

# Temple Theology

An Introduction

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## Foreword

In the spring of 2003, Margaret Barker gave the Cardinal Hume Lectures at Heythrop College, University of London, on the theme of 'Temple Theology as Source of Christian Theology'. SPCK immediately saw that these accessible, informative and original lectures ought to be made available to a wider public, and I am delighted by their publication in this volume. In these lectures, Margaret Barker offers an excellent introduction to her important work on Judaism, the temple and Christian origins.

In her view, the theology and mysticism of the Jerusalem temple is the major source of the earliest Christian reflection. As she puts it: 'Temple theology is the original context of the New Testament. It knew of incarnation and atonement, the sons of God and the life of the age to come, the day of judgement, justification, salvation, the renewed covenant and the kingdom of God.'

The great puzzle is how early Christian reflection on Jesus emerged so clearly, so rapidly and with such a high degree of definition. What patterns of interpretation, already in Jewish religion, crystallized around the person of Jesus Christ and his work? It is commonly held that the earliest interpretations of Jesus were 'low' (e.g. 'the final prophet'), and that later interpretations were 'high' (e.g. 'the divine Son').

But if Margaret Barker is correct that the mysticism of the temple lies at the heart of Christology, we need move away from this simplification and think instead that the very earliest Christologies were 'high', viewing Jesus as the LORD, Yahweh, who rescues his people by an atoning sacrifice in his blood, after which he will be exalted and enthroned in heaven as the companion of God's throne. She has also suggested that these high estimates of his identity and mission originate not in the minds of others, but in Jesus' own mystical experience and

insights: as the first and best interpreter of himself, 'he is the author and finisher of the faith, rather than the early communities, a supposition which has been fashionable for some time'. Her interpretation of temple theology should not be ignored by anyone interested in Judaism and the origins of Christian faith.

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## Introduction

The invitation to deliver the Cardinal Hume Lectures for 2003 gave me the opportunity to pause and look around my work. For many years I have been absorbed in a quest to rediscover the meaning of the temple, and as I have accumulated material and drawn tentative conclusions, I have published them before moving on to the next phase. Information has come from many sources, not just from the work of my fellow biblical scholars, and I have often been reminded how far I have travelled (or even strayed!) from the mainstream. In these lectures I describe something of the view from this point on the journey, and speculate about what may lie over the horizon, and how this could affect our perception of Christian origins.

One thing has become quite clear: the original gospel message was about the temple, not the corrupted temple of Jesus' own time, but the original temple which had been destroyed some six hundred years earlier. All that remained were memories, and the hope that one day the true temple and all it represented would be restored. Jesus was presented as the high priest from the first temple; Melchizedek returned to his people. The restoration of the first temple was the hope of the first Christians, and to set them, their writings and their presentation of Jesus anywhere else than in the temple setting distorts what they were preaching and misrepresents the original gospel. The Book of Revelation is the key to understanding early Christianity. Because it is steeped in temple imagery, most people find it an opaque and impossible text, but people who thought in this 'temple' manner also wrote and read the rest of the New Testament. If we read it in any other way, we are reading our own meaning into the texts and are not connecting with the original teachings of the Church.

There are only the smallest fragments of archaeological evidence from the first temple: a little ivory pomegranate may be

all that we have.<sup>1</sup> The real remains, however, are still visible in the shape of traditional church buildings, in the shape of the most ancient Christian liturgies,<sup>2</sup> and in the 'shape' of Christian thought. The earliest Christian writings assume a world view and a setting which can only have come from a temple – and not the actual temple of their own time. Since the Book of Revelation describes the heavenly throne and the heavenly court of angels and elders, this must have been a memory of the holy of holies in the older Jerusalem temple, furnished with a great golden throne. When the Book of Revelation was written, the holy of holies had been empty for centuries. Some commentaries suggest that the scene was inspired by the court ritual of the Roman empire, without asking which fishermen from Galilee might have seen such a ritual. When very similar material was identified in the hymns found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, it became clear that these were temple scenes with angel priests attending the heavenly throne. People were still singing about a temple that had ceased to exist, or rather, had ceased to have a physical existence in Jerusalem.

To glimpse the earlier teachings, it is necessary to search far beyond the Bible itself. There is still caution about this in some quarters, but with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the increased scholarly interest in that vast body of ancient texts known as the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, a new context for Christian origins is being reconstructed. Christian scholars must take account of all the evidence. The impact of the last fifty years of discoveries has been comparable to the impact of the Bible translations of the Reformation. New questions have been raised and old certainties have been challenged. These have cleared the way for a new picture of the relationship between Christianity and the Hebrew tradition from which it emerged.

It used to be thought that many fundamentals of the Christian faith came from Greek culture, since their roots could not be found in the Hebrew Scriptures. Any concept of the Trinity or the Son of God could not possibly have come from the strict monotheism of Hebrew tradition, it was assumed. Thus 'On

<sup>1</sup> Described in *Biblical Archaeologist* 53/3 (1990), pp. 158–66, but now thought to be a forgery.

<sup>2</sup> The subject of my book *The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy* (London, T. & T. Clark, 2003).

earth as it is in heaven' had probably been adopted from the 'forms' of Platonism, and the cosmic nature of the atonement was thought to be a Greek addition to the original teachings.<sup>3</sup> The Holy Wisdom, to whom the great churches were dedicated, has been explained as a personification of a late development in Greek philosophy influenced by the Egyptian goddess Isis. None of this is necessary once the temple roots of Christianity are recognized.

Many other writings from the era of the second temple regarded it as the impure centre of an apostate priesthood. This does not mean that they preferred the non-sacrificial worship of the synagogue. It shows that they were cherishing the memory of an older faith, that of the anointed kings in Jerusalem and their lost temple. Many of the voices in those writings complained that they were still in exile, and that for them there had been no glorious return in the time of Joshua and Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah.<sup>4</sup> The earliest of these voices is heard towards the end of Isaiah, when the prophet complains of watchmen who are blind and without knowledge (Isa. 56.10). This is temple talk. The watchmen were the priests, the angel guardians of the temple, and they had rejected Wisdom who gave them knowledge. 'Opening eyes' was a sign of the restoration of the true priesthood, and so the prophecy of Joel 2.28 – the gift of prophecy, visions and dreams – was fulfilled at Pentecost (Acts 2.17). Isaiah condemned the restored (second) temple as a harlot on a hilltop (Isa. 57.7), who excluded the ancient worshippers of the LORD (Isa. 56.1–8), and made a mockery of the priestly rituals (Isa. 66.1–4). The people excluded in the fifth century BCE looked for the destruction of the harlot temple and its wicked priesthood who had enforced their long exile. The Book of Revelation records the joy of the early Church as that great harlot was burned, the great harlot who had corrupted the earth (Rev. 19.1–4), and so we can be sure there were Christian voices among those who rejected the second temple.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The most influential account of this was at the beginning of F. W. Dillstone's *The Christian Understanding of Atonement* (Welwyn, Nisbet, 1968).

<sup>4</sup> See M. A. Knibb, 'The Exile in the Literature of the Inter-Testamental Period', *Heythrop Journal* 17 (1976), pp. 253–72.

<sup>5</sup> See my book *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 2000), pp. 279–301.

The harlot was replaced by the Bride of the Lamb, the heavenly Jerusalem (Rev. 21:15–21), which John described as an immense holy of holies, furnished with the throne of the LORD. *The Christian vision was set in the original temple.* John also saw the servants of the LORD standing near the river of life, and the tree of life from which Adam had been barred (Rev. 22:1–5). The Christian vision reverses the story in Genesis 1–3, and has humans restored to Eden. Since scholars have often concluded that these chapters were the viewpoint of the second, apostate temple, it may be that the familiar story of Eden originally described how the older priesthood had been expelled from their Eden temple, and lost access to their tree of life. Adam was remembered as the first high priest, and Jesus was described as the new Adam. The Christians remembered and hoped for the earlier Eden – the true temple – and saw themselves returning to the place and the priesthood from which they had been driven. This was their world view.

Jesus was described and remembered as a great high priest (Heb. 4:14), the Melchizedek raised up by the power of an indestructible life (Heb. 7:16) who had offered the final atonement sacrifice to fulfil and supersede the temple rites (Heb. 9:1–14). Melchizedek's priesthood was more ancient than Aaron's, and the Letter to the Hebrews argues that the Melchizedek priesthood is superior to the Aaronic (Heb. 7:11–19). Now Aaron was the brother of Moses, but Melchizedek was priest in Jerusalem in the time of Abraham. *Melchizedek represented the older faith.* The Jerusalem kings had been priests in the manner of Melchizedek (Ps. 110), but there had been no place for an anointed king, a Messiah, in the religion of Moses. Deuteronomy set strict limits on the role and powers of the king (Deut. 17:14–20), but these rules had been elaborated with the wisdom of hindsight, and inserted after the demise of the monarchy. Paul knew where the roots of Christianity lay; he argued that Christianity looked to the faith of Abraham (and by implication Melchizedek), and so was rooted earlier than the Law given to Moses (e.g. Rom. 4).

Since the discovery of the Melchizedek text among the Dead Sea Scrolls (11Q13), we can see the significance of this claim that Jesus was Melchizedek. One damaged line of the text seems to describe teachers who have been kept hidden and secret, and the whole text clearly celebrates the return of the divine Melchizedek to rescue his own people from the power of the Evil One.

Melchizedek was expected to appear exactly when Jesus began his public ministry, and the description of the role of Melchizedek is exactly how Jesus is presented in the gospels. Jesus as Melchizedek was formerly thought to be peripheral to the understanding of his ministry, something claimed by the early Christians because it was known that Jesus had no family claim to the priesthood of Aaron. Jesus as Melchizedek can now be seen as the key to the New Testament, and the implication of this is that Melchizedek's temple was the world of the first Christians.

Much Christian study of the Old Testament has concentrated on the history of Israel, especially the traditions of the Deuteronomists found in Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings. The Deuteronomists – so called because they promoted the viewpoint of Deuteronomy – were devotees of the Moses strand of Israel's religion and hostile to both temple and monarchy. Emphasis on the historicity of their account – as if this was the truth of the Bible – has created considerable problems for Christian scholars. Biblical archaeology has been given a prominent place, implying that the existence of artefacts could establish the truth – as opposed to the historical accuracy – of the Bible. It is now recognized that the Old Testament histories are not reliable as a grid within which archaeologists can set their finds, and indeed these finds frequently call into question the historical accuracy of the Old Testament 'histories'.<sup>6</sup> Now that Christian scholars have been liberated from the burden of establishing the historical accuracy of certain claims, we are free to ask other questions whose answers are of more immediate importance to Christians. Whose history are we reading in the Hebrew Scriptures? To what extent were older materials edited and reworked for the new situation after the exile? To what extent has an older faith been overlaid with the beliefs and preferences of a later age? How much about the original temple can be gleaned from the biblical sources?

This is not a crypto-fundamentalism which assumes that the earliest account must be the purest. Rather it is the recognition that the Old Testament, both text and canon, has a complex

<sup>6</sup> See, for example P. R. Davies, 'In Search of "Ancient Israel"', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement* 148 (Sheffield, JSOT, 1992).

history, and that others who shared the Hebrew heritage did not always share the same beliefs or the same Scriptures. Among these 'others' were the first Christians. The Hebrew Scriptures as we know them were preserved, edited and transmitted by the priests and scribes of the second temple, the very people whom the 'long exile' tradition condemned as impure apostates who had altered the Scriptures. 'Sinners will alter and pervert the words of righteousness in many ways . . . and lie and practise great deceit and write books concerning their words' (1 Enoch 104.10; 1 Enoch 98.15—99.1 is similar). This Enoch text was regarded as Scripture by the early Christians, and so they will have known the accusation that the tradition was being altered. This probably explains why the 'long exile' tradition is recorded in texts which were not accepted into the Hebrew canon. The longing to return from that exile is apparent in the New Testament: 'Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the land' (Matt. 5.5).<sup>7</sup>

For Christians these are very serious questions. Since the 'primary' sources for the history of the Jerusalem monarchy (1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings) are hostile to most of the kings, any reconstruction of the origin of the Messianic ideal in Jerusalem is seriously hampered. This same source is also hostile to the first temple in Jerusalem, and so any search for the temple roots of Christian worship has to rely largely on material outside the Old Testament. The Old Testament does tell the story of Israel's religion, but not in the way that is often assumed. The key event was the great purge in the time of King Josiah at the end of the seventh century BCE, when everything that the Deuteronomists deemed impure was removed from the temple and destroyed (2 Kings 23). This is not an objective account, and it is easy to see that *most* of what King Josiah removed were the religious artefacts and practices of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and almost all the kings in Jerusalem. They had survived in the land until the sixth century BCE – sacred trees, pillars, places outside Jerusalem to offer sacrifice – but King Josiah removed everything that did not conform to the Moses religion as set out in Deuteronomy.<sup>8</sup> *In other words, the 'Moses' religion with the ten commandments and the*

*Aaron priesthood did not finally replace the Abrahamic faith and the Melchizedek priesthood until just before the first temple was destroyed. (It is hard to find any indication in the early chapters of Isaiah, written in the eighth century BCE, that the prophet knew about Moses and the ten commandments.)*

The most important result of Josiah's purge was the introduction of monotheism. The earlier religion had known of God Most High – the deity worshipped by Melchizedek (Gen. 14.19) – El Shaddai, the deity of the patriarchs (Exod. 6.3), and Yahweh, who appeared in human form, for example to shut Noah safely into the ark (Gen. 7.16). There is no proof that these were one and the same deity. Only later were all these ancient forms said to be identical. It was the prophet of the exile who declared that Yahweh was El, and that there was no other God (Isa. 43.12–13; 45.22). In the more ancient names for the deities, however, we glimpse the Father (God Most High), the Son (Yahweh, the One who appeared in human form), and the Mother (El Shaddai, whose name means the God with breasts). The Qur'an implies that Christians were worshipping the Mother and the Son, presumably as part of their Trinity, but emphasizes that Jesus did not teach them to worship in that way (4.171; 5.75–76, 116).

The Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament) was compiled from a variety of older sources after the destruction of the original temple, after the demise of the monarchy, and after Josiah's purge. The stories are presented as a historical sequence, but they also reflect the more recent development: that the religion of the patriarchs was finally superseded by the religion of Moses as late as the sixth century BCE. It was then that the name of the God of the patriarchs was replaced by the name of the God of Moses, and so forth (Exod. 3.13–15; 6.3). It was then that the teaching about atonement was altered. After the sin of the golden calf, when the Law was given for a second time, Moses learned that one person could not make atonement for the sin of another (Exod. 32.30–33). This must have been an older practice excluded from the final form of the 'Moses' religion. Excluding atonement is a matter of some importance for Christians. Jewish tradition remembered and recorded (as late as the fourth century CE in the Jerusalem Talmud *Ta'anit* 4.5) that many priests of the original temple had fled to Arabia after the time of Josiah's purge. They must have taken with them the faith of the older temple. Paul also spent time in 'Arabia' (Gal. 1.17 – one wonders why) before

<sup>7</sup> For more detail see my book *The Great High Priest*, pp. 294–315 (see note 1).

<sup>8</sup> This was first set out by J. van Seters in 'The Religion of the Patriarchs in Genesis', *Biblica* 61 (1980) pp. 220–33.

returning and *arguing that the roots of Christianity lay in the faith of Abraham.*

Traditions associated with the origin of Islam knew that there had been another ancient faith that was neither Christianity nor Judaism. The earliest account of the life of Muhammad was written by Ibn Ishāq in the middle of the eighth century CE and so only about one hundred years after the time of Muhammad. Before the prophet appeared, he wrote, four good men set out to seek the religion of their father Abraham, which they believed their people had corrupted. 'They went their several ways in the lands, seeking the Hanifiya, the religion of Abraham.' One of them eventually met a Christian monk in Syria who told him there was nobody left who could guide him to the religion of Abraham, but that a new prophet would soon appear.<sup>9</sup> The Qur'an, too, distinguished between the religion of Abraham and the religion of Moses: 'Do you say that Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes were Jews or Christians?' (2.140). 'Abraham was not a Jew nor yet a Christian' (3.67). Much of the ancient temple lore re-emerged in Islam; the traditional dimensions of the holy of holies are also those of the Ka'aba. Traditions about Abraham in Arabia were unknown in Jewish sources until the discovery of the so-called *Genesis Apocryphon* among the Dead Sea Scrolls, which describes Abraham's travels east to the Euphrates and then around the coast of Arabia.<sup>10</sup>

Recovering the world of the original temple is not a simple matter. There is no single text which reveals the lost world and proves beyond any doubt that what I am proposing was the case. What *is* beyond doubt is the unsatisfactory and even unreasonable account of 'New Testament background' which has prevailed for so long. It has been assumed that rabbinic texts from a period long after the New Testament could be used to illustrate the New Testament situation, but that the writings of Philo, a Jewish contemporary of Jesus in Egypt, were suspect because they were so different from the rabbinic texts. Giant figures whose influence shaped New Testament scholarship throughout the twentieth century have now been accused of

assuming 'the acute Hellenization . . . the syncretistic paganization of primitive Christianity', and repeating this argument without verifying it adequately in the ancient sources.<sup>11</sup> Things are changing.

If Jesus taught people who were familiar with the world of the Dead Sea Scrolls, then this must have been part of the actual 'New Testament background'. These people even had different Hebrew Scriptures – different books and different versions of familiar texts such as Isaiah. What has happened to all those prophetic texts mentioned in the Books of Chronicles (e.g. the history of Nathan the prophet, the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite and the vision of Iddo the seer, 2 Chron. 9.29)? There was no fixed canon of Hebrew Scripture until after the advent of Christianity, and *there is good reason to suspect that the familiar Hebrew canon was established in reaction to Christianity.* Even the Hebrew text from which the English Bible is translated was fixed at the end of the first century CE and excluded the version(s) which the first Christians (and the Dead Sea community) had used. Other pre-Christian texts preserved the voices of the long exile and of hostility to the second temple, yet these texts were only preserved by Christian scribes. Jews were forbidden to read them, and the scrolls of the 'minim' (heretics) had to be burned even if they contained the sacred Name.<sup>12</sup> This explains what happened to much of the evidence. The 'long exile' tradition must have been one of the factors which distinguished Jews from Christians. In other words, the Christians were the heirs of those who rejected the second temple and its tradition, and longed for the restoration of the true temple. Given the tradition represented in the Old Testament *as we have it in the Roman and Protestant Churches* (that is, the Old Testament translated from the post-Christian Hebrew text), it is material outside the canon of scripture that is likely to prove a more useful source of information about the matrix of Christianity.

When the Roman emperor Constantine, early in the fourth century CE, built great churches in Palestine, the complex built around the site of Calvary and the tomb of Jesus was clearly intended to be the restored temple – not the temple destroyed by

<sup>9</sup> *The Life of Muhammad*: a translation of Ibn Ishāq's *Life of the Prophet*, with introduction and notes by A. Guillaume (1955; repr. Lahore etc., Oxford University Press Pakistan, 1967), pp. 98–103.

<sup>10</sup> 1Q20.XXI.

<sup>11</sup> M. Hengel, *The Son of God* (London, SCM Press, 1976), p. 18.

<sup>12</sup> Babylonian Talmud *Gittin* 45b; translation in I. Epstein (ed.), *The Babylonian Talmud* (35 vols, London, Soncino Press, 1935–48).

the Romans in 70 CE but the original temple destroyed in 586 BCE. The relics 'acquired' for the benefit of pilgrims were relics of the first temple: King Solomon's ring which had kept the demons away from the building site, and the horn of oil used to anoint the ancient kings. Calvary became the temple mount where, according to Jewish legend, Isaac had been sacrificed. Pilgrims were told that Adam had been created, not from the dust of the temple mount, but from the dust of Calvary.<sup>13</sup> The Christians had restored the older temple, the true temple. Constantine did not do this simply as a statement of imperial grandeur. From the very beginning, Christians had adopted and preserved the ways of the original temple. Many priests joined the Jerusalem church (Acts 6.7). A secret, priestly tradition, passed down unwritten, was known in the early church, and it concerned certain practices in the liturgy and temple customs.

The temple tradition, once it has been identified, is clear in the Gospels themselves. The role of the royal high priest (in the older temple this would have been the anointed king), for example, was to carry away the sin and uncleanness of the people so that they could be restored within the bonds of the covenant. The clearest picture of this is in Isaiah 53. It is no coincidence that this is one of the most frequently cited texts in the New Testament. The royal high priest was the great angel in human form, the Man, who passed between heaven and earth. The vision of Daniel 7 is frequently cited or assumed in the New Testament, the human figure ascending with clouds to his enthronement. The royal high priest was born as son of God in the holy of holies. Psalm 110 (damaged in the Hebrew but readable in the Greek) describes this process and is the other most frequently cited text in the New Testament. The two temple rituals originally exclusive to the high priests were carrying blood into the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement and eating the most holy Shewbread on the Sabbath. These were combined to become the Christian Eucharist.

The quest for the temple is also, in a sense, a quest for the underlying or original meaning of some Old Testament texts. One of the curious facts about this investigation is that a high proportion of the relevant Hebrew texts is now either missing from the current Hebrew even though it was known in the pre-

Christian Dead Sea Scroll texts, or unreadable in the current Hebrew and has to be reconstructed from the Greek. This cannot be coincidence. Where Christian writings quote a sequence of scriptural texts – as in Hebrews 1 – we cannot assume that the ideas expressed were a Christian innovation, that the texts were being used out of context in order to dress new ideas decently in scripture. A whole web of established assumptions – often unacknowledged – has to be questioned and indeed abandoned. Once freed from these assumptions, we are better placed to tackle the whole question of how Christianity developed – doctrine, liturgy, art and imagery, lifestyle.

