FROM THE EARTHLY TO THE HEAVENLY TEMPLE: LINES FROM THE BIBLE AND QUMRAN TO HEBREWS AND REVELATION

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Among the NT writings, Hebrews and Revelation have a particular interest in God's heavenly temple. We hear about sacrifice at the heavenly altar, a high priest in the image of the angelic Melchizedek, incense rising before the heavenly throne, and angels singing and acting in God's presence. Texts from the OT and the scrolls provide an important background for central concepts in these two writings.¹

Old Testament Foundations

Some OT texts describe God marching forward from his holy mountain surrounded by angelic forces. According to Deut 33:2, "YHWH came from Sinai, and dawned over them from (Mount) Seir, he shone forth from Mount Paran, He came with myriads of holy ones" (i.e., angels). Similar descriptions are found in Judg 5:4–5, Ps 68:8–9, and Hab 3:3.

The rule of thumb in the OT is that God is invisible to mortals. But he can make exceptions and allow people to see his throne and to gaze at his presence. Exodus 24:9–11 preserves the memory of Moses and the elders of Israel, dining with and receiving a vision of God enthroned above a sapphire floor. In 1 Kgs 22:19–23 we encounter the prophet Mica son of Yimla who sees into God's presence and listens to God's dialogue with his angels about Israel's fate below.

Other OT texts describe God's change of address. He moved from Sinai and into his new dwelling at the temple in Zion. At the holy mountain his glory was

¹This chapter draws on two more technical articles that have been recently published:
holy is the Lord of Hosts,” tunicing themselves into the heavenly song. Psalm 22:4 knows that the Lord, enthroned over the cherubim in the Holy of Holies (cf. Exod 25:22), rules over the praises of Israel. This verse demonstrates that earthly temple singers envisioned themselves in communion with angels singing before God’s throne. When the Levites were singing, their praises were elevating God’s throne, as we sing in some modern choruses.

Some Second Temple psalms (Ps 11:4–7; 25:14; 73:23–26, cf. Job 19:25–27; Prov 3:32, “his council is with the upright ones” [author’s translation]) demonstrate a charismatic piety in which the singer may gaze upon the face of the Lord and be taken into his intimate council. The “council of God” was previously the prerogative of elect prophets (1 Kgs 22:19–22; Jer 23:18, 22). These psalms suggest that Levites singing these psalms entertained a hope of visionary experience. Jon Levenson describes the expectations of pilgrims and those seeking asylum in the temple who could be forced to stay there for years: “The apogee of the spiritual experience of the visitor to the Temple was a vision of God . . . Psalm 11 asserts a reciprocity of vision: YHWH, enthroned in His Temple, conducts a visual inspection of humanity, and those found worthy are granted a vision of his face.” The hymn concludes with the promise, “the upright shall gaze his face.” These singers would easily take the promise of Isa 33:17, “Your eyes will see the king in his beauty,” to their hearts. Psalm 11:4 indeed understands the temple below as an earthly antitype to a heavenly archetype. Within this concept a vision of the above for the pious one below is easily understood.

**Intertestamental and New Testament Texts**

Priestly and Levitic tradition continued to treasure the hope of divine revelation to individuals in the temple. The historian Josephus reports revelations to the high priest Jaddus at the time of Alexander the Great (Ant. 11.326–328) and to the Hasmonean high priest Yohanan Hyrcanus (ruled 135–105 BCE; Ant. 13.282–283). According to rabbinic tradition, an angel could appear to the high priest in the sanctuary during the Yom Kippur liturgy. And according to Luke, NT figures continue this tradition: the priest Zechariah encounters the angel in the temple, Simon and Anna receive revelation of the Messiah in the temple, and Stephen had a vision of the enthroned Son of Man (Luke 1:5–23; 2:25–38; Acts 7:55–56). Stephen’s vision probably took place in the meeting room of the high council, located in the temple precincts or its immediate surroundings. The book of Revelation reflects visionary access to the heavenly sanctuary, although in this case the seer is distanced from the (fallen) earthly temple.

