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36 The Talmudic Apocalypse: Ḥagigah, Chapter 2

Annette Reed, with her accustomed perspicacity, has recently written of *Sefer Hahekhlat* [3 Enoch]:

It is even possible that the textual formation of this work may have been marked by varied and multiple contacts with earlier Enochic traditions in different forms and channels. Just as its form seems to remain fluid, so this fluidity may too have enabled different types of contact and continuity with the Book of the Watchers and other earlier Enochic texts and traditions—as perhaps accruing in the course of its movement through different locales. Some parallels simply seem to reflect the widespread diffusion of ideas from the Book of the Watchers across the Mediterranean and the Near, while others seem to point to the vibrant afterlives of Second Temple Jewish traditions about Enoch, angels, and demons especially in “magical” and other transcredal contexts in Sasanian Babylonia; still others hint at more direct literary connections, perhaps even including the “back-borrowing” of some of the extracted materials from 1 Enoch preserved by Byzantine Christian chronographers. (Reed 2001; 2005)¹

In this chapter, I wish to pick up on Reed’s posited, “more direct literary connections.” The Talmud, I will argue, proffers key evidence for this factor, providing a sort of missing link between Second Temple texts and the Hekhalot. I am, I must emphasize, not returning in any way to models that project secret lines of unbroken and intact transmission. Rather, what I intend here is to make a case precisely for the broken, fraught, and contested transmission and reception, a kind of bricolage.

¹ Annette Yoshiko Reed, “Categorization, Collection, and the Construction of Continuity: 1 Enoch and 3 Enoch in and beyond ‘Apocalypticism’ and ‘Mysticism’” (unpublished paper, 2016).

Note: This chapter has been first presented under the auspices of Prof. Florentina Geller at the Topoi, Center for Excellence, at the Freie Universität Berlin in the Spring of 2016 and then as the second of the Kent Shaffer lectures at Yale University Divinity School in the same season. I am very grateful for the comments and support on both occasions and especially for Prof. Geller’s enormous help, especially but not only with the Slavonic text. I would like to acknowledge here as well the impact that the Enoch Seminar has had on me in the germination of these ideas from their very beginning and until their present fruition (whether fragrant or fetid, I will leave other noses to judge), despite my hesitation to accept the notion of an Enochic Judaism. It is only fitting that this piece see its first light of day in a volume honoring Prof. Gabriele Boccaccini who both advanced the cause of Enochic Judaism and allowed others full liberty to dissent from it under his auspices. May you live long and prosper, Gabriele.

At the same time, I am claiming that one vital element in the bricolage is a constituent of ancient Jewish tradition. In other words, while, on the one hand, I would certainly and definitely not associate myself with a scholarly tradition which posits “Merkaba mysticism” in the Second Temple literature and then goes so far as to use the later literature to reconstruct it, I also reject a view that allows for the transmission of these themes only among “Christians” with their eventual appearance in the Hekhalot literature as a product of external influence. Notions of Jesus or Paul as “Merkava mystics” have always seemed risible and grossly ahistorical to me. Nonetheless, I continue to maintain that there are traceable developments of ideas within the very open tradition (not an esoteric one but a contested one; certainly *not* a sectarian Enochic Judaism!²) that continue to indicate—to my mind—historical connections as well, namely the ontological transformation of Enoch into divine being and his ultimate historical transformation into Metatron, without which, as Peter Schäfer saw, neither the Hekhalot text nor the Bavli in Ḥagigah are explicable. In this sense, it is equally a mistake to refer to rabbinic *influence* on 3 Enoch as it would be to deny possible intimacy with Christian traditions.

In this chapter, I hope then to show that major and very specific themes characteristic of apocalypses were alive in the worlds of the Rabbis who formed the Talmud.

The Talmudic Apocalypse

I will focus on the import of a text in rabbinic literature that has been much investigated but not fully exploited in this inquiry in the past. I refer to the talmudic *sugya*, especially in the Bavli, on the first Mishna of the second chapter of Tractate Ḥagigah. This passage and especially its earlier parallels and sources have been dubbed in the past, “the mystical collection.” For the purposes of the present inquiry, I will name it, especially in the version to be found in the Bavli, as the talmudic apocalypse, seeing as it contains at least two of the elements that characterize apocalyptic literature of the Second Temple, namely cosmological/meteorological information

² Pace Hermann, I have never argued that Metatron is a “remnant of a pre-Christian Enochic Judaism as opposed to a Mosaic halakhic Judaism.” See Klaus Hermann, “Jewish Mysticism in Byzantium: The Transformation of Merkavah Mysticism in 3 Enoch,” in *Hekhalot Literature in Context: Between Byzantium and Babylonia*, eds. Ra’anan Boustán, Martha Himmelfarb, and Peter Schäfer, TSAJ 153 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 85–116 (106). It boggles the mind to understand whence Hermann determined that this position—almost the direct contradictory of my own—was ever advanced as mine. Let me emphasize, however, that aside from this oddity in Hermann’s writing, I have learned much from it.

and theosophy, together. It is important and interesting to note that prior delving into these questions, namely the survival of apocalyptic themes/literatures/ideas from Second Temple times into the early Byzantine era has for the most part focused on the so-called Merkava mystical texts, the theosophical elements. Much less attention has been paid to an equally important element, namely the cosmological speculation rife in the apocalypses and prominent in the Talmud as well.

