

in heaven. The *Book of the Watchers*, a collection of visionary stories, is set, in turn, into a larger collection called the *First Book of Enoch*. It tells how the "watcher" angels, whom God appointed to supervise ("watch over") the universe, fell from heaven. Starting from the story of Genesis 6, in which the "sons of God" lusted for human women, this author combines two different accounts of how the watchers lost their heavenly glory.²² The first describes how Semihazah, leader of the watchers, coerced two hundred other angels to join him in a pact to violate divine order by mating with human women. These mismatches produced "a race of bastards, the giants known as the nephilim ["fallen ones"], from whom there were to proceed demonic spirits," who brought violence upon earth and devoured its people. Intertwined with this story is an alternate version, which tells how the archangel Azazel sinned by disclosing to human beings the secrets of metallurgy, a pernicious revelation that inspired men to make weapons and women to adorn themselves with gold, silver, and cosmetics. Thus the fallen angels and their demon offspring incited in both sexes violence, greed, and lust.

Because these stories involve sociopolitical satire laced with religious polemic, some historians have recently asked to what specific historical situations they refer. Are Jews who thus embellish the story of angels that mate with human beings covertly ridiculing the pretensions of their Hellenistic rulers? George Nickelsburg points out that from the time of Alexander the Great, Greek kings had claimed to be descended from gods as well as from human women; the Greeks called such hybrid beings heroes. But their Jewish subjects, with their derisive tale of Semihazah, may have turned such claims of divine descent against the foreign usurpers.²³ The *Book of the Watchers* says pointedly that these greedy monsters "consumed the produce of all the people until the people hated feeding them"; the monsters then turned directly to "devour the people."

Or does the story express instead a pious people's contempt for a specific group of Jewish enemies—namely, certain members of the Jerusalem priesthood? David Suter suggests that the story aims instead at certain priests who, like the "sons of God" in the

story, violate their divinely given status and responsibility by allowing lust to draw them into impurity—especially marriages with outsiders, Gentile women.²⁴

Either interpretation is possible. As John Collins points out, the author of the *Book of the Watchers*, by choosing to tell the story of the watchers instead of that of the actual Greek rulers or corrupt priests, offers "a paradigm which is not restricted to one historical situation, but which can be applied whenever an analogous situation arises."²⁵ The same is true of all apocalyptic literature, and accounts for much of its power. Even today, readers puzzle over books that claim the authority of angelic revelation, from the biblical book of Daniel to the New Testament book of Revelation, finding in their own circumstances new applications for these evocative, enigmatic texts.

The primary apocalyptic question is this: Who are God's people?²⁶ To most readers of the *Book of the Watchers*, the answer would have been obvious—Israel. But the author of *Watchers*, without discarding ethnic identity, insists on moral identity. It is not enough to be a Jew. One must also be a Jew who acts morally. Here we see evidence of a historical shift—one that Christians will adopt and extend and which, ever after, will divide them from other Jewish groups.

The author of the *Book of the Watchers* intended nothing so radical as the followers of Jesus undertook when they finally abandoned Israel to form their own distinct religious tradition. He takes for granted Israel's priority over the rest of the nations, always mentioning Israel first. But this author takes a decisive step by separating ethnic from moral identity and suggesting a contrast between them. He takes his beginning from the opening chapters of Genesis, choosing as his spokesman the holy man Enoch, who far antedates Abraham and Israel's election and, according to Genesis, belongs not to Israel but to the primordial history of the human race. This author omits any mention of the law given to Moses at Sinai, and praises instead the universal law that God wrote into the fabric of the universe and gave to all humankind alike—the law that governs the seas, the earth, and the stars. Addressing his message to "the elect and the righteous"

among all humankind, he demonstrates not only, as George Nickelsburg observes, an "unusual openness to the Gentiles," but also an unusually negative view of Israel, or, more precisely, many—perhaps a majority—of Israel's people.²⁷

The *Book of the Watchers* tells the stories of Semihazah and Azazel as a moral warning: if even archangels, "sons of heaven," can sin and be cast down, how much more susceptible to sin and damnation are mere human beings, even those who belong to God's chosen people. In the *Book of the Watchers*, when Enoch, moved with compassion for the fallen watchers, tries to intervene with God on their behalf, one of God's angels orders him instead to deliver to them God's judgment: "You used to be holy, spirits possessing eternal life; but now you have defiled yourselves." Such passages suggest that the *Book of the Watchers* articulates the judgment of certain Jews upon others, and specifically upon some who hold positions that ordinarily convey great authority.