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The priestly writings of Aramaic Levi and Jubilees (from the third and second centuries, also preserved outside of Qumran) conceive of a priestly ministry in union with the angels. In the Aramaic Levi Document 6:5, Levi, the forefather of priests and Levites, is told by Isaac, "You are near to God and to all his holy ones." Similarly, Jb 31:14 foresees Levi "serving in his temple like the angels of the presence and like the holy ones."

Some hymns from the pre-Maccabean temple specifically reflect the concept of a union between earthly and heavenly worshipers. In the Hymn to the Creator in 11QPs’, God marches forth accompanied by the tumult of mighty waters (cf. Ezek. 1:24), and angelic powers surround God’s throne in praise.

Great and holy are you, Lord, holy among the holy ones from generation to generation. At his fore marches majesty, at his rear, the tumult of many waters. Loving kindness and truth surround his face; truth, justice and righteousness uphold his throne. He divided darkness from light, preparing the dawn with the knowledge of his heart. When all his angels saw it, they rejoiced in song—for he had shown them what they knew not: descending out the mountains with food, fine sustenance for all who live. Blessed be he who made the earth by his power, and established the world by his wisdom. By his understanding He stretched forth the heavens and brought out [the wind] from [his] treasures.

The threefold use of “holy” recalls Isa 6:3. The benediction “Blessed be he” shows a liturgical setting in which earthly singers praise their God. The angels are described singing when they witnessed God’s act of creation. Our temple singers would not imagine the angels turning mute in the continuation. Similar themes are heard in 4Q88. Apocryphon of Judah, where the singer instructs stars and angels to join the jubilation of Judah at the festivals in the temple: "Let heaven and earth give praise in unison, let all the twilight stars give praise! Rejoice, Judah, rejoice and be glad! Make your pilgrimages, fulfill your vows... For you, O Lord, are eternal, your glory endures forever.’’

The Sabbath liturgy contained in the preexilic Words of the Luminaries echoes Ezekiel and the threefold “holy” from Isa 6 in its vision of heaven and earth praising the Creator (4Q504 frags. 1–2, col. 7). In the preserved text the word “holy” occurs twice; a third can be emended:

Give thanks... to his holy name forever... all the angels of the holy firmament, (from down below up) to the heavens, the earth and all its schemers, praise his holy name, yea, even the [great [abday], Abaddon, the waters and all that is [in them, praise him] always, the earth with all its creatures, forever.

Among those participating in the choir are angels of the holy firmament, a term echoing Ezekiel’s vision (Ezek 1:22–26) and perhaps alluding to Exod 24:9–11. Words of the Luminaries’ links with later synagogue liturgy suggest a common Israelite setting for these daily prayers; the most logical one would be Levitic liturgy in the temple.

In the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice, found in eight copies in Qumran and Masada, the earthly conductor directs the praises of the angels. At times he asks the earthy singers to join (4Q403 1:36–37): "Rejoice, you who exult in [knowing him, with] a song of rejoicing among the wondrous godlike angels. Exalt his glory with the tongue of all who exalt His wondrous knowledge, with the mouth of all who chant [to Him]." These songs may have their origin in the Levitic choir of the pre-Maccabean temple, and they demonstrate how the singing Levites saw themselves in line with the angelic choir above. God is indeed "enthroned over the praises of Israel."

I now turn to a non-hymnic composition, a preexilic ”testament” of Levi in Aramaic from the early second century BCE. The text of 4Q541 frag. 9 portrays an end-time priest whose teaching and words are like the words of heaven. Tested through trials, his teaching and sacrificial ministry will lead to a renewal of the world.

He will transmit [to them] his [wisdom. And he shall make atonement for all those of his generation, and he shall be sent to all the children of his people. His words are like the words of heaven, and his teaching is like the will of God. Then the sun everlasting will shine and its fire will give warmth unto the ends of the earth. It will shine on darkness; then darkness will vanish from the earth, and mist from the dry land.