The Mishna

My main witness for this claim is a piece of evidence that has been hiding in plain sight. Although to the best of my knowledge, this witness has been ignored by and large by scholars asking *this* question,³ I have subsequently seen—very happily—that a great scholar of an earlier generation from the nonacademic wing of talmudic scholarship already adumbrated the point.⁴ This very famous passage from the Mishnah is in Tractate Hagigah chapter 2:1:

ב,א אין דורשין בעריות בשלושה, ולא במעשה בראשית בשניים; ולא במרכבה ביחיד, אלא אם כן היה חכם ומבין מדעתו. וכל המסתכל בארבעה דברים, רתוי לו כאילו לא בא לעולם—מה למעלן, מה למטן, מה לפניו, מה לאחור. וכל שלא חס על כבוד קונו, רתוי לו כאילו לא בא לעולם.

Although the text of this Mishnah is contested in some details, it is essentially translatable as:

One does not expound forbidden sex among three, and the Work of Creation between two, and the Work of the Chariot with one unless he is a sage who understands by himself [alternative reading from some mss. “a sage who understood by himself”]. One who looks at four things, it would have been a mercy for him [alternative reading, some mss. “it would have been fitting for him”] had he not come into the world. Anyone who is not careful for the honor of his maker, it would have been a mercy for him [alternative reading, some mss. “it would have been fitting for him”] had he not come into the world.

It has been clear since the beginning of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, if not even higher than that, that the Mishnah here is polemicizing against someone

³ Not atypically, Klaus Hermann, who, in a very important discussion, does cite and discuss this Mishna, focuses on the Merkaba aspects and not the *Ma'ase Bereshit*, which is my interest in this chapter. Hermann, “Jewish Mysticism in Byzantium,” 99–101.

⁴ R. Todros Abulafia, see Maharsha ad loc and Saul Lieberman, *Order Mo'ed*, vol. 3 of *Tosefta Ki-Fshuta: A Comprehensive Commentary on the Tosefta* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1962), 1286.

or other(s) specific. The general scholarly opinion (until fairly recently)—with only some antithetical voices crying in the wilderness—has been that these are anti-gnostic declarations.⁵

Now there is little doubt that the Palestinian talmudic material and Genesis Rabbah are suffused with anti-gnostic rhetoric. As the Jerusalem Bible scholar, Samuel Loewenstam summed up the matter in 1960, writing, “This Mishna, in which one feels its recoil from esoteric literature, is one of the most well known among Jews, and well known as well is its embedding in astonishing and startling discussions in the Talmuds, whose mythological character in general and gnostic character in particular stands out to the investigator’s eye.”⁶ Menachem Kahana, in a much more recent publication, explained the very existence of the extended discussion of Genesis 1 in Bereshit Rabbah as a product of the desire to counter those readers of Genesis, formerly known as gnostics,⁷ who distinguished between a good God and a bad demiurge. There is much to commend such an approach, even to prove it.⁸

Loewenstam suggests the point that I will defend (albeit with an important variation) to the effect that the way that the late antique (both Talmuds and Bereshit Rabbah) interpret the Mishnah needs to be separated from the most compelling historical interpretation of the Mishna itself.⁹ As Loewenstam writes,

5 See Hanokh Albeck, commentary, Hanokh Yalon, pointing, *Shishah Sidre Mishnah* (Yerushalayim: Mosad Bialik; Tel-Aviv: Devir, 1952–59), 510–11, who not only cites earlier views to that effect but supports and extends them, arguing that even the prohibition on the public interpretation of sexual matters has to do with the “gnostics” who attack the Patriarchs of Genesis for their apparent sexual derelictions. See discussion of these tendencies in Hermann, “Jewish Mysticism in Byzantium,” 103 as well as Hermann’s dissent from them.

6 Shmuel I. Loewenstam, “What is Above; What is Below; What is Before; What is After: On an Alleged Gnostic Element in Mishna Hagiga,” in *Yehezkel Kaufmann Jubilee Volume*, ed. Menahem Haran (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1960–61), 112–21 (112). All translations from Hebrew and Aramaic in this essay are mine.

7 Michael Allen Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism”: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Karen L. King, *Making Heresy: Gnosticism in Twentieth Century Historiography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

8 See Menachem Kahana, “Towards the Arrangement of the Pericope ‘In the Beginning Created’ in Midrash Bereshit Rabba,” in *Higayon le-Yonah: Hebetim Hadashim Be-Heker Sifrut Ha-Midrash, Ha-Agadah, Veha-Piyut: Kovets Mehkarim Li-Khevedo Shel Profesor Yonah Frenkel Be-Mil’ot lo 75 Shanim*, eds. Yehoshu’a Levinson, Ya’akov Elboim, and Galit Hasan-Rokem (Yerushalayim: Hotsa’at sefarim ‘a. sh. Y.L. Magnes, ha-Universitah ha-’Ivrit, 2006), 348–76 (373–76) [in Hebrew].