It is beyond doubt that the faith of the temple became Christianity. Images and practices that most Christians take for granted such as priesthood, the shape of a traditional church building, or the imagery of sacrifice and atonement are all obviously derived from the temple. By reconstructing the world of the older faith it can be shown that Invocation of the divine Presence, Incarnation, Resurrection, Theosis (the human becoming divine), the Mother of God and the self-offering of the Son of God were also drawn from the temple. The gospel as it was first preached by Jesus, and as it was developed and lived by the early Church, concerned the restoration of the true temple.

This explains how Christian doctrine was able to develop so quickly; it was the expression of a long established set of beliefs in the light of the life and work of Jesus.

One is tempted to say that more happened in this period of less than two decades (after Easter) than in the whole of the next seven centuries, up to the time when the doctrine of the early church was completed. Indeed one might even ask whether the formation of doctrine in the early church was essentially more than a consistent development and completion of what had already been unfolded in the primal event of the first two decades, but in the language and thought forms of Greek, which was its necessary setting.<sup>14</sup>

How important it is, therefore, to understand those first two decades in their original temple setting.

<sup>13</sup> Details in my book *The Great High Priest*, p. 98 (see note 1).

<sup>14</sup> M. Hengel, *The Son of God*, p. 2 (see note 11).

A temple stood in Jerusalem for over a thousand years. According to the biblical account, the first temple was built by Solomon about 950 BCE and was severely damaged by the Babylonians about 350 years later. It was rebuilt towards the end of the sixth century BCE by people who returned from exile in Babylon, and was rebuilt again by Herod the Great at the end of the first century BCE. The structure was finally destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE, but the influence of the temple and its world has far outlasted its physical existence.

Jesus would have known Herod's temple, and he prophesied its destruction. Not one stone of it, he said, would be left standing (Mark 13.2). From this we might assume that Jesus was opposed to the temple, but in fact, as we shall see, *the world of the temple was the world of the first Christians, and they expressed their faith in terms drawn almost exclusively from the temple*. Jesus and his followers opposed what the temple had become; they identified themselves as the true temple, with Jesus as the great high priest.

When Jesus was arrested by the temple authorities, one of the charges brought against him was threatening to destroy the temple and to rebuild it in three days (Mark 14.58). Another was claiming to be the Messiah (Matt. 26.63–64). These were two aspects of the same charge, as can be deduced from the *Book of Enoch*,<sup>1</sup> a text which the early Christians regarded as Scripture. The *Book of Enoch* described the judgement of the fallen angels,

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<sup>1</sup> The *Book of Enoch* (usually known as *1 Enoch*) is the Ethiopic translation of a text known to have existed in Aramaic. Fragments were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. An English translation is available in vol. 1 of J. H. Charlesworth's *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2 vols, London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983–85). There is also a translation with fuller notes: R. H. Charles, *The Book of Enoch* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1893 but reprinted several times and recently as a paperback by SPCK).

and then how the Lord of the sheep would carry away the old temple and set up something greater in its place (1 Enoch 90.28–29). This is the reason for the two questions at Jesus' trial: Did you claim that you would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days? Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One? This same passage accounts for the exchange between Jesus and the Jews recorded in John 2.19–21: 'Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?"' Later reflection led the evangelist to add, 'But he spoke of the temple of his body'. Jesus was claiming the prophecy of Enoch, that he was the Lord of the sheep who would destroy and rebuild the temple. Enoch is not in our Bible today, but the Dead Sea Scrolls show that it was one of the most widely used books in the time of Jesus. In first century Palestine, it would have been known that the Messiah, the Good Shepherd, would destroy and rebuild the temple. This is just one example, to show why the *Book of Enoch* and other similar texts are now recognized as important evidence for understanding Christian origins, especially in the matter of the temple.

If temple research is restricted to biblical texts, the task is not unlike trying to reconstruct the history of Christianity in Britain since 1066, when the only primary sources available are the remains of an old hymn book, a couple of cuttings about royal events, some papers about restoration work on a major cathedral and a bundle of undated bits from a vestry cupboard. Why this should be so is an important question, especially as the little information we have in biblical texts is inconsistent and concerns only the external aspects. *The heart of the ancient faith is missing*. Even the standard work of reference on Judaism in the time of Christian origins<sup>2</sup> deals only with externals: priestly families and the hierarchy, revenues and management of temple funds, organization of temple ceremonial, temple security and the police duties of the Levites and so on. There is nothing about what the priests believed themselves to be, or what their rituals meant. *There is no temple theology*.

Biblical texts about the temple have interesting discrepancies. A comparison of the two accounts of Solomon's temple, that of

the Chronicler, who was a temple enthusiast, and that of the Deuteronomist, who was not, show that there was a sensitivity about certain aspects of the temple: the cherub throne in the holy of holies, for example, and the veil which screened it. The Deuteronomist, who did not favour the temple, described only two golden cherubim in the holy of holies and said nothing of a veil (1 Kings 6.23–28); whereas the Chronicler described the cherubim as the *golden chariot throne* (1 Chron. 29.18) screened by a veil of blue, purple and crimson, woven with fine linen and embroidered with cherubim (2 Chron. 3.14). What was the problem with the throne and the veil? Were they just the Chronicler's fantasy, or was the Deuteronomist censoring information about the temple? There is a similar problem with temple music. The Chronicler wrote in detail about the musicians and the importance of their continual ministry before the ark (1 Chron. 16.37). When Solomon consecrated the temple, he wrote, and the ark had been put into the holy of holies, the temple musicians and singers made music in unison until the Glory of the LORD filled the temple (2 Chron. 5.11–14). Elsewhere the Chronicler confirmed that this was the purpose of the music, *to invoke [the presence of] the LORD* (1 Chron. 16.4), and so the musicians played, and the Glory filled the house. The Deuteronomist did not mention music (2 Sam. 6; 1 Kings 8.10). Perhaps there was a difficulty about invoking the presence of the LORD, or was this another fantasy on the part of the Chronicler?

And what of atonement? Whoever compiled the final form of the Pentateuch denied that any one person could make atonement for another. After the sin of the golden calf, we are told, Moses went before the LORD and offered his own life as an atonement for the sin, but the LORD said to Moses: 'Whoever has sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book' (Exod. 32.33). Why had Moses thought it possible to offer himself as the atonement? What we seem to have in this text is the promulgation of a new practice by means of the Moses story. One person making atonement for others is no longer possible in the era of the Law, when each is responsible for his own sins. *Whoever has sinned against me, him will I blot from my book*. And so the Day of Atonement does not appear in the Deuteronomist's calendar: Passover, Weeks and Tabernacles are the recognized feasts (Deut. 16), whereas the priestly calendar lists the Day of Atonement among the appointed feasts in the autumn (Lev. 23.26–32). This is our problem. Which

<sup>2</sup> Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* rev. Geza Vermes and Fergus Millar (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1973–).

of the biblical accounts is accurate? Was the ancient temple a place of atonement, a golden throne and a veil, with musicians invoking the presence of the LORD, or was it not? This is a matter of some importance for Christians, since these elements – atonement (one person offering himself for the sin of others), the heavenly throne and the veil of the temple – are important in the New Testament, and invocation, *epiklesis*, was central to early liturgies.

It is possible to reconstruct something of the world of the temple using a range of ancient materials, not just the biblical texts, and then to show how this reconstruction can illuminate biblical texts and Christian practices.

### The Shape of the Temple

Later Jewish sources preserve many traditions, almost certainly memories, about the temple. When the Babylonian Talmud was compiled, well into the Christian era, it was remembered that the furnishings of the first temple sanctuary had been hidden away in the time of King Josiah: the ark containing the jar of manna and Aaron's rod, and the holy oil with which kings and priests had been anointed.<sup>3</sup> Thus no one was anointed, and there could have been no Messiah, in the period of the second temple. The great commentary on Numbers, *Numbers Rabbah*, records that in the time of the Messiah the true temple furnishings would be restored: the fire, the ark, the seven branched lamp, the Spirit and the cherubim.<sup>4</sup> These are interesting memories. The ark was to reappear in the time of the Messiah – and the Book of Revelation records that John saw the ark in the heavenly temple just before the woman clothed with the sun gave birth to her child, the Messiah who was taken up to the throne of God (Rev. 11.19–12.6).

Using material such as this, it is possible to reconstruct something of the meaning of the temple. We shall look first at the meaning of the holy of holies, which housed the chariot throne, and the veil, those two aspects of the temple of which the Deuteronomist said nothing.

<sup>3</sup> Babylonian Talmud *Horayoth* 12a; translation in I. Epstein (ed.), *The Babylonian Talmud* (35 vols, London, Soncino Press, 1935–148).

<sup>4</sup> *Numbers Rabbah* XV.10; translation in Harry Freedman (ed.), *Midrash Rabbah* (10 vols, London, Soncino Press, 1939).

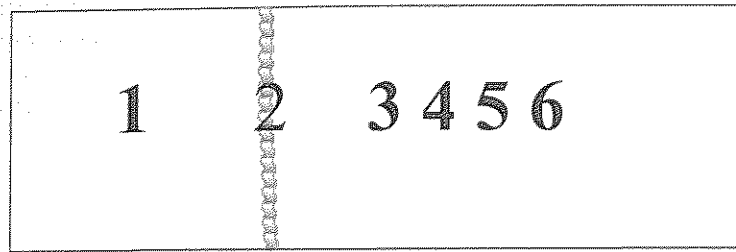
The temple (and the tabernacle, which for the most part shared its symbolism) represented the creation. The six days of creation described in Genesis 1 were replicated in the six stages of building the desert tabernacle. An early Midrash<sup>5</sup> declared: 'The tabernacle is equal to the creation of the world', and proceeded to show how Day One in the Genesis account corresponded to the holy of holies, the second day to the veil, the third day to the bronze laver and the fourth day to the seven branched lamp.<sup>6</sup> A modern reconstruction by Ginzberg,<sup>7</sup> based on a variety of ancient sources, proposed that the third day corresponded to the bread of the presence, the shewbread. The most ancient evidence for this correspondence is found in the last chapter of Exodus, where Moses assembled the tabernacle (Exod. 40.17–33). He began on the first day of the year – the new year was traditionally linked to the creation story – and the tabernacle was assembled in stages each marked by 'as the LORD commanded Moses'. First the outer structure was set up, Day One, when God separated light from darkness. Then the veil was put in place to separate the holy of holies, corresponding to the second day of creation when the heavens were set in place to separate what was above from what was below. On the third day the table for the bread, wine and incense was set in place, to represent the third day of creation when plants with seeds and fruit were made. On the fourth day the seven branched lamp was set in place, to represent the great lights set in heaven on the fourth day.

After this there are problems, because the Hebrew and Greek texts of Exodus diverge at this point, but the pattern is clear enough for the first four days, and this pattern was long remembered. Cosmas, an Egyptian Christian, writing in the sixth century, knew not only that the account of the creation was replicated in the building of the tabernacle; he also knew that the first chapter of Genesis had been the record of Moses' vision on Sinai. This was the link between Moses and the creation story. Moses had been in the cloud on Sinai for six days before the LORD spoke to him on the seventh (Exod. 24.15–16), and in those six days he had seen the creation.

<sup>5</sup> Midrash, from the Hebrew word *darash* 'seek', is a way of expounding Scripture which seeks its theological significance.

<sup>6</sup> Midrash *Tanhuma* 11.2; translation by S. A. Berman (Hoboken, N.J., KTAV, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society of America, 1909–38), vol. 1, p. 51.

*The temple and the days of creation*

Day	Temple/tabernacle feature	Meaning
1	Holy of holies	The throne of God, the hidden heart of creation, the source of life.
2	The veil	The web of matter that conceals the throne of God from human perception.
3	The table for the bread	The vegetation of the earth, wine and incense.
4	The seven branched lamp	The sun, moon and five known planets.
5	The altar of burnt offering	The symbolism is no longer clear because the text of Exodus 40 differs in the Greek and the Hebrew. It is probable that the altar represented non-human creatures.
6	The High Priest	The human as the high priest of creation.

Immediately after this vision, he had been commanded to build the tabernacle according to what he had seen in his vision and so the tabernacle replicated the creation. Cosmas described it thus:

Since therefore it had been shown him how God made the heaven and the earth, and how on the second day he made the firmament in the middle between them . . . Moses in like manner, in accordance with the pattern he had seen, made the tabernacle and placed the veil in the middle and by this division he made the one tabernacle into two, the inner and the outer.<sup>8</sup>

He went on to explain how God revealed to Moses 'all he had done in making the world in six days, showing him in six other days the making of the world, performing in his presence the work of each day'.<sup>9</sup> Other ancient texts, as we shall see, imply that this had been the vision of the high priest in the holy of holies. There are many examples of Moses legends absorbing traditions from the first temple, and of the Sinai story being expanded with images from the holy of holies.

The first two days of creation, corresponding to the holy of holies and the veil, show how traditions about the beginning of creation can help to reconstruct beliefs about the holy of holies and the veil, and how both can illuminate familiar biblical texts.

### The Holy of Holies

The inner sanctuary, known as the 'oracle',<sup>10</sup> was built as a perfect cube and lined with gold. In the second temple, it was empty, yet the mystical and apocalyptic texts from that period were set in a richly furnished holy place, a place of fire where the great Holy One was enthroned before countless angels. The earliest material in the *Book of Enoch* described how Enoch, a high priestly figure, ascended into a heavenly temple of fire and crystal, in which there

<sup>8</sup> Cosmas 2.35 (*A Christian Topography*, tr. J. W. McCrindle for the Hakluyt Society, London 1897).

<sup>9</sup> Cosmas 3.13.

<sup>10</sup> Hebrew *אֵבֶן*, traditionally understood as the place where the divine voice was heard, has recently been explained as meaning the 'back part' of the temple. This latter meaning is unlikely.

was an inner house of fire. The Great Glory sat there on his throne, but none of the angels could enter this holy place, except Enoch, who was summoned into the presence. This must reflect temple practice, where only the high priest could enter the inner house, whilst the other priests were allowed no further than the hall of the temple. Isaiah had a vision of the throne and the angels in the temple, and Daniel saw the figure of a Man ascending with clouds to the presence of the Ancient of Days. Had there once been a throne in the holy of holies, which could have inspired these visions? If so, why had the Deuteronomist not mentioned it?

There is a similar problem with the description of the beginning of creation,<sup>11</sup> which corresponds to the holy of holies. Genesis 1 does not mention the origin of the angels, even though the account concludes with the words: 'Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them' (Gen. 2.1). Scholars have often noted the absence of the angels, especially as the *Book of Jubilees*, another ancient text corresponding to Genesis,<sup>12</sup> does describe the origin of the angels. At the beginning, God created 'all the spirits who minister before him',<sup>13</sup> and these were listed as the angels of the presence, and the angels of fire; winds, weathers and seasons. Better known than the *Book of Jubilees* is the *Benedicite*, found in the Greek text of Daniel, which exhorts all creation to praise the LORD. The second half lists the works of creation in the order familiar from Genesis: the earth, the plants, the waters, the fish, the birds, the animals and finally the human race. The first half, however, lists the angels described in the *Book of Jubilees*: the powers, the weathers, the winds and the seasons. The *Benedicite* assumes a fuller creation story. The angels are missing from the corresponding part of Genesis 1, and the rabbis were emphatic that they had never been there. They had various suggestions about the origin of the angels but were agreed on one thing; they had not been created

<sup>11</sup> The Mishnah states that the story of the Creation and the description of the Chariot throne in Ezekiel must not be taught publicly, but a teacher could confirm the truth about them to a pupil who already understood. Mishnah *Hagigah* 2.1; translation in H. Danby, *The Mishnah* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1933).

<sup>12</sup> The origin of this text is not known. Fragments have been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, and it was preserved as Scripture by the ancient Ethiopian Church. It has a priestly 'feel' to it, just as 1 and 2 Chronicles have a priestly feel to them when compared to the parallel accounts in 1 and 2 Kings.

<sup>13</sup> *Jubilees* 2.2; translation in Charlesworth, vol. 2 (see note 1).

on Day One.<sup>14</sup> This must have been an important issue for them, and despite the tradition in *Jubilees* and the *Benedicite*, angels at the beginning of the creation was not an answer they could allow. Thus an empty holy of holies signified more than just a missing throne; *the angel theology of the holy of holies was also missing*. The Book of Revelation, however, was set in a fully furnished holy of holies, complete with throne and angels, and John, like Enoch, was invited to enter and stand before the throne. It is interesting that John was remembered as a high priest who wore the Name of the LORD on his forehead.<sup>15</sup>

The theology of the holy of holies was the preserve of the high priesthood; everything 'concerning the altar and within the veil' was restricted to the sons of Aaron (Num. 18.7; also LXX Num. 3.10). This gives a context for statements found in some early Christian writers that Jesus was the true high priest who had taught the secrets to his followers. Ignatius of Antioch, perhaps early in the second century, wrote: 'To Jesus alone as our high priest were the secret things of God committed.'<sup>16</sup> Clement of Alexandria wrote of his opponents: 'They do not enter in as we enter in, through the tradition of the LORD, by drawing aside the curtain.'<sup>17</sup> When contemporary rabbis defined *their* authentic tradition they claimed that it had been transmitted from Moses to Joshua, then to the elders, then to the prophets and then to the men of the great synagogue.<sup>18</sup> The priesthood and its tradition were not mentioned, and we can only speculate why this was so.

### The Secret Tradition

St Basil, in his mid-fourth-century treatise *On the Holy Spirit*, explained that there were teachings from the apostles which had never been written down. These concerned facing east to pray,

<sup>14</sup> *Genesis Rabbah* III; translation in Freedman (see note 4).

<sup>15</sup> Eusebius, *History of the Church* 3.31; translation by Andrew Louth and G. A. Williamson (rev. ed., London, Penguin, 1989).

<sup>16</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Philadelphians* 5; translation by Maxwell Staniforth in *Early Christian Writings: the Apostolic Fathers* (London, Penguin, 1968).

<sup>17</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies* 7.17; translation in *The Ante Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1979–1986), vol. 2.

<sup>18</sup> Mishnah *Aboth* 1.1 (see note 11).

marking with the sign of the cross, and the *epiklesis*, the words used in the Liturgy to call on the LORD to come, originally to the temple (e.g. Ps. 38.21–22; Ps. 70.1, 5), but in this instance to the bread and wine.<sup>19</sup> It cannot be coincidence that all three were customs from the first temple. Basil explained that ‘they had been kept in silence and in secret’, and concerned ‘liturgical customs, prayers and rites of the sacraments’ and the theological doctrines implied in them. Origen (died 253 CE), when he was explaining why the furnishings of the tabernacle had been wrapped by the high priests before the Levites had been permitted to carry them (Num. 4), said that the true meaning of these furnishings had thus been veiled from Israel, but was now known to the Church ‘handed down and entrusted to us by the high priest and his sons’.<sup>20</sup> Basil compared facing east, the sign of the cross, and the *epiklesis* to the secrets of the holy of holies. In the New Testament, the Letter to the Hebrews has a list of the furnishings of the holy of holies and then we read, ‘Of these things we cannot now speak in detail’ (Heb. 9.5). This knowledge was not to be written down and made public. Peter wrote in his first letter that Christians knew about ‘things into which angels long to look’ (1 Pet. 1.12). This too must have been the holy of holies, which the angels could not enter. As early as Deuteronomy, the possession of this knowledge had been a matter of controversy: ‘The secret things belong to the LORD our God’; all that was required of Israel was obedience to the revealed commandments (Deut. 29.29). The Law was not something which had to be brought down from heaven, and there was no need to ask: ‘Who will go up for us to heaven, and bring it to us . . . ?’ (Deut. 30.12).

The secrets of the holy of holies concerned the origin of creation, Day One; those who entered the holy of holies saw the vision of creation that Moses had seen. Texts such as 2 *Enoch* describe in detail how Enoch saw the days of creation unfold before him, and this was how he became wise. We do not know the age of this Enoch text, but R. Nehuniah, a Jewish mystic who claimed that he had seen ‘the mysteries and the secrets . . . the weaving of the web that completes the world’,<sup>21</sup> taught around

<sup>19</sup> *On the Holy Spirit* 66.

<sup>20</sup> Origen, *Homily 5 On Numbers*.

<sup>21</sup> *Hekhalot Rabbati* 201. Similar material is translated in Peter Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God: Some Major Themes in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Albany, NY, State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 12.

the end of the first century CE. He seems to have had a mystical experience like that described in 2 *Enoch*, showing that such teachings were known in the time of Jesus. Exactly the same experience, however, is implied in the Book of Job, and so must have been part of the Hebrew tradition for a very long time. Eliphaz taunted Job about the limits of his wisdom and asked him: ‘Have you listened in the council of God?’ He also asked him ‘Are you the first man . . . brought forth before the hills?’ (Job 15.7–8). When the LORD himself spoke to Job from the whirlwind he said: ‘Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding’ (Job 38.4). Those who stood in the council and learned wisdom had been present before the creation of the visible, material world, and had watched it come into being.

