PART THREE

TEMPLE, PRIESTHOOD AND 4QMMT
TEMPLE MYSTICISM AND THE TEMPLE OF MEN

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A number of sectarian texts presuppose a union between the earthly temple of men and the heavenly sanctuary, between the officiating members of the Yahad below and the angels above. As a liturgical unity the Yahad is an earthly counterpart of the heavenly sanctuary where God’s angels stand in priestly ministry before the heavenly king. The thesis of this paper is that these concepts represent adaptations of earlier temple theology from the pre-Maccabean temple. An investigation of this background may illuminate how ideas of an earthly and heavenly temple were formative in the crystallizing of sectarian identity.

I. Foundational Texts from the First Temple Period

God’s heavenly entourage is described in early mountain theophanies, usually connected with the Sinai event. According to Deut 33:2, “YHWH came from Sinai, and dawned over them from Seir, he shone forth from Mount Paran, He came with myriads of holy ones.”¹ Similar theophanies are found in Judg 5:4–5; Ps 68:8–9; Hab 3:3. According to Deuteronomy 33, the Lord comes with myriads of holy ones, i.e. angels. Ps 68:18 describes YHWH accompanied by myriads of angelic chariots, while Judges 5:20 portrays the stars as heavenly beings fighting with Israel against her enemies. These theophany descriptions are so vivid and visually drawn that their origin may be sought among early Israelite mystical seers visualizing the Sinai event.

The early Sinai tradition also knows of God’s heavenly abode. Exod 24:9–11 preserves the memory of Moses, Aaron and his two sons, and seventy elders of Israel, dining with and receiving a vision of the God of Israel, enthroned above a sapphire floor (cf. רקיﬠ fi’rmament’ in Ezekiel and later tradition): “God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank.” Here

¹ English translations usually follow the NIV.