9 Loewenstam, “What is Above,” 117. See also now: “We cannot therefore assume that the concerns of the third and fourth-century Amoraim represent the original meaning and purpose of the ban, and research of its origins inevitably necessitates a separate inquiry into the earliest sources at our disposal.” Yair Furstenberg, “The Rabbinic Ban on ‘Ma’aseh Bereshit’: Sources, Contexts and Concerns,” in *Jewish and Christian Cosmogony in Late Antiquity*, eds. Lance Jenott

and I concur: “It follows that the Mishna is critical of mystical-philosophical speculations. There is no basis, however, for connecting these meditations [that the Mishnah rejects] to the gnostic doctrine.... The formula underwent a process of updating in the light of gnosis.”¹⁰ Once we have separated the Mishna from its later anti-gnostic interpretations as in the Palestinian Amoraic texts, we are free to look for other possible contexts in which it originally functioned. While Loewenstam wishes to connect the Mishnah’s formulation with that of the Bible and an Akkadian letter, I prefer rather to connect it directly with a source much closer to home, to wit Sefer Ben Sira which is cited in the Bavli itself as a justification for the Mishnah’s ruling (Hagigah 13a).¹¹

In Ben Sira 3:21–23, we read:

(ט) פְּלֵאוֹת מִמֶּדֶד אֶל תְּדַרוֹשׁ, וּמִבִּסָּה מִמֶּדֶד אֶל תִּתְקַוֶּר.
 (כ) בְּמֶה שֶׁהוֹרֵשִׁית הַתְּבוּנָה, וְאִין לָךְ עֵסֶק בְּנִסְתָּרוֹת.
 (כא) בְּיֹתֵר מִמֶּדֶד אֶל תִּמְרֵהוּ, כִּי רַב מִמֶּדֶד הָרְאִיתָ.

Do not expound (or investigate) that which is too wondrous for you, and that which is hidden from you, do not research. Contemplate only that which is permitted to you, and you have no business with hidden things. Do not meddle in that which is beyond you, for you have been shown matters that are too great for you.

The Talmud saw clearly the connection between this passage and the Mishnah. Now even though I have argued elsewhere¹² (in the wake of others) that it is a mistake to see Ben Sira as coming from circles entirely other to the ones that produced Enoch, it is certainly critical—inter alia, precisely in this passage—of apocalyptic knowledge, just as the Talmud saw, thus suggesting quite strongly that the Mishnah’s context is condemnation of apocalyptic knowledge as well.

The single most important recent advance in this question is from the pen of Annette Yoshiko Reed. Reed’s aim is to use the Mishnah as a means for

and Sarit Kattan Gribetz, TSAJ 155 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 39–63 (39). From my point of view, what this means is that one cannot draw conclusions from the way that Bereshit Rabbah understood matters to the ways that the Babylonian Talmud understands them, the latter being my current target.

¹⁰ Loewenstam, “What is Above,” 131.

¹¹ Loewenstam mentions this connection but then moves off it very quickly without taking it up at all. *Ibid.*, 120. I observe now that I am preceded on this point by Furstenberg, “The Rabbinic Ban,” 45–48.

¹² In the Kent Shaffer lectures at Yale Divinity School which I was privileged to deliver in March 2016. This chapter is derived from one of those lectures.

discovering why all apocalypses other than Daniel were excluded from the canon and then (allegedly) lost to non-Christian Jews. Although I disagree with her conclusion (of the total loss of all apocalypses other than Daniel to Jews), her premise is incontrovertible:

For us, it suffices to note that, while the mishnah seeks only to limit the public exposition of Ma'aseh Bereshit and ha-Merkavah, it mounts an outright condemnation of speculation into "what is above, what is below, what is before, what is after." This four-part phrase aptly describes the complex of concerns that we find explored in apocalypses: an interest in the cosmos, from the heights of heaven to the very ends of the earth (above, below), and an interest in the meaning of history, stretched along the entire access of historical time (before, after)... As with Ben Sira centuries earlier, this ruling seems to respond to individuals or groups engaged in such speculations, and it is plausible that those Jews who composed and transmitted apocalypses should be counted among its targets.¹³

Not against "gnostics," then, the Mishnah is an anti-apocalyptic jeremiad similar in thought and even language to that of Ben Sira. This, in itself, then, is an important argument for the vitality of apocalypse at the time of the promulgation of this Mishnah; just as "no smoking" signs in classrooms once meant that people smoked there.

Reed's general comparison of motifs can be strengthened significantly via a quotation from the *Parables of Enoch*, the second section of *1 Enoch*:

And the other angel who went with me and showed me what is hidden told what is first and last in the heaven in the height, and beneath the earth in the abyss, and at the ends of heaven and on the foundation of heaven [1 Enoch 60:11].¹⁴

Would it be going too far to suggest that this text enables us to decode the Mishnah's four directions and also provides us with the context of the Mishnah's polemic itself? It is exactly the revelation of things hidden by heavenly beings to which the Mishnah objects, and the list in the Apocalypse of what the seer has been shown corresponds exactly to the list of things forbidden to see in the Mishnah.¹⁵ One does not have to imagine that the Enoch *text* was known to the Tannaim but only that practices of apocalyptic speculation and at least general ideas about their

¹³ Annette Yoshiko Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: The Reception of Enochic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 141.

¹⁴ My student Shmaryahu Brownstein reminded me of the significance of this passage.

¹⁵ Cf. Alon Goshen Gottstein, "Is Ma'aseh Bereshit Part of Ancient Jewish Mysticism?" *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 4 (1995): 185–201, who takes an entirely different line of interpretation. While I don't think that his view is excluded, I, obviously, prefer the one that I proffer.

content were known to them as something they (at least sometimes) resisted.¹⁶ If the Tannaitic literature cannot be used, and it cannot, to reconstruct Merkaba speculation among the early Rabbis, it can be used, I suggest, to demonstrate that apocalyptic ideas were alive and well in the environment of the Tannaim, alive and kicking enough to require serious attempts at suppression.¹⁷ I would offer that the Mishnah's primary objection to such kinds of knowledge was the implicit claim of authority that they made independent of and perhaps in competition