Although this priest is earthly, his ministry gives resonance in the heavenly realms. Such a description suggests a relation to priestly circles that conceived of the officiating temple priest as being linked to and in line with the heavenly temple and the angels serving above. A connected tradition, evidenced in the Greek Testament of Levi 3:4–6; 5:1–2; 8:18–19 and Aramaic Levi 4:4–13 refers to the ascent of Levi to the heavenly realms. A central blessing from the Qumran community refers to the officiating high priest standing in the midst of angels in the heavenly sanctuary (1QpHab 3–4).

May the Lord bless you and set you, perfected in honor, in the midst of the holy angels: (may he rejoin you for the eternal covenant of the priesthood. May he make a place for you in the holy [habitation.] May he judge all princes by the measure of your works, all [leaders] of the nations by what you say. He has justified you from all [defilement,] chosen you and placed you at the head of the holy angels. ... May you stand forever as an angel of the presence in the holy habitation, to the glory of the God of hosts. May you serve in the temple of the kingdom of God, ordering destiny with the angels of the presence, a Council of the Community [with the holy angels] forever, for all the ages of eternity. ... May he establish you as holy among his people, as the "greater light" [Gen 1:16] to illumine the world with knowledge, and to shine upon the face of many with wisdom leading to life.

A related rabbinic tradition judges the officiating high priest as more important than the angels (y. Yoma 5.2). Neither angels nor the son of man are present in the tent of meeting on Yom Kippur, but only the high priest and God. The two last texts quoted above provided the matrix that enabled a sectarian author to coin
the “Self-Glorification Hymn” on the messianic high priest, modeled upon the Teacher of Righteousness, the priest who founded the community. This hymn, here quoted from 4Q491, exists in two versions and was included in the Thanksgiving Hymns of the community.

God has given me a mighty throne in the congregation of the angels. None of the ancient kings shall sit on it, and their nobles [shall not] be there. There are none comparable [to me] in my glory, no one shall be exalted besides me; none shall come against me. For I have dwelt on a high, and reside[d] in the heavens... I am reckoned with the angels and my abode is in the holy assembly. Whoso has experienced contempt like me? Who is comparable to me in my glory? Who has borne troubles like me? And who like me has refrain[ed] from evil? I have never been taught, but no teaching compares [with mine]. Who then shall assault me when [I open] my mouth? Who can endure the utterance of my lips? Who shall challenge me and compare with my judgment? For I am reckoned with the angels, with my glory with that of the sons of the King.

Heavenly Temple and Christology in Hebrews

These priestly texts provide a living background for the Christology of Hebrews. This Jewish Christian author knows other NT writings that testify to Jesus as messianic prophet and royal messiah, as the Wisdom of God who speaks with the Lord's own authority, and as the Suffering Servant. In the choir of early Christian voices that give expression to the meaning and importance of Jesus’ ministry he wants to add one central element from his treasured tradition: that the high priest has a dual ministry, earthly and at the same time officiating in the heavenly sanctuary. He wants to supplement the words about the “Son of Man as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45), the blood of Jesus “poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt 26:28), and Paul's words of Christ as a “sacrifice of atonement” (Rom 3:25). Drawing on his priestly and Levitical heritage the author of Hebrews describes Jesus as the ultimate high priest, who sacrificed himself on Golgotha, which takes the place of the earthly temple. But at the same time Jesus is officiating in the real and heavenly sanctuary, before the throne of God.