In 160 B.C.E., after the Maccabees' victory, a group who regarded themselves as moderates regained control of the Temple priesthood and temporarily ousted the Maccabean party. Recalling this event, one of the Maccabees adds to the collection called the *First Book of Enoch* another version of the story of the watcher angels, a version aimed against those who had usurped control of the Temple. This author says that the watchers, falling like stars from heaven, themselves spawned Israel's foreign enemies, depicted as bloody predators—lions, leopards, wolves, and snakes intent on destroying Israel, here depicted as a herd of sheep. But, he continues, God's chosen nation is itself divided; some are "blind sheep," and others have their eyes open. When the day of judgment comes, he warns, God will destroy the errant Jews, these "blind sheep," along with Israel's traditional enemies. Furthermore, God will finally gather into his eternal home not only Israel's righteous but also the righteous from the nations (although these will remain forever secondary to Israel).

A third anonymous writer whose work is included in the *First Book of Enoch* is so preoccupied with internal division that he virtually ignores Israel's alien enemies. This author has Enoch predict the rise of "a perverse generation," warning that "all its

deeds shall be apostate" (*I Enoch* 93:9). Castigating many of his contemporaries, this author, as George Nickelsburg points out, like several biblical prophets, speaks for the poor, and denounces the rich and powerful, predicting their destruction.²⁸ He even insists that slavery, along with other social and economic inequities, is not divinely ordained, as others argue, but "arose from oppression" (*I Enoch* 98:5b)—that is, human sin.²⁹

The story of the watchers, then, in some of its many transformations, suggested a change in the traditional lines separating Jew from Gentile. The latest section of the *First Book of Enoch*, the "Similitudes," written about the time of Jesus, simply contrasts those who are righteous, who stand on the side of the angels, with those, both Jews and Gentiles, seduced by the *satans*. Accounts like this would open the way for Christians eventually to leave ethnic identity aside, and to redefine the human community instead in terms of the moral quality, or membership in the elect community, of each individual.

Another devout patriot, writing around 160 B.C.E., also siding with the early Maccabean party, wrote an extraordinary apocryphal book called *Jubilees* to urge his people to maintain their separateness from Gentile ways. What troubles this author is this: How can so many Israelites, God's own people, have become apostates? How can so many Jews be "walking in the ways of the Gentiles" (*Jub.* 1:9)? While the author takes for granted the traditional antithesis between the Israelites and "their enemies, the Gentiles" (*Jub.* 1:19), here again this conflict recedes into the background. The author of *Jubilees* is concerned instead with the conflicts over assimilation that divide Jewish communities internally, and he attributes these conflicts to that most intimate of enemies, whom he calls by many names, but most often calls Mastema ("hatred"), Satan, or Belial.

The story of the angels' fall in *Jubilees*, like that in the *First Book of Enoch*, gives a moral warning: if even angels, when they sin, bring God's wrath and destruction upon themselves, how can mere human beings expect to be spared? *Jubilees* insists that every creature, whether angel or human, Israelite or Gentile, shall be judged according to deeds, that is, ethically.

According to *Jubilees*, the angels' fall spawned the giants, who sow violence and evil, and evil spirits, "who are cruel, and created to destroy" (*Jub.* 10:6). Ever since, their presence has dominated this world like a dark shadow, and suggests the moral ambivalence and vulnerability of every human being. Like certain of the prophets, this author warns that election offers no safety, certainly no immunity; Israel's destiny depends not simply on election but on moral action or, failing this, on repentance and divine forgiveness.