These people had also been born in the holy of holies ‘brought forth before the hills’. Since Job had presumably been born in the same way as any other person, this birth in the holy of holies must have been something different. In fact, it would have been the experience described elsewhere as resurrection. Those who entered the holy of holies and stood before the throne of the Holy One became angels. In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus explained that there was no marriage in heaven because there was no death: ‘[Those in heaven] are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection’ (Luke 20.36). Resurrection was transformation into the angelic state. There are accounts of how Enoch was transformed into an angel, resurrected, and then sent back to earth. The most detailed of these accounts described how he was anointed with oil as he stood before the throne and saw himself becoming an angel.<sup>22</sup> In temple theology, resurrection was not a *post mortem* experience. It was *theosis*, the transformation of a human being into a divine being – which came with the gift of Wisdom; and *theosis*, described in various ways, was at the heart of temple tradition, together with the belief in a resurrected anointed one, a resurrected Messiah. The Christians thought of themselves as angels on earth; Jesus had exhorted them to become sons of light (John 12.36; see also Eph. 5.8 ‘walk as children of light’), Paul reminded the Thessalonians that they were all sons of light (1 Thess. 5.5) and he wrote to the holy ones of Rome, Corinth and

<sup>22</sup> 2 *Enoch* 22; translation in Charlesworth, vol. 2 (see note 1).

Ephesus as the 'saints'. The Christians at Colossae had already been raised with Christ (Col. 3.1) and John knew that those who had been anointed knew all things (1 John 2.20). These are images of high priesthood, the resurrected state. This is the high priesthood of all believers.

The holy of holies was the invisible creation, beyond the veil and so outside matter and time, and rituals in the holy of holies were deemed to take place in eternity, before the creation of the visible world. Thus Enoch described how the Man (meaning the Messiah) was named before the sun and the stars were created (*1 Enoch* 48.2–3). The words of Isaiah are more familiar: 'to us a child is born, to us a son is given' was the song of the angels as the new angel was born, the one who was to become the Davidic king (Isa. 9.6–7). Psalm 110, one of the most frequently cited texts in the New Testament, described how the Melchizedek high priest was begotten in the glory of the holy ones, a reconstruction based on the Old Greek as the Hebrew text at this point is opaque. Since the Old Greek describes the origin of the divine Son, begotten in the holy of holies, this may explain the state of the Hebrew. 'I have begotten you' is also found in Psalm 2.7. One of the secrets of the holy of holies and of the high priesthood, then, was the generation of the Son in eternity as the Melchizedek high priest. This explains Jesus' response to his critics: 'Do you say of him whom the Father consecrated [i.e. as high priest] and sent into the world, "You are blaspheming," because I said, "I am the Son of God"?' (John 10.36). In Jesus' time the high priest – or perhaps we should say the true high priest – was believed to be at one with God, the Son of God, and this union was described as sharing life or spirit (John 6.57, 63).

## Unity

You may have noticed that I have not described the beginning of creation as 'the first day'. The veil represented the second day, the table the third day and the seven branched lamp the fourth. The beginning, however, was not described as the first day as it was not part of the temporal sequence. The Hebrew has Day One, and the rabbis remembered this as the Day (or the state) in which the Holy One was one with his universe.<sup>23</sup> Day One was thus the

<sup>23</sup> *Genesis Rabbah* III.8; translation in Freedman (see note 4).

state of unity underlying (rather than preceding) all the visible creation. Philo was emphatic: 'In the beginning', he wrote, 'is not to be understood in the chronological sense, for there was no time before the visible world was created'.<sup>24</sup> Thus we should understand the opening line of Genesis in terms of the holy of holies: 'In the beginning, God created . . .'

Those who entered the holy of holies understood how that original unity had become the diversity of the visible creation. When Enoch was shown the hidden things, he saw first how the kingdom was divided, and then he saw the secrets of the winds and the weathers (*1 Enoch* 41). The holy of holies was the Kingdom, which explains why the heavenly city in the Book of Revelation is a giant cube: it was the holy of holies. Those who experienced only the visible creation knew that it was divided and separated. Genesis 1 described the process: the firmament separated the waters, the lights of heaven separated light from darkness, and everything was created distinct, according to its kind. Only those who had access to the secrets knew of the underlying unity. The fragments of a Wisdom text from Qumran mention the mystery of existence (or perhaps it means the mystery of coming into being): 'Gaze on the mystery of existence, and know the paths of everything that lives', i.e. how everything comes forth from the holy of holies (4Q418).<sup>25</sup> When John stood before the throne in the holy of holies, he heard the song of creation: 'Worthy art thou, our Lord and God . . . for thou didst create all things, and by thy will they existed and were created' (Rev. 4.11).

The unity within the holy of holies meant that all the angels were derived from the One. The lesser were each a part of the greater and the greater were part of the even greater. Collectively they were the Fullness of God, because all the angels were aspects of God. The seven angels who emerged from the holy of holies in Revelation 15 were all dressed as the high priests, because they were all the high priest. The four titles given to the new angel in Isaiah 9.6: 'Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace' became in the Old Greek just one title: the Angel of Great Counsel, i.e. the Wisdom Angel. This unity and plurality is well illustrated by a text usually identified

<sup>24</sup> *On the Creation* 26 in Loeb Classical Library *Philo* vol. 1.

<sup>25</sup> In G. Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (London, Penguin, 1997).

as gnostic, but the gnostic texts are full of temple imagery, and so are a valuable source of information. The *Letter of Eugnostos*,<sup>26</sup> which was adapted and presented as the teaching of Jesus himself in a parallel text known as the *Wisdom of Jesus Christ*, says this:

Time came to be as a type of the first begetter, his son. The year came to be as a type of the Saviour, the 12 months as a type of the 12 powers, the days of the year as a type of the powers revealed by the Saviour. In relation to the angels who came out of these, who are without number, the hours and the moments of the days are a type.

Thus all are one, just as seconds are parts of a minute, and minutes parts of an hour.

This important concept illuminates John 17, often described as Jesus' high priestly prayer. At first he prays to be glorified with the Father in his presence 'with the Glory I had with thee before the world was made' (17.5), and he speaks of 'my glory which thou hast given me . . . before the foundation of the world' (17.24), clear references to the holy of holies as Day One, and to his being there. The major theme of the prayer is unity, 'that they may be one even as we are one' (17.22). The union is elsewhere described as sharing life or spirit (John 6.57, 63). The perfect unity is the sign of divinity and proof of Jesus' origin. He has come from the One, he is part of the One, and he makes his disciples One. This occurs at the end of the Book of Revelation in its original setting, where the servants of God-and-the-Lamb, a unity, worship him, singular, in a state where the LORD God is their light and they have his Name on their foreheads. In other words, they have been admitted to the holy of holies and bear on their foreheads the Name, which is the mark of high priesthood. Those who returned to the holy of holies recovered the original unity, which may explain the imagery in the early eucharistic prayer in the *Didache*. 'As this broken bread, once dispersed over the hills, was brought together, so may thy Church be brought together from the ends of the earth.'<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> CG III.3.84; translation in J. M. Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (Leiden, Brill, 1996).

<sup>27</sup> *Didache* 9; translation in *Early Christian Writings* (see note 16).

It was the high priest – here Jesus – who enabled the divided elements of the creation – here human beings – to recover their original unity with God. Elsewhere in the New Testament, Jesus is described as the One who holds together all things, not just his disciples. 'He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible . . . He is before all things, and in him all things hold together' (Col. 1.15–17; see also Eph. 1.10). Paul describes this state of union as the goal of the redemptive process: 'And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject to him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all' (1 Cor. 15.28, AV). This bonding together is the key to understanding the Day of Atonement, the ritual performed exclusively by the high priest at the New Year. It was, as we shall see, a symbolic sharing of life.

### The Veil of the Temple

The veil of the temple represented the second day of creation, separating what was above from what was below, or, in the words of Exodus 26, separating the holy place from the most holy. The distinction between holy and most holy is important, as it was not simply a matter of degree. Holy things were holy in a passive sense, but whatever was described as most holy, or holy of holies (both represent the same Hebrew words) was actively holy. The most holy item, place or person imparted holiness. This had been a matter of controversy when the second temple was established, as can be seen from the ruling in Haggai 2 that holy flesh did not impart holiness, but impurity was contagious. Nevertheless, priests who did not have an impeccable genealogy were prevented from eating the most holy food (Ezra 2.63).

The veil in the tabernacle which screened the holy of holies was hung from four pillars of acacia wood overlaid with gold (Exod. 26.32), but how these pillars were arranged is not clear. If they were set in a line, the veil would have been a division across the width of the tabernacle or temple, but this arrangement raises certain problems. How did the high priest enter the holy of holies if the veil was one piece of very heavy fabric? It is possible that the pillars were set as the four corners of a square, with the veil hung around them, creating what Enoch described as a second house within the first house. This would account for some enigmatic

lines in the Mishnah<sup>28</sup> which describe how the high priest entered the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement. He went through the temple until he reached the space between the curtains, plural, a space which was one cubit wide, and he walked along between them, turned and then walked back with the curtain on his left side until he reached the ark. Since the Mishnah is emphatic that there was only one curtain, the only possible arrangement would have been one curtain hung around four sides of a square, with an overlap at the front.

The holy of holies was often described as a tower, distinct from the hall of the temple which was the house. The Babylonians burnt the house and demolished the tower, according to the Book of Enoch (*1 Enoch* 89.66), and the returning exiles rebuilt the tower and placed before it a table for the bread offering, but the bread was ritually unclean (*1 Enoch* 89.73). In Isaiah's song of the vineyard, the tower in the midst of it was understood to be the holy of holies (Isa. 5.2),<sup>29</sup> and so Jesus' parable of the vineyard with a winepress and a tower (Mark 12.1–9) was directed against the current 'tenants' of the holy of holies. In Christian art, too, the holy of holies is often depicted as a canopy supported by four pillars.

Those who passed beyond the veil found themselves outside time. When Rabbi Ishmael ascended and looked back he saw the curtain on which was depicted past, present and future. 'All generations to the end of time were printed on the curtain of the Omnipresent One. I saw them all with my own eyes.'<sup>30</sup> The *Apocalypse of Abraham* described how the patriarch ascended, and then looked down and saw all creation foreshadowed on the firmament.<sup>31</sup> Enoch was taken up by three angels and set on a high place whence he saw all history, past, present and future. The prophet Habakkuk also stood to watch – which could be translated 'took his place for priestly service' – and set himself in the tower. He looked out to see what the LORD would say to him. 'And the LORD answered me: "Write the vision; make it plain upon tablets"' (Hab. 2.1–2). These would have been tablets from heaven on which were written the words of the LORD and visions of the

future. We often read of such tablets, the best known being those Moses brought from Sinai. When the psalmist was perplexed by the triumph of evil men, he went into the sanctuary of God and then he perceived their end (Ps. 73.17). He, too, must have had a vision of the future. None of these texts can be dated with any confidence, but Isaiah 40 is usually thought to antedate the building of the second temple, so it could reflect first-temple beliefs. Isaiah was anxious about the future of his people in exile, and the LORD reminded him of what he had learned when he stood in the holy of holies. 'Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he who sits above the circle of the earth . . . who stretches out the heavens like a curtain and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; who brings princes to nought, and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing' (Isa. 40.21–22). The prophet of the exile had seen the future of his people as he stood in the beginning, at the foundation of the earth. When Jesus was in the wilderness, the devil set him on a high place in the temple, and he also took him up and showed him 'all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time' (Luke 4.5). In the Book of Revelation, John was summoned into the holy of holies by a voice which said 'Come up hither, and I will show you what must take place after this' (Rev. 4.1). These were the visions of temple mystics. There must have been more of these visions known to the early Church, because Clement of Alexandria wrote that knowledge of things past, present and future had been revealed by the Son of God, the great high priest who had passed through the curtain.<sup>32</sup> Clement must have known some teachings of Jesus which are not in the Gospels.

According to Exodus 26.31, the veil was woven from blue, purple and scarlet thread – we assume it was wool – and from fine linen, and it was *hošeb* work, usually translated 'skilled' work. Both Philo and Josephus record what was believed about the veil in the first century CE:<sup>33</sup> that the four colours represented the four elements from which the world was made, the red being fire, the blue air, the purple water and the white linen the earth. The Mishnah, recording material from the same period, says that the veil was woven by young women and measured

<sup>28</sup> Mishnah *Yoma* 5.1 (see note 11).

<sup>29</sup> R. Yosi, early second century CE, in *Tosefta Sukkah* 3.15; translation in J. Neusner (ed.), *Tosefta* (New York, KTAV, 1979).

<sup>30</sup> 3 *Enoch* 45.6; translation in Charlesworth, vol. 1 (see note 1).

<sup>31</sup> *Apocalypse of Abraham* 21.1; translation in Charlesworth, vol. 1 (see note 1).

<sup>32</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies* 7.17 (see note 17).

<sup>33</sup> Josephus, *War* 5.212–13; Philo, *Questions on Exodus* 2.85; translations of both in Loeb Classical Library.

20 x 40 cubits overall (about 10 x 20 metres).<sup>34</sup> It was constructed from 72 strips of fabric, each one handbreadth wide,<sup>35</sup> and must have been a valuable piece of fabric. Titus took the veil as loot when the Romans destroyed the temple in 70 CE, and chose to keep it in his palace, rather than putting it in a temple along with the other spoils. Later tradition records that the veil became the most precious relic in the Great Church in Constantinople, encased in a covering of gold and silver and suspended above the altar.<sup>36</sup>

Woven from the four elements, the veil which concealed the Glory of God represented matter, the stuff of the visible creation. An exactly similar fabric was used for the outer vestment of the high priest, which he wore in the hall of the temple, but not in the holy of holies, where he wore the white linen of the angels. The coloured vestment was therefore associated with his role in the visible creation, and although the Hebrew Scriptures say nothing of the meaning of the high priest's vestments, Philo and Josephus reveal that the outer vestment represented the created world.<sup>37</sup> The book of the Wisdom of Solomon, perhaps a century earlier than Philo and Josephus, has simply 'On Aaron's robe the whole world was depicted' (Wisd. 18.24). Thus the high priest was an angel who had emerged from the holy of holies into the visible creation, and vested himself in the stuff of creation. When he functioned in the visible creation, he also wore the Sacred Name on his forehead because he represented the LORD of the hosts dwelling with his people. 'Blessed is he who comes with the Name of the LORD' must have been the acclamation for the high priest.

The veil and the vestment being made of identical fabric is the key to understanding the role of the high priest and the temple context of the concept of Incarnation. The vested high priest in the temple was the Glory of the LORD veiled in matter. Thus we read of Simon, who was high priest about 200 BCE: 'How glorious he was as he came out of the house of the veil . . . like the morning star among the clouds . . . he made the court of the sanc-

<sup>34</sup> Mishnah *Middoth* 4.7 (see note 11).

<sup>35</sup> Mishnah *Shekalim* 8.4-5 (see note 11).

<sup>36</sup> There is an account in the thirteenth-century *Pilgrim Book of Anthony of Novgorod*, but I do not know of an English translation.

<sup>37</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities* 3.184; Philo, *Special Laws* 1.95-6; translations of both in Loeb Classical Library.

tuary glorious' (Ben Sira 50.5, 6, 11). Elsewhere this would be identified as the language of theophany. Hecataeus, a Greek writing about 300 BCE, described the Jewish high priest as an angel, and when he spoke the Jews immediately fell to the ground and worshipped him.<sup>38</sup>

Incarnation represented by the veil was implied by the gospel writers, who linked the death of Jesus to the tearing of the temple veil, and the Letter to the Hebrews, written to an early Christian community, mentions 'the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh' (Heb. 10.20). The writer does not explain what is meant by this, and so we must assume that the recipients of the letter already knew what the veil represented. The world of the temple was the world of the early Christians. (We know the veil and incarnation symbolism best from Charles Wesley's Christmas carol: 'Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail the Incarnate deity'.) The association of the veil and incarnation is set out in the greatest detail in the *Infancy Gospel of James*,<sup>39</sup> an early Christian text which depicts Mary as one of the young women chosen to weave the new temple veil. She was given the purple and red wool to spin, and as she was working, the angel spoke to her. Thus she was making the new temple veil while she was pregnant. (The angel speaking to Mary as she was spinning became the icon of the Annunciation.) It is possible that this was just an early legend, linking the incarnation and the veil, but, given that Herod was refurbishing the temple at that time, it is entirely possible that Mary had been a temple weaver working on the new veil.

The incarnation as the priestly vestments is not mentioned in the letter to the Hebrews and is only implicit in other biblical texts, but St Symeon of Thessaloniki (died 1429) knew this meaning of vestments: 'The priest coming out of the sanctuary and his descent into the nave signifies the descent of Christ from heaven and his humility. That he wears priestly vestments signifies the incarnation.'<sup>40</sup>

John recorded in the prologue to his Gospel how the Word had

<sup>38</sup> Theophrastus in Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica* XL 3.5-6.

<sup>39</sup> Text in M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1924).

<sup>40</sup> St Symeon, *On Prayer* 41; translation in H. N. L. Simmons (Brookline, MA, 1984).

emerged from 'the beginning' and become flesh. Luke described the Ascension as the moment when the great high priest returned to the holy of holies. He blessed the disciples and was taken to heaven. A cloud took him out of their sight. This is temple imagery – the high priest entering the holy of holies surrounded with incense. The Ascension was the moment when the LORD passed from one particular time and place in the visible creation back into the holy of holies, the eternal present beyond the veil.

Reconstructing the temple in this way and applying the results to the biblical texts can never be an exact science, but as the pieces fall into place and a picture begins to emerge, the task becomes easier, and the results more exciting.

No created mind can by any means possess the capacity to understand all, but as soon as it has discovered a small fragment of what it is seeking, it again sees other things that must be sought for, and if in turn it comes to know these, it will again see arising out of them many more things that demand investigation (Origen, *On First Principles* 4.3.14).<sup>41</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Origen, *On First Principles*; translation by G. W. Butterworth (London, SPCK, 1936).

In Matthew's account of the Last Supper we find the words: 'This is my blood of the covenant, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins' (Matt. 26.28). This is the form of words found in third century papyri and in the fourth century Sinai and Vatican codices. 'My blood of the *new* covenant' is found in the slightly later Alexandrinus and Bezae codices. The words in Mark are different: 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many' (Mark 14.24), and here, the word 'new' is found in the Alexandrinus codex but not in earlier texts. The words in Luke present a considerable problem, since the covenant blood is not mentioned at all in the western text. Paul's account in 1 Corinthians 11.25 is the only place where 'new covenant' is the secure reading in accounts of the Last Supper. (The phrase 'new covenant' also appears in Hebrews 9.15.) This is important, since 'new' and 'covenant' are so often thought to be inseparable in Christian thinking. There must have been huge numbers of early Christians for whom the Last Supper was not about the new covenant, but about the covenant, and the question is: Which covenant?

Matthew, generally agreed to be the Gospel written for Hebrew Christians and reflecting their special concerns, also has the words 'for the remission of sins'. Perhaps this was a further definition of the covenant, necessary for a Hebrew community which knew several covenants. The covenant in question was the one which dealt with remission of sins.

- The first covenant mentioned in the Old Testament was the covenant with Noah, 'the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth' (Gen. 9.16). The creation would be secure and never again destroyed by flood. *This covenant does not mention remission of sins.*

- The second covenant was that with Abraham, and was the promise of heirs and land (Gen. 15.18–21). *Again, no mention of remission of sins.*
- The third was at Sinai, when Israel undertook to keep the ten commandments, and although there was *no reference to sin in that account*, there was the phrase 'blood of the covenant' (Exod. 24.8).
- The fourth covenant was with the royal house, that their throne and kingdom would be established for ever (2 Sam. 7.12). *No mention of remission of sins.*
- Jeremiah looked forward to a new covenant, not like the covenant at Sinai, but written on the heart, and here there *is* reference to forgiveness of sins (Jer. 31.34). There follow in Jeremiah two sayings which begin: 'Thus says the LORD', and the compiler of the Jeremiah scroll thought it appropriate at this point to include two oracles based not on the Sinai covenant, but on the covenant with Noah, 'the everlasting covenant'. The security of Israel was part of the fixed order of creation, and only if this was destroyed would Israel cease to exist.

'Everlasting covenant' is perhaps not the best way to translate the *b<sup>e</sup>rit 'olam*. The Hebrew dictionary offers two meanings for the consonants translated 'everlasting'; it can be either ancient, perpetual, the remote future and eternity, or it can be hidden, secret. In fact these should not be distinguished as two meanings, because in the world of the temple the hidden, secret place was the eternal state outside time, and so this everlasting covenant would have been connected to the holy of holies. This explains why the everlasting covenant was also described as the 'covenant of peace', *šalom*, another word associated with the state beyond the veil. The consonants of *šalom*, variously pointed, mean complete, sound, secure, restored, and made good, and include the idea of the judgement necessary to bring this about. The related verb can mean 'requite'.

A story about Phineas, the grandson of Aaron, will illustrate how this covenant was understood. A man of Israel married a woman of Midian, in the time when such things were forbidden. It was a blatant breach of the covenant law, and Israel was in danger because the covenant had been broken. Plague broke out and the people 'wept at the door of the tent of meeting' (Num.

25.6). From the way this story was told, we conclude that the covenant was envisaged as protection for Israel, and any breach of the covenant exposed them to danger, sometimes described as 'wrath'. When Phineas the high priest took his spear and killed the offending couple, the plague ceased. Because of his action to protect the covenant, the LORD gave to Phineas and his descendants 'my covenant of *šalom* . . . the covenant of the priesthood of eternity (or, the covenant of eternal priesthood) because he . . . made atonement for the people of Israel' (Num. 25.12–13, my translation). The covenant of peace was therefore linked exclusively to the high priesthood, and entailed making atonement to repair any breach in the covenant which exposed the people to danger. This high priestly covenant must have been the covenant of the Last Supper, since it dealt with the putting away of sins (the literal meaning of the word translated 'remission' in Matthew's account), and it was the covenant restored by an act of atonement, another major New Testament theme which is not associated with any of the 'historic' covenants in the Old Testament.

