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B. Rabbinic Judaism

The diverse descriptions of heaven in rabbinic literature reflect ongoing rabbinic engagement with representations of God or of the heavenly realms recorded in earlier Israelite and Jewish texts. Especially central to the development of rabbinic traditions concerning heaven were the biblical account of creation (Gen 1–3), the theophany of the prophet Isaiah (Isa 6), and Ezekiel's vivid description of the divine chariot-throne (Ezek 1; 10), but works that were eventually excluded from the Jewish canon, such as the Enochic *Book of the Watchers* (1 En. 1–36), also played a role at various stages in this process (Reed: 233–72). While rabbinic conceptions of heaven were primarily the product of the dynamics of scriptural interpretation, they also appear to have been informed at times by cosmological speculation current in various branches of Greco-Roman and Near Eastern scientific thought (Schäfer 2004; Leicht).

Rabbinic speculation regarding the heavenly realms changed over time and differed by region. The tannaitic corpora from 3rd-century Roman Palestine (especially the Mishnah and Tosefta) present exegesis of the account of creation (*ma'aseh bereshit*) and Ezekiel's vision of the chariot (*ma'aseh merkavah*) as esoteric disciplines, hoping to restrict them to the learned rabbinic elite (e.g., *mHag* 2:1; *tHag* 2:7). It is only in the rabbinic compilations produced from the late 4th to the 7th century that we begin to find extended discussions of the topography of heaven as well as the activities of its human, angelic, and divine denizens (e.g., *yHag* 2:1, 77a; *BerR* 1–12; *bHag* 12b–13a). But despite this general temporal trend, the rabbis of Roman Palestine and of Sasanian Babylonia adopted different stances toward "non-Jewish" models of heaven. While the Palestinian Talmud absorbed key features of Greek cosmological speculation, such as the use of analogical argumentation and experiments using the clepsydra, the Babylonian Talmud primarily employed traditional exegetical methods to develop its descriptions of heaven and the cosmos (Leicht).

Despite these patterns of temporal and regional variation in rabbinic descriptions of heaven, certain images do recur throughout rabbinic literature. Perhaps the most vivid descriptions of the heavenly realm in classical rabbinic literature, found in both Palestinian and Babylonian sources, are the various versions of Moses' ascent to heaven to receive the Torah from God and his struggle with the angels who seek unsuccessfully to thwart his efforts (e.g., *PesRab* 20; *bShab* 88a–89a). Rabbinic sources at times depict heaven as a temple in which an angelic priesthood performs the heavenly liturgy (Boustán 2005: 165–73). Heaven is also frequently depicted in rabbinic literature as either an imperial court with a host of angelic retainers serving God or as a law court in which God sits in judgment over the righteous and the wicked (e.g., *yBer* 9:5, 14c; *yShab* 2:6, 5b). But with the development of full-scale rabbinic scholastic institutions (*yeshivot*) in Sasanian Babylonia toward the end of late antiquity, heaven came to be imagined as an academy where God presides over the study of Torah in the guise of a rabbinic master (e.g., *bBM* 86a; *bGit* 68a; Rubenstein: 28–29). The transformation of heaven from a temple into an academy may reflect broader historical developments within Judaism, as the sacrificial cult in Jerusalem gave way to the scholastic piety of the rabbis.

Access to heaven and its secrets also represents a central theme in the Hekhalot literature, a group of texts that developed at the boundaries of rabbinic Judaism. As conceived in Hekhalot literature, the process of ascent culminates with the practitioner's participation in the heavenly liturgy and his commission by God to communicate his abiding love for his people Israel (Schäfer 2009: 243–330). Rabbinic figures from 2nd-century Palestine – most commonly, R. Ishmael and R. Aqiva – serve as the protagonists of Hekhalot literature and as the tradents of its esoteric teachings. This literary framework, however, is patently fictional and serves as an authorizing strategy to anchor Hekhalot literature to the increasingly hegemonic rabbinic tradition (Boustán 2011). Hekhalot texts depict the celestial realm as consisting of seven stacked "palaces" or "temples" (Heb. *hekhalot*) with God enthroned on his chariot in or just above the seventh and highest heaven. Classical rabbinic sources, even at their most daring, merely narrate the ascent to heaven of certain special figures from the biblical or rabbinic past. By contrast, Hekhalot literature contains detailed prescriptions for ritual practices, such as the use of divine names and secret passwords that are said to enable even the most humble of Jews to navigate the dangers of heaven and, like Moses, to return from on high with special knowledge and power.