Yet Jews and Gentiles do not confront demonic malevolence on equal footing. *Jubilees* says that God assigned to each of the nations a ruling angel or spirit "so that they might lead them astray" (*Jub.* 15:31); hence the nations worship demons (whom *Jubilees* identifies with foreign gods).³⁰ But God himself rules over Israel, together with a phalanx of angels and spirits assigned to guard and bless them.

What, then, does God's election of his people mean? The author of *Jubilees*, echoing the warnings of Isaiah and other prophets, suggests that belonging to the people of Israel does not guarantee deliverance from evil. It conveys a legacy of moral struggle, but ensures divine help in that struggle.

Jubilees depicts Mastema testing Abraham himself to the breaking point. For according to this revisionist writer, it is Mastema—not the Lord—who commands Abraham to kill his son, Isaac. Later Abraham expresses anxiety lest he be enslaved by evil spirits, "who have dominion over the thoughts of human hearts"; he pleads with God, "Deliver me from the hands of evil spirits, and do not let them lead me astray from my God" (*Jub.* 12:20). Moses, too, knows that he and his people are vulnerable. When he prays that God deliver Israel from their external enemies, "the Gentiles" (*Jub.* 1:19), he also prays that God may deliver them from the intimate enemy that threatens to take over his people internally and destroy them: "Do not let the spirit of Belial rule over them" (*Jub.* 1:20). This sense of ominous and omnipresent danger in *Jubilees* shows the extent to which the author regards his people as corruptible and, to a considerable extent, already corrupted. Like the *Book of the Watchers*, *Jubilees*

warns that those who neglect God's covenant are being seduced by the powers of evil, fallen angels.

Despite these warnings, the majority of Jews, from the second century B.C.E. to the present, reject sectarianism, as well as the universalism that, among most Christians, would finally supersede ethnic distinction. The Jewish majority, including those who sided with the Maccabees against the assimilationists, has always identified with Israel as a whole.

The author of the biblical book of Daniel, for example, who wrote during the crisis surrounding the Maccabean war, also sides with the Maccabees, and wants Jews to shun contamination incurred by eating with Gentiles, marrying them, or worshipping their gods. To encourage Jews to maintain their loyalty to Israel, the book opens with the famous story of the prophet Daniel, sentenced to death by the Babylonian king for faithfully praying to his God. Thrown into a den of lions to be torn apart, Daniel is divinely delivered; "the Lord sent an angel to shut the lions' mouths," so that the courageous prophet emerges unharmed.

Like the authors of *Jubilees* and *Watchers*, the author of Daniel, too, sees moral division within Israel, and warns that some people "violate the covenant; but the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action" (Dan. 11:32). Though concerned with moral issues, he never forgets ethnic identity: what concerns him above all is Israel's moral destiny as a whole. Unlike the writers of the *Book of the Watchers* and *Jubilees*, the author of Daniel envisions no sectarian enemy, either human or divine. Grieved as he is at Israel's sins, he never condemns many, much less the majority, of his people as apostate; consequently, he never speaks of Satan, Semihazah, Azazel, Mastema, Belial, or fallen angels of any kind.

Although there are no devils in Daniel's world, there *are* angels, and there are enemies. The author presents the alien enemies, rulers of the Persian, Medean, and Hellenistic empires, in traditional visionary imagery, as monstrous beasts. In one vision, the first beast is "like a lion with eagles' wings"; the second "like a bear," ferociously devouring its prey; the third like a leopard "with four wings of a bird on its back and four heads"; and "a

fourth beast [is] terrible and dreadful and exceedingly strong; and it had great iron teeth: it devoured and broke in pieces, and stamped the residue with its feet." In another vision, Daniel sees a horned ram that the angel Gabriel explains to him "is the king of Greece." Throughout the visions of Daniel, such monstrous animals represent foreign rulers and nations who threaten Israel. When Daniel, trembling with awe and terror, prays for his people, he is rewarded with divine assurance that all Israelites who remain true to God will survive (12:1-3). Thus the book of Daniel powerfully reaffirms the integrity of Israel's moral and ethnic identity. It is for this reason, I suggest, that Daniel, unlike such other apocalyptic books as the *Book of the Watchers* and *Jubilees*, is included in the canonical collection that we call the Hebrew Bible and not relegated to the apocrypha.

