

THE HOLY ONES OF THE MOST HIGH IN DANIEL VII

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Who are the 'holy ones of the Most High' in Daniel vii 18, 22, 25, 27 and who or what is the 'one like a son of man' in Dan. vii 13? These interrelated questions are the subject of continuing scholarly debate. I shall concentrate on the first of the two questions. 'The holy ones of the Most High' has been interpreted as designating either (a) angels or (b) the faithful people of Israel of the last days¹). Let us call these interpretations the angelic view and the Israelite view respectively.

For a precise discussion, the several layers of tradition need to be distinguished. We can inquire about the meaning of the expression (a) in the preliterary and nonliterary sources behind the Aramaic text of Daniel, (b) in the literary sources, if any, utilized by the final redactor or author, (c) in the mind of the final redactor/author, (d) in subsequent interpretation of Daniel vii (LXX, Theodotion, pseudepigrapha, NT). This article is concerned primarily with stage (c). For this stage, the Israelite view is favored by the following factors:

¹) The most recent representatives of the angelic view are John J. Collins, 'The Son of Man and the Saints of the Most High in the Book of Daniel', *JBL* 93 (1974), 50-66; Joseph Coppens and Luc Dequeker, *Le Fils de l'homme et les Saints du Très-Haut en Daniel, VII, dans les apocryphes et dans le Nouveau Testament* (Louvain-Bruges-Paris, 1961); Coppens, 'Les Saints du Très-Haut sont-ils à identifier avec les milices célestes?', *ETL* 39 (1963), 94-100; idem, 'La vision daniélique du Fils d'Homme', *VT* 19 (1969), 178-182; idem, *Miscellannées bibliques* (Louvain-Bruges-Paris, 1963) (contains a reprint of 'Les Saints du Très-Haut'); L. Dequeker, 'The "Saints of the Most High" in Qumran and Daniel', *OTS* 18 (1973), 108-187; Martin Noth, *The Laws in the Pentateuch and Other Studies* (London, 1966), 215-228; Carston Colpe, *TDNT* VIII 422-423.

The Israelite view is represented by C. H. W. Brekelmans, 'The Saints of the Most High and Their Kingdom', *OTS* 14 (1965), 305-329; Heinz-Wolfgang Kuhn, *Enderwartung und Gegenwärtiges Heil* (Göttingen, 1965), 90-93; Robert Hanhart, 'Die Heiligen des Höchsten', *Hebräische Wortforschung* (VT Sup. 16, 1967), 90-101; Ulrich B. Müller, *Messias und Menschensohn in jüdischen Apokalypsen und in der Offenbarung des Johannes* (Gütersloh, 1972), 25-26; Alfred Mertens, *Das Buch Daniel im Lichte der Texte vom Toten Meer* (Würzburg, 1971), 53-55.

For bibliography, see especially Collins, 'Son of Man', and *TDNT* VIII 400-401.

(1) Dan. vii 18. Israel is promised a great kingdom elsewhere in the OT (Num. xxiv 7, Isa. lx 12, Mic. iv 8)²⁾. The coming kingdom is associated with the coming of a Messianic king to Israel. Hence this interpretation of Daniel is best confirmed if the 'son of man' figure originates in Israelite kingship, as Bentzen and Borsch argue³⁾. On the other hand, an eschatological angelic kingdom is unknown to the OT and intertestamental literature⁴⁾.

(2) Dan. vii 21, 25. The language about the oppression of the 'holy ones' is inconsistent with the angelic view⁵⁾.

(3) Dan. vii 27. Contextually, 'people of the holy ones of the Most High' of vii 27 appears to be an alternative expression for 'holy ones of the Most High' of vii 18. But 'people' ('*am*') must refer to human beings, not angels (so uniformly in the OT; but see below).

(4) The mention of angels in other connections in Dan. vii 10, 16 makes it unlikely that the 'holy ones of the Most High' of vii 18 are to be identified with angels⁶⁾.

The angelic view is favored by the following:

(1) *Qeḏōšīm*, when used as a noun in the Hebrew Bible, usually refers to angels, not men.

