed, as are singular and plural. The vision seems to be a fiery, fourfold female figure, the Living One, above whom was the likeness of a throne where a human form was seated. The human - ‘*adam*’, so no gender is indicated - was a fiery bronze figure, surrounded by the brightness of a rainbow. This was ‘the appearance of the likeness of the Glory of the LORD’ (Ezek.1.28).

Ezekiel distinguishes between the likeness, *d^emut*, and the appearance, *mar’eh*, of the elements in the vision, but only the Authorised Version is consistent in its translation. Other versions obscure this important distinction. The word *d^emut* implies the thought or concept preceding an action, a plan, whereas *mar’eh* is the visible appearance. Ezekiel uses here a distinction better, *and later*, known in Plato: the *d^emut* was the invisible aspect of the Glory and the *mar’eh* was the visible. Ezekiel saw the Glory manifested, shining forth from the invisible state. Thus the A.V. has: ‘As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals (Ezek.1.13), and, describing the Glory: ‘the likeness of a throne as the appearance of a sapphire throne’ (1.26), and ‘the appearance of the likeness of the Glory of the LORD (Ezek.1.28)³². The Glory of the LORD shone forth for Ezekiel in human form, but the implication is that the Glory could be made visible in other ways. The fiery human figure appeared to Daniel (Dan.10.5), unnamed, but recognised by the early Christians as the LORD. Hippolytus, writing early in the third century in Rome, said that he was ‘the LORD, not yet indeed as perfect man, but with the appearance and form of a man’³³ (Hippolytus, Commentary on Daniel XXIV).

The Psalmist had seen the Glory of the LORD entering the temple in human form. He sang of the King of Glory entering the ancient doors (Ps.24.7-9). He knew that the LORD was clothed with honour, majesty and light (Ps.104.1-2). He also sang of a great procession - singers and minstrels entering the temple with ‘my King, my God’ (Ps.68.24-5). What had he seen? Elsewhere in his world he might have seen a statue dressed in golden robes being taken into a temple, but Jerusalem had no statues³⁴. The King, the royal high priest, was God with his people, Immanuel, and so the King of Glory entering the temple was probably the human king in his role as the visible presence of the LORD. When there were no more kings in Jerusalem, the Aaronite high priest had that role, and the prescription for his vestments shows something of their original meaning. They were ‘for Glory and for beauty’ (Exod.28.2), and the high priest wore the Name on his forehead (Exod.28.36-7). When Enoch stood before the throne in heaven [i.e. in the holy of holies] to be consecrated as high priest, he was anointed and then vested with the Glory of the LORD: ‘The LORD said to Michael, “Go, take Enoch

³¹ A comparison of modern translations, which differ quite widely, will show the difficulties of these passages.

³² For detail see my book *The Great High Priest*, London and New York: T & T Clark, 2003, pp 179-184

³³ *Dominum videt, non quidem perfecte hominem, sed in habitu hominis apparentem.*

³⁴ A.L.Oppenheim, ‘The Golden Garments of the Gods’ *Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 8 (1949) pp. 172-193. For a detailed study see, C H T Fletcher-Louis, *All the Glory of Adam. Liturgical Anthropology in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Leiden: Brill, 2002, pp. 68-84,

from out his earthly garments, and anoint him with my sweet ointment, and put him into the garments of my Glory” (2 En.22.8)³⁵ The meaning of the vestments was long remembered: they had been the garments of God (Exodus Rabbah XXXVIII.8); ‘It is because they are emanations of the supernal mysteries, and are made after the supernal pattern, that they are called residual garments, *bigde haš’rad*, inasmuch as they were made from what was left over of the supernal robes, of the residue of the ethereal celestial splendours.’ (Zohar Exodus 229b)³⁶.

If the high priest ‘was’ the LORD, then we should expect the LORD to be depicted as a high priest, and this does happen in the Apocalypse of Abraham, a text which survives only in Old Slavonic, but probably written in Hebrew just after the destruction of the second temple in 70 CE³⁷. In other words, these ideas would have been available to the early Christians. The story is a longer version of Genesis 15, when Yahweh-Elohim speaks to Abraham. Genesis does not describe him, but the Apocalypse of Abraham does. Yahweh-Elohim has become Yahweh-El, the heavenly guardian of Abraham and his family (Ap. Abr. 10.16). He restrains the heavenly powers (Ap. Abr. 10.3-4), exactly what Philo says of the Logos (On Planting 10), and he is dressed as the heavenly high priest: his body like sapphire, his face like chrysolite, his hair like snow. He wears purple garments and the turban of the high priest (as in Zech.3.5) and he has a golden staff or sceptre (Ap.Abr.11.1-3). St John saw the risen LORD in the temple, dressed as a high priest. His face was shining like the sun, his feet were like molten bronze and his eyes as fire. He was wearing a long robe and the golden girdle only worn by a high priest (Josephus Antiquities 3.159). There is no description of his robe, *poderes*, but Philo (Allegorical Interpretation II.56; Moses II.118) and Aristaeus (Letter 96) both use this word to describe the coloured vestment of the high priest.