The majority of Jews, at any rate those who assembled and drew upon the Hebrew Bible, apparently endorsed Daniel's reaffirmation of Israel's traditional identity, while those who valued such books as *I Enoch* and *Jubilees* probably included a significant minority more inclined to identify with one group of Jews against another, as Daniel had refused to do. Most of those who *did* take sides within the community stopped far short of proclaiming an all-out civil war between one Jewish group and another, but there were notable exceptions. Starting at the time of the Maccabean war, the more radical sectarian groups we have mentioned—above all, those called Essenes—placed this cosmic battle between angels and demons, God and Satan, at the very center of their cosmology and their politics. In so doing, they expressed the importance to their lives of the conflict between themselves and the majority of their fellow Jews, whom the Essenes consigned to damnation.

Many scholars believe that the Essenes are known to us from such first-century contemporaries as Josephus, Philo, and the Roman geographer and naturalist Pliny the Elder, as well as from the discovery in 1947 of the ruins of their community, including its sacred library, the Dead Sea Scrolls. Josephus, at the age of sixteen, was fascinated by this austere and secretive community: he says that they "practiced great holiness" within an extraordi-

narily close-knit group ("they love one another very much").³¹ Josephus and Philo both note, with some astonishment, that these sectarians practiced strict celibacy, probably because they chose to live according to the biblical rules for holy war, which prohibit sexual intercourse during wartime. But the war in which they saw themselves engaged was God's war against the power of evil—a cosmic war that they expected would result in God's vindication of their fidelity. The Essenes also turned over all their money and property to their leaders in order to live "without money," as Pliny says, in a monastic community.³²

These devout and passionate sectarians saw the foreign occupation of Palestine—and the accommodation of the majority of Jews to that occupation—as evidence that the forces of evil had taken over the world and—in the form of Satan, Mastema, or the Prince of Darkness—infiltrated and taken over God's own people, turning most of them into allies of the Evil One.

Arising from controversies over purity and assimilation that followed the Maccabean war, the Essene movement grew during the Roman occupation of the first century to include over four thousand men. Women, never mentioned in the community rule, apparently were not eligible for admission. Although the remains of a few women and children have been found among the hundreds of men buried in the outer cemetery at Qumran, they probably were not community members.³³ (Since the whole cemetery has not yet been excavated, these conclusions remain inconclusive.) Many adjunct members of the sect, apparently including many who were married, lived in towns all over Palestine, pursuing ordinary occupations while striving to devote themselves to God; but the most dedicated withdrew in protest from ordinary Jewish life to form their own "new Israel," the monastic community in desert caves overlooking the Dead Sea.³⁴ There, following the rigorous community rule, they dressed only in white and regulated every detail of their lives according to strict interpretations of the law set forth by their priestly leaders.

In their sacred books, such as the great *Scroll of the War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness*, the brethren could read how God had given them the Prince of Light as their super-

natural ally to help them contend against Satan, and against his human allies.

The Prince of Light thou has appointed to come to our support: but Satan, the angel Mastema, thou hast created for the pit; he rules in darkness, and his purpose is to bring about evil and sin (1 QM 19:10–12).

The Essenes called themselves the “sons of light” and indicted the majority as “sons of darkness,” the “congregation of traitors,” as people who “depart from the way, having transgressed the law, and violated the precept” (CD 1:13–20). The Essenes retell the whole history of Israel in terms of this cosmic war. Even in earliest times, they say, “the Prince of Light raised up Moses” (CD 5:18), but the Evil One, here called Beliar, aroused opposition to Moses among his own people. Ever since then, and especially now, Beliar has set traps in which he intends to “catch Israel,” for God himself has “unleashed Beliar against Israel” (CD 4:13). Now the “sons of light” eagerly await the day of judgment, when they expect God will come with all the armies of heaven to annihilate the corrupt majority along with Israel’s foreign enemies.