According to Heb 4:10 and Heb 6:20, Jesus has “become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek,” fulfilling the messianic promise of Ps 110:4. Three texts from Qumran cast new light on the figure of Melchizedek and the argument and exegesis of Hebrews. 4Q4 Visions of Amram, a priestly writing in Aramaic from the early second century BCE, describe the prince of light and the prince of darkness, the two angelic powers who rule over humankind. The prince of darkness is named Melki-rasha (“My king is evil”). The name of his counterpart is not preserved in the six fragmentary copies of this work, but he was no doubt called Melchi-zedek (“My king is righteousness”). This angelic ruler of the sons of light is divine (perhaps not in the Nican sense of the word); he brings healing and saves people from the power of death. As leader of God’s heavenly army he takes on the role that other texts ascribe to the archangel Michael.

In a fragmentary context in the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice one of the angels is referred to as “… [z]edeq, priest in the assembly of God” (4Q401 11.3). We may with confidence restore the name of the angel as Melchizedek. These liturgical songs thus conceive of Melchizedek as an angel with a priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, perhaps as a counterpart to the service of priests in the earthly temple.

From Cave 11 comes the “Melchizedek text,” a biblical commentary on the Year of Jubilee and God’s forthcoming redemption of his people. In this text Melchizedek is an angelic redeemer who leads the battle against the evil powers. “He shall alone for all the sons of [light]... and release them from the debt of all their sins... he will deliver all the captives from the power of Belial.” It is he who is spoken of in Is 52:7, “Your God reigns,” he is the God who “holds judgment among the godlike ones” (Ps 82:1). “The year of God’s favor” (Isa 61:2, cf. Luke 4:19) is here rendered as “the year of Melchizedek’s favor” (11Q13 2:8-16). The first two writings come from a wider priestly tradition in Judea; the third was probably authored in the priestly-led Qumran community early in the first century BCE. Together they testify to the concept of an angelic Melchizedek, priest and prince in God’s assembly. A similar picture of Melchizedek emerges in 2 Enoch, a Jewish apocalypse from the first century CE, preserved in Slavonic. The idea of a heavenly Melchizedek probably crystallized in priestly exegesis of Gen 14 and Ps 110:4. The names of Abraham’s antagonists were read symbolically: The king of Gomorrah is Birsha (“Son of wickedness”), while the king of Sodom is Bera (“Son of evil”). We may speculate if these priests read Gen 14 as referring to an earthly visit of the angelic Melchizedek, who helped Abraham in his fight against the evil powers.

How is Melchizedek described in Hebrews? He is “without father or mother... without beginning of days and end of life; like the Son of God he remains priest forever.” In contrast to earthly priests who die he is “declared to be living” (Heb 7:3, 8). Jesus appears as priest like Melchizedek not because of his ancestry (he was not the tribe of Levi) but “on the power of an indestructible life” (Heb 7:15-16). When we recognize the thoroughly priestly character of Hebrews it is hard to escape the conclusion that this author shares a similar image of Melchizedek as that evolving from 2 Enoch and the Qumran writings discussed above. Our author is a priest or Levite who interpreted the Melchizedek tradition in light of the Jesus event: Melchizedek prefigures the priestly ministry of Jesus, who brought himself forth as a sacrifice on the cross, and at the same time in the heavenly sanctuary, “he entered heaven itself to appear for us in God’s presence” (Heb 9:24). In contrast to Pharisaic theology this author subscribed to a priestly, perhaps Sadducean, axiom, based on Levitical and temple tradition: “without the shedding of
blood there is no forgiveness" (Heb 9:22). As Hebrews probably read Gen 14 as referring to an earthly visit of the heavenly Melchizedek, he also would appear as a biblical foreshadow of the incarnation of Christ, who “for a little while was made lower than the angels” (Heb 2:7–9).

We have surveyed Qumran texts that prefigure NT motifs and that easily could be interpreted as prophecies of Jesus. In my understanding these texts and their authors could have been used by God to prepare his people for the “fullness of time.”

Not only priests and Levites are connected with the angelic assembly. This is true also for the whole congregation: “You have come to the heavenly Jerusalem ... to thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn whose names are written in heaven” (Heb 12:22–23). Through Christ’s sacrifice every believer now has access through the veil (of the Holy of Holies) and into God’s presence (Heb 6:19; 10:20), a privilege previously accessible only to the high priest on the Day of Atonement.