¹⁶ See also the important Pierluigi Piovaneli, "A Testimony for the Kings and Mighty Who Possess the Earth": The Thirst for Justice and Peace in the Parables of Enoch," in *Enoch and the Messiah Son of Man: Revisiting the Book of Parables*, ed. Gabriele Boccaccini (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 363–79, who demonstrated the non-sectarian nature of *The Parables of Enoch*. For the earliest and least developed instantiation of my hypothesis based on this which I am elaborating here in its fullest (and final and hopefully most nuanced) form, see Daniel Boyarin, "The Parables of Enoch and the Foundation of the Rabbinic Sect: An Hypothesis," in *The Words of a Wise Mouth Are Gracious. Divre Pi-Hakam Hen. Festschrift for Günter Stemberger on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. Mauro Perani, SJ 32 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 1–22. Considering that I wrote there already, "I wish to offer here a very preliminary sketch of an hypothesis that although it is (intentionally) hidden within rabbinic texts, there is, nonetheless, evidence there to suggest that rabbinic Judaism grows out of a Judaism deeply informed by the sort of religiosity that is manifest in the Parables" (56), I find it doubly puzzling that Hermann has glossed my putative views as he does (see above here n. 2), and even harder to understand why Schäfer in the same volume as Hermann in 2013 has described me as holding "His [Metatron's] appearance in 3 Enoch in particular has led some scholars to establish an unbroken connection between the three Books of Enoch and to argue for an early Jewish Metatron tradition that helped shape the Christian notion of Jesus as the second and younger God next to his divine Father." Peter Schäfer, "Metatron in Babylonia," in *Hekhalot Literature in Context: Between Byzantium and Babylonia*, eds. Ra'anan Boustan, Martha Himmelfarb, and Peter Schäfer, TSAJ 153 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 29–39 (29). Although in this latest version of my argument, I will nuance considerably (having read the marvelous scholarship of Schäfer's students, Boustan, Hermann, and Reed), the claim that there is direct continuity between the Second Temple 1 and 2 Enoch and *Sefer Hahekalot* (sogennante 3 Enoch), I assert categorically that I have never imagined or intimated that Metatron came before Jesus on the scene of history, rather that there was a parallel relation between the development of the Gospels out of the Son of Man traditions in Daniel and the early Enoch books, on the one hand, and the development of the eventual Metatron traditions as they developed in later rabbinic literature out of the ancient Son of Man traditions, on the other, i.e., that Christology and Metatronology shared a common ultimate source in Second Temple literature—quite a different matter from claiming that either one is the *source* of the other. Polemic is, it seems, borne sometimes of misunderstanding and (I assume) inadvertent misrepresentation of the presumed rival (and I will not absolve myself of this sin easily either).

¹⁷ This point would lead to a partial amendment of Reed's claim that there is no attempt at suppression of Enoch traditions in rabbinic literature. See Annette Yoshiko Reed, "From Asael and Šemihazah to Uzzah, Azzah, and Azrael: 3 Enoch 5 (§§7–8)," *JSQ* 8 (2001): 105–36 (130), although, to be sure, Reed is explicitly limiting herself to knowledge of the text of the Book of the Watchers, while I am insisting on the persistence of traditions.

with the Rabbis' Oral Torah, the exclusive possession of the rabbinic community and authority structure.¹⁸ If this argument bears weight, it shows strongly that apocalyptic speculation, and perhaps even apocalyptic texts, were known to Palestinian Jews in the first three centuries of the Christian era.

In what follows, I wish to explore in some detail the enormous implications that a *counter*-apocalyptic reading of the Mishnah bears for our larger questions of the history and emergence of early medieval Jewish visionary traditions (and their doctrines!) and their Christian congeners. In particular I will look closely at the Babylonian talmudic sugya on this Mishnah which is, it turns out, an absolutely key text that has been much disregarded until now (on all sides of the debate about apocalypse and Hekhalot).

The Bavli on Ma'seh Bereshit

The first observation that I wish to make here in general is that the sugya of the Talmud seems strongly to identify the study of Ma'seh Bereshit with cosmological information of various types.¹⁹ This becomes clear from the very organization of the talmudic passage:

Not in "Ma'ase Bereshit" in two. From whence these words? As it is taught by our Rabbis [i.e., a tannaitic source]: "When you ask about the first days"—one may ask but two may not ask. We might suppose that a person may ask about before the creation of the world—it comes to teach us "from the day on which G-d created Adam on the Earth." We might suppose that a person may not ask about the six days of Creation—it comes to teach us "about the first days that were before you." We might suppose that one may ask about what is above, what is below, what is before and what is after—it comes to teach "from one end of the heaven to the other end of heaven," You ask about from one end of heaven to the other end of heaven, and you do not ask about what is above, what is below, what is before and what is after! [b. Hagigah 11b]²⁰

¹⁸ See also Philip S. Alexander, "3 (Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, eds. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City: Doubleday, 1985), 234.

¹⁹ On this point, cf. Goshen Gottstein, "Is *Ma'aseh Bereshit* Part of Ancient Jewish Mysticism?"

²⁰ תלמוד בבלי מסכת חגיגה דף יא עמוד ב
לא במעשה בראשית בשנים מנא הני מילי? דתנו רבנן: כי שאל נא לימים ראשונים - יחיד שואל, ואין שנים שואלין. יכול ישאל אדם קודם שנברא העולם - תלמוד לומר למן היום אשר ברא אלהים אדם על הארץ. יכול לא ישאל אדם מששת ימי בראשית - תלמוד לומר לימים ראשונים אשר היו לפניך. יכול ישאל אדם מה למעלה ומה למטה, מה לפנים ומה לאחור - תלמוד לומר ולמקצה השמים ועד קצה השמים - מלמקצה השמים ועד קצה השמים אתה שואל, ואין אתה שואל מה למעלה מה למטה, מה לפנים מה לאחור.