Had Satan not already existed in Jewish tradition, the Essenes would have invented him. In the *Book of the Watchers* fallen angels incite the activities of those who violate God’s covenant, but the Essenes go much further and place at the center of their religious understanding the cosmic war between God and his allies, both angelic and human, against Satan, or Beliar, along with his demonic and human allies. The Essenes place themselves at the very center of this battle between heaven and hell. While they detest Israel’s traditional enemies, whom they call the *kittim* (probably a coded epithet for the Romans),³⁵ they struggle far more bitterly against their fellow Israelites, who belong to the “congregation of Beliar.” David Sperling, scholar of the ancient Near East, suggests that substitution of Beliar for earlier Belial may be a pun on *belā ’ôr*, “without light.”³⁶ They invoke Satan—or Beliar—to characterize the irreconcilable oppo-

sition between themselves and the “sons of darkness” in the war taking place simultaneously in heaven and on earth. They expect that soon God will come in power, with his holy angels, and finally overthrow the forces of evil and inaugurate the Kingdom of God.

The Essenes agree with *Jubilees* that being Jewish is no longer enough to ensure God’s blessing. But they are much more radical: the sins of the people have virtually canceled God’s covenant with Abraham, on which Israel’s election depends. Now, they insist, whoever wants to belong to the true Israel must join in a new covenant—the covenant of their own congregation.³⁷ Whoever applies to enter the desert community must first confess himself guilty of sin—guilty, apparently, of participating in Israel’s collective apostasy against God. Then the candidate begins several years of probation, during which he turns over his property to the community leaders and swears to practice sexual abstinence, along with ritual purity in everything he eats, drinks, utters, or touches. During the probationary period he must not touch the pots, plates, or utensils in which the members prepare the community’s food. Swearing can earn him instant expulsion, and so can complaining against the group’s leaders; spitting or talking out of turn incurs strict penalties.

A candidate who finally does gain admission is required, at his initiation ritual, to join together with the whole community to bless all who belong to the new covenant and ritually curse all who are not initiates, who belong to the “men of Beliar.” The leaders now reveal to the initiate the secrets of angelology, and according to Josephus, he must solemnly swear to “keep secret the names of the angels” (*War* 2.8). Through practices of purity, prayer, and worship, the initiate strives to unite himself with the company of the angels. As the historian Carol Newsome has shown, Essene community worship—like the Christian liturgy to this day—reaches its climax as the community on earth joins with angels in singing the hymn of praise that the angels sing in heaven (“Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts; heaven and earth are filled with thy glory”).³⁸ Sacred Essene texts like the *Scroll of the War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness* reveal

secrets of angelology, which the sectarians regarded as valuable and necessary information, for recognizing and understanding the interrelationship of supernatural forces, both good and evil, is essential for their sense of their own identity—and the way they identify others.³⁹

The Essenes, then, offer the closest parallel to Mark's account of Jesus' followers, as they invoke images of cosmic war to divide the universe at large—and the Jewish community in particular—between God's people and Satan's. Yet the two movements differ significantly, especially in relation to outsiders. The Essene covenant, as we have seen, was extremely exclusive, restricted not only to Jews, who must be freeborn and male, but to those devout few who willingly joined the "new covenant." Although Mark and Matthew saw the beginning of Jesus' movement primarily within the context of the Jewish community, its future would increasingly involve the Gentile world outside.