This priestly covenant has been much neglected in our reading of the Old Testament, overshadowed as it is by the historic covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses and David.<sup>1</sup> It would also be true to say that priestly theology has received little attention, because of the concentration on Deuteronomy. The assumption that Deuteronomy was the 'norm' has led to a number of distortions in our perception and presentation of the Old Testament, which has two distinct 'theologies'. There is the temple theology, concerned with Wisdom, and with the structure and harmony of the creation, and the Deuteronomic theology which is focused on the figure of Moses and the history of Israel as the chosen people. *It is the Deuteronomic theology which has come to dominate the popular view of Old Testament theology.* The fact that the Deuteronomic strand had no creation theology, no place for atonement, no place for the anointed kings of the house of David, no place for prophets except insofar as they agreed with Moses, and no place for the Wisdom tradition was, curiously, not seen as a problem. Wisdom was assigned to the periphery and apocalyptic to the appendix – a late decline due to foreign influence, it was suggested.

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed study of the eternal covenant see Robert Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant* (London, Sheed & Ward, 1992).

The priestly theology saw the pattern of history as a whole, revealed in the holy of holies as past, present and future. It was the Deuteronomists who made 'history' an interpretation of *past* events, made Moses the centre of their scheme, and gradually attributed to Moses the royal traditions of the temple. It was the Deuteronomists who forbade the secrets of the holy of holies – and thus had no creation theology (Deut. 29.29). They based their religion on the visible material creation. 'Then 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. And he declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the ten commandments; and he wrote them on tablets of stone' (Deut. 4.12–13). The Deuteronomists made the Mosaic covenant the keystone of their system. There has been a long debate about the form and pedigree of the Deuteronomic style of covenant, whether or not it was modelled on a political treaty form, and if so, whose. Had the covenant been strictly a business arrangement between the LORD and Israel? Was this form of covenant even known before the seventh century, when the Deuteronomists became influential in the southern kingdom? And where did they come from anyway? All these questions have been asked, and for good reason, but no satisfactory answer has been given.

There is much evidence to suggest that there was a theological and literary revolution in between the first temple and the second, and that what we understand as the 'Old Testament' includes a massive reworking of first temple material. The importance of this for Christians is the fact that the roots of Christianity are in the first temple traditions, and so we have to try to recover what lies beneath the reworked materials.

### The Older Faith

Underlying the 'historic' covenants recorded in the Old Testament was the everlasting covenant, and we can see how even this covenant came to be historicized as the older traditions received their familiar form under the influence of the Deuteronomists in the early years of the second temple. The priestly material in the Noah story described how God made the everlasting covenant with Noah, and this covenant guaranteed the stability of the

creation for ever. The implication was that the priestly ministry of atonement would no longer be necessary to maintain the stability and harmony of the creation. These same second temple priests wrote Genesis 1 and were silent about the angels of Day One. They turned the myths of the temple into history, and thus the myths lost their power. Genesis 1 happened a long time ago, Adam and Eve were history, and so on. The temple traditions preserved in the Enoch books, however, regard the builders of the second temple as impure apostates, and tell the history of their people without mentioning Moses and the Exodus.<sup>2</sup> The *Damascus Document*, a key text among the Dead Sea Scrolls, describes the whole of the second temple period as 'the age of wrath'.<sup>3</sup> Since wrath was the result of breaking the covenant, this must have been the era of the broken covenant; the groups who looked for the new covenant may well have been looking for the renewed covenant, the restoration of the older faith.

Key words in the older system were given new meanings by the Deuteronomists. 'Cleave' (*dbq*) usually means to unite with: 'the leprosy of Naaman shall cleave to you' (2 Kings 5.27); 'my bones cleave to my flesh' (Ps. 102.5); 'Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you' (Ps. 137.6). Cleaving to the LORD must have meant something similar, but for the Deuteronomists cleaving meant obedience, not union. 'You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice and you shall serve him and cleave to him' (Deut. 13.4). But one can hardly imagine Adam cleaving to his wife being understood as absolute obedience to her. 'Cleaving' is but one example of how the Deuteronomists had their own meanings for key theological terms. In the later mystical tradition, which had its roots in the ancient temple, 'cleaving' was understood to mean a mystical union, and R. Akiva (fl. 120–140 CE) insisted that this was how the word was to be understood. 'Cleaving unto the LORD your God – literally cleaving.'<sup>4</sup> This is the unity of the holy of holies, but the Deuteronomists had their own secular adaptation of the word.

<sup>2</sup> The *Apocalypse of Weeks*.

<sup>3</sup> In Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (London, Penguin, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> Babylonian Talmud *Sanhedrin* 64a cited in M. Idel, *Kabbalah. New Perspectives* (New Haven and London, Yale, 1988), p. 38 and note.

'Remember' is another word characteristic of the Deuteronomists; it was remembering their common history that bound Israel together as the chosen people, and gave them their characteristic way of life. 'Remember what Amalek did to you' (Deut. 25.17). The distinction between the two theologies can be illustrated by the two versions of the fourth commandment: Keep the Sabbath day 'for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth . . . and rested the seventh day' (Exod. 20.11), or keep it because 'You shall remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and your servants too must be given a day of rest' (Deut. 5.14–15). The one appeals to the natural order of things, living in harmony with the pattern of creation, and the other to history. These are the two strands in Old Testament theology. Now the consonants for this key word 'remember' (*zkr*) can also be translated 'invoke', which is a priestly, temple activity, and this has led to interesting ambiguities, for example when the LORD revealed his Name to Moses at the burning bush. Moses was told: 'Thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations' (Exod. 3.15), or 'This is how I am to be invoked throughout all generations'. The Hebrew can mean either. According to the Chronicler, the music of the Levites was to invoke the LORD (1 Chron. 16.4), but the Deuteronomist mentioned no music. The Deuteronomists remembered the LORD whereas the priests invoked the presence. If Jesus spoke either Hebrew or Aramaic at the Last Supper, his words 'Do this in remembrance of me' will have had the same ambiguity. He could also have meant 'Do this as my invocation.'

### The Eternal Covenant

The covenant of eternity, the priestly covenant which was overshadowed by the more political Mosaic form, was the bonds which held the created order in place. There is a vivid picture of this covenant, albeit when broken, in Isaiah 24.

The earth mourns and withers,  
 the world languishes and withers,  
 the heavens languish together with the earth.  
 The earth lies polluted  
 under its inhabitants;  
 for they have transgressed the laws,  
 violated the statutes,

broken the everlasting covenant.  
 Therefore a curse devours the earth  
 and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt;  
 therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched  
 and few men are left.

(Isa. 24.4–6)

The priestly covenant manifests itself as the laws and the statutes, and when these are broken, the earth withers away and the creation collapses. The Deuteronomist also taught about statutes and ordinances, but when they were broken, Israel lost possession – the key word – of the land (e.g. Deut. 4.1).

'Statutes' is an interesting word. Literally it means 'something engraved', *hvaq*, and 'violated the statutes' is literally 'they have gone through the engraved thing'. These engraved things were the divine plans in the holy of holies, made 'before' the three dimensional visible creation. Proverbs 8.27–29 was Wisdom's description of the sequence of the creation, since she had been in the beginning, the holy of holies, beside the Creator. In other words, this was a vision like that of Genesis 1, except that Wisdom revealed details of Day One which are not in Genesis. Wisdom had been beside the Creator when he *engraved* a circle on the face of the deep,<sup>5</sup> when he set for the sea its *engraved mark* . . . when he *engraved* the foundations of the earth. All this happened before the mountains were shaped and the earth was formed, so the *engraved* state preceded or lay beneath the material world. Jeremiah knew that the sea had an *engraving of eternity* which it could not pass (Jer. 5.22), he knew that there were *engravings* for the moon and the stars (Jer. 31.35–36). Everything had its engraved place and its limit. Human life was defined: 'You have made his engraving and he cannot pass it,' said Job (Job 14.5, my translation); 'He is in the Unity and who will cause him to revoke . . . he will complete [a word from *Salom*] what is engraved for me, and many things like this are with him' (Job 23.13–14, translating literally). The eternal laws for human society were also engraved, as was the course of human history and the calendar. The familiar words of Psalm 2 are, literally, 'I will tell of the *my engraving* (or, the engraving). The LORD said to me, You are my son, today I have

<sup>5</sup> We shall return to this theme in the fourth chapter.

begotten you' (Ps. 2.7, translating literally). According to Clement of Alexandria, the Gnostic Theodotus taught that the Son had been drawn in outline in the beginning<sup>6</sup> – a clear reference to this state of existence which preceded solidity and matter. A temple memory in the Jerusalem Talmud was that Solomon drew pictures of all sorts of trees in the temple, and these pictures also produced fruit when the corresponding trees outside produced fruit.<sup>7</sup> According to 3 *Enoch* 39.1–2, the throne of Glory was engraved with names, and when these flew off, they became angels, and a Palestinian Targum records that the image of Jacob sleeping at Bethel was engraved on the throne above (*Ps. Jon. Gen.* 28.12; also *Gen. R* LXVIII 12).<sup>8</sup>

These engravings were known as *šurot*, which I shall not attempt to translate. The word is used in the Qumran hymns to describe the heavenly beings in the holy of holies: '*šurot* of living *'elohim* (gods), *šurot* of luminous spirits, figures of *šurot* of *'elohim* engraved . . .' (4Q405).<sup>9</sup> This word *šurot*, which is a plural form, only occurs in post biblical texts, but the singular form *šur* appears throughout the Old Testament, where it is translated 'Rock', a word with the same consonants. Sometimes 'rock' is an appropriate translation, but there are many places where 'rock' does not appear in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, and so the bilingual translator must have known that at that point the word had another meaning. Thus in Isaiah 30.29 'Rock of Israel' became in the Greek 'God of Israel' or Isaiah 44.8 'Is there a God beside me? There is no Rock. I know no other', became in the Greek 'There is no God except me'. This means that the familiar Rock of ages (Isa. 26.4), in the Greek 'the great eternal God', was probably 'the *šur* of the holy of holies'.

The secrets of Day One, which do not appear in Genesis,

<sup>6</sup> *Excerpts 19 in Excerpts from Theodotus* translated by R. P. Casey in *Studies and Documents 1* (London, Christophers, 1934).

<sup>7</sup> Attributed to R. Aha bar Isaac in Jerusalem Talmud *Yoma* 4.4; translation in J. Neusner, *The Talmud of the Land of Israel* (Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1989-).

<sup>8</sup> 3 *Enoch*; translation in J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983–85), vol. 1; *Targum Pseudo Jonathan Genesis* translated by Michael Maher (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1992); *Genesis Rabbah* translated by Harry Freedman, *Midrash Rabbah* (London, Soncino Press, 1939).

<sup>9</sup> Translated by Vermes (see note 3).

included a description of everything created in that state. There were the angels of the weathers and seasons, for example, but also 'All the spirits of his creatures which are in heaven and on earth'.<sup>10</sup> These must have been the engraved things, the *šurot* of all living things in the holy of holies. Those who broke the eternal covenant had gone beyond the laws, broken through and destroyed on earth what had been engraved in the holy of holies. 'On earth as it is in heaven' would be a good description of the creation as it was intended to be, but sinners had caused the covenant to collapse, and with it the creation.

I should like now to quote two passages from a scholar of Islam, William Chittick, who describes an exactly similar system in Muslim thought, using similar words. They too have this temple concept of 'oneness of being' or 'unity of existence', and recognize that everything in creation has its *ḥaqq*, its own truth and proper place. He wrote:

God, who is the Absolute Ḥaqq, has given each thing in the universe a creation and a guidance, and the thing's creation and guidance are its ḥaqq because they tie it back to the First Ḥaqq. The thing's 'creation' can be understood as its actual reality and its 'guidance' as the path it must follow to achieve the fullness of what it is to become. In other words, 'creation' refers to the fact that each thing has come from God, and guidance refers to the fact that God has provided each with a path that it follows in returning to its Creator.

The absolute Ḥaqq is God himself who is the basis for every other ḥaqq.

The Qur'an says: 'Wherever you turn, there is the face of God' (2.115). The goal of *taḥqiq* is to see the face of God wherever you turn, in every creature and in oneself, and then to act according to the ḥaqq of God's face. If we understand anything in the universe without taking the Divine Face into account, then we have lost the thing's ḥaqq. By losing sight of the thing's ḥaqq, we have lost sight of God

<sup>10</sup> *Jubilees* 2.2; translation in Charlesworth, vol. 2 (see note 8).

<sup>11</sup> W. C. Chittick, 'Time Space and the Objectivity of Ethical Norms; The Teaching of Ibn al-'Arabi', *Islamic Studies* 39:4 (2000), pp. 581–96, especially pp. 584, 585.

and by losing sight of God we have lost sight of the declaration of the unity of God (tawhid).<sup>11</sup>

### 'In him all things hold together'

Returning now to the temple theme, and the eternal covenant rooted in the holy of holies, there is an interesting and ambiguous relationship between the holy of holies in which were the engraved things and the Second Person, to use Christian terminology for a moment. (This is not inappropriate in an Old Testament context, as I shall show in the next chapter.) The most holy Place and the most holy One had a similar role, both, for example, being veiled in the fabric which represented matter. Consider now the prologue to John's Gospel: 'In the beginning was the Word [that is, the Logos who is the Second Person of the Trinity] . . . In him was life, and the life was the light of men' (John 1.1, 4). The Logos here is the vessel holding all life, exactly as the holy of holies held all life. Consider too Colossians 1: 'He is . . . the first-born of all creation; for *in him all things were created*, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible' – and there follows a list of heavenly powers, presumably equivalent to the angels of Day One – 'He is before all things, and *in him all things hold together*' (Col. 1.15–17, italics added). Here the First-born is the state in which all life originates. He precedes all things, and 'in him all things hold together'. The First-born is thus the bond of the creation, the bond of Unity, and this Unity is the Unity of Day One. So we have the Logos in the world and the world in the Logos. We are in Christ (Rom. 12.5) and Christ is in us (Rom. 8.10). Peter's sermon in Solomon's porch described Jesus as the Author of Life (Acts 3.15).

Let us now look at these bonds of creation, which were the Eternal covenant, and the seal which secured them. 'In him all things hold together.'

First, we need to consider the Hebrew words used in Genesis 1 to describe the process of creation. 'In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.' 'Created' – *bara'* – is a verb used only of divine activity, and here in Genesis it is divine activity in the holy of holies, the state which precedes or underlies the visible creation. This verb is seldom found outside the priestly texts in the Pentateuch and the Second Isaiah. This divine activity

produced heaven and earth (Gen. 1.1), the sea monsters (Gen. 1.21) and human beings (Gen. 1.27), the host of heaven (Isa. 40.26), righteousness (Isa. 45.8), new and hidden things (Isa. 48.6), new heavens and a new earth (Isa. 65.17). It also produced the anointed cherub described in Ezekiel 28 (Ezek. 28.13, 15). Thus there were various types of creative activity in Genesis 1; there was the uniquely divine *bara'*, as well as 'separating' (God separated the waters (Gen. 1.7)), and 'making' (God made the beasts of the earth (Gen. 1.25)). The visible creation, apart from humans and sea creatures, *was not the result of the exclusively divine activity.*

The word *bara'* is similar in sound and form to the word for covenant, *b<sup>e</sup>rith*, and the Hebrew dictionary suggests that the root meaning of 'covenant' is 'to bind'. This similarity of the words for covenant-and-binding and for the uniquely divine creative activity leads me to suspect that is the key to the older creation story, that the words had been related. Creating in the holy of holies was a process of binding into bonds, engraving limits and definitions, and then using them to order the visible creation. When the LORD spoke to Job from the whirlwind and reminded him that he did not have the wisdom of those who had witnessed the creation, he said: 'Who . . . shut in the sea . . . and prescribed bounds [my "engraved thing"] for it . . . and said, "Thus far shall you come, and no farther . . .?"' (Job 38.8–11). 'Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades, or loose the cords of Orion?' (Job 38.31). 'Do you know the ordinances ["engraved things"] of the heavens? Can you establish their rule [*mštr*] on the earth?' (Job 38.33), a word which does not appear elsewhere in the Hebrew Scriptures. This is significant; it clearly refers to the correspondence between earth and heaven, and is from the same root as a word for writing, and for subordinate scribes. There are many similar examples of the Creator defining and restraining the forces of the natural world.

The covenant also restrained and bound the kings and rulers. Psalm 2 depicts kings of the earth and rulers plotting against the LORD and his Messiah to break free from their bonds (the word implies imprisonment) and from their cords (a word suggesting something woven together). The LORD and his Messiah must have maintained both the natural and the social order by means of bonds and weavings, and this was the eternal covenant. R. Nehuniah, a temple mystic early in the second century CE, saw in his visions the very bonds of the covenant, 'the mysteries and the

secrets, the bonds and the wonders, . . . the weaving of the web that completes the world'.<sup>12</sup>

The fullest picture of the eternal covenant is found in the Enoch literature, which preserves fragments of a poem about the great oath which binds the creation:

These are the secrets of this oath:  
 The heaven was suspended before the creation of the world  
 and for ever.  
 And through it the earth was founded upon the water . . .  
 From the creation of the world and unto eternity.  
 And through that oath the sea was created, and he set the  
 sand against the time of anger  
 And it dare not pass beyond it from the creation of the world  
 unto eternity  
 And through that oath the depths are made fast . . .  
 And through that oath the sun and moon complete their  
 course . . .  
 And through that oath the stars complete their course . . .  
 (1 Enoch 69.16ff)<sup>13</sup>

The great oath also bound the spirits of the waters and the winds, the voice of the thunder and the light of the lightning, and the various weathers. In other texts, these are listed as the things created on Day One.

This section of the *Book of Enoch* is not well preserved, but the context of the poem is how the fallen angels corrupted the creation, the power of the great oath and how it had been broken. The story seems to be that they succeeded in corrupting the visible creation, but they did not have the power to corrupt and destroy the invisible unity, because they did not have the Name.

<sup>12</sup> *Hekhalot Rabbati* 201. Similar material is translated in Peter Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God: Some Major Themes in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Albany, NY, State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 12.

<sup>13</sup> Translation in Charlesworth, vol. 1 (see note 8).

## The Abuse of Knowledge

The fallen angels had revealed the secrets of the creation to mortals on earth, but they had not been able to learn the secret Name, the seal and bond of the Unity. Before looking at the Name and its importance, let us continue with Enoch's account of the fallen angels and the knowledge they revealed, which is more clearly described in an earlier part of *1 Enoch*. The material in chapters 6—8 is the oldest in the book, and tells how the angels, led by Azazel, bound themselves by a counter oath, came to earth, took human women and fathered children. They then taught them how to use metals to make weapons and jewellery, how to prepare cosmetics and 'to beautify the eyes' (*1 Enoch* 8.1 – an important detail!<sup>14</sup>), which led to fornication and corruption. They taught them incantation and astrology, astronomy, medicine, charms, wisdom and abortion (*1 Enoch* 69.12, using also Syncellus). They also taught the 'changing of the world' (*1 Enoch* 8.1), which the Ethiopian commentators – *1 Enoch* is best preserved in Ethiopic – interpreted as changing a human into an animal. This is an interesting observation, since one of the conventions of these apocalypses is that mortals are described as animals (we are familiar with the parable of the sheep and the goats representing the human race) and angels are described as men (we are familiar with the Son of Man, which simply means the Man). One of the sins of the fallen angels seems to have been reducing humans from their angelic state to that of mortals.

As a result of the teachings of the fallen angels – the abuse of women, the manufacture of weapons, medicine and abortion, the cosmetics and jewellery of the fashion industry which led to fornication and corruption, predicting (i.e. shaping) the future, and reducing humans to mortality, 'there arose much godlessness . . . and as men perished they cried and their cry went up to heaven' (*1 Enoch* 8.2, 4). The four archangels looked from heaven, saw the state of the earth and heard the prayers, and they carried the prayers to God Most High. The four archangels were then sent to earth to warn Noah, to bind the leader of the fallen angels and imprison him in a pit in the desert, and then to foment war among the children of the fallen angels, so that they killed each

<sup>14</sup> This anointing of the eyelids could have been the evil counterpart of the true anointing which opened the eyes and was the gift of Wisdom, see p. 92.

other. On the future day of judgement, Azazel would be cast into the fire. After the judgement, the LORD said to the archangel Raphael (whose name means 'God's healing'), 'Heal the earth which the angels have corrupted . . . and heal the plague, that the children of men may not perish through all the secret things which the [fallen angels] have revealed and taught to their sons' (1 Enoch 9.7). (This is the basic outline of the Book of Revelation.)

According to the Enochic tradition, the eternal covenant had been broken as the result of corrupted knowledge. Knowledge, or rather Wisdom, transformed humans into angels, but the characteristic of Wisdom was that Wisdom joined all things together. It was the abuse of the knowledge and the power it gave which destroyed the eternal covenant and fragmented the creation.

Some words now from one of those who witnessed the explosion of the first atomic bomb in July 1945, words which seemed to me, when I first read them, as extraordinarily appropriate to this theme of the destruction of the bonds of creation by those who had great knowledge. General Farrell wrote in his report of 'a strong, sustained and awesome roar which warned of doomsday and made us feel that we puny things were blasphemous to dare to tamper with the forces hitherto reserved to the Almighty'.<sup>15</sup>

Isaiah knew that the covenant was broken by the abuse of knowledge. When he wrote: 'They have transgressed the law, violated the statutes, and broken the everlasting covenant', so that the whole creation was withering away, Isaiah's context was a world ruled by the fallen angels. The evils which would bring judgement upon Jerusalem, according to Isaiah, were diviners and soothsayers, silver, gold and weapons of war (Isa. 2.6-7), pride, corrupt rulers, and fashionable women with their painted eyes and trinkets (Isa. 3.15-25). These are not breaches of the ten commandments; they are the sins of the fallen angels, whom Genesis 6 described as the sons of God who took wives from the daughters of men. Isaiah 1.2, 4 refers to these rebel angels:

Sons have I reared and brought up,  
but they have rebelled against me . . .

