

Heavenly Sanctuary In Rabbinic Literature

O santuário celestial na literatura rabínica

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ABSTRACT

Several refernces in classical Rabbinic sources indicate that the temple in heaven presents a concrete, not an abstract reality. Modern commentators agree to the fact that in the Jewish mind the earthly sanctuary was built in accordance with the pattern of the Heavenly one.

KEYWORDS: HEAVENLY SANCTUARY; CLASSICAL RABBINIC JUDAISM; PATTERN; REALITY

RESUMO

Diversas referências nas fontes rabínicas clássicas indicam que o templo no céu apresenta uma realidade concreta, e não abstrata. Comentaristas modernos concordam com o fato de que, na mente judaica, o santuário terrestre foi construído de acordo com o padrão do santuário celestial.

PALAVRAS-CHAVES: SANTUÁRIO CELESTIAL; JUDAÍSMO RABÍNICO CLÁSSICO; PADRÃO; REALIDADE.

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INTRODUCTION

The nature of the Sanctuary represents a major fundamental issue that separates Seventh-day Adventist theology from the mainstream of Christianity. The structural similarity between the Eastern orthodox cathedral and Jerusalem Temple is emphasized as a proof of the church's representation of Jerusalem on this earth.³ Many cathedrals in the western tradition follow the same pattern of thinking in their design. For example, the famous cathedral in Worms, Germany has a literal replica of the Arc of the Covenant in its sanctuary. In fact, even in the protestant culture the worship hall is traditionally called a sanctuary. This is why acknowledgement of the existence of the heavenly sanctuary is a problem for many Christian scholars because it goes against the traditional values of the main stream Christianity. And for this reason many modern scholars prefer to use platonic approach in their interpretation of the book of Hebrews 9.

In the study of the heavenly Sanctuary/Temple motif in the book of Hebrews it is possible to perceive a variety of opinions. On the one hand, some critical-historical scholars tend so see a connection between Hebrews' description of the heavenly Sanctuary/Temple and the philosophical thought of the Judaism of the Greek-speaking Diaspora represented by Philo of Alexandria.⁴ For Harold W. Attridge, although "there is no single strand of

³ Sf. Alexander Men, *Tainstvo I obraz* (Russian)

⁴ E.g. James Moffatt, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (Edinburgh,: T. & T. Clark, 1924); Ernst Käsemann, *Das Wandernde Gottesvolk; Eine Untersuchung Zum Hebräerbrief*, 4th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961); Erich Grässer, "Der Glaube Im Hebräerbrief" (Habilitationsschrift, N. G. Elwert, 1965); Franz Joseph Schierse, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, trans., Benen Fahy (London: Burns & Oates, 1969); Gerd Theissen, *Untersuchungen Zum Hebräerbrief*, Studien Zum Neuen Testament, vol. 2 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1969); Ceslas Spicq, *L'épître Aux Hébreux*, 2 vols., Sources Bibliques (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1977); Jean Héring, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Epworth, 1970); Lala Kalyan Kumar Dey, *Intermediary World and Patterns of Perfection in Philo and Hebrews* (Missoula, MT: Soc of Bib Lit-Scholar's Pr, 1975); Jean Daniélou, "La Symbolique Du Temple de Jerusalem Chez Philon Et Josephé," in *Le Symbolisme Cosmique*

Judaism that provides a clear and simple matrix within which to understand the thought of our author or his text,”⁵ throughout his commentary he regularly indicates, “there are undeniable parallels that suggest that Philo and our author are indebted to similar traditions of Greek-speaking and thinking Judaism.”⁶