Such a democratization of priestly privileges had a precursor in the community that produced the Qumran writings. The Qumran community regarded the physical temple as polluted. Therefore angelic liturgies had to be sung outside the Jerusalem temple to secure pure liturgical partners for the angels. This community conceived of itself as a spiritual temple with its members in liturgical communion with the heavenly sanctuary and the officiating angels. The singers therefore saw themselves as successors of purified priests and Levites in sacrificial and liturgical temple service. In the liturgical celebration of the community lay Israelites had access to a mystical experience previously cherished by temple priests and Levites. A member’s identification with the praying “I” in the Thanksgiving Hymns would give the faithful access to the source of mystical revelation and communion with God. According to these hymns, the purified one “can take his stand in your presence with the perpetual host and the spirits ... in a jubilating union” (Thanksgiving Hymns 19:16–17). As part of the community where praise and supplication rose like incense before the heavenly throne as a “sacrifice of thanksgiving” (4Q174 1:7), the non-priestly member was transformed to some kind of priestly status. This spiritual renewal would be seen as a sign of the community of the end times (Joel 3:1–5, cf. Num 11:25; Acts 2:24–36).

The mystical prayer and praise of this community may be seen as a precursor of the Pharisees’ and early Jewish Christians’ realization of the idea of a “kingdom of priests” (cf. Exod 19:6; Isa 61:6; 1 Pet 2:5; Eph 2:21–22; Rev 1:6; 5:8, 12; Avot de Rabbi Nathan 4, where Johanan ben Zakka is attributed with the dictum that acts of loving-kindness provide an atonement as effective as the temple sacrifices).

### Temple and Priesthood in Revelation

In contrast to the priestly-led Qumran community, for Revelation the new community of the Messiah realizes the priesthood of all believers; leadership by priests or Levites is not needed to establish the new priestly ministry. The introductory greeting states that Christ by his blood “has made us a kingdom, priests for God his father” (Rev 1:6). Revelation 5:10 recalls this proclamation; Christ has “made them a kingdom, priests to God,” and adds that the priestly believers shall “rule on the earth,” a promise that will be realized in the millennium: “They shall be priests with him and rule with him a thousand years” (Rev 20:6).

The acknowledgement of the present eschatology of John the seer suggests that the vision of the multitude in Rev 7:9–17 may be interpreted as a description of the full community of believers partaking in the heavenly worship. This multitude serves God night and day in his temple, similar to the ministry of Levitic singers who served God in praise day and night in the temple (Pss 134; 135:1–2).

Revelation 5:8 and 8:3–4 describe the prayers of the holy ones (viz., the believers on earth) as incense rising before God’s heavenly throne, conveyed through the censers of heavenly beings. The priests’ offering of incense before the veil to the Holy of Holies is a colorful image of Second Temple Judaism. The silence in heaven (Rev 8:1) signifies the time during which the angel burns the incense on the altar to accompany the prayers of the saints. The same thought is found in rabbinic tradition: when Israel comes to pray, the angels are silent. The temple is the starting point both for John and the rabbis: during the morning and evening service of the temple incense was burned while the community (as well as Jews elsewhere in the land) was praying outside the temple (Exod 30:1–10; Judg 9:1; Luke 1:10; Acts 3:1). The ascending smoke of incense was seen as symbolizing and assisting the ascent of prayers to God in heaven. The association of prayer with incense goes back to OT times (cf. Ps 141:2, “Let my prayer be counted as incense before you”) and continues in Revelation and Hebrews (cf. Heb 13:15, “Let us offer up a sacrifice of praise to God”).