Ah, sinful nation,  
a people laden with iniquity,  
offspring of evildoers,  
sons who deal corruptly!  
They have forsaken the LORD,  
they have despised the Holy One of Israel,  
they are utterly estranged.

The society Isaiah described had fallen under the influence of the evil angels and broken the eternal covenant and, as a result, the people were separated from God. Jeremiah had a similar picture of the relationship between knowledge and the destruction of the creation.

My people are foolish . . .  
they have no understanding . . .  
They are skilled in doing evil,  
but how to do good they know not.

He then described how everything established by the covenant bonds had collapsed and he saw the precreated state:

I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void . . .

(These are the words used in Genesis 1, the waste and void over which the Spirit hovered to produce order and creation.)

I looked on the mountains, and lo they were quaking,  
and all the hills moved to and fro.

(Jer. 4.22-23)

Creation was destroyed not by ignorance, but by those 'skilled in doing evil' – the abuse of knowledge.

In Romans 8, Paul explained the significance of the broken covenant for Christians. Using key words from this story of the fallen angels – sons of God, bondage to decay, glorious liberty – he wrote: 'All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God . . . the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to . . .' – and here Paul uses an interesting word, *mataiotes*. The creation was subjected to foolishness, profanity, going nowhere, having no purpose. He

<sup>15</sup> In R. Jungk, *Brighter than a Thousand Suns: The Moral and Political History of the Atomic Scientists* (London, Victor Gollancz and Rupert Hart-Davis, 1958), p. 198.

then continued: 'The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God' (Rom. 8.14–21). This is the renewal of the creation and implies that the (new) sons of God do not abuse the knowledge of creation and do not break away from unity with the Creator.

Some words now from an article in the *Guardian* (20 November 1999) in which John Berger was describing the 'hell' panel of Hieronymus Bosch's *Millennium Triptych*. It was, he suggested,

a strange prophecy of the mental climate imposed on the world at the end of the twentieth century, by globalisation and the new economic order . . . there is no horizon there. There is no continuity between actions, there are no pauses, no paths, no pattern, no past, no future. There is only the clamour of the disparate fragmentary present. Everywhere there are surprises and sensations, yet nowhere is there any outcome. Nothing flows through. Everything interrupts. There is a kind of spatial delirium.

This is the 'going nowhere' of a creation in bondage to corruption, the broken covenant, a world in bits and estranged from God. The post-modern state.

If we understand Paul's description of the creation set free from bondage to decay in terms of the Enoch tradition, this would explain how the kingdom of God came to be described in terms of Enoch's restored creation. After the archangels had healed the earth, according to Enoch, it would be 'worked in righteousness' – a word associated elsewhere with the restored covenant – and it would yield huge crops – grapes, olives and grain in miraculous quantities. Only when the earth had been cleansed from oppression, unrighteousness and uncleanness – human failings – would its fertility be restored. When Irenaeus expounded Romans 8 at the end of the second century, he explained that the creation would be restored to this miraculous fertility in the kingdom of God. He then quoted teachings of Jesus not recorded in the New Testament but passed on by John to the churches in Asia Minor where Irenaeus had been brought up. Jesus had taught that every grape and every grain would yield miraculous quantities, all plants would flourish and animals live at peace with each other. This is how the Enoch

tradition described the restored creation, and John attributed this teaching to Jesus. It was the result of restoring the eternal covenant.<sup>16</sup>

This had also been the vision of Isaiah. The wolf would lie down with the lamb, and the leopard with the kid, and there would be no more pain or destruction when the earth was filled with the knowledge of the LORD. In Isaiah's context, we can read this as an implied contrast with the knowledge of the fallen angels, which brought pain and destruction, and caused the eternal covenant to collapse. Isaiah's vision of the peaceful creation, as we might now expect, began with a description of the transformation of the human mind. Someone was anointed with the Spirit of the LORD, the spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge and fear of the LORD. These gifts of the Spirit transform the human mind – 'change the mind' is the literal meaning of the Greek word for repentance, *metanoia*. We have heard a great deal in recent years about the gifts of the Spirit as Paul described them in Corinth – but very little about the effect of the Spirit in transforming the human mind. The Spirit-transformed mind sees with anointed eyes and hears with anointed ears, and so judges with righteousness and decides with equity for the meek of the earth. This is the gift of Wisdom which joins all things together.<sup>17</sup>

There are several indications that it was the corruption of knowledge that led to sin which destroyed the covenant. Thus Malachi, condemning the corrupt priesthood at the beginning of the second temple period, reminded them of their ancestor Levi. 'My covenant with him was a covenant of life and peace . . . True instruction was in his mouth . . . He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity. For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth, for the priest is a messenger [angel] of the LORD of Hosts. But you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by your instruction, you have corrupted the covenant' (Mal. 2.5–8). Ezekiel, who was a priest in the first temple, described how an anointed cherub who had walked among the sons of fire was thrown from the Garden of Eden. This cherub had been clothed in precious stones and gold, and the

<sup>16</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.32–3; translation in *Ante Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1979–1986), vol. 1.

<sup>17</sup> We shall return to this theme in the fourth chapter.

description (in the LXX) makes it clear that this cherub was the high priest. The cherub's sins were pride and the corruption of wisdom, and the punishment was to become ashes on the earth, to die (Ezek. 28.12–19).

The anointed cherub high priest was also described as 'full of Wisdom, perfect in beauty', the 'seal of the measurement (*toknit*)' or perhaps the 'seal of the pattern (*tabnit*)' – the two Hebrew words look very similar (Ezek. 28.12). The role of the cherub high priest was to secure the bonds of the covenant. The mysterious Servant figure in Isaiah had the same role; he was himself the covenant. Translating literally, he had been drawn in outline, he was a *šur*, and appointed as covenant of the people. Here it looks as though a letter has dropped from a more familiar phrase, since the Hebrew 'covenant of the people' is known only in one other place in Isaiah, but with the addition of one letter it becomes 'the eternal covenant'.<sup>18</sup> The poems about the Servant in Isaiah 42 and Isaiah 49 then read: 'I made you a *šur*, and appointed you as the eternal covenant and as a light to the Gentiles, to open blind eyes and to release prisoners from the dungeon' (Isa. 42.6–7, my translation; 49.8–9 is similar). The familiar words of the fourth Servant Song in Isaiah 52–53, 'Upon him was the chastisement [*musar*, from *ysr*] that made us whole, and by his stripes we are healed' could also be read 'Upon him [i.e. it was his responsibility] was the bond [*mosar*, from 'sr] of our wholeness, and by his uniting us we are healed' (Isa. 53.5).<sup>19</sup> The seal or bond which held the covenant in place was the *Servant*, the cherub high priest, the one who wore the Name. It was that Name which the fallen angels had tried to obtain, because this would have given them the power to bind or to loose the covenant bond on earth and in heaven. Justin, in the mid-second century, knew that the bonds of the creation had been sealed with a cross,<sup>20</sup> which was the ancient sign of the Name, and so the sign with which the high priest was anointed on his forehead.

In the *Book of Jubilees*, Isaac had his sons swear by the Name, the greatest oath, 'which created the heavens and the earth and all

<sup>18</sup> So that *bryt 'm* becomes *bryt 'lm*.

<sup>19</sup> The primary meaning of the root *hbr* is 'to unite'; the meaning 'stripes, wounds' is relatively rare: *h<sup>a</sup>burah/hoberet* in Exod. 26.10 etc. for device to join tabernacle curtains.

<sup>20</sup> Justin, *Apology* 1.60; translation in *Ante Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1.

things together'.<sup>21</sup> The Prayer of Manasseh shows how the whole creation was bound and so created by the great Name: 'Thou who hast made the heaven and the earth with all their order, who hast shackled the sea with thy word of command, who hast confined the deep and sealed it with thy terrible and glorious Name . . .'

Who then is this, that even the wind and sea obey him?  
(Mark 4.41)

He is before all things and in him all things hold together.  
(Col. 1.17)

To unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (Eph. 1.10)

We began this chapter by looking at some of the ways in which the Deuteronomists took over the older words and ideas and gave them a new meaning: remembering the LORD instead of invoking the LORD, cleaving to the LORD as obedience rather than unity, and the covenant as an arrangement whereby obeying the commandments was rewarded with possession of the land. The story of the Garden of Eden was also reworked for the new dispensation. The cherub high priest who had abused Wisdom became the human pair who had disobeyed and taken knowledge. Both the cherub and the human pair were driven from the Garden, both the cherub and the human pair became mortal.

If we consider only one strand of Old Testament theology we create for ourselves huge problems in relating the Old Testament to the New. A scheme which forbade the secret things (Deut. 29.29), with no place for Day One, for atonement, for the anointed One, for angels and the heavenly hosts, does not relate easily to what we know of early Christianity. The kingdom of which Jesus spoke was the state of the holy of holies, the unity at the heart of all things which had secured the eternal covenant. The covenant had been broken by the fallen angels who broke the unity and rebelled. This must be the original context for 'Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven' and for 'This is my blood of the covenant, poured out for many for the putting away of sins' (Matt. 26.28, my translation). In the next chapter we shall look at the process of renewing and restoring the covenant.

<sup>21</sup> *Jubilees* 36.7; translation in Charlesworth, vol. 2 (see note 8).

Atonement was central to the world of the temple and became central in the teachings of the Church. In order to set atonement in its original context, we must first look at the key figure in the ritual. The high priest, and only the high priest, performed the blood ritual of the Day of Atonement and he represented the LORD, the Second Person. We must also look at some aspects of early Christian teaching which have been all but forgotten.

For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist (1 Cor. 8.6).

These were Paul's words to the church in Corinth, explaining to them that there were many so-called pagan gods, but that for the Christian there was one God and one Lord, or, as would be said later, the First Person and the Second Person.

Students of the New Testament have invariably been perplexed by Paul's statement here; how was it possible for a good Jew like Paul, a monotheist, to distinguish between the Father and the Lord? Students of the New Testament have also been perplexed by the way Paul could take Old Testament texts which referred to the LORD, the God of Israel, and apply them to Jesus. Thus Joel 2.32, 'all who call upon the name of the LORD shall be delivered,' was used originally of the LORD, the God of Israel, but Paul applied it to Jesus the Messiah in Romans 10.13. The Christians were identifying the Messiah as the LORD, the God of Israel. 'Jesus is LORD' was a fundamental affirmation – but the implications of this are rarely noticed. The first Christians were declaring that the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to Abraham, spoken to Moses and guided Israel through the desert, had been incarnate in Jesus. The Old Testament God of Israel was not God the Father but God the Son, and the earliest Christian understanding of the

Old Testament made this quite clear. The Old Testament theophanies were preincarnation appearances of the Son.

### The Second God<sup>1</sup>

Justin, who was martyred in Rome in the middle of the second century, wrote:

... then neither Abraham nor Isaac nor Jacob nor any other man ever saw the Father and ineffable LORD of all things, and of Christ himself, but they saw him who according to his will is both God his Son and his Angel.<sup>2</sup>

Irenaeus, who fiercely opposed the heretics of his time, read his Old Testament in the same way at the end of the second century:

So Abraham was a prophet and saw what was to come to pass in the future, the Son of God in human form, that he was to speak with men and eat food with them and then bring down judgement from the Father.<sup>3</sup>

Hippolytus explained that the fiery man clothed in white linen described in Daniel 10 was the LORD not yet fully incarnate. Eusebius, writing early in the fourth century, explained:

If it is not possible for the Most High God, the Invisible and Uncreated, the Omnipotent, to be seen in mortal form, the being who was seen [in the Old Testament theophanies] must have been the Word of God . . .<sup>4</sup>

Constantine had a church built at Mamre where the LORD appeared

<sup>1</sup> I set this out in detail in my book *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God* (London, SPCK, 1992); see also 'The Second Person' in *The Way*, January 2004, pp. 1-14.

<sup>2</sup> Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 127; translation in *Ante Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1979-1986), vol. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Irenaeus, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 44; translation by J. A. Robinson, *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* (London, SPCK, 1920).

<sup>4</sup> Eusebius, *Proof of the Gospel* 1.5; translation by W. G. Ferrar (London, SPCK, 1920).

to Abraham because, wrote Sozomenes in the fifth century, 'there the Son of God appeared to Abraham with two angels'.<sup>5</sup>

Jesus found himself in the Old Testament: 'You search the scriptures,' he said to the people who had seen the miracle at the pool of Bethsaida, 'and it is they that bear witness to me' (John 5.39). Or again, on the road to Emmaus, 'He interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself' (Luke 24.27). Paul told the Christians in Corinth that it had been Christ who accompanied Moses in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10.1-5). There are many examples. It is unfortunate that the Jerusalem Bible chose to translate the Name in the Old Testament by 'Yahweh', rather than by the traditional 'the LORD', as this obscures and severs the most obvious link between the Old Testament and the New. Using the Greek form of the Name, Jesus was proclaimed in the New Testament as 'the LORD'.

The LORD, the God of Israel, had been known as the Son of God long before the Christians began to use that name for Jesus. In the earliest strata of the Old Testament texts we read of God Most High, and of the sons of God, the great angels. The First-born of these sons was the LORD, and the others were the angels of other nations. The *Clementine Recognitions*, a work attributed to Clement the early bishop of Rome, has Peter give a remarkable explanation of the relationship between God Most High and the great angels.

For every nation has an angel to whom God has committed the government of that nation, and when one of these appears, although he be thought and called God by those over whom he presides, [that angel] does not give such testimony to himself. For the Most High God has divided all the nations of the earth into seventy two parts and over these he has appointed angels as princes.<sup>6</sup>

Israel, then, had been entrusted to the greatest of the archangels, identified as Christ the God of Princes. A similar account is found in the Greek Old Testament: God Most High allocated the nations among the angels, and the LORD received

<sup>5</sup> Sozomenes, *Church History* 2.4, in *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, series 2, vol. II.

<sup>6</sup> *Clementine Recognitions* 2.42; translation in *Ante Nicene Fathers*, vol. 8.

Jacob as his heritage (Deut. 32.8). This is not in the Masoretic Hebrew text, and so for a long time there was a suspicion that it had been a Christian addition, confirming the claim 'One Father and one LORD'. A pre-Christian Hebrew fragment of Deuteronomy at Qumran, however, does have this account of the sons of God, and the question now is: How did there come to be two Hebrew versions of this verse which was so important for Christians? Consider too the story in Genesis 14, where Melchizedek meets Abram. In all the other ancient versions Melchizedek's God is named simply God Most High (Gen. 14.22), but only in the Masoretic Hebrew is Melchizedek's God named the LORD God Most High, not distinguishing 'the LORD' and 'God Most High' as Father and Son. There are many examples. I offer these simply to show that God the Father and God the Son were distinguished before the advent of Christianity, and that the Second Person, the Son, had been the God of Israel, the Great Angel.<sup>7</sup>

The Son had been manifested in the royal high priests of the older temple cult. He would have been born as a normal human being, and so we have to ask how it was that the high priest became an angel, how he became divine. The answer must lie in the ritual performed in the holy of holies, where only the high priest was allowed to enter. Several texts do describe how the king was 'born' as son of God, or 'raised up' in the holy of holies. Being born as a son of God and being resurrected were both descriptions of the process of becoming divine. Jesus himself used the terms interchangeably. Angels are the sons of God, the resurrected, he said (Luke 20.36).

The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews knew that Melchizedek had become high priest through resurrection, and that this distinguished his priesthood from that of Aaron. The Levitical priests – Aaron and his sons – held the priesthood 'according to a legal requirement concerning bodily descent' (Heb. 7.16), whereas Melchizedek had been raised up and had the power of an indestructible life. Melchizedek was therefore an eternal priest. The words 'he was raised up' are often understood to mean no more than that he was raised to high office, but the Greek here is the word for resurrection. Melchizedek was

resurrected to the eternal priesthood which he held by the power of an indestructible life.

Psalm 110 is an enthronement psalm, set in the holy of holies, and the king is declared to be an eternal priest after the order of Melchizedek. The text which precedes this pronouncement is, however, damaged and impossible to read in the Hebrew. Had we only the Hebrew text, we should never have known how the human king became the Melchizedek high priest. The Old Greek translation, however, says that he was begotten as a son of God. Part of the text once read: 'In the glory of the holy ones I have begotten you.' The king had been born as an angel among the angels in the holy of holies. The damaged text also mentions 'dew' as a part of the process, and dew was a symbol of resurrection (Ps. 110.3). The psalm known as the last words of King David (2 Sam. 23.1) describes him as the anointed one of the God of Jacob, the man who was raised up or resurrected. Psalm 2 records that when the king was set on Zion he heard the words 'You are my son, today I have begotten you' (verse 7). And the angels in the holy of holies welcomed the birth of the new angel by singing 'To us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace' (Isa. 9.6). The Old Greek here does not give four titles but one: he shall be called the Angel of Great Counsel. The new angel is named.

In *1 Enoch* we find a comparable picture: the Son of Man is named – that is, given the great Name – before the sun and stars were made (*1 Enoch* 48.2–3), in other words, in that state which preceded the creation of the sun and stars. This was the holy of holies. Most remarkable of all is the description found in *2 Enoch*, where Enoch the high priest figure has ascended through the heavens to stand before the throne. The LORD summons Michael to remove Enoch's earthly clothing – the symbol of his mortal body – and to dress him in the garments of glory – the symbol of the resurrection body. Enoch is then anointed with a fragrant myrrh oil and sees himself transformed into an angel. 'The appearance of the oil is greater than the greatest light, its ointment like sweet dew, and its fragrance myrrh, and it is like the rays of the glittering sun' (*2 Enoch* 22). The myrrh oil is prescribed in Exodus for consecrating the high priest and the furnishings of the tabernacle. It was a most holy oil, which means that it imparted

<sup>7</sup> I set this out in detail in my book *The Great Angel* (see note 1).

holiness and anything it touched became holy (Exod. 30.29). Nothing like it was to be made for secular use.

The newly consecrated high priest – and to consecrate means to make holy – the anointed new-born son of God was then sent out into the great hall of the temple, and so symbolically out into the world. This is how Jesus described his own experience. When accused of blasphemy for claiming union with the Father, he said: ‘I and the Father are one thing’ (John 10.30, my translation). When Jesus reminded his accusers of the claims of the high priesthood, he quoted Psalm 82, that there were heavenly beings known as gods, the sons of the Most High, and then described the making of the high priest. ‘Do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, “You are blaspheming,” because I said I am the son of God?’ The high priest was believed to be one with the God, a son of God. Hence Luke’s careful wording in the Annunciation narrative: ‘He will be called the Son of the Most High . . . therefore the child to be born will be called holy, Son of God’ (Luke 1.32, 35). This, incidentally, echoes words in an Aramaic fragment from Qumran: ‘They will call him the Son of the Most High . . .’ (4Q246).<sup>8</sup>

When we think about atonement, and the Day of Atonement whose ritual centred on the high priest, it is important to remember that the high priest had been the LORD, the Son of God Most High, long before the Christians used those terms.

### Coming with the Name of the LORD

The outer vestment of the high priest, as we have seen, symbolized the incarnation, and he also wore a golden seal on his forehead, engraved with – and here there is a problem. What was engraved on the golden seal? Most English versions translate Exodus 28.36: ‘engrave on it like the engravings of a seal *Holy to the LORD*’, but writers in the late second temple period understood that the seal was engraved only with the *four letters of the sacred Name*. Aristeas said that the high priest wore the Name on a plate of gold;<sup>9</sup> Philo, who came from an aristocratic priestly

family, wrote that the high priest wore the four letters of the Name.<sup>10</sup> The Hebrew of Exodus 28.36 probably meant that the seal was holy, and so it should be translated ‘engrave on it like the engravings of a holy seal “The LORD”,’ rather than ‘engrave it like the engravings of a seal, “Holy to the LORD”’.<sup>11</sup> The high priest’s golden plate would have been the seal of the LORD, exactly what John described in the Book of Revelation, in his vision of the angel rising with the dawn, ‘with the seal of the Living God’ (Rev. 7.2). The angel was coming to rescue his own from the impending judgement, by marking them with his seal. He was the angel high priest.

The name which the high priest wore enabled him to bear the guilt of the holy offerings and make them acceptable (Exod. 28.38). Wearing the Name enabled the high priest to carry, or to forgive – the word *naša’* has both meanings – the imperfections of the people’s offerings. He was the sin-bearer, and so the Palm Sunday acclamation: ‘Hosanna [which means “Save us”]. Blessed is he who comes with the Name of the LORD’ (Mark 11.9) must have been an acclamation for the one who bore the Name as the sin-bearer. The third commandment had been intended for the high priest: ‘You shall not wear/carry [the word *naša’* again] the Name of the LORD your God in vain for the LORD will not hold him free of guilt who wears his Name in vain’ (Exod. 20.7). The high priest had the Name and thus the power of the Name. He was the seal of the eternal covenant, like Isaiah’s Servant figure, or the cherub high priest described by Ezekiel.

There were two forms of the sacred Name: the form pronounced (probably incorrectly) as Jehovah, represented in English translations by the word LORD in capital letters. It probably means ‘He who is’, or ‘He who causes to be’. This form was used throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, and was translated into Greek as *kurios*, LORD. The other form, ‘I AM the Existing One’ or ‘I cause to be what I cause to be’, occurs only in the story of Moses and the burning bush (Exod. 3.14), and is the Name only used by the LORD of himself. In Greek, this became ‘I am the Existing One’,

<sup>8</sup> In Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (London, Penguin, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> *Letter of Aristeas* 98; translation in J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983–85), vol. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Philo, *Life of Moses* 2.114; Josephus, another priestly aristocrat, said that the high priest was called by the most honourable of venerated names (*War* 4.163); translations of both in Loeb Classical Library.