The fullest description of a vested high priest in the temple is Ben Sira’s picture of Simeon. He wore the garment of Glory, and, like the human figure in Ezekiel’s vision of the Glory, he was like a rainbow shining in clouds of glory. He was compared to the sun shining on the temple of the Most High (Ben Sira 50.7) and made the temple court glorious by his presence (Ben Sira 50.11) The people, said Ben Sira, fell prostrate to worship the LORD, the Almighty God Most High (Ben Sira 50.17), and the context implies that they were prostrated before the high priest. This is not impossible. About a century before Simeon, i.e. about 300 BCE, a Greek visitor to Jerusalem had seen the high priest emerge from the temple and concluded that he was an angel. The Jews, wrote Hecataeus, ‘immediately fall to the ground and worship, *proskunein*, the high priest as he explains the commandments to them.’³⁸ Simeon, who had just emerged in glory from ‘the house of the veil’ (Ben Sira 50.5), had a similar reception. This was the Glory of the LORD coming forth from the holy of holies. Aristaeus, a

³⁵ Translation in R H Charles *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, vol.II, Oxford; Clarendon Press (1913) 1968, p.443..

³⁶ The passage continues: ‘R Simeon said: “All the priestly robes were emblematic of the supernal mystery, having been made after the celestial pattern”’ Zohar Exodus 231a

³⁷ Scholars have detected Hebrew forms and idioms in the sometimes very literal translation. There is an allusion to Ap. Abr. in Clementine Recognitions 1.33.

³⁸ Quoted in Diodorus of Sicily XL.3.5-6.

visitor from Egypt, also saw the high priest in the temple court and said of his vestments: 'Their appearance makes one awe-struck and dumbfounded. A man would think he had come out of this world into another one' (Letter 99).

Given that the Glory came out into the temple as the high priest, there may be places in the Old Testament which describe the emergence of the high priest [royal or Aaronite] from the holy of holies. Isaiah spoke of the people in darkness who had seen a great light, and then described the 'birth' of a king among the angels: 'Unto us a child is born...' (Isa.2, 6-7). This was the heavenly birth of the Davidic king, when he was begotten in the holy of holies, in the Glory of the holy ones (Ps.110.3) and presumably then came forth into the temple court. The Glory of the LORD was the strength of the anointed king (Ps.89.15-18). The Servant was appointed as a Light to the nations (Isa.42.6; 49.6, c.f. Lk.2.32); he saw the light [of the Glory] after his sufferings, and his soul was satisfied (Isa.53.11 in the Greek and Qumran Hebrew, 1Q Is^a)³⁹.

Isaiah, the great temple prophet, frequently used this imagery of light: The Holy One of Israel was a light and a fire (Isa.10.17). 'Let us walk in the light of the LORD' (Isa.2.5; c.f. Ps.56.13). 'The LORD will be your everlasting light' (Isa.60.20). The Psalmist, too, sang of the light of the face of the LORD: 'Lift up the light of thy face upon us, O LORD' (Ps.4.6). Psalm 27 begins: 'The LORD is my light and my salvation' and then describes seeing the beauty of the LORD, and seeking his face. 'In thy light do we see light' (Ps.36.9). 'He will bring forth your vindication as the light' (Ps.37.6). 'Send out thy light and thy truth, let them lead me, let them bring me to thy holy hill and to thy dwelling' (Ps.43.3). The light of the face enabled the people to triumph over their enemies (Ps.44.3). It became proverbial: 'In the light of a king's face there is life, and his favour is like the clouds that bring the spring rain' (Prov.16.15).

Those who saw the light reflected the light. Moses' face shone when he came down from the mountain (Exod.34.29). 'Look to him and be radiant' sang the Psalmist (Ps.34.5). Seeing the light imparted knowledge to the seer⁴⁰, whose reflected radiance imparted this to those who saw. The unknown hymn writer at Qumran wrote: 'I thank thee O LORD, for thou hast illumined my face by thy covenant.... I seek thee, and sure as the dawn, thou appearest as perfect light to me ...' (1QH XII) 'My light shall shine forth in thy Glory. For as a light from out of darkness, so wilt thou enlighten me' (1QH XVII). The priests at Qumran were blessed with the words: 'May you be as an angel of the presence ... May he make you holy among his people, and an [eternal] light [to illumine] the world with knowledge and to enlighten the face of the congregation ...' (1 QSb IV). St Paul explained that this radiance was part of the Christian hope: 'And we all, with unveiled faces, beholding/reflecting⁴¹ the

³⁹ Jesus expounded this version of this text to the disciples on the road to Emmaus Lk.24.26. Nothing else in the Hebrew Scriptures fits.

⁴⁰ Another echo of 1 En.93.8, the link between Wisdom and the vision.

⁴¹ Katoprizo can mean looking into a mirror or reflecting like a mirror.

Glory of the LORD are being changed into his likeness, from one degree of Glory to another ...' (2 Cor.3.18).