Nonetheless, the Essenes, though rigorously exclusive, were led by their objections to the assimilationist tendencies of their fellow Jews to move, paradoxically, in the universalist direction indicated by the *Book of the Watchers* and *Jubilees*. (The Essenes treasured both of these writings in their monastic library; *Jubilees*, wrote an anonymous Essene, is a book that reveals divine secrets "to which Israel has turned a blind eye" [CD 16.2].) The Essenes outdid their predecessors in setting ethnic identity aside, not as wrong, but as inadequate, and emphasized moral over ethnic identification. When they depict the struggle of the Prince of Light against the Prince of Darkness, they do not identify the Prince of Light with the archangel Michael, the angelic patron of Israel.⁴⁰ Instead, they envision the Prince of Light as a universal energy contending against an opposing cosmic force, the Prince of Darkness. For the Essenes these two energies represent not only their own conflicts with their opponents but a conflict within every person, within the human heart itself:

The spirits of truth and falsehood struggle within the human heart. . . . According to his share in truth and right, thus a man

hates lies; and according to his share in the lot of deceit, thus he hates truth (1 QS 4:12–14).

The Essenes, of course, took their own identification with Israel for granted. Since they required every initiate to their covenant to be Jewish, male, and freeborn, "every person" meant in practice only Jews who met these qualifications. But certain followers of Jesus, especially after 100 C.E., having met with disappointing responses to their message within the Jewish communities, would draw upon such universalist themes as they moved to open their movement to Gentiles.

As we saw in the previous chapter, Jesus' followers, according to Mark, also invoke images of cosmic war to divide the universe at large—and the Jewish community in particular—between God's people and Satan's. Mark, like the Essenes, sees this struggle essentially in terms of intra-Jewish conflict. So does the follower of Jesus we call Matthew, who, as we shall see in the next chapter, took up and revised Mark's gospel some ten to twenty years later. Taking Mark's basic framework, Matthew embellished it and in effect updated it, placing the story of Jesus in a context more relevant to the Jewish world of Matthew's own time, Palestine c. 80–90 C.E. By the time Matthew was writing, Jesus' followers were a marginal group opposed by the ruling party of Pharisees, which had gained ascendancy in Jerusalem in the decades following the Roman war. In the central part of Matthew's version of the gospel, the "intimate enemies" had become primarily Pharisees.

About the same time, another follower of Jesus, whom tradition calls Luke, also took up Mark's account and extended it to fit his own perspective—apparently that of a Gentile convert. Yet Luke, as fervently as any Essene, depicts his own sect as representing Israel at its best; according to Luke, as we shall see, Jesus' followers are virtually the only true Israelites left.

Near the end of the century, c. 90–100 C.E., the writer called John offers a bold interpretation of these events. Many scholars agree that the gospel of John presents the viewpoint of a radically sectarian group alienated from the Jewish community

because they have been turned out of their home synagogues for claiming that Jesus is the Messiah. Like the Essenes, John speaks eloquently of the love among those who belong to God (John 10:14); and yet John's fierce polemic against those he sometimes calls simply "the Jews" at times matches in bitterness that of the Essenes.

Let us investigate, then, how each of these New Testament gospel writers reshaped Mark's message as the Christian movement changed throughout the first century.

III

MATTHEW'S CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE PHARISEES: DEPLOYING THE DEVIL

Jesus' followers succeeded, far more than many of them expected—or perhaps even hoped—in attracting Gentiles (from the Latin term for "nations," *gentes*) but, to their disappointment, largely failed to attract Jews. Between 70 and 100 C.E., this movement, which began, as George Nickelsburg says, as "a relative latecomer among the sects and groups in post-exilic Judaism,"¹ grew rapidly. Although many of Jesus' followers were Jewish, they tended increasingly to separate from other Jews, often meeting for worship in the homes of fellow members, rather than in synagogues. This situation distressed many of them, who insisted that they didn't want to depart from traditional ways but had been forced into it, having been rejected by Jewish leaders, sometimes even expelled from their home synagogues.

As the Jesus movement spread throughout the Roman world, various adherents began to drop distinctively Jewish practices, most notably circumcision, and then also dietary and Sabbath laws. By 100 C.E., in regions that include Greece, Asia Minor, Italy, and Egypt, many Christian churches had become predominantly Gentile. They still insisted, nonetheless, that they alone were the true embodiment of Israel. George Nickelsburg points out the irony of their situation:

A young, upstart group, whose membership had rapidly and radically changed, was asserting that it was more authentic