<sup>11</sup> All the known seals and seal impressions show that this *l* was prefixed to the name on a seal.

*egō eimi ho ōn*. Both forms of the Name are used for Jesus: the acclamation 'Jesus is LORD' identifies Jesus as 'He Who Is', and the 'I Am' sayings of the Fourth Gospel show Jesus using the personal form of the Name. This form *ho ōn* also appears in icons, where the LORD is identified by his personal Name written in the halo.

There can be little doubt that Jesus was recognized and acclaimed as the LORD, the God of Israel described in the Hebrew Scriptures, and thus his incarnation would have been as the high priest.

The royal high priest who bore the Name and was the LORD with his people, was the key figure on the Day of Atonement. When we read in Leviticus, or in the Mishnah, of the rituals he performed, these were the actions of the LORD, and thus atonement was brought about by the LORD and only by the LORD.

### The Day of Atonement

'Atonement' and the other Hebrew words related to it all derive from the root *kipper*, but not too much can be drawn from the literal meaning of the word.<sup>12</sup> The dictionary gives the root meaning as 'cover', with derived nouns *kipporim* meaning the act of atonement and *kapporet* the place of atonement.<sup>13</sup> The *kapporet* 'mercy seat' was a seat insofar as it represented the divine throne under which was the ark. The *kapporet* was not simply the lid of the ark, despite the Good News Bible's rendering 'the lid of the Covenant Box' (Lev. 16.2), or the New English Bible's 'cover over the ark'. The Chronicler described the holy of holies as 'the house of the *kapporet*' (1 Chron. 28.11).<sup>14</sup> The translation of *kapporet* is an interesting indication of the translators' concerns. We are invited to think of the *kapporet* as an adjunct of the ark which held the ten commandments, its lid or its cover, whereas in fact the *kapporet* was the throne or the

symbol of the throne, the central feature of the temple, the place where the LORD appeared (Lev. 16.2). In the temple, where the cherubim over the ark were the huge creatures which formed the golden throne in the holy of holies, it was the LORD who was enthroned there: 'Thou who art enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth' (Ps. 80.1), or the human king who was the LORD with his people, Immanuel. Solomon sat on the throne of the LORD as king, wrote the Chronicler, and the people worshipped him, Solomon (1 Chron. 29.20, 23). Enthronement on the *kapporet* was the final stage in *theosis*, which, as we have seen, was resurrection. The Lamb enthroned in the Book of Revelation is one with God. 'The throne of God and of the Lamb' shall be there and they shall 'worship him' (singular; Rev. 22.3).

The ritual for the Day of Atonement was prescribed in Leviticus 16. The high priest, in this case Aaron, had to prepare himself with ritual washings and sacrifices to enter the holy of holies, for there the LORD would appear to him 'in the cloud' (i.e. the incense) 'upon the *kapporet*' (Lev. 16.2). The high priest had to put on the linen garments worn only in the holy of holies. He did not wear the coloured vestment which symbolized the incarnation, because he was passing beyond the material state to stand in the Divine Presence. He had to enter the holy of holies alone, and it is interesting that Philo understood this differently. What we read as 'There shall be no man in the tent of meeting when he enters to make atonement' (Lev. 16.17), Philo understood as: 'He shall not be a man when he enters to make atonement'.<sup>15</sup> Philo understood that the high priest in the holy of holies was divine, indicated by his wearing the white linen of the angels.

The ritual for the Day was as follows: Two goats (the Mishnah, which described what was done in the time of Jesus, said the goats had to be identical) were chosen by lot, one for Azazel and one for the LORD. The high priest first took the special incense into the holy of holies and left it there to fill the place with the smoke. (Recall Isaiah's vision: 'In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the LORD . . . high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple . . . and the house was filled with smoke' (Isa. 6.1-4). Isaiah experienced one of the seraphim taking away his guilt and

<sup>12</sup> If I stand on my lawn and break bread, I am feeding the birds. The same action in a biblical context or a church setting has a different meaning.

<sup>13</sup> 'Ransom' (*kopher*) is deemed to derive from another root.

<sup>14</sup> The GNB and NEB recognize that 'lid/cover' is inappropriate in their renderings of 1 Chron. 28.11, literally house of the *kapporet*, which they have to paraphrase as 'the most holy place where sins are forgiven' and 'shrine of expiation' respectively. 'House of the lid' would clearly have been nonsense.

<sup>15</sup> Philo, *On Dreams* 2.189, 231; translation in Loeb Classical Library.

forgiving his sin. This was a Day of Atonement vision.) After the high priest had prepared the holy of holies with incense, he killed a bull as a personal sin offering and took the blood into the holy of holies. Then he sacrificed 'the goat for the LORD' and took that blood into the holy of holies. Each time, he sprinkled the blood on the mercy seat towards the east and seven times in front of the mercy seat. Then he sprinkled blood on the corners of the altar. The purpose of this was to cleanse and to consecrate the holy places 'because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel, and because of their transgressions and all their sins' (Lev. 16.16). The Mishnah gives more details, presumably of how this was done at the end of the second temple period when the holy of holies was empty and there was no *kapporet* to sprinkle. The high priest sprinkled seven times within the holy of holies, and then seven times on the temple veil; he sprinkled up and then down, a movement described as 'like a whip'. Then he sprinkled the four corners of the altar within the temple, the golden altar of incense, and finally he sprinkled the great altar in the courtyard. The remaining blood was poured out under the southern face of the great altar.<sup>16</sup> Two points: John described Jesus cleansing the temple with a whip (John 2.15); and in his vision of the fifth seal in the Book of Revelation, John saw the souls of the martyrs under the altar: their life, their blood, had been poured out as part of the great atonement (Rev. 6.9). Day of Atonement imagery permeates the entire New Testament.

These are complex texts, and what I have given is the merest outline. The Day of Atonement ritual used to be considered a late addition to temple lore, the result of an unfortunate decline into foreign ways in the second temple period. The Day of Atonement as described in Leviticus is now recognized, largely due to the work of the Jewish scholar Jacob Milgrom and his work on Leviticus,<sup>17</sup> as an ancient rite. The purpose of the elaborate cleansing of the temple was to purify the holy place from the sins of the people. The people, however, were not allowed to enter the holy place, so any uncleanness in the temple must have been because the temple was the microcosm of the whole creation.

<sup>16</sup> Mishnah *Yoma* 5.4–5; translation in H. Danby, *The Mishnah* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1933).

<sup>17</sup> Especially Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16* (Anchor Bible) (New York, Doubleday, 1991).

Where sin had been committed elsewhere, this polluted the temple, and conversely, when the temple was purified, the creation it represented was restored and renewed. This was renewing the bonds of the eternal covenant.

Consider now the movement of the ritual: it was outwards from the holy of holies, from heaven to earth, so the high priest sprinkling the blood to cleanse and to consecrate showed the LORD restoring the creation. The blood represented life, although exactly how this was understood is not clear. Leviticus 17.11 explained: 'For the life/soul (*npš*) of the flesh is in its blood and I have given it to you/appointed it for you to atone for your lives/souls upon the altar, for the blood atones by means of the life/soul' (my translation). It was atonement with like for like, the *npš* making atonement for the *npš*, but it was blood/life brought from the holy of holies. When he emerged from the temple, the high priest placed both his hands on the head of the scapegoat and thereby put all the sins onto the goat. The logic of the ritual requires that the high priest was himself carrying all the sins of Israel at that point. He was the sin bearer. The goat was then led out into the desert, carrying away the sins. According to the Mishnah, the animal had red wool tied to its horns, and when it reached the desert place named Beth Chaduda,<sup>18</sup> it was pushed over a cliff to die.<sup>19</sup> The high priest in the temple then called out the Name, and the Atonement, the renewal of the Creation, was completed. In the calendar used at Qumran, set out in the great Temple Scroll, the Day of Atonement always fell on a Friday.<sup>20</sup>

We must now look at these two identical goats, the one for Azazel (the scapegoat) and the other for the LORD. This way of translating presents huge problems, the first of them being why an offering was sent to Azazel, the leader of the fallen angels. Origen, however, writing early in the third century, left a small but vital clue as to how this Hebrew was understood in his time. He had contacts with the Jewish scholars in Caesarea where he lived, and so it is very significant indeed that he said the scape-

<sup>18</sup> There are other spellings of this name. Targum *Pseudo Jonathan* has Beth Chadure.

<sup>19</sup> Mishnah *Yoma* 6.8; translation in Danby (see note 16).

<sup>20</sup> See J. Maier, *The Temple Scroll* (Sheffield, JSOT, 1985). This was a 364-day calendar with intercalary days from time to time.

goat was Azazel, driven out into the desert.<sup>21</sup> This is a perfectly possible reading of the Hebrew, 'for' and 'as' being the same preposition *le* in Hebrew. If the one goat was chosen 'as Azazel', rather than 'for Azazel', then the other goat must have been chosen as the LORD. The Mishnah describes how lots were drawn over the two goats, and how the high priest pronounced the Name as the lot bearing the Name was drawn. *This lot was inscribed in the same way as the seal which the high priest wore*, and it was 'put on' the goat before it was sacrificed. It was therefore the blood/life of the LORD which was brought out from the holy of holies to make the atonement which restored the covenant bond and renewed the creation. With the system of substitutions that characterized temple ritual, there was the high priest who 'was' the LORD, offering the blood/life of the LORD and taking this into heaven, the holy of holies. *The LORD was both the high priest and the offering*. The Letter to the Hebrews assumes this system of substitutes and contrasts it with the new reality: 'But when Christ appeared as a high priest . . . he entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood' (Heb. 9.11–12). This was no longer a ritual of substitutes; this sacrifice had fulfilled what the temple ritual had represented. The death of Jesus was interpreted as the sacrifice of the Day of Atonement, even though he died at the time of the Passover. The passage in Hebrews continues: 'Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant' (verse 15) – and here the word 'new' is a secure reading, unlike 'new covenant' in some of the Gospel texts we noted in the previous chapter. The high priest pouring out the blood was the culmination of the great rite of atonement, hence the words in Matthew's account of the Last Supper: ' . . . my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the remission of sins' (Matt. 26.28, italics added). The creation, wounded and broken by the effects of human sin, was thus healed and reunited with and by the life of the LORD, the great high priest. The eternal covenant was renewed. 'He is the bond of our wholeness, and by his uniting us we are healed' (Isa. 53.5).<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Origen, *Against Celsus* 6.43; translation by H. Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1953).

<sup>22</sup> For this translation, see p. 50.

The *Letter of Barnabas* 7<sup>23</sup> gives some important additional information, quoting from a prophetic text we no longer have. The priests used to eat the holiest portion of the sacrificed goat, raw and mixed with sour wine (vinegar). The special portion was normally burnt as the LORD's portion, and consisted of the kidneys and liver and their fat (e.g. Lev. 3.3–5). The text Barnabas quotes is: 'Let them eat of the goat which is offered for their sins at the fast, and let all the priests, but nobody else, eat of its inward parts, unwashed and with vinegar.' Barnabas then related this to Jesus' drinking the vinegar before he died. This information about eating the raw offering is confirmed by the Mishnah, which says that 'the Babylonians' used to eat the goat offering raw, and elsewhere 'the Babylonians' was said to be a term of contempt for Alexandrian Jews.<sup>24</sup> This practice of mixing the central portion of the sacrifice with sour wine is strikingly similar to the Orthodox Church's practice of mixing the central portion of the Eucharistic bread with wine. It also shows that blood was consumed in temple rites, despite all that has been said about drinking blood being unthinkable for a Jew.

### The Day of Judgement

When the high priest entered the holy of holies he did so surrounded by clouds of incense, and so whenever we read of someone going to heaven with clouds this is a Day of Atonement image. These visions help to provide some missing details for the Day of Atonement. First, there is Daniel's vision of the Man, or Son of Man, coming with clouds to the Ancient of Days on his throne. The English translations then add that he was presented before him or brought near, but this word 'brought near' is also used for temple offerings. Given that this is a temple vision, it is likely that the Man was *offered* before the throne – however we understand this – and then was given 'dominion and glory and kingdom': he was enthroned. The judgement followed, when the fourth beast was condemned and destroyed, and the Saints of the Most High established their everlasting kingdom. The same

<sup>23</sup> Translation in *Early Christian Writings* (Penguin Classics).

<sup>24</sup> Mishnah *Menaḥoth* 11.7; translation in Danby (see note 16). Babylonian Talmud *Menaḥoth* 100a; translation in I. Epstein (ed.), *The Babylonian Talmud* (35 vols, London, Soncino Press, 1935–48).

sequence is described in *1 Enoch*. Enoch saw the Ancient of Days, and the Man approaching the throne. This Man was the Chosen One, the revealer of the hidden things who had been appointed to judge the earth. The prayers of the righteous ones ascended to heaven, *together with the blood of the Righteous One*. The angels united in prayer and praise and thanks, and then the books were opened and the judgement began (*1 Enoch* 46–47).

The clearest example of this sequence in the New Testament is Paul's quotation in *Philippians* 2, possibly an early hymn. Jesus Christ 'emptied himself, taking the form of a servant . . . and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord . . .' (*Phil.* 2.7–11). The self-emptying is the high priest's self-offering on the Day of Atonement, and 'servant' was one of his titles. What is striking is the sequence: he offered himself, *therefore* he was exalted and given the Name, and the whole creation worshipped him as the Lord. Paul has the same image in *Romans*, where he links the living sacrifice of the Christian life to a transformed mind (*Rom.* 12.1–2).

The sequence atonement, judgement and enthronement is implied in Luke's account of the Ascension when Jesus went with a cloud into heaven, and the two angels said he would return in the same way. The Second Coming was the return of the high priest to complete the atonement and bring the judgement. This is the pattern of the Book of Revelation; as the seventh seal was opened, the angel with the incense threw fire from the altar onto the earth (*Rev.* 8.1–5) and then, after the trumpets had sounded, he emerged from heaven in a cloud, 'and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom, of our Lord and his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever" (*Rev.* 11.15). Peter's sermon in Solomon's Porch was a simpler description of the same expectation: 'You denied the Holy and Righteous One . . . and killed the Author of life . . . Repent therefore and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out and that times of renewal may come from the presence of the LORD, and that he may send you the appointed Messiah, Jesus, whom heaven must keep until the time for establishing all that God spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old'

(*Acts* 3.14–21, my translation). All the motifs are here: the Holy and Righteous One, the Author of Life, the Day of Atonement, images of repentance and the removal of sin, the renewal of creation emerging from the presence of God, and the Anointed One kept in the holy of holies until the time for his return.

The Day of Atonement as the Day of Judgement is glimpsed in *Deuteronomy* 32.43. I say glimpsed because this is another example of a Christian proof text which is much shorter in the Masoretic Hebrew than in the Old Greek and the Qumran Hebrew. In the longer – and I suggest the original – form, the heavens rejoice and the sons of God worship the LORD, the nations rejoice with his people and all the angels of God triumph with him, because he avenges the blood of his sons and brings justice to his enemies and those who hate him, and he atones the land of his people (*Deut.* 32.43, LXX). The angelic praise and triumph are not in the Masoretic Hebrew, but this was a key text in the Letter to the Hebrews. 'Let all God's angels worship him' (*Heb.* 1.6) was one of the catena of texts used to demonstrate the Christian claim for Jesus: he was the Son who made purification for sins, was then enthroned on high and given the greatest Name, and then 'when he brings the first-born into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him".' This is yet another example of Jesus being identified as the God of Israel, here bringing judgement on the Day of Atonement, and another example of two Hebrew versions of a text important to the Christians.

The Day of Atonement as the Day of Judgement can best be seen in a Jewish text, *The Assumption of Moses*, which was known in the first century CE and is an expansion and interpretation of the final part of *Deuteronomy*. It shows how *Deuteronomy* 32.43 would have been understood by Jesus' contemporaries. This is the setting in which the recipients of the Letter to the Hebrews would have understood the verse, a setting very similar to the Book of Revelation. 'Then his kingdom will appear throughout the whole creation, the devil will meet his end and sorrow will be led away with him' – a clear reference to leading away the scapegoat. 'Then the hands of the greatest angel will be filled [with incense], and he will avenge them of their enemies. The Heavenly One will rise from his throne and go forth from his holy place, with indignation and wrath on behalf of his sons.' There follow the signs of the Day of Judgement: the earth trembling and the

sun darkened, the moon turned to blood and so forth.<sup>25</sup> This text shows clearly that the LORD was expected to come as the angel high priest on the Day of Atonement.

The *Book of Enoch* gives more detail. When the earth had been corrupted by the works of the fallen angels, and the prayers of their victims had been heard in heaven, the archangels were sent to bring the judgement. Azazel was bound and imprisoned in a pit in the desert, at a place whose name is very similar to the place of the scapegoat.<sup>26</sup> On the final day of judgement, Azazel would be cast into the fire. Another version of the story says that the rebel angels were imprisoned with their leader for seventy generations, until the time of their final destruction. When Azazel had been bound, the archangels were able to cleanse the earth from all defilement and all sin, and to heal it (*1 Enoch* 10). According to Luke's genealogy, there were seventy generations from Enoch to Jesus (Luke 3), and so the release of Azazel and his final judgement would have been thought imminent. Now the name Azazel means the Strong One, and this is why, after performing many exorcisms, Jesus spoke of binding the strong man before entering his house to take his possessions (Mark 3.27). The Book of Revelation describes an angel binding Satan and throwing him into a pit for a thousand years, so that the kingdom can be established on earth. The parable of the sheep and the goats tells the same story. The Man returns with his angels, as in Deuteronomy 32.43 where the LORD emerges with his angels, and he sits on the throne as judge. He is then described as the King, and he speaks of his Father, i.e. the King is the Son of God. 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.' The others are condemned to the 'fire prepared for the devil and his angels' (Matt. 25.34, 41).

Atonement restored the bonds of the eternal covenant. The story of Phineas in Numbers 25 makes clear the link between atonement and covenant: 'my covenant of peace . . . because he . . . made atonement for the people of Israel' (verses 12-13). We have to think of atonement as the restoration of the covenant bonds which secured the created order and protected those

<sup>25</sup> *Assumption of Moses* 10 in J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983-85), vol. 1, where it is called *The Testament of Moses*.

<sup>26</sup> The Ethiopic text is thought to be a translation of a translation of the original.

within. Mary Douglas has studied Leviticus with the eye of an anthropologist, and she drew some interesting conclusions about the language used to describe atonement. Concentration on ideas of cleansing, she concluded, distracts us from

Leviticus' own very specific and clear description of atonement . . . [which means] 'to cover or recover, repair a hole, cure a sickness, mend a rift, make good a torn or broken covering' . . . Atonement does not mean covering a sin so as to hide it from the sight of God; it means making good an outer layer which has rotted or been pierced.<sup>27</sup>

This rotted outer protection had been destroyed by sin, and atonement was the ritual for its restoration. Ezekiel, who was a priest in the first temple, wrote: 'I will bring you into the bond of the covenant. I will purge out the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against me' (Ezek. 20.37-38, translating the Hebrew literally). The security of the restored covenant bond underlies Paul's words in Romans 8: 'I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom. 8.38-39).

From the beginning, the Church linked Good Friday and the Day of Atonement. The *Letter of Barnabas* 7 compared the red robe to the red wool worn by the scapegoat and 'the point of there being two similar goats is that when they see him coming on the Day they are going to be struck with terror at the clear parallel between him and the goat'. Justin also linked the sacrificed goat to the Second Coming.<sup>28</sup> Early lectionaries had the synagogue Day of Atonement readings for Holy Saturday, remembering not only the great fast but also the recreation of the world.<sup>29</sup> Most remarkable of all must be the Maundy Thursday celebration in the Lateran in Rome, which claimed many temple relics

<sup>27</sup> Mary Douglas, 'Atonement in Leviticus', *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 1 (1993-4), p. 117.

<sup>28</sup> Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 40 (see note 2).

<sup>29</sup> See Eric Werner, *The Sacred Bridge: the Interdependence of Liturgy and Music in Synagogue and Church during the First Millennium* (London, Dennis Dobson; New York, Columbia University Press, 1959).

including the ark of the covenant encased in the high altar. The mediaeval Popes commemorated the origin of the Eucharist by performing a unique ritual with a relic of the blood of Christ. A blood offering over the ark can only have been the Day of Atonement, celebrated by the Pope on Maundy Thursday as the origin of the Eucharist.<sup>30</sup>

### Melchizedek the Great High Priest

The people's response to the LORD's Atonement was the Sabbath year and the Jubilee year. Every seventh year was a Sabbath year when no crops were to be sown or sold, and only food which grew of itself could be harvested and eaten. Debts to those within the covenant were to be cancelled, and Hebrew slaves set free. The seventh year had to be like the seventh day of creation, when God looked at everything he had made, and it was very good (Gen. 1.31). There was no debt, no slavery, and no agriculture, and so the human pair and all other creatures ate only the seeds, fruits and plants which grew from the earth. Every seventh Sabbath year was a Jubilee year, the Sabbath of Sabbaths, when in addition to observing the Sabbath year requirements, each person returned to his ancestral home and property. On the Day of Atonement a herald went throughout the land proclaiming the year of Jubilee, the year of liberty, *d<sup>e</sup>ror*, the key Hebrew word for identifying Jubilee material (Lev. 25.10). The response to the Atonement and renewal of the creation was the renewal of human society within the covenant bond.<sup>31</sup> Since so many Jews lived outside Palestine in the second temple period, and therefore had to live in alien economic systems, the Jubilee requirements were spiritualized, and their equivalents became release from the debt of sin, release from slavery to evil spirits and the great ingathering of Israel. The Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures rendered

<sup>30</sup> S. de Blaauw, 'The Solitary Celebration of the Supreme Pontiff. The Lateran Basilica as the New Temple in the Medieval Liturgy of Maundy Thursday', *Omnes Circumstantes: Contributions towards a History of the Role of the People in the Liturgy, presented to Herman Wegman* (Kampen, J. H. Kok, 1990), pp. 120-43.