Revelation 8 and 9 show an intimate relation between the believers’ praise and prayers and the burning of incense in the heavenly temple. The believers’ priestly ministry is connected with the heavenly realms both in John’s apocalypse and in Hebrews (Heb 4:14–16; 9:11–12; 10:19–22). The angelic hymns in Rev 4–5 were likely used in earthly liturgies in Asia Minor, perhaps before John’s experience and certainly thereafter. Therefore, there is already now a union between the heavenly and earthly singers. If John came from a Levitic background and was at home in the temple watches where God’s servants praised him night and day, it is easy to understand that he conceives of an unending priestly ministry with the prayers of the church steadily rising in the heavenly sanctuary.

John’s description of angelic priestly ministry is indebted to Jewish tradition treasured by Levites and priests. The angels’ priestly ministry is elaborated in the visions of the sanctuary (Rev 4–5; 8:1–4). Further, angles come out from the altar before they are sent to minister on earth (Rev 8:5; 14:18; 16:17; cf. 9:13). The image of angles being sent out from the altar can owe their inspiration to the Levitic temple guard, which under the command of the high priest’s deputy was

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was a well-known image in the ancient world. Of particular importance is the rabbinic tradition that the doors of the temple were opened forty years before its destruction, so that rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai had to reproach them (b. Yoma 39b, cf. a similar incident reported by Josephus, J.W. 6.293–294). In all three texts the opening of the doors is related to end-time judgment. Hebrews uses related but different terminology—the way through the curtain to the inner sanctum has been opened by Christ (Rev 6:19, 8:3–5; 11:1; 14:14; 16:7). The see notes that there is still a covenantal ark in the heavenly sanctuary (Rev 11:19). As long as the holy ones on earth lift up their prayers as incense rising before God’s throne, there must be a sanctuary above with an altar (Rev 6:9; 8:3–5; 9:11; 11:1; 14:14; 16:7). But in the end there is no temple, only God’s throne (Rev 20:11), a temple source (22:1–2), and God’s city, the new Jerusalem. God the Almighty and the Lamb are their temple (Rev 21:22–23). Jeremiah 3:16–17 may lay behind Rev 21:22 as a proof text; this passage on the restoration of Israel describes Jerusalem, Gentiles coming to Zion, and the Lord’s throne, but no ark of the covenant. In its description of the end-time Zion without a temple Revelation differs from other Jewish groups who expected a restored temple in the end times.12

In Rev 15:5–8 the heavenly temple is opened and the temple filled with the smoke of God’s glory and power. Here again we encounter priestly terminology, albeit belonging to the all-Israelite Scriptures. There are a number of parallels between Rev 1:8 and the daily temple sacrifices described in Mishna Tamid.13 Knowledge of such procedures was the prerogative of priests and Levites.

In other texts (Rev 7:17; 11:6, 22:1–2) we encounter the temple source with living water, running water. The image of the temple source with paradisiacal connotations goes all through the HB (cf. Gen 2:10–14; Ps 46:4; Ezek 47:1–12; Joel 4:18; Zech 13:1; 14:6) and is often connected to end-time scenarios. In Quornan this tradition often recurs in the Thanksgiving Hymns and 4QInstruction. Both writings testify that the “opened fountain” of Zech 13:1 is a reality in the community of the end time (4Q418 81 1, 12; 1QIh 9:4; 10:18; 13:10; 12, 13; 14:17–18; 16:8; 18:30, cf. Sir 24:23–33).

In Rev 7:15 God will raise his dwelling over the martyrs. The biblical background of this image may be found in Isa 4:5–6, a promise that God will spread over Zion a cover. But we also recall Ps 84 of the Levitic sons of Korah, who long to dwell in the temple and gaze upon God in its precincts (cf. Ps 11:4–7).

Revelation’s War Ideology

Revelation recapitulates Jewish eschatological tradition on the militant Messiah and his army. In the lion-like Lamb and his followers these hopes are transformed and fulfilled through the sacrificial death of the Lamb. The 144,000 (Rev 7:3–8; 1:14–15)

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12 The only exception is the contemporary apocalypse 4 Ezra, which does not mention any temple in the messianic millennium (7:26–28). Only the Torah will abide forever (9:31–37).

represent the end-time army of this Messiah, those who are following him faithfully, even unto death. Revelation uses holy war language while transferring it to non-military means of triumph over evil.