The Greek-speaking and thinking Judaism, or Hellenistic Judaism, is the combination of both Greek thought and the needs of Jewish interpretive praxis,⁷ the effort to harmonize the Holy Scriptures with Greek philosophy.⁸ From this combination emerges the allegorical method developed by Philo of Alexandria, which he draws especially from Platonic/Pythagorean and Stoic philosophy, showing obvious kinship with Middle Platonism.⁹ Therefore, when Attridge refers to the correspondence of the earthly and heavenly Sanctuary/Temple in the book of Hebrews, he uses the word “allegory.” He says that Philo “understands this correspondence within the framework of his Platonic metaphysics;”¹⁰ and, even though “the correspondence between earthly and ‘heavenly’ sanctuaries in Hebrews does not appear to be as complex as it is in Philo... yet there are significant parallels between Philo and Hebrews in the structure of their treatment, parallels that point to their common Hellenistic Jewish background.”¹¹ For him, the language and the function of the earthly-heavenly dichotomy are strikingly similar in both Philo and Hebrews. What is most transcendent is also most real in

Des Monuments Religieux, Orientale Roma Xiv (Roma: Is. M.E.O., 1957).

5 Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, ed. Helmut Koester, Hermeneia - a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), 29.

6 Ibid. Attridge makes 722 references to the name of Philo in his commentary.

7 Werner G. Jeanrond, “History of Biblical Hermeneutics,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 436.

8 Hans Dieter Betz, “Hellenism,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 129.

9 Peder Borgen, “Philo of Alexandria,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 342.

10 Attridge, 223.

11 Ibid., 223-224.

a psychological and moral sense. As corollary, the interior reality that the heavenly Sanctuary/Temple symbolizes is not a principle or virtue generally available to humankind, but a relationship made possible by Christ.¹² That is, the heavenly Sanctuary/Temple has a spiritualized sense.

On the other hand, other scholars support a much more literal interpretation for the Sanctuary/Temple in their tentative of safeguarding the objectivity of Christ's work there.¹³ For William Johnson "it is becoming more and more clear that many Jewish groups believed in a realistic heavenly sanctuary and liturgy."¹⁴ In this context, rabbinic literature is a valuable source in order to grasp Jewish mindset of early Christian era and, therefore, a closer view of the Judeo-Christian, otherwise called apostolic theology.

SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

Dealing with the Rabbinic Literature One must be aware about the historical period when the main rabbinic documents were composed. Many historians define as the era that began after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE as a period of Rabbinic Judaism¹⁵. In its first half from

12 Ibid., 222-224. For a wider explanation about Philo and the Sanctuary/Temple, see: Stuart Dunbar Robertson, *The Account of the Ancient Israelite Tabernacle and First Priesthood in the "Jewish Antiquities" of Flavius Josephus* (Ann Arbor, MI: Bell and Howell, 1992), 238-277.

13 E.g. *Issues in the Book of Hebrews*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel & Revelation Committee Series, vol. 4 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1989); William G. Johnson, "Defilement and Purgation in the Book of Hebrews" (Vanderbilt University, 1973); R. Williamson, "Platonism and Hebrews," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 16, no. 4 (1963); Ronald Williamson, *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews*, *Geschichte Des Hellenistischen Judentums*, vol. 4 (Leiden: E J Brill, 1970); Allan J. McNicol, "The Relationship of the Image of the Highest Angel to the High Priest Concept in Hebrews" (Vanderbilt University, 1974).

14 William G. Johnson, "The Heavenly Sanctuary - Figurative or Real?," in *Issues in the Book of Hebrews*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Inst, 1989), 50.

15 Sf. Stephen Whylen, *Settings of Silver: an Introduction to Judaism* (New York:

2nd to 7th centuries the major Rabbinic documents such as Mishnah, Tosefta, Midrashim and both Talmuds were composed.¹⁶

When studying the issue of the Heavenly Temple in Rabbinic literature it is important to be aware about the two trends in the development of Rabbinic Judaism, classical and mystical. First documents of the mystical trend are believed to have appeared in the 6th-8th centuries.¹⁷ Among the first documents of the early Jewish mysticism of that period the *Heikhalot* literature occupies significant place. According to Sholem *Heikhalot* mystics clearly represents a Jewish spin of the Neo-Platonist philosophy. Most of the *heikhalot* works did not survive but they are heavily quoted in the document called *Sefer Yetzira*¹⁸. While the Hebrew word *heikhal* means temple and is used in the Hebrew Bible to designate the Heavenly Temple¹⁹, the *heikhalot* in Jewish mysticism are used to designate a mile posts on the way of the soul towards the Throne of Almighty.

