THE TEMPLE AND THE ORIGINS OF JEWISH APOCALYPTIC

BY

R. G. HAMERTON-KELLY
Scripps College, Claremont, Calif., U.S.A.

There is in apocalyptic literature a clear tradition of hostility to the temple of Jerusalem, coupled with a great concern for the temple as a religious idea. The Qumran sectaries, for instance, abhorred the corrupt shrine in Jerusalem, yet they understood their community to be a temple. 1) If one follows this theme of hostility and fascination back to the time of the return from Babylon, it provides a useful guide to the religious history of that period, and casts light on the origins of apocalyptic thought. We hope to show that there were two dominant attitudes to the temple in the early theocracy, represented by Ezekiel and P respectively, and that the apocalyptic tradition derives from the Ezekelian attitude. We begin by tracing the tradition about the temple in apocalyptic literature.

1.

The temple as an idea plays an important role in apocalyptic thought. It is the center of the promised new creation, and an eternal reality in the divine world. The following survey confirms this judgement.

For the writers of Jubilees (c. 150), 2) the consummation of all things occurs when God builds His temple on Mount Zion, the navel of the earth and hub of the new creation (viii 19, iv 26), and comes to reign as “King on Mount Zion” in full view of all the nations (i 17, 26-28). The present earthly temple has been defiled (xxiii 21), and the new temple must replace it. Jubilees implies that the eschatological


temple exists in heaven before it is revealed in the Last Days, as the following reference to the heavenly cultus shows:

And may the Lord give to thee (i.e. Levi) and thy seed greatness and great glory, and cause thee and thy seed from among all flesh, to approach him to serve in his sanctuary as the angels of the presence and as the holy ones.

I Enoch vi-xxxvi (c. 160 B.C.) gives an elaborate description of the heavenly house of God (xiv 8ff.) where His throne is set and His glory dwells. His earthly throne is Zion, the high mountain upon which God will sit when He “visits the earth with goodness” (xxiv 1-glory dwells. His earthly throne is Zion, the high mountain upon which God will sit when He “visits the earth with goodness” (xxiv 1-xxv 4). Although these chapters of Enoch emphasize the present existence of the heavenly temple rather than its eschatological manifestation, it is clear that the heavenly temple will replace the present earthly temple in the eschaton.

I Enoch lxxviii-xl (c. 150 B.C.) is a recital of the history of Israel and Judah in which the various participants are symbolized by animals, as in Ezek. xxxiv 3, 6, 8. According to this writer, the temple of Zerubbabel was ritually polluted: they tried to offer bread on the altar “but all the bread on it was polluted and not pure” (lxxxix 72ff.). In the Future Age, the “Lord of the Sheep” takes away the old house and brings a larger and more glorious one in its place, and takes up his abode in it (xl 28-29). The new temple is apparently brought from heaven. There is theological hostility to the temple in Jerusalem, combined with an interest in the heavenly, eschatological temple.

According to I Enoch xci-civ (mid first century B.C.), every generation since the exile has been apostate (xciii 9), because “there is no one who can discern the things of heaven”. But in the Future Age, a house worthy of the “Great King” will be built (xci 13) and the “Great Glory” will be revealed (cii 3).

I Enoch xxxvii-1xxi (late first century B.C. or early first century A.D.) tells of a heavenly house which Enoch saw in the “heaven of heavens” (1xxi 5ff.) and looks forward to the time when “the Righteous and Elect one shall cause the house of his congregation to appear.” There are also several details in these chapters which recall the book

1) Reading the variant, “and the Lord of the sheep was within it” in verse 29C, according to A. and P. II, p. 259, n. 29.