The concept of war in heaven with repercussions on earth has parallels in the early 4Q Visions of Amram (ca. 200–150 BCE) and the later 11Q Melchizedek, both preserving priestly traditions with dualistic features. Here we encounter Melchizedek as the end-time judge of Belial and his army. And he will redeem those belonging to him in the great Year of Jubilee and freedom. The parallels to the ruling Lamb as well as the rider on the white horse (Rev 19:11–21) are many. Both Hebrews and John the seer are indebted to priestly traditions on Melchizedek as God's vigilant viceroy.

These two texts and the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice illuminate Revelation's royal terminology, where both God and Christ are designated with royal titles. In Rev 11:14–19 God has taken on kingship (cf. the recurring image of God as king in the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice). In Rev 1:5 Jesus is Lord over the kings of the earth, and in Rev 19:16 he is proclaimed "King of kings and Lord of lords." Those who belong to him have themselves been made royal priests.

Another feature of the book's war ideology is the conviction that the priestly believers shall "rule the earth" or "rule the land." The declaration of the believers as royal priests in the introduction (Rev 1:6) probably refers to believers who shall rule the land, as is explicitly stated in Rev 5:10. In the letter to Laodicea the victorious believer shall sit with the Lord on his throne (Rev 3:21), and in the letter to Thyatira the victorious one will rule the Gentiles with an iron rod (Rev 2:26–27), similar to the description of the end-time Messiah in the main part of the book (Rev 12:5; 19:15–16). As the enthroned Messiah shall rule by an iron rod, so shall his church. These verses should be interpreted in connection with the millennium of Rev 20, a limited time during which the Messiah rules on earth together with the faithful. "They shall be priests with him and rule with him for a thousand years" (Rev 20:6).

The concepts of royal believers ruling the land may be indebted to the painful loss of the land of Judea in 67–70 CE, a close memory of John the seer. Further, "priests ruling the land" would for a Jewish reader recall the rule of the Hasmonaeans (Maccabean) high priests (164–38 BCE). 4Q Papyri of Jeremiah C describes three bad priests who did not walk in God's ways (4Q387 frg. 2 col. III, lines 5–7; frg. 3 lines 4–8), probably Jason, Menelaus, and Aelius (174–169 BCE). These three priests, as well as the Hasmonaeans, could be antitypes for the end-time priests who shall rule in the name of the Lamb-like Messiah. The loss of the land in the great revolt, as well as the OT background, suggest that we should first read these passages as "ruling the land" and only secondarily as "ruling the earth." The wider universal dimension could indicate that John the seer's eschatology developed during the decades following the great revolt.

Jerusalem still occupies a central role for the author. Toward the end of the millennium Satan and his earthly allies will encircle the "beloved city" of Jerusalem (Rev 20:9). This city is also called "the camp of the holy ones," recalling the Qumran designations "the congregation of Jerusalem" and "Jerusalem, who is the holy camp" and "capital of the camps of Israel" (War Scroll 3:3; 4QMMT B 60–62). Revelation 21–22 perceives the eschatological fulfillment as Jerusalem created anew. A similar hope is articulated in the contemporary Jewish apocalypse 4 Ezra: the exoed, hidden Jerusalem will appear and be rebuilt for the world to come (4 Ezra 7:26; 8:52; 10:39, 44). But in the messianic kingdom, which precedes the world to come, God's Messiah will rebuild the city of Zion (4 Ezra 13:29–50).