(2) Dan. vii 13. The 'son of man' is a heavenly figure. If the 'holy ones' of vii 18 are to be identified with the 'son of man', they also are heavenly⁷⁾.

²⁾ 'L'espérance israélite traditionnelle tend à confondre le règne de Dieu et la domination de son peuple sur la terre. Pour elle, la royauté de Dieu se réalise dans les victoires d'Israël et de son roi guidés par la divinité nationale' (André Caquot, 'Les quatre bêtes et le ((Fils d'Homme)) (Daniel 7)', *Semitica* 17 (1967), 66). See also the intertestamental literature cited by Brekelmans, 'Saints of the Most High', 326-329. Brekelmans lays great store by this argument.

³⁾ Aage Bentzen, *King and Messiah* (London, 1955), 74-75; Frederick H. Borsch, *The Son of Man in Myth and History* (London, 1967).

⁴⁾ Brekelmans, 'Saints of the Most High', 326-329; Caquot, 'Quatre bêtes', 66. But cf. the objections of Collins, 'Son of Man', 62-63; Coppens, 'Vision daniélique', 181-182; Dequeker, 'Saints of the Most High', 185-187.

⁵⁾ So A. Feuillet, 'Le Fils de l'Homme de Daniel et la tradition biblique', *RB* 60 (1953), 194; M. Delcor, *Le Livre de Daniel* (Paris, 1971), 157.

⁶⁾ 'Dagegen spricht m. E. unter anderem auch die Tatsache, dass Dan. 7, 10 diese himmlischen Wesen, die Engel, die Gottes Thron umstehen, eigens genannt werden und nach 7, 16 einer von diesen Thronassistenten Gottes Daniel Aufschluss über die Vision gibt. Dass Dan. 7, 10 und 16 die gleichen himmlischen Wesen gemeint sind, erhellt vor allem aus dem Gebrauch des gleichen Verbums in den beiden fraglichen Versen. Es lässt sich jedoch kein Bezug dieser Verse zu den „Heiligen des Höchsten“ feststellen' (Heinrich Gross, 'Der Messias im Alten Testament', *Trierer Theologische Zeitschrift* 71 (1962), 168 n. 21). Coppens replies to this in *Miscellannées bibliques*, 98-99.

⁷⁾ But cf. the caution of Noth, who points out that the picture of clouds of heaven may have other motivations (*Laws*, 222).

(3) The word 'am in vii 27 can be translated 'host' rather than 'people'. This is supported by the language of Qumran using 'm for an angelic host⁸).

(4) The construct relation of vii 27 ('am qaddîšê) can be interpreted in a possessive rather than an exegetical sense. That is, it may mean 'people associated with the holy ones of the Most High', rather than 'people who are the holy ones of the Most High'⁹). This makes it possible to equate 'am with Israel and 'holy ones' with the angels who are associated with Israel in the final war. Such a conception is not farfetched, as the War Scroll of Qumran demonstrates¹⁰).

(5) If the phrase *kl qdwsy 'lywn* of CD 20:8 refers to angels, it supports the angelic interpretation of the similar expression *qaddîšê 'elyônîn* in Daniel¹¹).

Counterarguments exist to most of the above arguments. A crucial question is whether the reference of 'am to angels can be sustained. So far as I can see, such a meaning of 'am does not occur elsewhere in the OT. Moreover, Qumran texts do not really exhibit such use of 'm. The two most plausible instances of such use are 1 QH 3:21-22 and 1 QM 12:8. But in both these cases 'm can be pointed as 'im and translated 'with'.

First, 1 QH 3:21-22 says that God cleanses a perverse spirit that he may stand *bm'md 'm šb' qdwsym* and come *byhd 'm 'dt bny šmym*. If one follows Noth and Colpe¹²), this must be translated 'in the garrison of the host of the army of holy ones' and 'in the community of the host of the congregation of the sons of heaven'. In both phrases, 'host' ('m) is then superfluous, since 'army' (šb') and 'congregation' ('dt) already express the requisite idea. On the other hand, good sense results if one understands 'm as 'with' and translates 'in the garrison with the army of holy ones' and 'in the community with the congregation of the sons of heaven'. Noth objects that

⁸) Noth refers to 1 QH 3:21-22 (ibid., 223).