<sup>31</sup> There is some dispute as to whether this was the year after the seven sevens, i.e. the fiftieth year, which seems to have been the first temple practice, or the forty-ninth year itself, which was the second temple practice.

*d<sup>e</sup>ror*, liberty, by *aphesis*,<sup>32</sup> the word found in Matthew's account of the Last Supper: 'my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the *aphesis* of sins' (Matt. 26.28). The atonement effected by the sacrificial death of Jesus must have been the renewal of the everlasting covenant which inaugurated the great Jubilee.

This is confirmed by one of the fragmented texts found at Qumran, the final section of a hitherto unknown work, now designated the Melchizedek text (11Q13).<sup>33</sup> What this text reveals about Jubilee expectations in the time of Jesus has given a whole new context in which to understand his ministry and teaching. The Melchizedek text describes what was to happen in the tenth Jubilee, in other words, during the last forty-nine years of a period of 490 years. Now the enigmatic prophecy in Daniel 9.24-27 also spoke of a period of 490 years, but described it as seventy weeks of years, 70 x 7, and the period was reckoned from the rebuilding of Jerusalem, by those whom Enoch called the impure apostates. Daniel's prophecy predicted that after 490 years there would be a great atonement to put an end to transgression and iniquity; vision and prophecy would be fulfilled, and the Most Holy One would be anointed. If we assume that Daniel's 490 years were the same as those of the Melchizedek text, we find that the ministry of Jesus fell within the early years of the tenth Jubilee.

The Melchizedek fragment begins with the Jubilee proclamation of Leviticus 25, that each should return to his own property. This is linked to Isaiah 61.1, another Jubilee text: 'The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me . . . to proclaim liberty [*d<sup>e</sup>ror*] to the captives'. The rest of the fragment shows that Melchizedek's Jubilee would bring liberty, forgiveness of sins and release from the power of the rebel angels who had captured the children of light. Melchizedek would inaugurate the judgement described in Psalm 82: 'God has taken his place in the heavenly council; in the midst of the *elohim* he sits in Judgement' - which is the setting for the Book of Revelation, where the Lamb takes his place on the heavenly throne and then

<sup>32</sup> By the time the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek, perhaps the third century BCE, *aphesis* was used both for the release of the Sabbath year, *sm<sup>h</sup>*, and for the liberty of the Jubilee year, *d<sup>e</sup>ror* (Deut. 15.1; Lev. 25.10).

<sup>33</sup> In Vermes (see note 8).

the seals are opened. The Melchizedek text then quotes Isaiah 52.7, the feet of the herald who proclaims peace and brings the good news – our word gospel – who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns’. The fragment then mentions Daniel (we assume it was the prophecy of 490 years), and then returns to Isaiah 61: ‘to comfort those who mourn’. The fragment breaks after revealing ‘your God is Melchizedek’.

Even what remains of this text shows that the divine high priest Melchizedek was expected to appear and proclaim the great Jubilee, to forgive sins, to rescue his own from the power of the evil spirits, to make the great atonement sacrifice and sit in judgement on the evil angels. Melchizedek’s Jubilee would certainly have included the ingathering of Israel. Thus the messianic expectation in the time of Jesus was for an anointed High Priest who would proclaim the kingdom and make the great atonement. This Melchizedek would appear in the first week of the tenth Jubilee, i.e. in the first seven years of the tenth Jubilee. Since the tenth Jubilee was to end in 66 CE, Melchizedek was expected to appear between 17 and 23 CE.

It is now generally accepted that Jesus was born in or before 6 BCE, and Luke records that he was about thirty years old at the time of his baptism (Luke 3.23); in other words, even had he been born as early as 13 BCE, he would still have been baptized in the first seven years of the tenth Jubilee. He then went to Nazareth and read from Isaiah 61, the Melchizedek prophecy: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me . . . to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord’ (Luke 4.18–19). The passage in Isaiah goes on to refer to ‘the day of vengeance of our God’ (verse 2), a reference to the liberty and judgement of the Day of Atonement. Jesus then said: ‘Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing’ (Luke 4.21). *He claimed to be Melchizedek.* And so Mark begins his account of the ministry: ‘The time is fulfilled [a reference to the tenth Jubilee], and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent [because the day of judgement is also at hand], and believe in the gospel [the good news of the Jubilee]’ (Mark 1.15). Then the ministry is presented as the work of Melchizedek: forgiving sins, performing exorcisms and gathering in the unclean and the excluded. Caiaphas’ sarcasm, recorded in John 11.50, also assumes this expectation: ‘you do not understand that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people’ – to which John added (verses 51–52): ‘He did not say this of his

own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.’ This was the ingathering of the tenth Jubilee.

In even the briefest of overviews such as this, it is possible to see how the world of the temple and its practices can illuminate the New Testament, yet the temple roots of atonement have been almost completely neglected in formulating Christian teaching.

After the city of Jerusalem had been destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE, refugees fled south. The prophet Jeremiah went with them, and told them that the disaster had been due to their sins, and that even in Egypt, the punishment would continue. The refugees in Pathros confronted Jeremiah and would not accept what he said. The disaster had been caused, they said, by neglecting the Queen of Heaven. Jeremiah then offers us a glimpse of the religion of seventh-century Judah – burning incense to the Queen of Heaven, pouring out libations to her and making loaves to represent her, ‘for then we had plenty of food, and prospered, and saw no evil’ (Jer. 44.17).

Set alongside this the brief and stylized history incorporated into the *Book of Enoch*, known as the *Apocalypse of Weeks* because each period of the history is designated as a week. It is the history of Enoch, Noah, Abraham, the giving of the Law (but without any mention of Moses or the Exodus) and the building of the temple; and then, in the sixth week, ‘All who lived in the temple lost their vision, and the hearts of all of them godlessly forsook Wisdom, and the house of the kingdom was burned and the whole chosen people was scattered’ (1 *Enoch* 93). This history knows nothing of the Deuteronomists’ story of the Exodus and their hero Moses, but it does emphasize Enoch, and says that Jerusalem was destroyed after the people in the temple had forsaken Wisdom. There is even a poem elsewhere about the rejected Wisdom:

Wisdom went forth to make her dwelling among the  
children of men, and found no dwelling place  
Wisdom returned to her place, and took her seat among the  
angels.

(1 *Enoch* 42)

## Josiah's Purge

Just before the temple was destroyed, there had been a massive purge of the religion of Judah and Jerusalem, usually described as King Josiah's reform. The Deuteronomists' own account of this purge makes it clear that an old copy of a law book had been found in the temple, and this prompted the young king to remove from his kingdom everything which did not comply with the regulations of that law book. 2 Kings 23 describes what happened: anything associated with the worship of Baal and Asherah and the host of heaven was removed from the temple and destroyed. The priests whom earlier kings had appointed to burn incense in other cities were deposed, but they would not come to serve in Jerusalem; they stayed in their own areas. The account emphasized the destruction of the Asherah, which was taken from the temple and burned by the Kidron, and the destruction of the houses of the *qdsm*, a word usually translated 'male prostitutes', but which should perhaps be read as 'holy ones, angels',<sup>1</sup> in view of the fact that Josiah was removing everything connected with the host of heaven. In these houses, women had woven linen garments for Asherah.<sup>2</sup> He also removed horses dedicated to the sun which had stood at the gate of the temple. What the refugees described as abandoning the Queen of Heaven, and Enoch described as forsaking Wisdom, must have been this purge by Josiah. What he had tried to destroy was the older religion of Jerusalem and Judah.

As late as the fourth century CE, people remembered what had happened at that time: the Jerusalem Talmud described how a large number of priests had fought with Nebuchadnezzar against Jerusalem, and had then been settled in Arabia, 'among the sons of Ishmael' (*j.Ta'anit* 4.5). These must have been the disaffected priests who would not accept Josiah's purge. Jeremiah records the fear of King Zedekiah, one of Josiah's sons: 'I am afraid of the Jews who have deserted to the Chaldeans, lest I be handed over to them and they harm me' (Jer. 38.19). The first temple was always remembered as the true temple. In the time of the Messiah, five things would be

<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew letters for both words are identical.

<sup>2</sup> The most likely meaning of the uncertain Hebrew of 2 Kings 23.7.

restored which had been in the first temple but not in the second: the fire, the ark, the menorah, the Spirit and the cherubim.<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere we read that in the time of Josiah the ark, the anointing oil, the jar of manna and Aaron's rod had been hidden.<sup>4</sup> The account of Josiah's purge must include within it somewhere the removal of the ark, the menorah, the oil, manna and high priestly staff, and the cherubim, presumably of the throne. Some of them may have been taken away for safe keeping, by those devoted to the temple tradition. Others would have been destroyed.

The first chapter of the Book of Proverbs also describes the rejected Wisdom, and could well have been set in the period between the rejection of Wisdom by Josiah and the destruction of the city by the Babylonians:

How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing,  
and fools hate knowledge?  
Give heed to my reproof;  
behold, I will pour out my spirit on you . . .  
Because I have called and you refused to listen . . .  
and you have ignored all my counsel . . .  
I also will laugh at your calamity;  
I will mock when panic strikes you . . .  
when distress and anguish come upon you.  
Then they will call upon me but I will not answer;  
they will seek me diligently but will not find me.  
(Prov. 1.22–28)

This is a Goddess speaking to the people who have rejected her.

Even a brief survey shows that there had been a Lady in Jerusalem who had been rejected and had returned to her place among the angels. She had been worshipped with wine and incense, and bread to represent her. She had protected the city and given prosperity, and she had given vision to the priests. She had been evicted from the temple by Josiah, and her cult probably involved the items removed in the purge or remembered as missing from the second temple: the item named the Asherah

<sup>3</sup> *Numbers Rabbah* XV.10; translation in Harry Freedman (ed.), *Midrash Rabbah* (10 vols, London, Soncino Press, 1939).

<sup>4</sup> Babylonian Talmud *Horayoth* 12a.

(probably the menorah), the host of heaven, the horses for the sun, the oil, the manna, the high priest's staff that bore almond blossoms, the ark, the fire and the Spirit. A long list, but these things were not forgotten.

In the Book of Revelation John saw the ark restored to the holy of holies (Rev. 11.19), he saw four horses ride out from the temple (Rev. 6.1–8), he saw the Man in the midst of the seven lamps, the menorah (Rev. 1.12), he heard the Spirit promising the faithful that they would receive the hidden manna (Rev. 2.17). John was describing the restoration of the first temple. He also saw the Queen of Heaven in the temple, even though she is not named as the Queen. 'A great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars' (Rev. 12.1). At her feet was a great red dragon. She gave birth to a son who was destined to fulfil Psalm 2 – to rule the nations with a rod of iron – and presumably the rest of the psalm as well: 'You are my son. Today I have begotten you'. The woman's son was taken up to the throne of God.

These few verses in the Book of Revelation show the importance of the Lost Lady and the cult of the first temple for understanding Christian origins.

### The Lost Lady

I shall now look at some of what can be recovered of the Lost Lady and her world, a world in which profound issues were explored and theology was expressed not in the abstract philosophies which we have come to associate with theology, but in pictures, symbols and the sound of words. This does not mean that we shall be looking at an unsophisticated system. Wisdom theology has been overshadowed by a simplistic theology of history, which modern scholars have presented as Old Testament theology. Wisdom, by means of the images used to depict her, addresses such questions as the relationship between the human and the divine, the means of theosis, the stewardship of knowledge, and the power which knowledge gives to transform or to destroy.

First the evidence of archaeology:

- Hundreds of small female figurines (854 to date)<sup>5</sup> have been found in Judah and Jerusalem, known as Judaeian pillar figurines. They are between 8 and 14 cm tall, with prominent breasts and prominent eyes. Figurines found in Jerusalem and north Judaea sometimes wear a turban, and some hold a disc which has been identified as a shield, a drum or a loaf. The face is often painted red, the 'dress' seems to have been white, and there are traces of red and yellow decoration on the neck and shoulders, perhaps representing jewellery. These figurines were often found with horse and rider figurines. Many had been smashed. Archaeologists have concluded that these figurines went out of use at the end of the second temple period, in the time of Josiah.
- Graffiti have been found on two large storage jars at Kuntillet 'Ajrud in the southern desert, which seems to have been a resting place for pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem. 'I bless you by *Yhwh* of Samaria and by Asheratah', says one, and the other, 'I bless you by *Yhwh* of Teman and by Asheratah.' There has been endless debate about these inscriptions, and how the name Asheratah relates to the Old Testament name Asherah.<sup>6</sup> Given that Asheratah is a constant form, and *Yhwh* is defined by his cult centre – Teman, Samaria – it looks as though Asheratah was the 'senior' figure, perhaps the mother of the LORD?
- There are the tablets found at the site of ancient Ugarit (on the coast of Syria) which describe their great goddess Athirat, the same name as Asheratah. She was their Great Lady, the Virgin Mother of the seventy sons of the high god El (a god who was often depicted as a bull);<sup>7</sup> she was a sun deity, she was the Lamp of the gods, the Bright One, and her symbol was a spindle. She had several names: Athirat, Raḥmay and Shapsh. She was the nursing mother of the earthly king, who was known as the Morning Star and the Evening Star (cf. Rev.

<sup>5</sup> R. Kletter, 'Between Archaeology and Theology. The Pillar Figurines from Judah and the Asherah', in Amihai Mazar (ed.), *Studies in the Archaeology of the Iron Age in Israel and Jordan* (Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), pp. 179–216.

<sup>6</sup> A good way into the debate is John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> These texts can all be found in N. Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit: The Words of Ilmilku and his Colleagues* (Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

22.16), and it seems that she was represented by the winged sun disc over the head of the king, showing that she was his heavenly mother.<sup>8</sup>

It is bad practice to reconstruct the male God of Israel from the biblical texts and the female from archaeological evidence, as this gives the impression that the Lady cannot be found in the written sources. The correspondence between the Great Lady of Ugarit and the Lost Lady of Jerusalem is, however, striking, as we shall see that the Lady of Jerusalem was described as a winged sun deity, the mother of the king named the Morning Star, and the mother of the sons of El (i.e. of the angels). The advantage of having archaeological evidence to support a hypothesis constructed from texts is that archaeological evidence is less likely to have been edited, although the archaeological reports from the first half of the last century show that numbers of these figurines were discarded as rubbish, because they were thought to have no possible relevance to biblical archaeology.

### The Mother of the LORD

Many fragments of Isaiah have been found at Qumran, but the Immanuel prophecy in Isaiah 7 only survives in the great Isaiah scroll, in other words, this is the only pre-Christian evidence for the Hebrew text of that prophecy. The present form of the text, even in English, implies that something is missing. Ahaz says he will not ask for a sign from the LORD, *yhwah*, and Isaiah says he will have a sign from the Lord *adonai* (instead), and there follows the prophecy of the birth of the child. The Isaiah scroll here differs from the Masoretic Hebrew by one letter, and reads: 'Ask a sign from the *Mother of the LORD your God*', and, when Ahaz refuses, Isaiah says: 'Then the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the Virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel' (Isa. 7.14, my translation). This would make very good sense if Jerusalem had had a Great Lady who had been the heavenly Virgin Mother of the earthly king, a king who was himself the sign of God with his people, Immanuel. The prom-

ised child then appears: 'to us a child is born' (Isa. 9.6), the song of the angels in the holy of holies as the new king is born as the divine son. The other account of this birth in Psalm 110 includes, in an otherwise unreadable patch of Hebrew, the name 'The Morning Star' in verse 3, although the RSV has simply 'morning'. Isaiah's contemporary, the prophet Micah, also spoke of an unnamed woman who was about to give birth to the great Shepherd of Israel. The familiar words of this prophecy are: 'You, O Bethlehem Ephrathah . . . from you shall come forth for me, one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days', and the word is '*olam*, eternity, the holy of holies. The lines about his mother are rarely noticed, but this is another text describing the mother and her royal son who is born in the holy of holies and will come forth (Mic. 5.2-4). There is also the prophecy in Malachi 4.5, which foretells the return of Elijah before the day of the LORD, and the Gospels identified John the Baptist as Elijah heralding the coming of the LORD (Mark 9.11-13). The other part of Malachi's prophecy is often overlooked, or mistranslated. When Elijah returns, 'the Sun of Righteousness shall rise, with healing in *her* wings'. The sign in heaven in Revelation 12 is the Queen of Heaven in the holy of holies with the ark. She is clothed with the sun and crowned with the stars, and she gives birth to the Messiah. Later she flies with the wings of a great eagle to escape from the serpent. This vision is set exactly in the centre of the Book of Revelation.

Wisdom describes herself in the holy of holies in Proverbs 8. In the temple, this had been constructed as a perfect cube and lined with gold to represent the light and fire of the divine presence (2 Chron. 3.8); here in Proverbs 8 it is the state beyond the visible and temporal creation. Wisdom was herself begotten and brought forth in this state (Prov. 8.24-25), and she was beside the Creator as he established the heavens and marked out the foundations of the earth. She witnessed the creation. She was also the '*amon*, a rare Hebrew word which probably means 'craftsman'; in the Greek it became *harmozousa*, the woman who joins together, or the woman who maintains the harmony (Prov. 8.30). This Wisdom poem does not describe the visible creation – trees, birds, animals – but only the structures which were established in the invisible state, the 'engraved things'. She was there when the Creator engraved the circle on the face of the deep, set the engraved mark for the sea which it could not pass, engraved the

<sup>8</sup> N. Wyatt, 'The Stela of the Seated God from Ugarit', *Ugarit-Forschungen* 15 (1983), pp. 271-7.

foundations of the earth (Prov. 8.27–29). She was the Creator's delight, and she danced and played before him. The male-and-female Creator is familiar from Genesis 1.26–27: 'Then God [a plural word in Hebrew] said, "Let us make the human in our image, after our likeness . . ." So God created the human in his image . . . male and female he created them' (my translation). The female figure also appears in Genesis 1.2: 'the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters'. 'Moving' here is a feminine form: *she* was hovering, fluttering over the face of the waters. When Genesis was translated into Aramaic, a version used in Palestine,<sup>9</sup> and so one the first Christians would have known, gave the first verse of Genesis as 'In the beginning with Wisdom the LORD created . . .' People remembered that Wisdom had been present at the creation, and that she was also known as the Spirit.

The woman in the holy of holies, clothed with the sun and giving birth to the Messiah, must have prompted the early Church to tell the story of Mary as the story of Wisdom. The *Infancy Gospel of James* is not easy to date, but Justin in the mid-second century knew that the birth had taken place in a cave; Clement of Alexandria, at the end of the second century, knew that Mary was a virgin after giving birth; and Origen knew that Joseph had been a widower with other children<sup>10</sup> – all details unique to the *Infancy Gospel of James*. A papyrus of the *Infancy Gospel of James*, dated to the end of the third century, is the oldest known complete Gospel text.<sup>11</sup> The *Infancy Gospel of James* tells how Mary was given to the temple when she was three years old, like the infant Samuel (1 Sam. 1.24). The priest received her and sat her on the third step of the altar, and she danced at his feet in the temple. She was fed by an angel, and grew up in the temple until, at the age of twelve and the onset of puberty, she had to leave. A husband was found for her, Joseph, who was a widower with sons. When a new veil was needed for the temple, seven

<sup>9</sup> Targum *Neofiti*; translation by Martin McNamara (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 78; translation in *Ante Nicene Fathers* vol. 1. Clement, *Miscellanies* 7.93; translation in *Ante Nicene Fathers* vol. 2. Origen, *Commentary on Matthew* 10.17; translation in *Ante Nicene Christian Library* (additional volume) (Edinburgh, 1897; repr. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1974).

<sup>11</sup> Papyrus Bodmer V.

young women were chosen to spin the wool and to weave. Mary was one of them, and while she was spinning, the angel told her that she would give birth to the Son of God Most High. Mary spinning the red wool as the angel speaks to her became the icon of the Annunciation. The little girl in the temple, dancing before the high priest, is exactly how Wisdom was described in Proverbs 8: playing and dancing before the Creator. Like Wisdom, Mary is depicted in icons as seated in the holy of holies, being fed by an angel. She left the holy place to give birth to her child, like the woman clothed with the sun appearing through the opened veil of the holy of holies. Whilst she was weaving the new veil, the symbol of incarnation, she was pregnant with her child, and in icons she is shown holding her spindle, the ancient symbol of the Great Lady. The Queen of Heaven and her Son were Mary and her Son, and just as Jesus was proclaimed the LORD, the God of Israel, so Mary was depicted as the Great Lady, his Mother.

The memory of the Holy Spirit as the Mother of Jesus is preserved in the writings of the Hebrew Christians. Origen often quoted from the *Gospel of the Hebrews*, which is now lost apart from quotations such as his. In this Gospel, Jesus says: 'Even now did my mother the Holy Spirit take me by one of my hairs and carry me away to the great Mount Tabor', possibly a reference to Jesus being driven into the desert by the Holy Spirit after his baptism.<sup>12</sup> Jerome, who is the main source of quotations from this Gospel, shows that the voice at Jesus' baptism was the voice of the Spirit:

According to the Gospel written in the Hebrew speech . . . 'It came to pass, when the Lord was come up out of the water, the whole fount of the Holy Spirit descended and rested upon him and said unto him: My son, in all the prophets I was waiting for thee, that thou shouldst come and I might rest in thee. For thou art my rest, thou art my first begotten son that reignest for ever.'<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Origen, *Commentary on John* 2.12; translation in *Fathers of the Church*, vol. 80 (Washington, DC, Catholic University of America Press, repr. 1989). *Homily* 15.4 *On Jeremiah*; translation in *Fathers of the Church*, vol. 97 (Washington, DC, Catholic University of America Press, repr. 1998).