The study of all aspects and details of the Heavenly Sanctuary in Jewish Mystical literature is beyond the scope of this presentation, whereas the discussion of the Celestial Temple in the classical rabbinic documents will be in the focus of our investigation. The research on this subject has been scarce over the years. The most detailed investigation of this subject was done by Avigdor Aftovitzer in the 30th.²⁰ However, in this

Paulist Press, 1989), 3-12.

16 Sf. H. L. Strack and G. Stermberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Mishnah* (T&T Clark, 1991); also Jacob Neusner, *Introduction to the Rabbinic Literature* (Doubleday, 1994). Neusner particularly defines 'a canon of the Judaism of the Dual Torah' to which many documents such as Targumim and Pseudo-Apocripha are not included. While the discussion on the full definition of the canon of Dual Torah is beyond the scope of this presentation, we will note that in our paper we will follow this definition and will not.

17 Gershom Sholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (Schocken Books, 1974).

18 The new academic translation of this document just came out by Hershy Worch *Sefer Yetzirah: chronicles of desire: new Hebrew/English translation & commentary*. (University Press of America, 2010).

19 For example, Ps. 18:6. HALOT.

20 Avigdor Aftovitzer, "BEIT HA MIQDASH SHEL LEMAALAH AL PE HAA-GADAH," *Tarbotz*, 1930: 139-53.

article Aftovitzer presents the *aggadot*²¹ about the heavenly Temple found in both classical and mystical rabbinic sources. The other helpful research on the subject of Heavenly Sanctuary was done by Luis Ginzberg²² in the 60th where he gives brief overview of many classical rabbinic sources that mention and discuss the Sanctuary in Heaven. Among over 30 different occurrences mentioned by Ginzberg three deserve special consideration and analysis. They are found in the Homiletical *Mishrashim*²³: *Tankhumah Yilamdeynu*²⁴ and *Bamidbar Rabbah*²⁵. Even though it is assumed by a number of scholars that these *midrashim* have been compiled in IVth century CE²⁶, the citations found there can be traced to the earlier sources and traditions that reach to the first century.

TANKHUMAH NASOH 11

This homily from the Midrash *Tanhumah* is a part of the exposition of the text from the Book of Numbers 7:1 which is a part of the *Parashat Nahoh* (Num 4:21 – 7:89). The text ויהי ביום כלות מצה refers to the finishing of the sanctuary by Moses, to which *Tanhumah* presents a following homily that will be cited partially. Teach us our Rabbi: how many things preceded Creation? Thus did our Rabbis taught us: Seven things were created before the world was created, they are: the Throne of Glory, the torah, the Temple,

²¹ *Aggadah* (from hifil stem of the Heb. root NGD, tell) is a genre of rabbinic literature that deals with the exposition and interpretation of the Scripture.

²² Luis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, Vol. III, 6 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1968).

²³ Homiletical or *Aggadic Midrashim* are present the compilations of rabbinic homilies that expound on Scripture through a special exegetical methods called *d'rush* (seeking, searching, exploring).

²⁴ *Tanhumah Yilamdeynu* is a collection of the homilies that expound on the weekly Torah portions read in the synagogues in accordance with the annual cycle of the Torah reading. NT reference to the existence of such a cycle can be found in Acts 13:15.

²⁵ *Bamidbar Rabbah* is a part of the collection of *Mishrashim* called *Midrash Rabbah*. It presents a homiletical commentary on the selected portions verses from the weekly Torah portions found in the book of Numbers.

²⁶ Sf. Strack & Sternberger.

the Patriarchs, Israel and the Name of the Messiah.