⁹) Coppens, 'Vision daniélique', 179; Dequeker, 'Saints of the Most High', 181.

¹⁰) 'Not only will the angels fight side by side with the earthly "holy people" (xii, 7-8), but also the "elect of the holy people", i.e. former earth-dwellers now in heaven, will fight side by side with the angels' (Yigael Yadin, *The Scroll of the War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness* (Oxford, 1962), 240-242). See also Collins, 'Son of Man', 56.

¹¹) So L. Dequeker, 'Daniel VII et les Saints du Très-Haut', *ETL* 36 (1960), 385-388. In favor of the angelic view of CD 20 :8, see also S. Lamberigts, 'Le sens de *qdwsym* dans les textes de Qumrân', *ETL* 46 (1970), 34-39. Against, see Brekelmans, 'Saints of the Most High', 323-324; Mertens, *Daniel*, 54-55.

¹²) Noth, *Laws*, 223; Colpe, *TDNT* VIII 422.

'garrison' (*m'md*) requires a following genitive to define it more closely. Though this is sometimes true (CD 20:5), in other cases *m'md* stands unmodified: 1 QH 11:13, 1 QM 5:4, 9:10, 13:16, 14:6, 1 QH 4:36, 5:29; 1 QHf 1:11. The closest parallel to 1 QH 3:21-22 is 1 QH 11:13, which says that the perverse spirit may stand *bm'md l'pnykb 'm šb' 'd wrwby* . . . Here '*m* must be translated 'with', confirming the interpretation of '*m* as 'with' in 1 QH 3:21-22¹³).

The case in 1 QM 12:8 is more difficult. The text runs *ky' qdwš' 'dwny wmlk hkbwd 'tnw 'm qdwšym gbwr [ym w] šb' ml'kym bpqwdynw wgbwr hmlh [mh] b'dtnw wšb' rwbyw 'm š'dynw*. The phrase '*m qdwšym* might be translated either 'host of holy ones' or 'with the holy ones'. In either case the grammatical connection with the context proves troublesome. One solution is to put '*m qdwšym* in apposition to the preceding 'us' (*'tnw*), resulting in an interpretation in which '*m* = Israel rather than angels¹⁴).

All in all, the support for '*m* = angelic host is exceedingly precarious. In Daniel vii, it is far more likely that holy ones = Israel than that '*m* = angels. The former usage is at least clearly attested in Ps. xxxiv 10; the latter usage is not attested at all.

Two further factors must be considered in making linguistic judgements about the 'holy ones'. First, the great weight of OT witness that Israel is the holy people must be considered a secondary support for the equation 'holy ones' = Israel. Second, the one established case in the Hebrew OT where *q^edōšim* = faithful Israel (Ps. xxxiv 10) must be compared with the mere handful where *q^edōšim* are *clearly* angels (Job xv 15, Ps. lxxxix 6, 8; cf. Dan. viii 13, 13). As further examples, Noth cites Job v 1, Prov. ix 10, xxx 3, Exod. xv 10, 11 LXX, Deut. xxxiii 3(2), Zech. xiv 5, Sir. xlii 17, Tob. viii 15¹⁵). But some of these examples are not as clear as could be desired, and others involve going to the Greek text. If we go to the LXX, the examples of angelic beings increase; but so do the examples of *hagioi* = Israel. It is precarious to base an argument on such a small statistical sample. *Hagioi* for angels is statistically more frequent than *hagioi* for Israel; but both usages are established. We cannot tell whether the greater frequency of the one usage is accidental.

Moreover, statistical frequency of this kind has almost no bearing

¹³) So Brekermans, 'Saints of the Most High', 321; Lamberigts, 'Sens de *qdwšym*', 26.

¹⁴) Yadin, *Scroll*, 316; Jean Carmignac, *La règle de la guerre* (Paris, 1958), 179.

¹⁵) Noth, *Laws*, 217.

on exegesis. If, for example, the word 'spring' referring to a season of the year is statistically more frequent than the word 'spring' referring to a mechanical device, it does not mean that we should automatically pick the first meaning in all disputed occurrences¹⁶). The proper course, then, is to approach Daniel with the presupposition that his readers were familiar with both meanings, even though both are infrequently attested in the Hebrew OT. The readers would pick whichever meaning best suited the context.