<sup>13</sup> Jerome, *On Isaiah* 11.2; translation in M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1926), p. 5.

The *Gospel of Philip* preserves another interesting tradition from the Hebrew Christians, for whom Spirit was a feminine noun. They said that the Spirit coming on Mary (Luke 1.35) could not be described as conception; presumably it was creation, as in Genesis 1. 'Some say Mary conceived by the holy Spirit. They are in error. They do not know what they are saying. When did a woman ever conceive by a woman?'<sup>14</sup>

### The Bread of the Presence

According to the refugees who argued with Jeremiah, the Queen of Heaven had been worshipped with incense, libations of wine and bread which represented her. Exactly the same was prescribed for the table in the temple for the shewbread. It was a table of gold on which were put plates and dishes for incense, flagons and bowls for libations, and the bread of the Presence (Exod. 25.29). One of the few things known about the bread of the Presence is that it had to be baked in a special mould; the shape of this mould was never revealed, although it is depicted having upward curling ends. The process of baking the bread of the Presence was the family secret of the house of Garmu and they kept their secret.<sup>15</sup> The bread of the Presence was the only cereal offering taken into the temple itself, and the Mishnah records how this was done at the end of the second temple period. There were two tables in the porch of the temple and 'on the table of marble they laid the bread of the Presence when it was brought in and on the table of gold when it was brought out, since what is holy must be raised and not brought down'.<sup>16</sup> Since gold was used for the most holy things, we conclude that the bread had acquired holiness whilst it was in the temple. The Targum described the bread of the Presence as the most sacred of all the offerings.<sup>17</sup> It was described as the most holy portion for the high priests, meaning

<sup>14</sup> *Gospel of Philip* (C.G. II.3.55); translation in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (Leiden, Brill, 1996).

<sup>15</sup> Mishnah *Yoma* 3.11; translation in H. Danby, *The Mishnah* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1933). Babylonian Talmud *Menahoth* 94ab; translation in I. Epstein (ed.), *The Babylonian Talmud* (35 vols, London, Soncino Press, 1935–48).

<sup>16</sup> Mishnah *Menahoth* 11.7 (see note 15).

<sup>17</sup> Targum *Onkelos* Lev. 24.9; translation in *The Aramaic Bible* (vol. 8, Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1998).

<sup>18</sup> It was later given to all the priests: Mishnah *Menahoth* 11.7 (see note 15).

that it imparted holiness to them (Lev. 24.9),<sup>18</sup> and it was eaten by them each sabbath, when the new loaves were taken into the temple. When the desert tabernacle was prepared for travelling, the furnishings had to be wrapped in two covers, to prevent any but the high priests from seeing them. The ark and the table, however, had to have three coverings (Num. 4.5–8).

How did the bread acquire this holiness and special status? The bread of the Presence, like other cereal offerings, was described as an '*azkarah*, usually translated 'a memorial offering'. The text in Leviticus could imply that the incense was the '*azkarah* but the Targums show that the '*azkarah* was the bread itself. We have already met another form of this ambiguous word '*azkarah*: did it mean 'remember' or 'invoke'?<sup>19</sup> Did the Levites remember or invoke the LORD? Was Moses told to remember the LORD by the newly revealed Name, or to invoke him? Here, the bread of the Presence is likely to have been not a memorial offering but an invocation offering, as this would explain its extreme holiness. Psalm 38 was to be sung with this type of offering, and includes the lines: 'O my God, be not far from me! Make haste to help me' (Ps. 38.21–22). Psalm 70 was also for the '*azkarah*: 'O LORD, make haste to help me! . . . O LORD, do not tarry!' (Ps. 70.1, 5). These are invocations. The bread of the Presence must have been a means of the LORD's presence in the temple.

Presence (*panim*, which literally means 'faces'), must have been a reverent circumlocution. There are many places in the Greek Old Testament where *panim* is understood as adding emphasis, and not as 'presence' in any special sense. Thus 'My Presence will go with you' – the LORD's promise to Moses (Exod. 33.14), became in Greek 'I myself (*autos*) will go with you.' 'The Angel of his Presence saved them' (Isa. 63.9) became in Greek 'Not an ambassador nor an angel but he himself saved them.' The Angel of the Presence was the LORD, and so the bread of the Presence must have been the bread of the divine Presence.

Wisdom invited her devotees to her table. 'Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Leave simpleness, and live, and walk in the way of discernment' (Prov. 9.5–6, my translation). Wisdom presided at a table where bread and wine were taken, and by taking her bread and wine her devotees acquired

<sup>19</sup> See p. 38.

Life and Wisdom. Later writers knew that Wisdom gave herself in her bread: 'Those who eat me will hunger for more' (Ben Sira 24.21). The *Genesis Rabbah*, the traditional Jewish commentary on Genesis, says that the bread which Melchizedek brought to Abraham was the bread of the Presence, and there follows a reference to this passage in Proverbs 9 about Wisdom's table.<sup>20</sup> It would be interesting to know what was said to the priests each Sabbath as they received their piece of the bread of the Presence.

One of the problems at the beginning of the second temple period, according to the prophet Malachi, was that the bread set on the table was polluted.<sup>21</sup> 'With such a gift from your hand, he will not lift up his Presence upon you' (Mal. 1.9, my translation). The LORD could not be present with polluted bread, and what follows came to be regarded by the Church as a prophecy of the Eucharist. 'From the rising of the sun to its setting my Name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my Name, and a pure cereal offering' (Mal. 1.11, my translation).<sup>22</sup> By implication, the Eucharist restored the bread of the Presence. Enoch too complained about the polluted bread in the second temple (1 *Enoch* 89.73).

Epiphanius, a bishop writing in the middle of the fourth century, described how women in Arabia – you will recall that the disaffected priests in the time of Josiah settled in Arabia – offered a small loaf of bread to Mary, and he linked this custom to the worship of the Queen of Heaven described in Jeremiah. Epiphanius dismissed the whole idea as ridiculous, but he did describe how they used to decorate a chair or square stool, and covered it with cloth. They put out bread there and offered it in Mary's name. Then the women ate the bread.<sup>23</sup> This is clearly a garbled account, but very interesting. It seems as though a loaf of bread was enthroned before it was eaten. Bread to represent her, perhaps.

<sup>20</sup> *Genesis Rabbah* XLIII.6.

<sup>21</sup> Mal. 1.7–9 has 'bread' rather than 'food' in both the Hebrew and the Greek, despite some English translations.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted by (e.g.) Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 41; translation in *Ante Nicene Fathers* vol. 1.

<sup>23</sup> Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion* 1.79; translation by Frank Williams (*Panarion*, vol. 1, Leiden, Brill, 1987).

## The Living One

Ezekiel, who was a priest in the first temple and was deported to Babylon, described how the Lady left the temple. In his two visions of the chariot throne, the one as it left the temple and the other as it appeared to him on the banks of the River Chebar in Babylon, he described a male and female figure. Most English versions of these chapters (Ezek. 1 and 10) attempt to cope with the confusing Hebrew by smoothing over the evidence for what Ezekiel was actually describing.<sup>24</sup> There are in fact four (feminine) Living Ones in human form (Ezek. 1.5), and they had four faces (presences), wings and hands. In the midst of the Living Ones was fire, and she/they were in the midst of a wheel within a wheel, and the rings were full of points of light (eyes). Wherever the Spirit went, the wheels went, because the Spirit of the Living One (feminine singular) was in the wheels (Ezek. 1.20). Over the heads (plural) of the Living One (fem. singular) there was the likeness of the firmament, like the gleam of terrible ice (crystal), and above this there was a throne on which was a human form, the likeness of the glory of the LORD (Ezek. 1.28). Since Ezekiel was describing the heavenly throne, this must have been how he imagined the holy of holies; the throne, and beneath it the gleaming firmament, and beneath that, a fourfold fiery, female figure with wings and hands. Ezekiel heard a sound 'like the voice of Shaddai', which must have been the name of the Living One (Ezek. 1.24; 10.5). There is a similar description in chapter 10, where he described the glory leaving the temple: 'As for their appearances, they four had one likeness, as if a wheel had been in the midst of a wheel' (Ezek. 10.10, AV); 'All their body [singular body, plural suffix] was full of points of light' (Ezek. 10.12); 'She is the Living One that I saw by the River Chebar' (Ezek. 10.15); 'She is the Living One I saw beneath the God of Israel by the River Chebar' (Ezek. 10.20). One very obscure verse (Ezek. 10.12) seems to say that all flesh, that is, all created things, were the points of light within the wheels. This was the Lady as Ezekiel knew her, leaving the temple. We are accustomed to translating the plural form *elohim* as God, singular; it is likely that the Living One was also described in singular and plural forms.

Elsewhere (Ezek. 28.12–19), Ezekiel described an anointed

<sup>24</sup> The only English version to give a fair representation of the Hebrew is the AV.

guardian cherub, full of Wisdom and perfect in beauty, who was driven out of the Garden of Eden. The cherub was the seal, and must have been the high priest, because the Greek version of the list of twelve gemstones worn by the cherub is an exact description of the high priest's breastplate. Fire came forth from the midst of the cherub – who must have been a fiery being – and consumed the holy place. What is remarkable is that the anointed guardian cherub high priest was female.

In its present form the oracle concerns the king of Tyre, but Tyre and Zion are very similar words in Hebrew, and the Hebrew text has already been distorted to conceal the gems of the high priest's breastplate. Only the Greek has the full list. Ben Sira, writing some four centuries after Ezekiel's vision, described Wisdom as the one who served in the temple of Zion. She was the high priest (Ben Sira 24.10).

### The Tree of Life

The other great symbol of wisdom was the Tree of Life. 'She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold fast to her are called happy' (Prov. 3.18). 'Happy' here is the Hebrew word *asher*, which may be word play on her name Asheratah. Ben Sira, writing in Jerusalem about 200 BCE, has Wisdom compare herself to all manner of trees: 'I grew tall like a cedar in Lebanon, like a cypress in the heights of Hermon, I grew tall like a palm tree in Engedi, like rose plants in Jericho, like a beautiful plane tree I grew tall' (Ben Sira 24.13–14). Enoch reveals more about the Great Tree. On his visionary journey in heaven, he saw a great tree by the throne, 'whose fragrance was beyond all fragrance, and whose leaves and blossoms and wood never wither or rot' (1 Enoch 24.4). No mortal could touch the tree until after the great judgement, when its fruit would be given to the chosen ones, and the tree itself transplanted again into the temple. The fruit of the tree was sometimes compared to the clusters on a palm (thus here) or to grapes. The tree is fully described in a text which was part of a small Christian library, hidden in a cave in Egypt in the fourth century and rediscovered in 1945. *On the Origin of the World* is usually identified as Gnostic, but texts such as these are full of temple imagery and traditions, and labels such as Gnostic (and therefore heretical) should not be applied with too much confidence. 'The colour of the tree of life is like the sun, and its

branches are beautiful. Its leaves are like those of the cypress, its fruit is like a bunch of white grapes.'<sup>25</sup> Enoch reveals something more about this tree; it is the place where the LORD rests when he is in Paradise. 'I saw Paradise, and in the midst, the tree of life, at that place where the LORD takes his rest when he goes [up] to Paradise . . . That tree is indescribable for pleasantness and fragrance, and more beautiful than any created thing. Its appearance is gold and crimson and with the form of fire' (2 Enoch 8.4).

In an account of the life of Adam and Eve written at the end of the second temple period, when God returns to Paradise, the chariot throne rests at the tree of life and all the flowers come into bloom.<sup>26</sup> The synagogue at Dura Europas<sup>27</sup> depicts a king enthroned in a tree. The tree was inseparable from the throne itself. Reigning from the tree became a Christian theme, and the subject of controversy with Jews. Justin claimed that they had removed words from Psalm 96.10, which were important for Christians. The verse had originally been: 'Say among the nations "The LORD reigns from the tree",' but, he claimed, 'from the tree' had been removed.<sup>28</sup> The *Letter of Barnabas* hints at this longer reading by saying that the royal kingdom of Jesus was founded on a tree,<sup>29</sup> and the longer version of Psalm 96 was known to several early Christian writers. 'From the tree' does not appear in any version presently known, but the tree of life and what it represented was a point of contention between Jews and Christians. In the Book of Revelation, faithful Christians were promised that they would eat the fruit of the tree of life (Rev. 2.7; 22.14), which stood by the throne of God-and-the-Lamb, watered by the river of life.

In the time of Jesus, the veneration of the Lady and her tree was not just a distant memory. Juvenal, the Roman satirist writing early in the second century CE, described a poor Jewish woman, possibly a refugee, as a fortune teller, 'an interpreter of the laws of Jerusalem, a high priestess of the tree, a reliable medi-

<sup>25</sup> C.G.II.5.110 in *The Nag Hammadi Library*. See chapter 1, n. 26.

<sup>26</sup> *Apocalypse of Moses* 22; translation in J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983–85), vol. 2.

<sup>27</sup> This ancient Syrian city on the Euphrates is now in Iraq. It was destroyed in war in 256 CE and the desert sand soon reclaimed and thus preserved the buildings.

<sup>28</sup> *Dialogue with Trypho* 71.

<sup>29</sup> *Letter of Barnabas* 8.

ator with highest heaven.<sup>30</sup> In a section of the Mishnah dealing with idolatry, there are prohibitions which must have been directed against the cult of the Lady. 'If a man finds an object on which there is a figure of the sun, a figure of the moon or a figure of the dragon (cf. Rev. 12), he must throw them into the Dead Sea'.<sup>31</sup> 'If a tree was planted from the first for idolatry, it was forbidden. If it was chopped and trimmed for idolatry, and it sprouted afresh, one need only take away what had sprouted afresh; but if a Gentile set up an idol under the tree and then desecrated it, the tree was permitted'.<sup>32</sup> Even to walk under such a tree made one unclean. Bread baked with wood taken from the Asherah was unclean, any garment woven with a shuttle made from Asherah wood was unclean. Branches from an Asherah or from an apostate city could not be used in Tabernacles processions.<sup>33</sup> This is an interesting list: the sun, the moon, and a dragon is reminiscent of the Lady in Revelation 12: bread and weaving are associated with the Lady, apostate cities show that this was not a matter of pagan practice but a dispute within the Hebrew community; and a shaped tree immediately suggests the menorah, which was a stylized almond tree (Exod. 25.31-37).

You will recall the belief that in the time of the Messiah five things would be restored to the temple: the fire, the ark, the Spirit, the cherubim and the menorah. Since the *asherah* was remembered as a stylized tree, the older translations of the Bible, made before the discoveries at Ugarit revealed the existence of the goddess Athirat, translated *asherah* as 'grove', following the Greek. It was forbidden to plant a grove of trees near any altar of the LORD (Deut. 16.21, AV); Jezebel had 400 prophets of the groves (1 Kings 18.19, AV). The *asherah* removed by Josiah would have been a stylized tree, and the only stylized tree associated with the temple was the menorah, the tree of fire which was the tree of life, and therefore a symbol of the Lady who was being removed. This menorah was remembered as the true menorah. There was a seven branched lamp in the second temple – it is depicted on the arch of Titus among the loot from the temple which was taken

<sup>30</sup> Juvenal, *Satires* 6.543-5.

<sup>31</sup> Mishnah *Aboda Zarah* 3.2 (see note 15).

<sup>32</sup> Mishnah *Aboda Zarah* 3.7 (see note 15).

<sup>33</sup> Mishnah *Sukkah* 3.1-3 (see note 15).

to Rome – yet people still looked for the restoration of the true menorah in the time of the Messiah.

The Lady's tree of fire appears in another story, where her demise is the preface to the story of Moses and the Exodus. The burning bush was her tree of fire. The story of Moses learning the new name for God at the burning bush is recognized by scholars as the point at which the compilers of the Pentateuch joined together the two traditions. Abraham, Melchizedek and the patriarchs were joined to Moses and the Exodus, and the God of the Patriarchs was renamed. At the burning bush a voice said that the name to be used in future was *yhwh* (Exod. 3.15). Later, we read: 'God said to Moses, "I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as El Shaddai, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them"' (Exod. 6.2-3). Ezekiel had described the voice of the Living One as the voice of Shaddai. Now Shaddai has been translated in various ways, most often by Almighty, but the usual meaning of this Hebrew word is breasts, suggesting that El Shaddai had a female aspect. In the stories of the patriarchs, El Shaddai was associated with the gift of fertility: 'El Shaddai bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you' (Gen. 28.3); 'I am El Shaddai: be fruitful and multiply . . . kings shall spring from you' (Gen. 35.11); 'El Shaddai . . . who will bless you with blessings of the breast and of the womb' (Gen. 49.25). If the story of the burning bush does represent the transition from the older religion to that of the Deuteronomists, then we should have an explanation for the later Christian custom of representing Mary by the burning bush. This fiery tree had been the ancient symbol of the Mother of the LORD; sometimes Mary is depicted literally within the burning bush, sometimes there is simply a fiery tree named 'the Mother of God', and sometimes the burning bush icon depicts Mother and Son surrounded by the angels of the weathers, that is, the angels of Day One in the holy of holies.

## The Anointing Oil

The oil which anointed the royal high priest and made him the LORD, the child of Wisdom, the Son of God, was perfumed oil from the tree of life. Wisdom was described by Ben Sira as the oil itself: a sweet perfume of myrrh, cinnamon and olive oil (Ben Sira 24.15) as prescribed in the instructions for the tabernacle (Exod.

30.23–25). Enoch described the experience of being anointed with this oil as he stood before the throne: ‘The LORD said to Michael: “Go and take Enoch from his earthly clothing [from his mortal body] and put on him the clothes of my glory [his resurrection body]. And so Michael did just as the LORD commanded him. He anointed me and he clothed me, and the appearance of that oil is greater than the greatest light, and its ointment is like sweet dew [the symbol of resurrection] and its fragrance is myrrh, and it is like the rays of the glittering sun. And I looked at myself and I had become like one of the glorious ones”.’ Enoch then saw the vision of the six days of creation.<sup>34</sup> The myrrh oil as the sacrament of theosis was mentioned by Pope Leo the Great in one of his Epiphany sermons: ‘He offers myrrh who believes that God’s only begotten son united to himself man’s true nature.’<sup>35</sup>

The perfumed anointing oil was kept in the holy of holies, and when the royal high priest was anointed, he received the gift of Wisdom herself: resurrection life, vision, knowledge and true wealth. The high priest was anointed on his head and between his eyelids – a curious detail which must have symbolized the opening of his eyes. When the oil was hidden away in the time of Josiah, Enoch said that the priests lost their vision. This is the context of the Messianic prophecy in Isaiah 11: ‘The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of Wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.’ The text continues, translating literally: ‘His fragrance shall be the fear of the LORD’ (Isa. 11.2–3).

Memories of the gift of Wisdom in the fragrant myrrh oil appear in a variety of texts from the early Christian period. John wrote in his first letter: ‘You have the chrism from the Holy One and you know all things . . . you have no need for anyone to teach you anything’ (1 John 2.20, 27, my translation). In the *Clementine Recognitions*, Clement attributed to Peter this explanation of the word Christ: ‘The Son of God, the Beginning of all things, became Man. He was the first whom God anointed with oil taken from the wood of the tree of life.’ Peter said Christ would in turn anoint those who entered the Kingdom. Peter continued, ‘Aaron the first high priest was anointed with a

<sup>34</sup> 2 Enoch 22; translation in Charlesworth, vol. 1 (see note 26).

<sup>35</sup> Sermon 6; translation in *Fathers of the Church* 93 (1996).

composition of chrism which was made after the pattern of the spiritual ointment’ and if this earthly copy was so powerful, how much greater, he argued, was that chrism extracted from a branch of the tree of life.<sup>36</sup> A collection of early Christian hymns known as *The Odes of Solomon* includes lines such as: ‘My eyes were enlightened and my face received the dew, and my soul was refreshed with the pleasant fragrance of the LORD’ and ‘He anointed me with his perfection and I became as one of those who are near him.’<sup>37</sup> Paul wrote to the Corinthians about ‘the fragrance of the knowledge of [Christ] . . . a fragrance from life to life’ (2 Cor. 2.14, 16), meaning a fragrance from the tree of life which leads to life. Christian pilgrims to the Holy Land used to bring back little flasks of oil inscribed ‘Oil from the tree of life.’<sup>38</sup>

The Lady was never really lost. Throughout the Bible and related texts, there is a whole network of symbolism through which the characteristic Wisdom theology was transmitted. Much of this is now more familiar as imagery associated with Mary, and appears in, for example, the Akathist Hymn or the Litany of Loreto. Its roots lie, however, in the first temple, which had been the house of Wisdom, the Queen of Heaven, the Mother of the LORD. In view of her importance, it is not surprising that the Great Church in Constantinople was dedicated to the Holy Wisdom.

<sup>36</sup> *Clementine Recognitions* 1.45–6; translation in *Ante Nicene Fathers*, vol. 8.

<sup>37</sup> *Odes of Solomon* 11 and 36; translation in Charlesworth, vol. 2 (see note 26).

<sup>38</sup> Andrei Grabar, *Les Ampoules de Terre Sainte* (Paris, 1958).

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