We learn several things from this passage in the Bavli.²¹ First, that according to the Bavli, at any rate, there is continuity between the clause of the Mishnah that forbids the study of *Ma'aseh Bereshit* in a group larger than two and the clause that delimits what may be investigated; indeed according to the Bavli both of these points derive from the same baraita (extra-mishnaic tannaitic tradition).²² Second, it is quite clear from this use of the baraita in the Bavli that there is no distinction between *droš* and *še'ol*, and, it seems *histakkel* as well (in this context), again whatever distinctions we may find in other rabbinic literary traditions. Up to this point, at any rate, the Talmud seems to be interpreting and supporting the Mishnah's restrictions.

In the very next line, however, the Bavli goes off on quite a different direction:

Now that he derives it from "From one end of the heavens to the other," why do we need, "From the day on which Adam was created on earth"?—[He needs it] for the view of Rabbi El'azar, as Rabbi El'azar said: The primeval Adam was from the earth to the heaven, as it says, "From the day on which Adam was created on earth and to the end of heaven." And once he sinned, the Holy Blessed One placed his hands upon him and made him small, as it says, "After and before you formed me and you placed your hand upon me." Rav Yehuda said that Rav had said: Primeval Adam was from one end of the world to the other, for it says: "... which Adam was created on earth and to the end of heaven and unto the end of heaven." And once he sinned, the Holy Blessed One placed his hands upon him and made him small, as it says, "After and before you formed me and you placed your hand upon me." If that's the case, the verses contradict each other! This one and that one are the same measure.²³

A fair amount of glossing will be necessary here. First of all, the Bavli clearly understands by "what is before and what is after," a temporal distinction, not a spatial one. This has been recognized many times, beginning from the eleventh-century

²¹ For useful surveys of the difference between the Bavli's versions of this material and that of the various Palestinian collections, see David J. Halperin, *The Merkabah in Rabbinic Literature*, American Oriental Series 62 (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1980) and Berakhyahu Lifschitz, "We Investigate 'Ma'ase Bereshit'," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 3.4 (1982): 513–24, [in Hebrew].

²² I emphasize here "according to the Bavli," since Palestinian citations of the baraita do not include the first clause. In any case, it is the Babylonian traditions that I am investigating here.

²³ תלמוד בבלי מסכת חגיגה דף יב עמוד א
השתא דנפקא ליה מלמקצה השמים ועד קצה השמים, למן היום אשר ברא אלהים אדם על הארץ למה לי? - כדרבי אלעזר. דאמר רבי אלעזר: אדם הראשון מן הארץ עד לרקיע, שנאמר למן היום אשר ברא אלהים אדם על הארץ, וכיון שסרח - הניח הקדוש ברוך הוא ידיו ומיעטו, שנאמר אחר וקדם צרתני ותשת עלי כפכה. אמר רב יהודה אמר רב: אדם הראשון - מסוף העולם ועד סופו היה, שנאמר למן היום אשר ברא אלהים אדם על הארץ ולמקצה השמים ועד קצה השמים. כיון שסרח - הניח הקדוש ברוך הוא ידיו ומיעטו, שנאמר ותשת עלי כפכה. - אי הכי קשו קראי אהדדי! - אידי ואידי חד שיעורא הוא.

commentators the Tosafot in northern France and the Rhineland. It is only thus that it can claim that the author of the baraita has learnt the restriction on investigation of that which is before creation from the verse that says, “what is before and what is after,” which is perfectly ambiguous in Hebrew between a spatial and a temporal reading, “before and after” being completely readable as “in front of and behind.” This renders the two parts of the verse, “from the day etc.” and “from one end to the other end” as apparently redundant, as it suggests that we can learn from either of them the injunction against the study of that which is before creation. Then the solution that the Bavli offers to this apparent redundancy involves two highly esoteric interpretations of the verse itself: one that reads “created the Primeval Man on the earth and to the end of heaven,” cutting the verse at that point (in good midrashic fashion), while the other reads “created the Primeval Man from one end of the heaven to the other end of heaven.” At this point, there seems now to be a contradiction between these two possible readings of the verse that leads to a contradiction “in fact,” viz. How tall *was* the Primeval Adam, from the earth to the heaven or from one end of heaven to the other? And the Talmud answers that these two measures are the same, the heavens being a kind of half sphere over the flat earth.

For our purposes, at any rate, the most significant matter to observe here is that effectively the Bavli has performed a switch from explaining the Mishnah’s ruling to itself practicing interpreting or inquiring into “Ma’ase Bereshit”! In other words, the restriction against dealing with such matters to some kind of private or near-private instruction has been completely breached and we are in the very midst of this matter from here on down. Thus, this is “Ma’ase Bereshit,” the investigation of the work of creation, that is, cosmology, far beyond what we could learn from the verses of Genesis themselves, and it goes on from here.