A tradition presented in this homily occurs in many other *midrashim*. This is a part of traditional *d^erash* – type exegetical exercise to determine what was created (i. e. conceived²⁷), planned before the heaven and earth were made.²⁸ In the next paragraph *Tanhumah* is going to present a proof text for each of the seven things that the Sages think were planned before creation. Particularly in regards to the Temple, they present the following reasoning. “As to the Temple, it is stated כסא כבוד מרום מראצון נקום מדצנו (Jer 17:12).” The Throne of Glory is high from the beginning, the place (i. e. foundation) of our sanctuary. In other words, the statement מראצון gives to the Rabbis the right to interpret this text in a way that the throne of God existed forever, which is obvious. However, in addition to this, Sages clearly see the parallelism in this verse between the phrase מראצון כבוד מרום מראצון, and מקום מקדצנו. This means that Divine Throne that is definitely in heaven above and definitely preexists creation. The parallel phrase ‘place of our sanctuary’ definitely indicates that the sanctuary is the place where the Thone of God is located and therefore since the throne is above and preexists creation, the sanctuary should be also. In other words the passage in *Tankhumah* definitely speaks about the Temple in heaven²⁹.

The homily in *Tanchumah Nasoh* 11 continues to elaborate on the vers from Jeremiah.

Come and see, then the Holy One Blessed be He told Moses to tell Israel to make for him a Sanctuary (mishkan), He told

²⁷ This is a commentary of S. Cassel in Abraham Davis, ed., *The Metsidah Midrash Tanchumah*, ed. Avraham Davis, trans. Reb S. Cassel, Vol. Bamidbar I (Monsey: Eastern Books Press, 2005). Sf . next comment.

²⁸ The similar trend of thinking occurs in the NT “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” Rev 13:8.

²⁹ While S. Cassel in his comment on the *Tanchuma*’s statement ‘shevah d^evarim nubr’u ‘d shelo nibra haolam’ (seven things were created befor the world was created) may be correct in regards to Israel Patriarchs, and Repentance, we believe that this statement in regards the Throne of Glory and the Sanctuary, as well as the Torah and the Name of the Messiah, should be take literally.

Moses ‘Moses, behold My Sanctuary is already built up above (bema’alah) as it is stated ‘The throne of Glory is high from the beginning’ and the Temple (heikhal) is built there, as it is stated ‘but the Lord is in His Holy Temple (heikhal), let all the world be silent before him’. (Hab. 2:20). And the Throne of Glory is built there as it is stated ‘The Lord established His Throne in Heaven’ (Ps. 103:19 and similarly Isaiah said ‘I saw My Lord sitting on the throne high and lofty and the edges of his garment filled the Temple’. But for the sake of My love for you I am leaving the Temple of above (Beit ha-Miqdash haelyon) and I am descending to dwell among the sons of Israel, as it is written ‘They shall make a Sanctuary for me, so that I may dwell among them’ (Ex. 25:8).

This section of *Tanchumah* is self – explanatory. It indicates that in classical Rabbinic Judaism there is a clear association between the Sanctuary that Moses built and the Sanctuary in Heaven that existed before the world was created.

BAMIDBAR RABBAH 15:9

This short homily found in Midrash Rabbah to the book of Numbers represents a *petokhtah*, a short sermonette where a preacher teakes a verse from the *ketubim* (Writings) and ties it together with the pericope text. The pericope text of this petikhtah is taken from the book of Numbers 8:2 . הנרות . מול פני המנורה יאירו צבת (When you light the candles in front of the menorah shell give light seven lamps). The expression מול פני המנורה אל presents a difficulty for the Sages. They do not understand the function of this prepositional phrase אל מול פני and thus seek (d^erash) for its meaning. The sermonette appears to present one of the explanations of this syntactical phenomena.

srael said ‘O send Your light and Your truth; let them lead me’ (Ps 63:3). Great is the light of the Holy One Blessed be He! The sun and the moon light up the world. But whence do they derive their radiance? They snatch a few sparks pf the celestial light, as it is stated ‘The sun and the moon...