The people of the restored temple looked for the light in their failing community, but Isaiah told them the light would return only when the temple and the community were fit to receive it. 'They seek me daily... as if they were a nation that did righteousness and did not forsake the ordinances of their God' (Isa.58.2). 'Your sins have hid his face from you' (Isa.59.2). 'We look for light and behold darkness' (Isa.59.9). Human sin had hidden the face/presence of the LORD (Isa.59.2), which later tradition described as the Shekinah, the 'dwelling' of the LORD in the temple. In the Enoch tradition, it was the sins of Enosh's generation that caused the Shekinah to return to heaven.⁴² The bright image of the Shekinah had originally been on a cherub beneath the tree of life, and anyone who looked upon it was protected from all ills such as sickness, pain, demons or insects (3 En.5.1-5) - reminiscent of the Psalmist's plea: 'Let thy face shine, that we may be saved' (Ps.80.3). The Shekinah was the Glory seen by Ezekiel, resting above the living creatures, whose faces reflected the Glory they bore (3 En.24.13). Isaiah's oracle of hope declared that the light and the Glory of the LORD would rise again on the truly restored city (Isa.60.1-2), and the images in this chapter were used by St John to describe the holy city that came down from heaven, where all the servants of the LORD saw his face in the place of everlasting light, where there was nothing accursed, no sin, (Isa.60.19-20; c.f. Rev.21.23-6; 22.3-5, 14-5)⁴³. The holy city of St John's vision comes to earth after the earthly Jerusalem, the wicked city, has been destroyed. He describes it as a huge holy of holies, a golden cube (Rev.21.16), where all the servants of the LORD not only see the vision but are taken into it (Rev.22.3-5). This is the Kingdom, where God-and-the-Lamb, a Unity, is enthroned (Rev.22.1). Jesus had spoken to Nicodemus about seeing the Kingdom and entering the Kingdom (John 3.3-5). Jesus had prayed that his disciples would be with Him, to see His Glory (John 17.24), and the final scene in St John's vision is the faithful seeing the face of the LORD who is their light. In the Kingdom, they reign with Him for ever.

There is reason to believe that this vision and its realisation was the original 'good news' of the Gospel. The Greek word *evangelion*, gospel, became the subject of bitter word play in the second century CE. Rabbi Meir said that it meant *aven gilyon*, the worthless revelation, and Rabbi Johanan said it meant *avon gilyon*, the wicked revelation (Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 116a, a line censored from many texts). There was also an anonymous ruling that the *gilyonim* and the books of the heretics did not defile the hands, meaning they were not sacred (Tosefta Yadaim 2.13)⁴⁴. *Gilyonim* usually means empty spaces or margins, but here it is likely to derive from *galah*, reveal. Revelations, visions, were clearly an important

⁴² Another version of this tradition appears in Gen Rab XIX.7: the Shekinah left by seven stages of sin – Adam, Cain, Enosh, Noah's generation, the builders of Babel, the Sodomites and the Egyptians in the time of Abraham - and it returned through seven righteous men – Abraham Isaac, Jacob, Levi, Kohath, Amram and Moses.

⁴³ The alternative way to read Psalm 37.29 was 'The righteous shall take possession of the land and cause the Shekinah upon it for ever', thus R Isaac, Genesis Rabbah XIX 7, reading *wayyaškinu*, they will cause the Shekinah to dwell, instead of MT *wayyiškenu*, and will they dwell

⁴⁴ The *gelyana* of Jesus Christ is how the Syriac version of the Book of Revelation begins.

category of Christian writing, and the rabbinic taunts suggest that vision was a key element in the meaning of *evangelion*, gospel. The gospel of the Kingdom, then, was probably the vision that had been at the heart of the ancient temple cult. The Targums understood the coming of the Kingdom as a revelation, and revealing the Kingdom meant revealing the presence of God⁴⁵. 'Your God reigns' (Isa.52.7) became in the Targum 'The Kingdom of your God has been revealed.' 'The LORD of Hosts will reign on Mount Zion' (Isa.24.23) became 'The Kingdom of the LORD of Hosts shall be revealed in the mountain of Zion...' In Ezekiel, the day of judgement is understood as the Kingdom: 'Your doom has come to you, O inhabitant of the land' (Ezek.7.7) became in the Targum 'The Kingdom has been revealed to you, O inhabitant of the land...' 'Your doom has come' (Ezek.7.10) became 'The Kingdom has been revealed.'

Jesus revealed the Kingdom to his disciples at his transfiguration. He told them that some would see the Kingdom 'come with power' before they died, and then He took Peter, James and John up the mountain where they saw Him transfigured. They saw the LORD shining forth, as in the ancient temple visions. This was the Kingdom. When Jesus said that the Kingdom was in the midst (Lk 17.21), He was speaking of the original temple world view, with the LORD enthroned as King in the holy of holies. 'Build me a holy place, that I may be dwell/ be seen in their midst.'

⁴⁵ See B D Chilton, *The Glory of Israel. The Theology and Provenance of the Isaiah Targum*, Sheffield: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement 23, 1983, pp. 77-81.