The Seven Heavens

In my view, however, the most revealing moment comes a page or so later when the third-century Palestinian Amora, Rabbi Shimon bar Lakish, otherwise known as Resh Lakish shares with us the following cosmological exposition:

Rav Yehuda said: there are two heavens, for it says: “Indeed to H’ your god are the heavens and the heavens of the heavens.” Resh Lakish said there are seven, and these are they: Curtain, Firmament, Grinders, Lofty, Dwelling, Foundation, Clouds. Curtain does nothing but enters in the morning and comes out in the evening, and thus renews every day the “work of creation,” as it says “He spreads out the Heaven like gossamer and stretches it like a tent for dwelling.” Firmament where the sun and the moon and the stars and the signs of the Zodiac are fixed, as it says “And God placed them in the firmament of

heaven.” Grinders in which millstones stand and grind Manna for the righteous, as it says, “And he commanded grinders above and the doors of heaven opened, and rained down Manna on them to eat etc.” Lofty in which Jerusalem and the Temple and the altar are built, and Michael, the great Prince stands and sacrifices on it a sacrifice, as it says, “I have indeed built a Lofty House for you, a foundation for your eternal dwelling.” And how do we know that it is called “heaven,” for it is written: “Look down from the heaven and see from the Loftiness of your holiness and splendor.” Dwelling in which there are bands of serving angels who say song at night and are quiet during the day, in honor of Israel, as it says: “During the day God will command his grace and at night, there is song with him.” And how do we know that it is called “heaven,” for it says, “Look from your holy dwelling, from the heaven.” Foundation in which there are the treasuries of snow and of hail, and the store-place for bad dew, and the store-place for gentle dew, and the chamber for storm and hurricane, and the cave of steam, with its doors of fire, for it say, “God will open for you his good treasury.”.... Clouds in which justice, law, and equity, the storehouses of life and the storehouses of peace and the storehouses of blessing, and the souls of the saints, and the spirits and souls who will be created in the future, and the dew that the Holy Blessed One will [use] to resurrect the dead.... This is where the wheels and the fire-angels and the holy living beings, and the serving angels, and the glorious throne, and the King, the living God, the exalted, dwells on them in clouds, for it says: “Make way for the Rider on the Clouds, his name is Y-ah, and how do we know it is called heaven? We learn it from a gezera Shava: “riding” “riding”: Here it is written “Make way for the Rider on the Clouds, his name is Y-ah,” and there it is written, “The Rider on the Heavens is there to aid you.” And darkness and cloud and fog surround him, as it says: “He will make darkness his hiding place around him, his tabernacle is the darkness of water, the thick clouds of the heaven.”²⁴

24

תלמוד בבלי מסכת חגיגה דף יב עמוד ב

אמר רבי יהודה: שני רקיעים הן, שנאמר: הן לה' אלהיך השמים ושמי השמים. ריש לקיש אמר: שבעה, ואלו הן: וילון, רקיע, שחקים, זבול, מעון, מכון, ערבות. וילון - אינו משמש כלום, אלא נכנס שחרית ויוצא ערבית, ומחדש בכל יום מעשה בראשית, שנאמר הנוטה כדק שמים וימתחם כאהל לשבת. רקיע - שבו חמה ולבנה כוכבים ומזלות קבועין, שנאמר ויתן אתם אלהים ברקיע השמים. שחקים - שבו רחיים עומדות וטוחנות מן לצדיקים, שנאמר ויצו שחקים ממעל ודלתי שמים פתח וימטר עליהם מן לאכל וגו'. זבול - שבו ירושלים ובית המקדש, ומזבח בנוי, ומיכאל השר הגדול עומד ומקריב עליו קרבן, שנאמר בנה בניתי בית זבל לך מכון לשבתך עולמים. ומגלן דאיכרי שמים - דכתיב הבט משמים וראה מזבל קדשך ותפארתך. מעון - שבו כיתות של מלאכי השרת, שאומרות שירה בלילה וחסות ביום, מפני כבודן של ישראל, שנאמר יומם יצוה ה' חסדו ובלילה שירה עמי. . ומגלן דאיכרי שמים - שנאמר השקיפה ממעון קדשך מן השמים. מכון - שבו אוצרות שלג ואוצרות ברד, ועליית טללים רעים, ועליית אגלים, וחדרה של סופה [וסער], ומערה של קיטור, ודלותיהן אש, שנאמר יפתח ה' לך את אוצרו הטוב. הני ברקיעא איתנהו? הני בארעא איתנהו! דכתיב: הללו את ה' מן הארץ תנינים וכל תהמות אש וברד שלג וקיטור רוח סערה עשה דברו. אמר רב יהודה אמר רב: דוד ביקש עליהם רחמים, והורידן לארץ. אמר לפניו: רבונו של עולם לא אל חפץ רשע אתה לא יגדך (במגדך) רע, צדיק אתה ה' - לא יגור במגדך רע. ומגלן דאיכרי שמים - דכתיב ואתה תשמע השמים מכון שבתך. ערבות - שבו צדק, משפט וצדקה, גנוי חיים וגנוי שלום וגנוי ברכה, ונשמתן של צדיקים, ורוחות ונשמות שעתידי להיבראות, וטל שעתידי הקדוש ברוך הוא להחיות בו מתים. צדק ומשפט - דכתיב צדק ומשפט מכון כסאך, צדקה - דכתיב ולבש צדקה כשרון, גנוי חיים - דכתיב כי עמך מקור חיים, וגנוי שלום - דכתיב ויקרא לו ה' שלום, וגנוי ברכה - דכתיב ישא ברכה מאת ה', נשמתן של צדיקים - דכתיב והיתה נפש אדני צרורה בצרור החיים את ה' אלהיך, ורוחות ונשמות שעתידי להיבראות - דכתיב כי רוח מלפני יעטוף ונשמות אני עשיתי. וטל שעתידי הקדוש ברוך הוא להחיות בו מתים - דכתיב גשם נדבות תניף אלהים נחלתך ונליאה אתה כוננתה. שם אופנים ושרפים וחיות הקדש, ומלאכי השרת, וכסא הכבוד, מלך אל חי רם ונשא שוכן עליהם בערבות, שנאמר סלו לרכב בערבות ביה שמו, ומגלן