at the light of Your arrows as they go, at the shining of Your glittering spear' (Hab. 3:1). Transcendent is the light on high, for only a hundredth part of it was given to all mankind as it says 'He knows what (mah) is the darkness' (Dan 11:22). Therefore 'I have made the sun and the moon theyt they shall give you light, as it is stated 'and God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light' (Gen 1:17). 'The seven lamps shall give light in front of the menorah' (Num 8:2). It is said 'In the light of king's countenance is life' (Prov. 16:15) R. Jacob the son of R. Yose noted 'the light from heaven was withheld from the wicked and given to Israel, seing that the Holy One Blessed be He was constrained to dwell with mortals in the light of the menorah, since he said to them. 'The seven lamps whould give the light in front of the menorah. This homily provides a typical example of Rabbinic Midrashic exegesis. The key verse in this homiletical reasoning is taken form Dan 11:22 and the work mah 'what' is midrashized with the word meah 'hundred'. Because the text of Dan. 11 looks obscure to the Rabbis they take the verses from this chapter for the word play and draw the implications out of that. In this case the implication is that the seven-candle menoreh in the temple has in front of it seven lamps that represent the lights of the heavenly abode. In his comments on this passage of Bamidbar Rabah Ginzberg cites the parallel passages from the other rabbinic sources that talk about the Temple menorah lit straight form the Heavenly Sanctuary.³⁰

TANKHUMAH NASOH 18

The following passage another homily that expounds on the verse from Numbers 7:1 mentioned above. Now the question is asked to the last words of the biblical text ויהי כיום כלות משה להקים את המשכן. Rabbis do not understand the role of the direct object marker ta. The homily attempts to resolve this difficulty. Rabbi Shimon said 'At the time when the Holy One Blessed be He told Israel to Make the Sanctuary, he hinted that the angels too should make a Sanctuary in heaven. As it is stated ' when moses finished erecting (ta) the Sanctuary. The Torah usually does not use the word *et* in

³⁰ The pattern, fashioned of fire, for the ark, the table and the candlestick came down from heaven to Moses, that he might make these vessels for the sanctuary. Sf. Ginzberg, vol. 6, 65, note 338.

this case. What does the Scripture teach here when it uses *et*? This means that it alludes to the Heavenly Sanctuary.

While this homily does not explain why the direct object marker alludes to the heavenly Sanctuary, the next homily clarifies the matter. *Tanchumah Nasoh* 19 equates the construction of the sanctuary with creation of the world. An quotes Gen 1:1 where it says

‘*et ha-shamayim ve-et ha-aretz*’ in other words in the mind of the rabbis the occurrence of the direct object marker in the phrase heaven and earth must hint to the fact that when Moses completed the Sanctuary (*et ha-mishkan*) on earth, the Sanctuary in heaven must have also been completed at some point³¹.

CONCLUSION

The passages from the *Midrashim* cited in this presentation represent only small portion of the rabbinic text that explicitly talk about the existence of the Sanctuary in Heaven, whose replica was built on earth by Moses and later by Solomon. The theme of the heavenly Sanctuary also appears in the later Medieval Compilations of *Midrashim*. Ginzberg particularly cites *Beth Ha-Midrash* medieval compilation of different Scriptural commentaries that talks about Michael as the High Priest of the Heavenly Sanctuary. All these references indicate that in classical Rabbinic sources unlike the Mystical ones the Temple in Heaven presents a concrete, not the abstract reality. Based on this many modern commentators³² agree to the

³¹ It may appear from this text that *Tanchumah* implies that the Heavenly Sanctuary was completed at the same time with the Earthly one, which contradicts the conclusion the homily in *Tanchumah Nasoh* 11. This is not the case. In rabbinic literature apparent anachronisms are very typical. Many researchers in this subject conclude that Rabbinic Hebrew lacks the sense of time. Because of this many such statements appear anachronistic. On the other hand, Ginzberg notes that in later medieval *midrashim* the idea that the Temple was built in heaven in place of the destroyed Jerusalem temple became popular.

³² Commenting on the text in Amos 9:6 מעלותו בשמים הבונה בשמים (The One who builds

fact that in the Jewish mind the earthly sanctuary was built in accordance with the pattern of the Heavenly one.

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His upper chambers in the heavens) David Noel Freedman points to the that the earthly Temple is build after the pattern of the Heavenly Sanctuary. Sf.

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