The Messiah ruling the Gentiles with an iron rod is an image from the messianic Ps 2, which recurs in the early Pharisian Ps Sol. 17:23–24 where the royal Messiah is called "to smash the arrogance of sinners like a potter's jar; to shatter all their substance with an iron rod; to destroy the unlawful nations with the word of his mouth."35

In the generation following another war lost, that of Bar Kokhba, Jewish Christians would again raise the hope of an earthly millennium around Zion, as evidenced in Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs and Lives of the Prophets. Jewish-Christian theology permeates these Jewish writings, which were edited by Jewish-Christian hands in the second century.36 Also here we find the hope that redeemed Israel will return to the land.

Revelation, the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, and Lives of the Prophets reflect the outcome of two different Jewish revolts with messianic flavor (66–70 CE and 132–136 CE). After both of them, Jewish Christians looked forward to a true messiah who would rule the land in a millennial kingdom.

Conclusion

I have suggested that the author of Revelation was a priest or Levite who had resided in Judea. Temple theology and priestly traditions belong to the heritage...

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35Another text illuminating the background of Revelation is the Gabrial Inscription. This text, written in ink on stone in the late first century BCE, is formed as a prophetic revelation from the angel Gabriel about Jerusalem threatened by enemy armies (cf. Rev 20). Then God commissions angelic hosts to fight the evil forces under the leadership of Michael (cf. Rev 11). He sends three angelic shepherds to visit his people and prophecy for them, and then calls these shepherds back to their place (cf. Rev 11, two witnesses prophecy on earth before they are killed by the Beast). See M. Heng, ed., Hazon Gabriel: New Readings of the Gabriel Revelation (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011).
of all Israel; they are not the property of priestly circles alone. But the cumulative evidence of priestly traditions that have set their stamp on John the seer forces the question: is John a priest or Levite who transforms the traditions that framed him in light of the Christ event (cf. Acts 4:36; 6:7, which refer to the Levite Barnabas and "many priests" who joined the Jesus camp)? John the seer represents a priestly or Levitic milieu with much in common with the frustrated theologians of Qumran. In the 50s and 60s they are, as members of the Jesus camp, at odds with the Sadducean leaders of the temple.

The visions of Rev 4 onwards show John's struggle with understanding God's hidden plans during and after the great revolt, in the aftermath of Nero's persecutions. The visions of the enthroned Lamb give meaning through the destruction of the temple and the end of sacrifices. The same is true for the interpretation of the prayers of the believers as incense rising before the divine throne. The visions in the main part of the book and the (perhaps later) vision of the ruling Christ in Rev 1:9–18 assure John and his circles that the Jesus movement is the legitimate successor of the temple with its divine presence on earth. Opposition from Jewish leaders in Smyrna and Philadelphia in the 90s confirm for John that Israel is now divided on the issue of the lion-like Lamb and Messiah.

Can there be a connection between the milieus that framed Hebrews and the book of Revelation? Hebrews knows of the heavenly temple, but the proceedings of this sanctuary are treated in the form of a treatise with scriptural exegesis, not in the form of a visionary writing or apocalypse. Hebrews also proclaims the believers' union with the angels officiating above: "you have come to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to thousands of angels, to a holy convocation" (Heb 13:22–23). This author shares a realized eschatology like that of John of Patmos: the end times have broken in and the believer partakes in this new reality. While Revelation has access to heavenly liturgies and revelations on how God's plan for history and his people is unveiled in the present and the future, Hebrews has its interest in the central liturgical event in the heavenly temple, the ultimate high-priestly sacrifice of Christ prefigured by the Yom Kippur sacrifices. Revelation conveys more than Hebrews about the consequences of Christ's sacrifice for the church in the world. For John, the primary image for Christ is the Lamb, not the ultimate high priest, although Rev 1:12–18 depicts Christ as the royal high priest. Also Hebrews knows the priestly ministry of all believers, since Christ has opened for them a road through the curtain into the heavenly sanctuary (Heb 4:14–16; 10:19–22). Hebrews and Revelation may derive from priestly milieus that were able to produce both theological treatises and apocalyptic visions.
THE WORLD OF JESUS AND THE EARLY CHURCH

Identity and Interpretation in Early Communities of Faith

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EDITOR

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