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Raʿanan Boustan

IV. Christianity

- Greek and Latin Patristics and Orthodox Churches
- Medieval Times and Reformation Era ■ Modern Europe and America

A. Greek and Latin Patristics and Orthodox Churches

The NT’s references to the “kingdom of heaven” greatly influenced the church fathers, particularly their ideas on soteriology and eschatology. The same is the case with the “new heaven and new earth” in Rev 21:1, which explicitly alludes to its conceptual counterpart in Gen 1:1, the “heaven and earth” created by God “in the beginning.”

One prominent aspect of the patristic conception of heaven is its frequent assimilation to paradise as both the protological, blessed condition of humanity and the eschatological abode of the saints (or in the case of those fathers who supported the doctrine of *apokatastasis*, or universal restoration, the ultimate destiny of all rational creatures). This assimilation was probably facilitated by the identification of Eden with the dwelling place of the blessed and the patriarchs after death in intertestamental Jewish literature. Irenaeus, however, distinguished the heaven of the Holy City from paradise (*Haer.* 5.36.1) in order to distinguish between types of retribution according to people’s different merits. On account of Christ’s advent, according to Clement of Alexandria, the human being who chooses obedience will be able to gain heaven, which Clement describes as “a greater prize” than the original paradise (*Protr.* 11.111.2–3). Origen also deems the end better than the beginning, essentially for the same reason, because heaven is not given, but must be chosen. Cyril of Jerusalem observes that only the third heaven, to which Paul was raptured (2 Cor 12:2–3), corresponds to paradise, but other heavens also exist (*Catech.* 14; *Res.* 26). Likewise, in the Latin redaction of the *Life of Adam and Eve*, God has Adam wait “in paradise, in the third heaven, until the day of the providential economy, when I shall have mercy upon all, thanks to my most beloved Son.”

Paul’s claim that the life of true Christians is not on earth but in heaven (Phil 3:20, where “life/conduct” is *πολίτευμα/conversatio*) greatly influ-

enced the fathers (Ramelli 2005). Christians must see and evaluate things *sub specie aeternitatis*, from the perspective of eternity, i.e., of heaven; this principle must govern their behavior while waiting for Jesus’ second coming from heaven. In Phil 2:10–11 Paul stressed that every creature will finally submit to Christ: “that in the name of Jesus every knee may bow, in heaven, on earth, and in the underworld, and every tongue may proclaim that Jesus Christ is the Lord.” Origen (who here interpreted “heaven” as angels, “earth” as humans, and “underworld” as demons) found in this passage, joined with 1 Cor 15:28 (which envisions all things subjected to God, including the Son, “so that God may be all in all”), the strongest biblical pillar for his doctrine of universal submission to Christ and universal salvation. Gregory of Nyssa follows Origen in the interpretation of these two passages. They apply the same interpretation to Eph 1:10, which recalls God’s intention to recapitulate all of creation in Christ, that is, “to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.” For Origen, heaven is the glorious abode of the saints, beyond the firmament, a luminous place where only light risen bodies can live (*Cels.* 3.42); it is a state of perfect knowledge and love. God will teach the causes of things and ineffable truths; at the end of this instruction the souls will be pure intelligences (*Princ.* 2.11.7). That all rational creatures will reach this perfection is a tenet of Origen’s doctrine of universal salvation, *apokatastasis*; he was followed by, among others, Eusebius, Didymus, Nyssa, Evagrius, and Eriugena. Basil rather indifferently uses “heaven” and “paradise” to indicate the abode of angels and saints, a place of vividly shining light (*Hom.* 1 in *Hex.* 5). The systematization of the nine angelic hierarchies described by Pseudo-Dionysius in his *Heavenly Hierarchy* brought about the distinction of nine heavens of angels, archangels, principates, powers, virtues, dominations, thrones, cherubs, and seraphs.

Turning to the Latin church, the early 3rd century account of the martyrs of north Africa, the *Passio Perpetuae*, speaks of a certain Satyrus who, shortly before martyrdom, had a vision of heaven as a garden of promised rest (11). Cyprian, also in a context of persecution and martyrdom, remarks that death is a passage to the kingdom of heaven (*Fort.* 12). Lactantius sees heaven as the eschatological dwelling place where human faculties will be transformed and adapted to the new heavenly condition (*Inst.* 7.26). Augustine begins to analyze the phrase “heaven and earth” in Gen 1:1 by referring to the spiritual creation suggested by Ps 113:16 LXX, “the heaven of heavens is for the Lord” (*Conf.* 12.2.2). This is the heaven of angels (*Serm.* 26.5; *Enchir.* 73). Augustine distinguishes this from the highest heaven (*summum coelum*), which he identifies with the dwelling place of the saints (*Gen. litt.*