Scholars have been looking for apocalypses in the Hekhalot literature²⁵ and ignoring the clear apocalyptic affinities of our text in the Bavli. First of all, the information about seven heavens that we find in the Bavli here is closely related to the ascent through seven Palaces that we find in Enoch.²⁶ Second, we find close and precise affinities in detail between the Resh Lakish text and parallels in the 1 and 2 Enoch.²⁷

One striking example will suffice for the nonce. In the *Parables of Enoch*, we find the following passage:

41.1 And after this, I saw all the secrets of Heaven, and how the Kingdom is divided, and how the deeds of men are weighed in the Balance. 41.2 There I saw the Dwelling of the Chosen, and the Resting Places of the Holy; and my eyes saw there all the sinners who deny the name of the Lord of Spirits being driven from there. And they dragged them off, and they were not able to remain, because of the punishment that went out from the Lord of Spirits. 41.3 And there my eyes saw the secrets of the flashes of lightning and of the thunder. And the secrets of the winds, how they are distributed in order to blow over the earth, and the secrets of the clouds, and of the dew; and there I saw from where they go out, in that place. And how, from there, the dust of the earth is saturated. 41.4 And there I saw closed storehouses from which the winds are distributed, and the storehouse of the hail, and the storehouse of the mist, and the storehouse of the clouds; and its cloud remained over the earth, from the beginning of the world. 41.5 And I saw the Chambers of the Sun and the Moon, where they go out, and where they return. And their glorious return; and how one is more honoured than the other is. And their magnificent course, and how they do not leave their course, neither adding nor subtracting from their course. And how they keep faith in one another, observing their oath. 41.6 And the Sun goes out first, and completes its journey at the command of the Lord of Spirits—and his Name endures forever and ever. 41.7 And after this is the hidden, and visible, path of the Moon, and it travels the course of its journey, in that place, by day and by night. One stands opposite the other, in front of the Lord of Spirits, and they give thanks, and sing praise, and do not rest, because their thanksgiving is like rest to them.²⁸

Closer parallels to the enumeration of the heavens can also be found elsewhere in the Enoch literature—for instance, a very similar descriptions of the seven heavens

דאיקרי שמים - אתיא רכיבה רכיבה: כתיב הכא סלו לרכב בערבות וכתיב התם רכב שמים בעזרד. וחשד וענן וערפל מקיפין אותו, שנאמר ישת חשד סתרו סביבותיו סכתו חשכת מים עבי שחקים.

25 See, e.g., discussion in Hermann, “Jewish Mysticism in Byzantium,” 94.

26 See *ibid.*, 91.

27 The Resh Lakish list is paralleled in classical rabbinic literature in *Leviticus Rabbah* 29:11. See Alexander, “3 Enoch,” 239. This tradition reappears in the Qur’an in the Prophet’s night journey, that is, another apocalypse!, and associated literature.

28 I have chosen to cite here the version of Michael Knibb found on the web at <http://www.scriptural-truth.com/stuff/BookOfEnoch.pdf>, for convenience’s sake and also because Nickelsburg and VanderKam have made some (very plausible) alterations in the order of the text, while Knibb gives the original text.

in 2 Enoch as well as the Ascension of Isaiah—but already from this text we see some impressive and important details, notably the intense attention to the details of meteorological phenomena as secrets of the heavens.²⁹ Especially convincing is the image of the weather kept in storehouses, or treasuries, one of the most striking features of the talmudic text we have just seen.³⁰ The upshot of this is that at least according to the Bavli it seems most plausible to understand *Ma'aseh Bereshit* as the cosmological side of apocalyptic knowledge and the *Merkava* as the theosophical aspect of apocalypse.³¹ The combination of cosmology and meteorology and then the combination of that with theosophy that we find in both the apocalypses and in the Talmud suggests strongly a continuity of tradition from the Second Temple apocalyptic to the *sugya* of the Babylonian Talmud, a continuity that is sufficient to explain how ideas and mythic materials from the former texts survived exoterically within non-Christian Jewish circles until their full-blown reemergence in Hebrew/Aramaic literature toward the end of late antiquity.

This reemergence might very well have been stimulated by developments within the spirituality of the encompassing Christian world and even part and parcel of those developments. As Hermann has remarked, “Indeed, a distinctive feature of 3 Enoch is its engagement with the cosmological and angelological conceptions of the older merkavah tradition, albeit in an apocalyptic mode. The literary material used to construct its cosmology and angelology is far closer to rabbinic literature than to any putative Gnostic speculative tradition regarding the aeons.”³² But the very concatenation of cosmological and angelological matters in the Talmud draws the talmudic text to the ancient apocalypses as well and thus provides the missing link between them, hidden, as it were, in plain sight. To be sure, the Talmud is almost too careful not to ascribe this information to angelic revelation, but as Martha Himmelfarb has done well to remind us:

These references to ascent remind us that the descriptions of the heavenly liturgy and the divine throne and the lists of angelic names presuppose ascent, even when it is not described. Instructions for invoking angels to descend to reveal the secrets of the Torah play

29 For a brilliant discussion of the seven heavens in the Ascension of Isaiah, see now Menachem Kister, “Metatron, God, and the ‘Two Powers’: The Dynamics of Tradition, Exegesis, and Polemic,” *Tarbiz* 82 (2013): 45–46 [in Hebrew].

30 As I have been reminded by Shlomo Naeh, the proximate source for this idea is Job 38:22, but notwithstanding this important point, it remains clear that given the entire context of this usage (quite different from its usage in the Bible; there the storehouses are for eschatological punishment, here for weather), the connection between Enoch and the Talmud remains strong (as Naeh himself proposed).