This clearly tips the scales in favor of the Israelite view of Daniel vii. Moreover, weaknesses exist in the alternate proposals for 'patching up' the angelic view. We have seen that the interpretation '*m* = host (of angels) in Dan. vii 27 is untenable. Suppose then that we adopt the suggestion of Coppens and Dequeker that '*am* = Israel and *qaddîšê 'elyônîn* = angelic beings¹⁷). The difficulty then is that the mention of Israel in vii 27 represents an intrusion. Up to that point, Daniel vii has spoken exclusively of angels and their possessing the kingdom¹⁸). Now suddenly without any explanation or further justification, vs. 27 says that the kingdom is to be given to Israel. Would not this perplex readers who expected it to be given to angels?¹⁹

Collins evades this difficulty by suggesting that 'holy ones' may refer to Jewish people *as well as* angels in Daniel vii²⁰). But this plunges him into more severe difficulties than ever. The original reason for introducing the angelic interpretation of Daniel vii was to eliminate the alleged difficulty of interpreting 'holy ones' as Israel.

¹⁶) A statistical argument of this kind actually occurs in Coppens, 'Vision daniélique', 181. He thinks that it supports his case to find 15 places in Qumran MSS where *qdmšym* designates angels, and 'only' ('seulement') 8 where it designates the community.

¹⁷) J. Coppens, 'Le Fils d'Homme daniélique et les relectures de Dan. VII, 13 dans les apocryphes et les écrits du Nouveau Testament', *ETL* 37 (1961), 13; idem, 'Vision daniélique', 179; Dequeker, 'Saints of the Most High', 181. Collins ('Son of Man', 62-63) oscillates between this interpretation and an interpretation which would refer *qaddîšê 'elyônîn* to both angels and Israel.

¹⁸) Coppens (*Miscellannées bibliques*, 93-98) supposes that 'saints' (*qaddîšîn*) refers to Israel and 'saints of the Most High' (*qaddîšê 'elyônîn*) to angels. But this is an unbelievably subtle distinction for a redactor or author to maintain without further clarification. Moreover, it concedes the crucial fact that 'holy ones' can refer to Israel.

¹⁹) Collins has ready the reply that the kingdom is established on two levels at once: heavenly and earthly ('Son of Man', 62). Dequeker maintains that the Maccabean author here introduces a further implication of the enthronement of the Son of Man ('Saints of the Most High', 181). But does either reply resolve the difficulty for the reader when he first encounters vs. 27?

²⁰) Collins, 'Son of Man', 63.

But now this interpretation has virtually been reintroduced, when Israel is included among the holy ones. It is alleged that the usage 'holy ones' = Israel is rare. But the usage 'holy ones' = angelic beings *plus* Israel is, if anything, still more rare. Collins does not produce any examples at all, though he points out that mingling of the angelic and human hosts may be taking place in Daniel just as in the Qumran War Scroll. Nevertheless, a mingling of hosts is not the same as a mingling of their names ²¹).

I conclude, then, that the interpretation that 'holy ones' refers to angels is inconsistent with the final state of the Aramaic text. What about the sources behind this text? Here I judge that there are too many unknowns. In the nature of the case, literary criticism cannot eliminate the possibility that some source in its original context required the angelic interpretation. But the final text shows that the use of 'holy ones' for eschatological faithful Israel ²²) was semantically acceptable. This obviates the need for hypothetical reconstruction ²³).

²¹) Kuhn judges a double reference to be out of the question (*Enderwartung*, 91, n. 2). Carmignac argues that *qdwšym* can refer to the souls of the dead (*La règle de la guerre*, 18). Even if this is true, it is not a usage broad enough to encompass living Israel and angels.

²²) As Caquot ('Quatre bêtes', 67) points out, the special status of *eschatological faithful* Israel is enough to motivate a special title.

²³) As this note goes to press, another article has appeared defending the Israelite view: Gerhard F. Hasel, 'The Identity of "The Saints of the Most High" in Daniel 7', *Biblica* 56 (1975), 173-192.