31 Pace Goshen Gottstein, “Is *Ma'aseh Bereshit* Part of Ancient Jewish Mysticism?” 196.

32 Hermann, “Jewish Mysticism in Byzantium,” 97.

an important part in the hekhalot texts, but all explicit attributions of descriptions of the contents of the heavens and especially the heavenly liturgy are to human beings who ascend.³³

It seems hardly too presumptuous, then, to suggest, at least, that at one stage in its transmission Resh Lakish's description of the seven heavens and their contents was accompanied by an account of how that knowledge had been gained.

The most impressive parallel that I have found, however, is from the text known as 2 Enoch. Preserved only in Old Church Slavonic (with *perhaps* some Coptic fragments extant), this text is apparently from the first century AD and from Palestine. In it we read of Enoch's journey through the seven heavens:

3 |The ascension of Enoch to the first heaven. 1 And it came about, when I had spoken to my sons, the men called me. And they took me up onto their wings, and carried me up to the first heaven. And they 2 put me down there. 4 1 They led before my face the elders, the rulers of the stellar orders... . And they showed me there the treasuries of the snow and the cold, 2 terrible angels are guarding the treasuries. -And they showed me there those guarding the treasuries; {and they showed me there the treasuries} of the clouds, from which they go in and come out. 1 And they showed me the treasuries of the dew, like olive oil. Angels were guarding their treasuries; and their appearance was like every earthly flower. 7

1 And those men took me up to the second heaven. And they set me down on the second heaven. And they showed me 2 prisoners under guard, in measureless judgment. And there I saw the condemned angels, weeping. And I said to the men who were with me, 3 "Why are they tormented?" The men answered me, "They are evil rebels against the L O R D , who did not listen to the voice of the L O R D , but they consulted their own will' They brought me up to the third heaven. And they placed me in the midst of Paradise. And that place has an appearance of pleasantness that has never been seen. 2 Every tree was in full flower. Every fruit was ripe, every food was in yield profusely; every fragrance was pleasant. And the four rivers were flowing past with gentle movement, with every kind of garden producing every kind of good 3 food. And the tree of life is in that place, under which the L O R D takes a rest; when the L O R D takes a walk in Paradise. ...

11 1 And ([the men]) lifted me up from there ([and they carried me up]) to the 4th heaven. And they showed me there all the movements ([and displacements!], and 2 all the rays <[of light]) of the sun and the moon. I measured their movements. I compared their light. And I saw that the sun has a light seven times greater than the sun(!). Their circle and their chariots on which each of them rides, passing like the wind. And there is no rest for them by day and by night, as they go off and come back. 3 And four great stars, holding onto the right-hand side of the sun's chariot, 4 on the left-hand side, 4 (going) with the sun perpetually, and going in front of the sun's chariot,

33 Martha Himmelfarb, "Heavenly Ascent and the Relationship of the Apocalypses and the Hekhalot Literature," *HUCA* 59 (1988): 73–100 (79).

20 1 And the men lifted me up from there, and they carried me up to the seventh heaven. And I saw a great light, and all the fiery armies of the club; incorporeal ones, archangels, angels, and the shining otanim stations. And I was terrified, and I trembled. 2 And the men picked me up with their ... And they said to me, “Be brave, Enoch! Don’t be frightened!” 3 And they showed me from a distance the LORD, sitting on his throne. And all the heavenly armies assembled, according to rank, advancing and doing obeisance to the L O R D . 4 And then they withdrew and went to their places in joy and merriment, in immeasurable light, but gloriously serving him ... 21 ... by night, nor departing by day, standing in front of the face of the L O R D , carrying out his will—with all the army of cherubim around his throne, never departing, and the six-winged ones covering his throne, singing in front of the face of the L O R D .³⁴

Even this (necessarily) very truncated citation of the passage is surely enough to teach us two things. First of all, it is clear that Resh Lakish’s account of the seven heavens stems from the same kind of literary tradition as this passage. Aside from the seven heavens themselves, there are two very impressive specific congeners: first, once again, as we saw in the *Parables of Enoch*, the specific interest in meteorological information as a major part of what the angels reveal with even the detail of treasuries for the hail and the snow and the dew; and second, the content of the seventh heaven with the Merkaba. There are, moreover, other echoes present as well, such as the constant singing of the angels. The other important thing that we learn from this comparison is that Resh Lakish’s tradition does not stem directly from 2 Enoch at all. The order and placement of various elements in the heavens is quite different, and, more importantly, there is much more emphasis in 2 Enoch on the presence of evil things in the heavens (only the bad dew remains in the talmudic version). In my presentation until now, I have sought to document some strong connections both general (the presence of cosmology and theosophy together) and detailed to establish the living connection of rabbinic tradition, both in the Mishnah—apophatically, as it were in the attempt to suppress—and in the Bavli—kataphatically—with some Second Temple apocalyptic traditions. The claim, once again, is not that the Rabbis had 1 and 2 Enoch before them nor that there were secret lines of transmission of these texts but that ideas and even basic literary structures from them remained alive in the cultural world of the Jews of rabbinic times and are reflected as well in the official texts of the Rabbis. Metatron, I would argue, in fine owes as much to Enoch, if not more, than to Jesus.

³⁴ James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1985), 1:111–35. The text I have cited here is from the shorter (and apparently more original recension—following advice of Prof. Andrei Orlov—and appears on every other page of the text).

Wisdom Poured Out Like Water



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